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## Ramana Ashtottaram

72. ओं गणेशमुनिभृङ्गेनसेवितांघ्रिसरोरुहाय नमः  
 om gaṇeśamunibhṛṅgenasevitāṅghrisaroruhāya  
 namaḥ

One whose lotus feet were sought by the honeybee Ganesa Muni.

The bee knows which flower holds the sweetest honey and seeks it for the benefit of the bee-hive. The story of Ganapati Muni's encounter with Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave is of major significance.

Hailed in his 21st year by competent scholars as *Kavyakantha*, [literally, one from whose throat flows inspired *kavyas*, classic literary works], Ganapati Muni was a truly great Sanskrit pundit and poet as well as an accomplished *sadhaka* of remarkable determination and experience.

Even though he was highly respected and had a coterie of disciples, he knew his knowledge and understanding were insufficient. He climbed the slopes of Arunachala to seek the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan. He sought the honey of jnana from him by asking the simple but profound question, "What is *tapas*?"

When he sat at the feet of Bhagavan, gathering the sweetness and light of jnana and making music through *slokas* he composed in praise of Bhagavan, other scholars and poets were also drawn to the same source of sweetness and light.

All of us will one day come to the point where we will realize that all our knowledge and experience is insufficient. If, in that moment of despair, we look up in prayer and faith, we too can climb the hill of knowledge and seek the ever-ready lotus of jnana. ▲

## EDITORIAL

# Duties and Rights

One of the most influential documents that have affected the way people perceive themselves in recent centuries is the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 which states that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." This comprehensive statement about individual human rights has, over the succeeding centuries, shifted peoples' perception of who they are as citizens, what is expected of them by society and most importantly what people demand as a natural right from their community and nation. World-wide communications have affected the way we perceive each other, radically changed commerce and profoundly altered the value of the arts, philosophy and science. It has created the anti-hero, broken down the traditional structures of social authority and smashed the classical theories of social contracts.

We see today the repudiation of any principle higher than individuality. There has been a dramatic swing in emphasis from the transcendental to the imminent. What began in modern times in Italy with the Renaissance idea that man is the measure of all things finally found political expression in the American Declaration and has now permeated most cultures on the globe either as an accepted or

assimilated fact; or alternatively, it is vigorously contested by extreme religious groups, which reveals how pervasive the trend is and how threatening to ossified mindsets.

The positive aspect of this shift from the transcendental to the mundane is that it spurred the sciences to focus on the human condition; in particular, medicine, to alleviate suffering. We are beginning to create the world in our own image by controlling the forces of nature and constructing artificial environments in which to live. However, increasingly, we are focusing on our rights to certain basic essentials that must be supplied by man-made organizations as the natural world cannot now do. With the population explosion we will increasingly demand that our rights be respected as resources are stretched. Consider just one resource, water.

Contrast this with the outlook of Hindu *dharma* in which the *dharma sastras* (scriptures) speak of nothing but duties. There is no such concept as a god-given right an individual is automatically entitled to. We see similar outlooks in Islam, Catholicism and Buddhism. In fact, all the traditional religions emphasize the dos and don'ts the individual must follow for a happy and fulfilled life. We are viewed not as separate individuals but essential parts of a greater whole whose purpose our minds can but for the present dimly perceive.

The situation we face today is between two value systems, one which asks what can I get out of any situation in this life on earth and the other, what is my place not only in the terrestrial structure but also in the celestial and how can I be in harmony with them?

There are innumerable questions which arise out of this contrast: does a universal set of rights and duties exist? Do rights or duties have primacy over the other? Does freedom as a natural right mean license to do anything one wants?

For those of us who follow the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the answers appear simple but actually are profoundly complex and far-reaching in their conclusions. Bhagavan says to ask ourselves 'Who am I?'. This one simple question confounds our mind and silences our hearts.

Our minds are awash with the pull and push of contradictory desires and fears. There is a contest between our duties and our desire

to do what we want regardless of others. Our hearts are ablaze with emotions that drive us to actions whether they are reasonable or irrational, beneficial or harmful. The flood of feeling, if left untended, will find ways to manifest itself whether we like it or not. We are just as perplexed as others by our own behaviour if we are not conscious of the roots from which they spring. The crucial question is how do we become conscious of ourselves so that whatever we think or feel or do is in harmony, as individuals and as members of society. The differentiation between duties and rights is critical.

Bhagavan says that realizing who we are is liberation, *moksha*. Let us leave aside the definition of *moksha* for the present because its importance is refined as we evolve in consciousness. The ideas we start out with are far less relevant when we reach the edge of our personal boundaries and dissolve the rigidities of perception we so long believed in. In reality, they are childish in the face of the great mystery of life. Nothing we conceive can grasp the immensity of life. It is not that we will gain *moksha* but that *moksha* is the dissolution of our ludicrous sense of self-importance. Though we ask for it, we actually don't want *moksha*; what we want is a placebo to give us a steady stream of happiness devoid of any effort or consequences.

Life in the traditional sense is a preparation; it is a protracted series of steps of self-revelation; it is the evolution of the soul so that it may be released from the laws of this world. The eternal laws of *dharma* in themselves do not bind us, rather they are guides so we may be free from harm and find release from our delusion of separation. Traditional religions emphasize transcendence; they see our life as a journey and our duty as the natural concomitant that eases the way. Duties make us aware, they develop the power of attention. The *rajasic* struggle to fulfil duties cultivates understanding and helps us overcome the *tamasic* tendencies that keep us in dopey chains of ignorance. It would be foolish to ignore one's duty in much the same way as it would be stupid not to heed the safety signs on a treacherous path.

For a person born and educated in the so-called modern way, all of the above may be helpful to become a socially acceptable person but

really, it is non-sense. The aim of modern life, it seems, is to find out what you want and to get it by whatever means acceptable by society. Our rights as individuals are tools that help us realize our desires. One cynical view is that motivated by greed, fuelled by anger and justified by jealousy, our desires are acceptable if the result is favourable. The more liberal humanistic view is that rights are given not to take but to express the riches and diversity of the personality and to respect the same rights in others. How each person adjusts to the rights of fellow human beings is another matter and need not concern us here. It is the principle we are concerned with.

How then do we define ourselves? Do we highlight our duties as the governing principle which guides our lives or do we insist on our rights? For most of us, it is a confused mixture of the two for we rarely see clearly defined options and our attitudes can change by the hour, let alone day. If one opts for duties as of primary importance we are never without instruction for the next step. On our level of consciousness if we cannot listen to our conscience, we can refer to traditional authority for guidance.

When we are in accord with the universal law (*dharma*) which sustains life, we are able to discriminate between right and wrong, what is of lasting value and what is ephemeral. This clarity needs to be developed; it is called a *sattvic* mind which is the key for release from the chains of suffering.

What actually is a duty? It is an obligation to do what is right or what is decreed for the betterment of society. But that does not mean fanaticism. It does not mean sacrificing the welfare of others for the sake of some impossible ideal. It means doing what is appropriate. It can all be subsumed in one principle: do not hurt others (*ahimsa*). Which, oddly enough, translates as simple good manners.

Our problem today is that because traditional certainties are crumbling, we do not know what our correct responsibilities are, despite the self-assured voices of TV pundits or street wags. Unless we are careful we can lose the thread of the sacred in the trivialization of values. According to the prevailing materialistic world view, we no longer have duties towards a higher purpose

in our life. In other words, this life is all there is and you had better get what you can.

What exactly are our rights? If it is our right to have what we want then what exactly do we want? If we want a lot of money then is it our right to have it, even at the cost of cheating others? If we want fame and public recognition, we already have a problem. Are rights free and without any obligations in return? The answer is obviously no.

We all know that 'there is no such thing as a free lunch', inevitably sooner or later we pay for what we have taken. If we take the long view and see the ramifications of our attitudes we would realize that giving is the best choice, be it our attention, our love, concern, our time or money. For by 'giving' we free ourselves from the narrow confines of our own selfish behaviour and a petty mindset. To paraphrase JF Kennedy, ask not what others can do for you, ask what you can do for others.

If however, we believe there is a higher purpose, we accept the need to change who we believe ourselves to be into someone more refined. We have ideals by which we strive to live, and use duties to cleanse our aspiration of unintelligent resistance to change. If we can, as Bhagavan advocated, do our work without personal attachment, then we are of service to others and achieve a sense of inner satisfaction and meaning. We are of value both to ourselves and to those around us. If we are only looking for our rights then we generally end-up confused and unhappy.

The highest expression of duty is *svadharma*. When we dedicate ourselves to a higher truth and pursue it, we are unwittingly in tune with the American Declaration, for it did not say that one has a right to happiness, but that one has a right to the pursuit of happiness. We all wish to be happy; the burning question is how we go about it. Eventually we all realize it is not by acquiring objects or by developing an overbearing sense of self-righteousness. It is rather by the exercise of discrimination between what is right and what is wrong, what is temporary and what is eternal. The easiest and best way to go about that is to ask one's self, where does my duty lie? Is it swayed by instant gratification or in being true to that quiet inner voice?

The choice is ours. ▲



# The Bare Knee and the Bald Head

## Part One

### Nonduality in Advaita and Children's Fiction

SHARADA BHANU

What could possibly connect Adi Sankara and the *The Chronicles of Narnia*? And can Bhagavan have anything to do with Harry Potter's problems with Voldemort? Children's fiction and Advaita? Moreover fantasy fiction of a foreign origin? A Tamil proverb prudently cautions against a hasty judgement deceived by the superficial similarity between a bare knee and a bald head. Yet to focus on difference may be even more misleading; the *Bhagavad Gita*, warns "if one merely sees the diversity of things with their divisions and limitations, then one has impure knowledge"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*. Trans. and introd. Juan Mascaro. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962. Ch.18, verse 21.

Sharada Bhanu has been a devotee of Bhagavan since 1977. This article summarises some concepts put forward in her doctoral dissertation 'Not Two: An Indian Perspective on Western Fantasy Fiction for Children.'

Western fantasy fiction that addresses children may be seen as advaitic in that it affirms the oneness of all that exists. In this fiction there exists no real other. Other worlds and other times are entered, to affirm that at deep levels of experience they are not different from this world and this time. It seems that in the act of writing through fantasy, whatever cannot be admitted in realistic fiction for adults finds a voice. This voice articulates a vision that appears to be essentially nondual. If animals or toys are protagonists, they turn out to be human. If hidden enemies have to be found they are located within the self. At one level child and adult are placed on a continuum and the child reader is encouraged to grow up while the adult recaptures a lost childhood. At yet another level children's fiction sees an adult inside each child and a child within each adult. These works persuade readers to interrogate core assumptions on which human lives are commonly constructed. Is there a world out there which is real? Are people confined only to their bodies? Are waking and dreaming different? Several novels written for children put forward the sophisticated idea that the nature of the world depends on the perceiver. This connects them to the Indian nondual philosophy of Advaita.

Advaita, usually translated as non-duality, is that school of thought that holds that what seems to be two or plural, is really one which is identical to the self. The true self of the individual, the *Atman*, is not different from *Brahman*, the ground of all existence. If the world is seen to exist independent of *Brahman* it is unreal. The world is said to be *maya* and its reality is questioned because unlike the unchanging and eternal *Brahman* it is impermanent. *Maya* is all experience arising from the ego, an assertion of 'I' 'me' and 'mine', and structured by subject-object relations. *Brahman* is a state which perpetually is but is perceived by the individual, when subject/object distinctions vanish.

According to Ramana Maharishi three theories of creation are used by practitioners of Advaita to explain the relationship of the perceiver and the world; the theory cited by the teacher will depend on the spiritual state of the seeker. They are *srsti-drsti*; the world precedes the existence of the seeker; *drsti-srsti*: the world comes into being at

the precise moment of perception and is indivisible from the nature of the perceiver<sup>2</sup> and finally, *ajata*: there is no creation, no world, no birth, no death, no seeker, no liberation; "there is only One and it admits of no discussion."<sup>3</sup> All three creation theories can be applied to the alternate worlds that fantasy produces.

Advaita, children's writing, and fantasy have a common interest in play. Advaita accounts for the seeming existence of the world by seeing it as *lila*, or play, of the one spirit. Fantasy texts create alternate worlds and frequently highlight features that psychologists see as characteristic of the minds of young children. This is animism, the belief that inanimate objects have life-like attributes, and pretend play through tales that bring toys to life or give voices to animals.

Didacticism, or conveying instruction, is another shared feature. Children's literature is usually written by adults who generally work on the assumption that the child is in need of correction. Fantasy is a powerfully didactic mode. It teaches through proceeding in a nondual mode and discovering the real world to be also magic. Advaita is didactic in approach. In this discipline, conceptual understanding is regarded as worthless without spiritual effort. One has to be, not think about being.

Religious traditions, including Indian spiritual traditions, attach special importance to the child as role model for the adult<sup>4</sup> and to the idea of a return to the source, a concept with mystic implications which can be connected to the relationship between adults and children. As child psychology shows, the very young child is in a state of non-differentiation. Such a state may be seen as non-dual, known in Advaita as realization. One of the most respected figures in the field of developmental psychology, Jean Piaget states in the final chapter of *The Construction of Reality in the Child* that at this stage of the child's development the outside world does not "seem formed by permanent

<sup>2</sup> Munagala, V. (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, § 420.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., § 383.

<sup>4</sup> Kakar, Sudhir. *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1978. pp.140-1.

objects, that neither space nor time is yet organised in groups and objective series, and that causality is not spatialized or located in things” and “the universe consists in mobile and plastic perceptual images centred about personal activity” for a self that “remains unaware of its own subjectivity”<sup>5</sup>The external world and the sensations experienced by the self are not distinguished from each other till later when they become separate.

This period may be said to be truly Advaitic, nondual. Piaget states in terms significant for both the researcher into fantasy and the student of Advaita: “From the point of view of consciousness, this primitive relation between subject and object is a relation of undifferentiation, corresponding to the protoplasmic consciousness of the first weeks of life when no distinction is made between the self and the non-self.”

Apparently, in terms of consciousness, the child has not separated itself from its own physical origins as protoplasm. Piaget sees the child only slowly and in stages, manifesting differentiation and developing all the features of an adult consciousness. In terms of Advaita the state of the child is in some respects like that of the realised soul who also does not differentiate between self and other and is perpetually joyful. However the child is presumably unaware of itself as subject let alone the nature and significance of its own vision. From a spiritual perspective, the goal of human existence would be to return to such a state, retaining adult awareness, knowledge of the value of this state and the power to remain in it. A return to origins and a prizing of childhood make excellent sense from a perspective that believes the origin is perpetually within.

From the perspective of children’s fantasy fiction two features characterizing the child between the ages of two to four are particularly important. One is animism, a faculty which “endows everything with the will to play its role,”<sup>7</sup> the other is pretend play which represents the

<sup>5</sup> Piaget, Jean. ‘The Elaboration of the Universe: Conclusion.’ *The Construction of Reality in the Child*. London: Routledge, 1955. Section 1. <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/piaget.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Section 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Section 4.

absent as though present and symbolizes “past experience and relates it to the present.”<sup>8</sup> This is a sign of mental health and a vitally important part of a child’s development. Pretend play is surely linked to what is called fantasy in the adult and exhibits the child’s creativity. Animism, in which everything that exists is seen as alive, may be interpreted as showing a sophisticated spiritual state. This stems from the absence of differentiation between the self and the external world in the psyche of the young child; the life within is perceived as existing without. What is frequently seen as merely ignorance on the part of the child can be held to exhibit a nondual wisdom as consistently recognized in Romantic poetry.

Gareth Matthews points out in his article ‘The Philosophy of Childhood’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that not only can a child of about five draw very rational conclusions from data available but small children show extraordinary mental abilities absent in the adult, in particular, a capacity for philosophical thinking:

“Philosophical thinking in children can hardly be seen as primitive or early-stage efforts to develop a capacity that adults normally have in a mature form. In fact adults have no standard or normal capacity to do philosophy. Moreover, they are much less likely to think philosophical thoughts than are children. In this respect, child philosophy is somewhat like child art. Children often have a freshness, an openness, and a creativity in philosophical thinking, as in painting and drawing, that is missing in most adults.”<sup>9</sup>

Many of the comments by children cited in Matthews’ remarkable studies indicate that small children show a capacity to interrogate the supposed reality of the world. For example, these queries from small children: “‘Papa, how can we be sure everything is not a dream?’ A

<sup>8</sup> Pringle, Mia Kellmer. *The Needs of Children: A Personal Perspective Prepared for the Department of Health and Social Security*. London: Hutchinson, 1975. p.48.

<sup>9</sup> Matthews, Gareth. ‘The Philosophy of Childhood.’ Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1994. in *The Philosophy of Childhood*. ‘The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.’ Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2002 ed. 13 Sept. 2002. 9 sections. 30 June 2004. Section 7 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2002/entries/childhood/>

mother ... recalled that her daughter, then three and a half, had once asked, 'Mama, are we 'live' or are we on video?'"<sup>10</sup>

There is evidence, therefore, that children need to be seen as persons in their own right, possessing special insights and capacities, in some ways superior to adults and not merely as incomplete adults. Adults being invariably, and in all cultures more powerful than children, it is the latter view that is universally held. A child is generally seen as a small person, an immature but developing human being, with an incomplete perspective and needing education. There is however, another radically different mode of perception, also normal and widespread, by which the child and childhood can be regarded. This perspective sees the young as precious, valuable in themselves. Social psychologist Sudhir Kakar observes, "in the Indian tradition of childhood... it is the child who is considered nearest to a perfect, divine state and it is the adult who needs to learn the child's mode of experiencing the world."<sup>11</sup>

Clearly such a perspective has much in common with the one asserted during the Romantic age and in particular through the writing of Rousseau. Romantic writing presents the child as innocent but not ignorant, closer to nature and recollecting origin, blessed with visionary insight and imaginative power, father of the man, capable of spontaneous joy and as existing in a state of spiritual health. Such writing emphasizes the paradoxical need of the adult to learn from the child and to remain in touch with children and the child the adult once was.

Developmental models of growth which see progress from childhood to adulthood in terms of straight line development or a development in stages, a staircase model as in the case of Piaget or even development in epiphanic flashes of insight are all according to Jack Priestley, unsatisfactory because "they assume that progression to a new stage causes us to leave behind an early

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>11</sup> Kakar, Sudhir. *Indian Childhood: Cultural Ideals and Social Reality*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1979. p.31.

one"<sup>12</sup> He offers instead the model of the cross section of an old pine tree with rings distinct near the core but hazy at the periphery where they register the tree's decay. "Childhood remains at our core and never leaves us although the years of later experience grow around it and dull its sharpest experiences."<sup>13</sup>

Western fantasy fiction for children and advaita, one of the most sophisticated systems of philosophy in the world, seem utterly at variance – at first glance. But between the bald head and the bare knee there may yet exist a bond. If we look more attentively, we begin to see the deep rooted correlation between writing that reflects and addresses the undivided consciousness of a child and the profound discoveries of the most distinguished minds in Hindu spirituality. C.S.Lewis' novels, which will be examined in the second part of this article, show that nonduality is also at home in the mythic world of Narnia. ▲

<sup>12</sup> Priestley, Jack. 'Moral and Spiritual Growth.' Richard and Jean Mills, eds. *Childhood Studies: A Reader in Perspectives of Childhood*. London: Routledge, 2000. p.124.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.125.

# The Vision of the Juki

## Part One

### An Unwritten Tradition: The First and Last Days With Uncle Noah

DOUGLAS HALEBI

In the winter of 1983, I had an essay published in the prestigious British journal *Studies in Comparative Religion*. That piece of writing was “The World of the Juki,” which attempted to evoke the memory of bygone days in a distant land. It was written as a tribute to a self-contained, self-renewing tribal community, maintaining its standards across time and space with no land, no sovereignty, no army to defend it, and no social standing, or, at best, a very limited standing.

Douglas Blake was born and educated in the United States, with paternal relatives of Gypsy origin in the Near East and maternal relatives of Anglo-American descent in North America. His uncle Noah, instilled in him and his brothers a thirst for ever deeper, purer, richer understanding of life. All his literary ventures have been an attempt to dip into the well of knowledge his Uncle extended to them.



The tributes were rare, the praise faint and guarded. Yet a few years ago a documentary film, *American Gypsy*, quoted from this article. And I was indeed gratified to learn that even so obscure an essay as mine, once published, can take on a life of its own and can be of some value to someone, somewhere. Some would say that writings such as my own should remain only a family treasure, not to be shared with a wider readership. The thirst for privacy, for discretion, goes deep. Yet if water is kept in a sealed jar and nourishes no one, what is its purpose?

After numerous other ventures and a life of many years in Mexico, Europe, the Near East and the United States, I find that I have much more to say about my paternal relatives, the patrons and sponsors who lavished hospitality on me in youth. And I've also discovered that this life is a never-ending process of growth, that the inner fermentation of man has no terminus except the one imposed on us by 'dropping the body' and leaving this world. And our reality is far richer than all our self-limiting theories about it, all our preconceived notions concerning both the Earth we live on and man himself. I have a thirst for self-expression that defines, directs and orients my life, a quest for ever richer, finer, purer, more lucid and more compelling words. And the creative process is as important as the finished work, just as the journey in life is not only a means to an end but an end in itself. And things have the meaning we are able to invest in them. When I came to Lebanon and Syria in the early 1960s with my brothers, visiting Uncle Noah, accepting his lavish hospitality, experiencing life for an extended period among my paternal relatives — a Gypsy group called by themselves the 'Juki' —, one thing surprised and gratified me more than any other: in that place and time, the Gypsies, like other peoples of nomadic origin, were considered not a mere intrusive presence, but a people of value.

In Lebanon our beloved host, Uncle Noah, was a poet, seer, teacher and worthy patron all at the same time. And in the *hashi nura*, or 'Gypsy Camp,' set in the shade of a modest pine forest, Noah was in his element. For us, he was like a wine-vat forever dripping with wine. And whoever tasted even drops of this illuminating wine always

craved more. Life, in that seemingly primitive milieu, proved to be a revelation for us. We expanded our horizons and thus our possibilities as well, as we were instructed, provoked, nourished and enticed by our teacher. Knowledge was not always transmitted in a formal, explicit manner, however. Instead, the most vital information, or the richest insight, often was expressed in the context of a seemingly mundane discussion, while we were sipping coffee or discussing the quality of a rug, the value of a copper dish. Such were the typical discussions of the Juki that prosaic, ordinary episodes in life were interspersed with a passionate thirst to express, in ever finer and purer language, the most delicate and sublime aspirations and the highest strivings. Everything was interrelated and life itself, the whole rhythm and flow of ancestral existence, could be called a religion of a kind.

Implicit in Uncle Noah's whole orientation toward family, society and the world were grave reservations about the 'progress' and 'development' claimed for the modern age. How, he asked us, should this curious word 'progress' even be defined? For progress implies a specific direction, an orientation, goals already posited and accepted, with respect to which it can be measured and evaluated. We found ourselves posing the questions latent in his conversations with us: Are people more fortunate only because they succeed in hoarding expensive possessions? And was the Earth itself no more than a 'possession' to lay claim to? Are we not, perhaps, becoming excessively dependent on technology? (The objection of many who lived in this 'city of tents' was not that the methodologies and techniques of the times didn't work. On the contrary, they said, these techniques and mechanical artefacts worked far too well, so that mere means to an end were too often mistaken for the ends themselves.) To what extent, then, did the most 'developed' societies merit our admiration, if at all? Was modern man wiser than the luminaries of the past? Did he have better character? And were there not timeless verities and universal, ever-abiding needs of man, values and aspirations as vital to life as the need for water, bread and sleep?

These were only the first stirrings of matters that pervaded almost every discussion my brothers and I had with our uncle, and with

Aunt Rihani, the bard Magrupi, and many others. The deepest thirst of man, Magrupi told us, is the thirst for meaning. And as soon as we have water that comes from a well or falls from the sky, then we sense within ourselves that this other, deeper thirst — the thirst to discover beauty in life— finds value even in seemingly routine or tepid events, and takes pleasure in our hospitality and generosity and the grandeur of our gesture. This life, with all its sorrows, is a quest to embark upon, a mission and a calling (even if this quest has little to do with political pretensions). And it is here, in this world, even if we are deluged by poverty, that we can turn wounds into fountains, give water to the thirsty, and share our knowledge with those who value it most. It is here that the caged bird, when it is unleashed, knows the beauty of having the whole sky to fly in.

It so happened, for the first time in my life, that I was living in a habitat where Gypsies were not deemed to be the dregs of humanity, unwanted and scorned, where they were not living in fear of being accused falsely of any number of grave crimes. I had been told, even in the United States, that it would be foolish, indeed, to use the very word Gypsy too loosely, that it would only invite tragic misunderstandings if one were to speak of one's connection to such a people, who were so deeply misunderstood that they felt utterly terrified of public discourse. No one had ever applied for a job, or for public assistance, or gone to school while expressing too freely these ancestral bonds. It was taken as a given that no one knowingly hired Gypsies to do any job. No one rented a house or an apartment to such people unless they were inconspicuous and, though vaguely foreign, not recognizable. Many years later, a New York newspaper poll listed the best-liked peoples of the world and those who were the least esteemed. According to that poll, Gypsies are the most despised people on Earth.

But then, as if I had entered another world, I found exactly the opposite response among the various peoples of Lebanon. I encountered people from all eighteen recognized sectarian factions and the other, unrecognized groups as well. Not only Uncle's extended family but an entire society considered Gypsies, a people of nomadic

origin whose vast and varied wanderings were well known, to have ever-abiding, deep affinities with the Arabs, another people of nomadic lineage, albeit not the same one. We Gypsies were still marginalized and we did not share in the prospects available to citizens of the Lebanese Republic. And yet we were honoured, valued, respected, and considered worthy souls with rich hearts and chivalrous ways, people who had great worth. When I finally left Beirut and Trablus, Damascus and Aleppo, I felt an overwhelming sadness, a bitter sorrow, to know that when I returned to Europe (where friends in Paris and a grandfather in Madrid awaited me), I would perhaps never, never be so honoured again.

Not only did I find it difficult to part with my beloved Uncle and his life-long friends. That, indeed, was sorrowful enough, even as my brothers and I contemplated a return one day. But there was also regret, nostalgia, deep and painful sighs in parting from Beirut and its astonishingly generous citizens. There was a farewell meal served up in the Gypsy Camp in which our relatives lived in relative repose, shaded by parasol pines and evergreen oaks, considering themselves as free as the wind. We ate well, tasting delicacies such as *nashuuf*, a thick, hot, spicy stew cooked in one enormous pot and then shared in by many households, as well as *bint sahn*, or 'girl on a plate,' a thin, crêpe-like bread coated in honey and so named for its sweetness. Before we exchanged the long, sing-song litany of courtesies with Uncle Noah and Aunt Rihani for the last time, before we sped away to the airport and a flight to Paris, we asked one last, poignant question of our teacher.

We insisted that Uncle tell us when the immensity of the prejudice against Gypsies in Europe would at last be surpassed. He heaved a deep sigh, sipped on his strong coffee, and decided to answer in his own dramatic way. "If," he told us, "I pour out a glass of rare, precious wine for a guest who has promised to join us, and if the guest does not arrive in one week, six months, six years, a score of years, half a century, then we must draw a certain conclusion. We must finally admit to ourselves that this long-sought, greatly respected guest will never come. And for us, it will be as if he had vanished from the

Earth. We, too, when we seek out understanding and acceptance among strangers, we are in the position of one who pours the cup of wine, again and again, patient, stubborn, ever seeking the day when the beloved guest is here. And if only a handful of people ever give respect to us and so receive it in turn, and the years of a lifetime pass, we finally admit to ourselves that this elusive, treasured phenomenon, human understanding, often does not occur at all. The tree has yet to ripen, the fruit to be tasted and shared. And, indeed, not only the Europeans but also we ourselves are at fault. Understanding is like a tree whose roots we must plant today, knowing how long it takes to water, prune, and cultivate it. Knowing that we must have faith that understanding, like a tree, ripens slowly and cannot be made to grow in haste. So perhaps, even if generations pass, we should still pour the wine, still grow the wine-grapes, and still polish the glass for the missing stranger.”

“And yet,” Rihani added, “we are powerless to give people what they are not prepared to receive. Powerless to induce the *hal* (inner state of being) in another soul that would cause it to surpass itself, surpass the limitations that cause it to see only the lowest aspects of life among us.”

But it was Magrupi, the old bard, who had the last word. Man, he informed us, was made in such a way, was endowed with so many riches, that only when we know any of the children of Adam well, in a deep, intimate manner, can we understand something of the wealth with which that soul has been endowed. He added that sometimes great story-tellers show us more about the intricately patterned souls of human beings than all the analyses of psychologists or journalists, pundits or politicians. “Always,” he admonished us, “prefer nuance to stereotype, living experience to mere theories about human nature.”

My wise Uncle Noah used to sit on a rotting oak-stump that he called his ‘throne.’ It is not the throne that confers value on the king, but the king who gives value to the throne. And the master who sits on the stump of a tree is no less worthy than one who lives amid splendour and fabulous wealth. What lessons, then, could Uncle Noah impart beneath a gold canopy on a lazy summer day, deep in

the parasol pines of Lebanon? I cannot remember all of his words, dripping with honey, sung and chanted as if by a bard performing on stage. No one had command of language like Uncle Noah, who drew on a glittering tapestry of tradition and intertwined it with eloquence typical of great scholars and writers. Every conversation was rich in stunning word formulations, yet the words were never written down. They seemed to belong to the forest, like the drooping trees and the blinding hot sun. They flowed out of him like water from an ever-flowing stream. Following is my own rendition of his purely verbal commentary. I can remember only some of his words, adding my own to complete Uncle’s monologue.

“They say the Earth is a cup of water in a thirsty universe, and all the stars only fireflies that cool and die in an hour of cosmic time,” he began, drinking deep from a well-fortified cup of wine. “But for us, blinded by the beauty of the world, none of this can matter: We are here, in a realm of golden-coated horses and silver birch trees. The moon rises slowly, like a field ripening in the spring, and its light is mirrored in a thousand streams that dazzle children and startle the aged.

“Here, where wine-grapes ferment as effortlessly as a snowflake tumbles to earth, everything is swirling in the midday heat. All eyes are glutted with honey, men are drunk in the splendour of a sunrise, enchanted by the light that drips from medlar trees and glistens in still ponds. Man is inebriated by life itself, instructed by the leaves that shimmer and dance on the swaying trees. Here we are smitten with wonder, possessed of a thirst for meaning that can never be slaked. “What need is there of Utopia when we have the burning laps of a young maiden? Why ponder the infirmities of age, the sting of death, when there’s even a breath of life left in us? Drink deep from your wine-vat, let your toasts honour the rising and the setting sun.

“Hail the moon, serenade the stars like a man bewitched and in a stupor. And know that all is not in vain: to have lived is to have experienced a giddy triumph! A sweet hour in the sun, beyond compare with any other delight in the world, the universe. Hail and praise the shimmering, white-hot stars of midnight. Drink in beauty

as if it were water found in a barren land. And love life. Burn it up with never a tear.”

And may we, indeed, heed Uncle Noah’s advice. May we journey through this world like a man hastening toward his own wedding feast. And if Noah were really here, sitting among us, he might add that the constellations drip with hidden meaning, that the stars are portents and similitude of forces beyond the limits of this material universe. That man was put on the Earth to turn darkness into light, slavery into freedom, ignorance into knowledge, and folly into illuminating wisdom. And that if we attain the highest, richest and freest *hal*, or inner state of being, we will be saturated with compassion, drenched in mercy, and stupefied by beauty.

Let us, in any case, remember that Uncle proclaimed Beauty the ultimate theophany, saying, “One day beauty will redeem the whole world.” *Bater*, may it be so. ▲

## Let Go

Samarender Reddy

What is this attachment to life we have  
When in death we do not taste the absence of life.  
Do we not in sleep every night  
Die to this world we hold dear.  
It is a different matter  
We wake up again to the same world.  
Do we not also every night  
Dream up a life for ourselves  
But so easily let go of it upon waking.  
When we can renounce without grief the dream world  
Why are we hung up on this waking world?

## VIDEO INTERVIEW

# The Ashram Printer

T.V. VENKATARAMAN

I am one of those fortunate people still alive, who have seen Bhagavan alive in flesh and blood apart from Bhagavan’s relatives. It may appear incongruous that I am starting the interview with ‘I’ while all the time Bhagavan was exhorting us to annihilate the ‘I’.

The first time I saw Bhagavan was in 1940 or 1941. At that time I was 11 or 12 years old and a school student. The school went on an excursion to Gingee and, on the return journey, we came to Tiruvannamalai to have Bhagavan’s darshan. I remember Bhagavan sitting on his couch, wearing a white loincloth, and two people in white sitting at his feet, playing violin. But that was a long time ago.

I think it all started with Sri D.S. Sastri, Suri Nagamma’s brother, who was the manager of the Central Bank in Chennai. My father, Sri T.K. Venkatesan, and my uncle had started a printing press called Jupiter Press way back in 1935. Our press had an account with

Sri Sastri's bank. Evidently, when Swami Niranjanananda needed some printing done for the Ashram, Sri Sastri was kind enough to suggest our name. At that time — in early 1940s — the Ashram published very little, as it was a difficult period for them financially. For example, once when we sent a bill for Rs.800/-, the Ashram was only able to remit their payments over an extended period in instalments of Rs. 200/-. But when I grew up and joined the press in 1949, things had picked up and during the mid 50s the then president, Sri T.N. Venkataraman (later Swami Ramanananda) used to chase us for the printing bills to make immediate payment.

Jupiter was a small press in 1935 but over time developed greatly and by the 1970's, was one of the bigger presses in Madras. We mainly did book publications, a lot of books for Ramakrishna Math and their monthly journals — *The Vedanta Kersari* in English, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* in Tamil, the Telugu *Ramakrishna Prabha* and other books. We used to print books for Sri M.P. Pandit of Sri Aurobindo Ashram who was a close friend of ours. People sometimes asked why all our books were orientated towards spiritual subjects. I don't know the answer but it proved to be a blessing.

In time, my father became close with Swami Niranjanananda, who always looked after him with great care. He called on us to do major publication projects. In those days, preparing books and doing the printing could take six months or more. I think the first major book we printed for the Ashram was the first edition of *Talks*, in three volumes, the second edition of the *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* printed in March 1949 of which I still possess a copy and after that *Letters*, in two volumes, followed by *Day by Day*. Much later, at the time of Swami Ramanananda's 60th birthday (*sashyabdha-poorthy*) in 1974, we brought out a colour album, entitled Venkatoo 60. This volume, containing colour pictures of Bhagavan, won the Best Printers Award at one of the printer's annual exhibitions in Madurai.

At the time of the publication of *Letters*, Sri D.S. Sastri would come to the press to see the proofs, his house being very near to our press. Once when the Ashram made the decision to translate and publish *Letters* in English, Sri Sastri worked night and day for three

days in order to finish everything quickly, fearing that the Ashram might change its mind.

In time I got to have direct contact with the Ashram publication department, especially when the *Mountain Path* began publication in 1964. Ours was the first printer of the *Mountain Path*, and we had closed down the press in 1989. However, I am continuing to involve myself in getting the journal printed. Prof. K. Swaminathan used to come to the press in connection with the magazine. If there were corrections, I would go to his house or he would send me post cards with the page and line numbers of the corrections to be carried out. When Sri Ganesan was editor of the *Mountain Path*, he used to come to Madras for proof-reading and page makeup. Much later, Sri Ramamani took over. As he was new to the job and as the Ashram did not have any facility for desktop publishing at that time, I used to take the proofs we typeset in Madras to the Ashram and sit for two to three days, cutting and pasting, making the necessary layout changes before taking everything back to Madras for printing. So every 3-6 months, I would have had the opportunity to come to the Ashram — the *Mountain Path* serving as a good excuse — and stay for three or four days in order to prepare the magazine. But the fact is I came in order to be charged up like a battery in its charger, which, in this case, was Bhagavan Sri Ramana; I came, got re-charged and then went back to my work in Madras.

My sister's husband, Sri Rajamani, was a great devotee of Bhagavan. Whenever any new book was published, he immediately ordered it. He always enquired as to how the Ashram was doing and whenever there was a function at the Ashram, he would straightaway send a donation. My father and uncle were not such great devotees as he was but they were nevertheless irrevocably attached to the Ashram. Swami Ramanananda became very close to my uncle, Sri Sambamurthi, and whenever he came to Madras, he would come to our press and visit my uncle. He used to treat us like family friends, and, of course, the camaraderie between our respective families continues to this day.

Once when we were doing commercial printing, we got distracted with other work and procrastinated doing the Ashram printing work.

Swami Ramananda came to the press in Madras and sat before us, saying in a bold manner: “What do you think you are doing? Sri Ramanasramam is paying you well. If I make up my mind, I will throw all your machines into the Bay of Bengal!” And there was truth in his words! So we got back to work on the Ashram publications. We have always loved doing work for the Ashram because the Ashram never treated us like an ordinary supplier but like family members.

A week or ten days before Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, my family and I came to the Ashram because we heard that Bhagavan’s health was sinking. We came by car and were blessed to have his darshan. The morning after Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, we saw the news in the paper and closed the press that day. The entire staff, some 6 or 7 of us including my uncle, left Madras and, arriving at the Ashram at noon, stayed until Bhagavan’s body was interred. In the years following Bhagavan’s Mahasamadhi, our printing work continued. And whenever my father would go to Bangalore to visit my sister, he would stop at the Ashram. Amazingly, however, it was only after Mahanirvana that the family began to move truly close to Bhagavan.

In retrospect, I wish I had taken more opportunity to spend time with Bhagavan. But as it was, the professional dimension seemed somehow to take precedence at that time. Another regret I have is that we did not have the foresight to preserve Bhagavan’s corrected proofs. Not knowing their value, we simply discarded them, as printers do when the printing is over.

Bhagavan always lived the life he preached, whatever he preached he lived it. So he is a great example to all of us as to how to conduct our lives. On several occasions, in troubled times, I always thought of him. Many times too numerous to mention, he gave me guidance on small matters and I found a peace of mind which I cannot readily explain in words.

However I cannot refrain from making a mention. Once my wife had to undergo a major surgery. At that time Sri Ramamani was the editor of the *Mountain Path* and we were in the midst of finalizing it. The surgeon had fixed the surgery in the next couple of days and the post-surgery required my attention for a fortnight. I could not

leave my wife’s bedside. My mind was in a turmoil and I left the matter entirely to Bhagavan. To my surprise the surgeon tells me next morning that she is postponing the surgery to a later date. Of course the work would have got done by Bhagavan without me.

I am not much of a sadhaka but, I consider doing work for the Ashram is itself my sadhana and fulfilment. I only pray for His Grace so that my faculties function till my last breath to enable me to continue doing work for the Ashram.

It is not given to many to be of service to Bhagavan, and I consider myself to be singularly fortunate to be able to do so. ▲

### Postscript

It has been a rare privilege working with Sri T.V. Venkataraman on the *Mountain Path*. When I first became involved with the magazine in 2002 it was TVV, as he is affectionately called, who guided me through the first steps. He could not have been kinder or more patient with all my ignorant questions. Nothing was too much trouble nor any task too small for his attention. He is modesty personified. I have relied upon his judgement and hawk-eye in catching typos as have all who work in the Ashram computer room when they set up a new book for publication. His subtle, gentle hand has been involved with most of the Ashram publications since the 1960s and we are all indebted to him both for publishing and the preparation of accounts.

We all wish him a long, healthy and happy life. To say this solely for his benefit would be disingenuous, for we have come to rely on his unreserved assistance and without him we would frankly be at a loss.

TVV is the personification of *karma yoga*.

He will no doubt try to delete the above encomium and if you see this postscript you will know that for once we have managed to get the better of his scruples!

— Christopher Quilkey



D. Thiyagarajan

## KEYWORD

# Sadhana Chatustaya

## The Four-fold Proximate Aid to Spiritual Practice

JOHN GRIMES

The Advaita Vedanta philosophical system lays down an oft-quoted four-fold proximate<sup>1</sup> requirement (*sadhana chatustaya*) qualifying an aspirant to pursue the direct path of knowledge. These preliminary qualifications are: 1) discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal (*nitya anitya vastu viveka*); 2) non-attachment to the enjoyment of the fruits of one's actions either in this world or in any other (*iba amutra artha phalabhoga viraga*); 3) possession in abundance of the six virtues, *viz.*, calmness, equanimity, turning away from sense-objects, forbearance, concentration, and faith (*sama damadi sadhana sampatti*); and 4) a longing or extremely intense desire for liberation (*mumuksutva*).

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<sup>1</sup> Many texts and teachers in the Advaita tradition, especially those who conform to the Bhamati school, prescribe proximate or preconditional aids in order that a direct assault on the Self will be successful. These proximate aids render the intellect strong and clear and such an aspirant is known as a qualified (*adhikari*) spiritual seeker.

According to the tradition, only that individual who possesses this four-fold requirement is qualified to study the Vedanta source-books under the guidance of a teacher who is not only learned in scripture but also well-established in Truth. Adi Sankaracarya presented this four-fold requirement in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* as well as more extensively in his *Vivekacudamani*. This preliminary discipline is also lucidly discussed in the *Kaivalya Navanitam* and many other Advaita texts.

Sri Ramana, when asked which is the best method of spiritual practice (*sadhana*), would generally reply that it depends on the temperament of the individual. Every person is born with latent tendencies (*samskara*) from his past lives. One method will prove easy to one person and another to another. There can be no general rule.<sup>2</sup> Advanced spiritual aspirants quickly realize the Self when given the right instructions by a qualified guru. The less mature need time to reflect on the Self before realizing it and the third group require many years of intensive spiritual practice.

According to Advaita, the *direct* path of knowledge (*jnana*) itself consists of three steps: 1) hearing (*sravana*); 2) reflection (*manana*); and 3) contemplation (*nididhyasana*).<sup>3</sup> Success will depend chiefly upon the qualification of the seeker. Place, time, and other circumstances are merely auxiliaries to success. It is said that when the guru's initial instructions do not result in a permanent and complete manifestation of one's true nature, the guru takes recourse in instructing the student to perform some prerequisite actions which will have the effect of purifying the intellect and removing the defects which hide one's inner Self. Thus, according to Advaita, *sadhanas* (spiritual practices) are not performed in order to gain the great inner Self, for one is already That, but to remove the impurities which cover it up and hide its Presence from the seeker. Sri Ramana was not actually opposed to these prerequisites for a spiritual aspirant and agreed that without them, it is unlikely that a person would even begin a spiritual discipline, let alone be successful.

<sup>2</sup> Spiritual Instruction, *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 'Abhyasa', No.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 2.iv.5.

"The very fact that you are possessed of the quest for the Self is a manifestation of divine grace *Arul*."<sup>4</sup>

These preliminary disciplines help to purify the mind, and without them being present in at least some degree, practicing a spiritual discipline would be like pouring water into a pot that has holes in the bottom. No matter how much water is poured into such a pot (be it Self-enquiry, meditation, etc.), the fruits of such practices will just run out the holes at the bottom of the pot. However, it may be noted that Sri Ramana did not emphasize prerequisites; instead he advised seekers to directly enquire into the source of the 'I'-thought.

The major difference between Sri Ramana and the Advaita tradition is that traditional Advaita philosophy posits that the Self can be discovered by the use of the mind, whether through affirmation or negation. Can the mind, by preliminarily employing the 'I'-thought, transcend itself? This is a debatable issue, but it is obvious that Sri Ramana's path of Self-enquiry differed from Advaita, if not in all details, most certainly in its emphasis and understanding. Sri Ramana was concerned with direct experience and not endless explanations however erudite and subtle.

Sri Ramana's path of Self-enquiry did not affirm the reality or real existence of the 'I'-thought. On the other hand, in Advaita practices, this 'I'-thought is affirmed and employed to focus, discriminate, concentrate, contemplate, and so on in the quest for Self-realisation. Though Advaita accepts all paths and the particulars in its path as tools or methodological devices in this quest for 'obtaining the already obtained,' it obviously differs from Sri Ramana's path in that it, even if provisionally, accepts the 'I'-thought of the spiritual practitioner in his or her quest and holds that it is with this 'I'-thought that the goal will be reached. Sri Ramana was aware that spontaneous and complete destruction of the 'I'-thought by Self-enquiry was not possible for many seekers and thus he sometimes, depending on circumstances and qualifications, advised various seekers to undertake preliminary practices which would cultivate purity and control of their wavering mind. "All methods are good since they will lead to Self-enquiry

<sup>4</sup> Sastri, Kapali, *Sat Darshana Bhashya*, 1993. Page v.

eventually.”<sup>5</sup> “This (vision of the Self) will only be encountered by those who are free of the delusion of desire, and not by those whose corrupted minds are full of desires for sense objects.”<sup>6</sup>

Advaita clearly delineates the characteristics and prerequisites (*sadhana chatushtaya*) of a person qualified to pursue an enquiry into the Self. “That person alone is considered qualified to inquire into the Absolute who possesses discrimination, detachment, the virtues such as tranquility and so on and an intense-longing-for liberation.”<sup>7</sup> These virtues are then expounded in the following verses 19-29 of *Vivekacudamani*. The text declares that the experience of Reality is possible only if they exist and impossible in their absence. Each qualification follows its predecessor according to the logic that ‘what precedes is the cause that follows.’ Detachment cannot be secured in the absence of discrimination. Until one is able to discriminate what is Real from what is unreal, what is permanent from what is impermanent, detachment will not arise. Likewise, the virtues will naturally flow from one when one is dispassionate.

To discriminate between the Real and the non-real (*nitya anitya vastuviveka*) is a good beginning. It is important. Discriminating wisdom makes the distinction between what is permanent and what is impermanent. However, eventually one must experience that there is no boundary between in and out, Real and non-real. Thus, this is but the first of the preliminary aids to liberation.

What is meant by discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal? Sankara accepts as Real only that which neither changes nor ceases to exist. No object, no knowledge, can be said to be absolutely real if its existence is only temporary. Absolute reality implies permanent existence. Thus, discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal is the conviction that the Absolute alone is eternal (*nitya*) and all else is ephemeral (*anitya*), bound by time, transitory. One must be absolutely clear that thoughts are impermanent. They appear and disappear. Forms are impermanent. They appear and

disappear. Even the most sublime experiences come and go. No form can be held onto. One must recognize the impossibility of holding onto anything, one’s body, one’s thoughts, and one’s experiences. This verse contains two-thirds of what has become an oft-quoted verse said to encapsulate Advaita in a nutshell: *Brahma satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva n’aparah*.

What is dispassion, detachment? Dispassion or detachment is the absence of any desire to enjoy the fruits of one’s efforts, either here in this life or in any other life anywhere else. This dispassion arises out of discrimination and not despair or despondency. It is the natural result of a vigorous discrimination by which the seeker recognizes that the pleasures which result from gain are transitory, fleeting, and impermanent and therefore cannot fulfill one’s deepest longing for eternal bliss.

Tranquility is said to be detaching the mind from the myriad sense-objects by continuously perceiving their defects and resting the mind permanently on one’s objective, i.e., the Self. Self-control is said to be the retention of both kinds of sense-organs (*karmendriyas* and *jnanendriyas*) in their respective centres, withdrawing them from all sense-objects. The best self-withdrawal is when thought-waves cease to be supported by external objects. Forbearance is said to be the endurance of all afflictions without caring for redress or revenge while always being free from anxiety or lament. Acceptance, with firm conviction, of the scriptures and the words of the Master as conveying the Truth is called faith by the wise. By this does Reality become apprehended. One-pointedness is said to be the perfect establishment of the mind forever in the pure Absolute free of any indulgences of the mind. An intense longing for liberation is the desire to be free from the bonds of ignorance, extending from the ego-sense and so on, down to the physical body itself, through the realisation of one’s true nature.

Sri Ramana said, “Who denies that good conduct is good or that it will eventually lead you to the goal? Good conduct purifies the *citta* (mind) and gives one a pure mind. The pure mind attains jnana, which is what is meant by salvation.”<sup>8</sup> ▲

<sup>5</sup> Venkataramiah, M. (ed.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2009. §189, p.61.

<sup>6</sup> Muruganar, *Padamalai*, Avaduta Foundation, Boulder, 2005. v.56, p.242.

<sup>7</sup> *Vivekacudamani*, v.17.

<sup>8</sup> Mudaliar, D., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. p.352, 31.12.46.

## ASHRAM CALENDAR 2011

Pongal	Saturday	15th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Wednesday	19th January
Sundaram Iyer Day	Tuesday	22nd February
Maha Sivaratri	Wednesday	2nd March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	18th March
Telugu New Year Day	Monday	4th April
Sri Rama Navami	Tuesday	12th April
Tamil New Year Day	Thursday	14th April
Bhagavan's Aradhana	Saturday	30th April
Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)	Thursday	26th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Tuesday	12th July
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Saturday	13th August
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Thursday	1st September
Navaratri Festival commences	Wednesday	28th September
Saraswati Puja	Wednesday	5th October
Vijayadasami	Thursday	6th October
Deepavali	Wednesday	26th October
Karthigai Festival commences	Wednesday	30th November
Karthigai Deepam	Friday	9th December
Bhagavan's 132nd Jayanthi	Monday	9th January 2012

## Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's  
Commentary

## Verse Twenty Nine

S. RAM MOHAN

## Verse 29

Without uttering aloud the word 'I' but with a penetrating mind, diving deep within to enquire and seek the source of arising of 'I', is the means for obtaining the Awareness of the Self, delineated as the path of supreme wisdom (*jnana*) Meditating on 'I am not this (body); I am that' could be an aid (to Self-enquiry). But can it, by itself, be as effective as the direct method of Self-enquiry?

## Commentary

The sadhana usually prescribed in the extant texts of Advaita-Vedanta differs from the direct path of Sri Bhagavan. These texts say that experience of the Self is to be won by passing through the three stages: listening (*sravana*) to the spiritual teaching; reflecting on it

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

(*manana*) with the help of reason; and finally continuous meditation (*nididhyasana*). One can listen to the great pronouncements (*mahavakyas*) such as *tat-tvam-asi*, together with their meaning as given by the guru. '*Tat-tvam-asi*' is the counterpart of another great pronouncement, *aham brahmasmi* which is utilized in the next stage of contemplation. In this step, a firm conviction of the truth of the instructions is acquired by continuous reflection on the *mahavakya* with the help of constructive logic, *anukoola tarka*, but not negative dialectics, which is an impediment to true knowledge. The third stage (*nididhyasana*) calls for constant meditation, on the instructions of the guru, to the total exclusion of other thoughts,. It is said that this leads to what is called *akhandakara vritti* which destroys the ignorance concealing the real; then the real shines by its own conscious light.

This sadhana employs the mental faculty. There is the triad of the meditator, the object of meditation and the act of meditation, which cannot lead to the thought-free state of pure consciousness. The object of *vichara* or quest taught by Bhagavan is to pursue the quest of 'Who am I?' till the mind totally subsides, free of all thoughts. This is the direct path. However, Bhagavan does concede that *nididhyasana* has its own use as a preliminary step to Self-enquiry.

In *Who Am I?* Bhagavan shows the direct path, which is described as "Seeking whence the sense of 'I' arises, but not uttering the word 'I'." To dive into the Heart, silence of speech and of mind is essential if the mind is to seek its birth-place or source of the I-consciousness.

The purpose of Bhagavan's *vichara* method is the extinction of the mind, and it cannot be achieved by a mechanical meditation on a sound or syllable. Bhagavan directs that instead of concentrating meditation on a syllable, the sadhaka enquire into who is the meditator, which alone will lead to the annihilation of mind. The essence of this enquiry is to reach the source of the ego, by relentlessly querying "Whence does this 'I' rise?"

This dynamic element is not present in traditional meditation, which engages the mind that thrives on the very act of thinking. Fed constantly on thoughts the mind is kept alive and active, whereas the purpose of the spiritual practice is the annihilation of the mind. The

path of jnana is to dive within by the inward-turning of the silent mind to know oneself and remain in a state of pure awareness. When the mind and word are silenced, it is as Bhagavan says, like catching the thief red-handed. The *vichara*-method consists in tracing the origin of 'I' that reflects the awareness aspect of the Consciousness. We cannot afford to allow the mind to function with its uninhibited movements, which weaken the inner search.

In the *Siva Puranam*, Manickavachakar says that when the ever-moving activities of the mind cease there the Lord of the Vedas is established. One who remains strong in one's resolution and does not allow the mind to waver and who, by constant striving reaches the source of the ego is known as *dhira*, the 'valorous one'.

The traditional method of *soham* 'I am He' or 'I am Brahman' can be an aid for Self-knowledge. The traditional method is a two pronged approach, first ascertaining the *Tat* (That) and finding 'That' to be Brahman; *vichara*, on the other hand, directly takes the sadhaka to the heart. "The Self is immediate in you, it is not necessary to have a pointer like 'I am Brahman' to know the Self for even in total darkness a person knows that he is there, he answers a call by stating 'I am here'." Therefore, "The enquiry 'Who am I?' is the *sravana*. The ascertainment of the true import of 'I' is the *manana*. The practical application on each occasion is *nididhyasana*. Being as 'I' is *samadhi*."<sup>1</sup>

In summary: The *vichara* here has been delineated in two forms: 'Who Am I?' and 'Whence Am I?'. Both are forms of the same *vichara*. It may be practised in either of the two forms. The quest 'Who Am I?' is the quest of the truth of the 'I'; the quest 'Whence am I?' is the quest of the place of the origin of the 'I'; the resultant experience is the state of liberation (*jivanmukti*). It is obtained and experienced while the body continues to exist, thus the life of the body is no hindrance to the *jivanmukta's* spiritual experience. Outwardly, it appears that the mind and body have survived the Self-realization and are functioning, more or less, as before. But for the jnani, these are not real and he remains perfectly unaffected. As Bhagavan says, "It is like a burnt rope. It may retain the shape of the rope; but it has no substance." ▲

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M. (ed.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2009. §647, p.631.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

# The Quest

Chapter Six

Vichara

LUCIA OSBORNE

There comes a time when the vichara, 'Who am I?' takes over and becomes all-sufficient for sadhana. Those who can do it from the beginning are on the direct road, a shortcut. Bhagavan said that all paths lead to the vichara, which is the royal path.

The quest for the Self, the vichara, is a direct method superior to any other, for the moment you go deeper with the quest for the Self the real Self is waiting there to take you in and then your effort ceases. In this process all doubts and discussions are automatically given up just as one who sleeps forgets all his cares.

Then there would shine in the heart a wordless illumination of 'I-I', that is, there would shine of its own accord the pure consciousness which is unlimited and one, the limited and the many thoughts having

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

disappeared. If one remains still the individual sense of the form 'I-am-the-doer' will be destroyed. This is release.

"Vichara is the process and the goal also. I AM is the goal and final Reality. To hold to it with effort is vichara. When spontaneous and natural it is realisation." A devotee once asked the Maharshi: "What is that one thing, knowing which all doubts are solved?" The reply was: "Know the doubter. If the doubter is known, doubts will not arise."

It is only the mind which entertains doubts. Doubts must be uprooted. The method for accomplishing this is the investigation 'Who am I?' On another occasion he said that the purpose of Self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source, to turn it inwards upon itself at the same time focusing the attention on the spiritual heart on the right, which is the centre of spiritual experience according to the testimony of sages. Those who follow his injunctions have found it to be so.

How to eradicate thoughts? This is where Self-enquiry comes in. Whence do these thoughts come? To whom? Who am I? The whole mind is focused in alertness over this question, which should not be repeated like a mantra. The elimination of thoughts brings us to a deeper awareness that is behind and beyond thoughts.

In the Hall in Bhagavan's presence one meditated relaxed, without fixing one's thought on any particular subject or idea. It brought peace. The simple terse words and answers in 'Who am I?' and other books were like rain falling on parched earth, fully satisfying. If one can say, 'my mind, my body, my thoughts and so on, wherever this possessive pronoun can be applied, it does not indicate the true Self. Who is it that says 'My?' 'Whose?' So I am not the mind or the body, or thoughts, or feelings. All that has been plaguing me for so long is not myself. Who am I then? The enquiry becomes the basic theme often submerged and recalled by life or sadhana.

"What happens when you make a serious quest for the Self," Bhagavan explains, "is that the I-thought as a thought disappears. Something else from the depth takes hold of you and this is not the 'I' which commenced the quest. That is the real Self, the import of 'I'. It is the Supreme Being Itself."

Bhagavan guides those who would follow Him on the most direct central path, the quest of the Self and for this any religion could serve as a foundation. He also guides on other paths also as explained later.

"The Bible and the Gita are the same," was his reply to a question by a visitor to the Ashram.

All great religions of the world have divine revelation as their common basis. They all testify to the Oneness of Being, the unity of God. Differences arise only in their external application to suit different people in different ages. Esoterically the message is the same. On scrutiny one may find that injunctions and prohibitions motivated by sound therapy 'good for body, good for mind' and on a lower theistic level were likely to be followed more strictly. Though in essence a religion is divine, as an institution it is human and as such carries within itself the seeds of imperfection.

Although Bhagavan's teaching hinges on Self-enquiry, seekers find guidance on whatever path they follow from their own level of attainment. The guidance given to each disciple was *ad hominem*, intensely direct and adapted to each temperament. It still is. His guidance continues as He assured us and the teachings in the books are inspired living words. Everyone sincerely seeking finds what he needs. The theme of Self-enquiry or of surrender recurs like a refrain in varying stanzas or the cadence in a symphony ending in Silence. Vichara is the process and the goal also. 'I AM' is the goal and final Reality. Reality is That which is. All attempts resolve themselves finally into the all-pervading Reality: That which Is. "*Bhakti* (devotion), *Japa* (invocation) and *Vichara* (enquiry) are only different modes of our effort to keep out the unreality." Bhagavan says that the unreality is an obsession. Reality is our true nature. As pointed out, Bhagavan guides seekers on all paths. The four margas are not exclusive of one another. To a famous singer pouring out his heart in songs of devotion and who wanted to know whether his way was right, Bhagavan said: "Yes, what you are doing is just what you have to do. Carry on and it will lead you to the goal. Through devotion to God we discharge our emotions and that is a sure way to reach Him." That was the right way for the singer. Those who were ready He would ask to follow the path

of Self-enquiry or of surrender, the royal road. A simple peasant who fell at His feet asking to be saved He told to go on repeating 'Siva', as he had been doing. So it became a mantra given by Bhagavan.

Whether one followed the path of jnana or of bhakti Bhagavan taught that this should not interfere with the proper and effective discharge of our duties in life. It is not advisable to create an artificial vacuum for the mind by depriving it of its natural occupation. When a seeker is ready for renunciation or a life of pure contemplation a change in outer circumstances takes place spontaneously to make this possible. Things simply fall into place.

Saints have designated bhakti as the mother of jnana. The two paths lead to the same goal. Perfect devotion means complete surrender of the ego to God or Guru, while Self-enquiry leads to the dissolution of the ego, so the two paths converge. There is no true wisdom without love nor true love without wisdom. Bhagavan agreed with a visiting swami that God is required for sadhana by most people. But the end of the sadhana even in bhakti is attained only after complete surrender. "Whatever path one may choose, the 'I' is the inescapable, the 'I' that does selfless service, the 'I' that pines for her lord from whom it feels it has been separated, the 'I' that feels it has slipped from its real nature. When the source of that 'I' is found out all questions will be solved."

When shall I become like the ether and reach Thee  
Subtle of being, that the tempest of thought may end,  
Oh Arunachala. verse 57a

When will waves of thought cease to rise?  
When shall I reach Thee, subtler than the subtle ether,  
Oh Arunachala! verse 57b

Unite with me to destroy Thou and me  
And bless me with the state of ever vibrant joy. verse 56

Look within ever seeking the Self with the inner eye  
Then will I be found. Thus didst Thou direct me,  
Beloved Arunachala! verse 44<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Arunachala Aksharamana Malai*, (Marital Garland of Letters). *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1968.

Bhagavan also admitted of *pranayama* or breath-control, as a legitimate help towards attaining thought-control although he never actually enjoined it. "Breath-control can also help the wandering mind attain one-pointedness, but one should not stop there. Quiescence lasts only so long as the breath is controlled. So it is transient. Control of mind spontaneously effects control of breath. Their source is the same."

Preoccupation with occult powers was not encouraged by Bhagavan and He warned devotees not to indulge in them. They usually serve to enhance the ego.

On the subject of hearing, the Zen Master Hui Hai explains that the nature of hearing being eternal we continue to hear sounds whether they are present or not. It is our own nature which hears and it is the inner cogniser who knows. Wisdom means that your stillness of mind is not disturbed by giving any thought to that stillness. ▲

## First of September

Ana Callan

The packet of sweets,  
the dhoti, coins  
all attachments tossed  
to the breeze

when he came  
to the feet of his Father.

Bearing only the love  
in his heart, limitless,  
o so much larger  
than anything  
that can be owned.



Inauguration of Dispensary 1942

# He Never Missed a Note

A. ROY HORN (CHANDRASHEKHAR)

Since the early 1990s, there have been a number of spiritual aspirants who have been going on tour, publishing video tapes and books and claiming to be personal representatives of some of India's greatest spiritual preceptors (*Sat Gurus*). A few of these spiritual aspirants proclaim that they have been given the special authority to spread and evangelize their spiritual preceptor's teachings. These spiritual aspirants claim, explicitly or by inference, that they have now been Self-realized and have achieved the position of an authentic spiritual preceptor and their power and authority have been passed to them

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through their *guru's* spiritual lineage. How can we explain this impulse by some spiritual seekers to evangelize spiritual teachings and to claim a special authority from a guru's lineage? How can we discriminate between a true and authentic spiritual preceptor and those who that are merely self-appointed?

First, it will be useful to understand the spiritual concept of a '*guru lineage*', or *parampara* in Sanskrit, that has a special meaning in the Eastern traditions. From a religious point of view, *parampara* means the deliberate empowerment or passing on of spiritual authority from one spiritual preceptor to a designated successor consisting of one or more of his or her direct disciples (*shishya*). The purpose of passing authority is to assure authentic continuity of the teachings and an unbroken line of qualified spiritual preceptors according to the religious tradition and personal wishes of the spiritual preceptor.

Second, there is also a spiritual concept in Sanskrit called a *sampradaya* that refers to a 'traditional lineage'. This kind of lineage is considered a bestowed traditional knowledge that is passed on within a spiritual culture to qualified spiritual aspirants. It is an inclusive teaching and practice that has been passed on within a spiritual culture for generations. *Advaita Vedanta* is an example of this inclusive traditional teaching of spiritual knowledge that has been passed to generations of qualified spiritual aspirants. On the other hand, an authentic and genuine *parampara guru* lineage is an exclusive granting that refers to particular qualified disciples (*shishya*). Not all spiritual preceptors establish a *parampara guru* lineage even if they naturally incarnate in a traditional lineage within the culture in which they live and teach.

Occasionally, a spiritual aspirant may have experienced a temporary glimpse of the true Self (*atma nishtha*) and subsequently fallen from his or her realization (*yogabhrashta*).<sup>1</sup> At other times, spiritual aspirants may have had an ecstatic experience or cosmic vision within their causal (*karana*) mind. Following such experiences, they may proclaim themselves to be 'enlightened' or 'awakened'. In this case, they may

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M. (ed.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2009. \$95, p.92.

be overtaken by their karmic predispositions and develop a newly acquired spiritual ego (*ahamkara*). A few may become further seduced and take on the role of a spiritual preceptor merely because of their temporary experiences. In truth, however, the vast majority of spiritual aspirants who naturally become 'Enlightened' or 'Awakened' merely continue their normal lives unaffected by the events and contents of their lives. It is very rare indeed that a spiritual aspirant's destiny is to be trained, guided and ordained to take on the profound role as a spiritual guide, preceptor and successor *parampara guru*.

In spite of this most profound of spiritual destinies, a zealous spiritual aspirant may take on the self-appointed role as a *parampara guru* with little depth and breadth of the spiritual knowledge of his or her spiritual preceptors's tradition and teaching. A fledgling spiritual aspirant may be a want-to-be successor *guru* and evangelize his or her version of truth to the world. However, such a self-proclaimed *guru* most likely does not have the practical experience to successfully guide new spiritual students step-by-step to their conclusions.

In addition, as an endeavour to obtain credibility, an unfinished and incomplete spiritual aspirant may appear as a new 'popular' personality 'I-self' on the spiritual social scene who claims a special *guru* lineage. This neo 'pop-guru' (popular as in the 'pop' in pop-singer, pop-music, pop-psychology, or pop-society) spiritual teacher often seeks by association and inference, through biographical books and infomercial videos, or by other creative promotional methods, the appearance of achieving spiritual authority. This pop-guru teacher often imagines and creates a *parampara guru* lineage without the express authority of a true and authentic *parampara guru*.

Neo pop-gurus may be endeavouring to exploit the name and reputation of an authentic spiritual preceptor. Even today, a few spiritual aspirants seek to endeavour to exploit, for personal gain, money and fame, Sri Ramana Maharshi's impeccable fifty year reputation as a fully Self-realized true and authentic *Sat Guru*. The great sage never declared any successor to represent Him or His teaching before His physical transition (*mahasamadhi*) in 1950. However, a few spiritual aspirants with limited experience and

spiritual knowledge have read Sri Ramana Maharshi's teaching from books and then portrayed themselves to be an experienced and authentic *parampara guru* lineage representative. For clarification, in this context, a *Sat Guru* is defined as someone who is perfectly and permanently abiding as the true Self (*atma nishta*) and functioning as a spiritual preceptor of the highest order. Occasionally, a *Sat Guru* may clearly declare a spiritually mature and Self-realized senior disciple to carry on his or her tradition and teaching. In the case of Sri Ramana Maharshi, He expressly left no official or unofficial *parampara guru* lineage. Therefore, any claim of a Sri Ramana Maharshi *parampara guru* lineage is merely the imagination of someone's subtle illusory spiritual ego.

Authentic *Sat Gurus* never, directly or indirectly, seek name and fame nor allow their devotees to do the same in their name. If name and fame happens to come to them, it is as meaningless as a grain of sand on a vast beach. They do not call attention to themselves for their cultural accomplishments. They do not relish the admiration that may be bestowed upon them. They do not exploit themselves in the name of religion. They do not accrue personal selfish benefits from their name and fame. To the *Sat Guru*, there are truly no 'others' that need to be 'enlightened'. From their lofty perspective, all is only the non-dual (*advaita*) unbounded true Self (*atma nishta*), eternal Truth (*sanatana dharma*), and primal Existence (*sat*).

Authentic *Sat Gurus* never charge fees to engage spiritual aspirants in the process of serving as a spiritual preceptor or in the consideration of the teaching of the eternal Truth (*sanatana dharma*). If they charge admission or ask for money for their personal spiritual instruction (*upadesha*) or advice, directly or indirectly, know immediately that they are not authentic *Sat Gurus*. *Sat Gurus* have no personal interest, directly or indirectly, in making promotional videos, going on tours, making TV programmes to promote their name and power, recruiting followers or devotees, or sending messengers throughout the world to evangelize their teaching. Pseudo *Sat Guru* imitators may encourage personal devotion to themselves and claim that they can give Enlightenment to the spiritual aspirant. In fact, all they can give

is a subtle illusion of enlightenment. Sri Ramana Maharshi said that not even a *Sat Guru* can give the experience of enlightenment. True enlightenment is and always has been the ever-existent true Self in the here and now! He stated that a spiritual preceptor only serves the process of removing ignorance (*avidya*) and the obstacles to realization according to the spiritual aspirant's maturity.<sup>2</sup>

As an example of a true and authentic *Sat Guru*, Sri Ramana Maharshi's life and teaching were like a full symphony. It was a complete teaching from beginning to end. Like Mozart, He never missed a note! Throughout His fifty year 'symphony', Sri Ramana Maharshi affirmed all major religions and their ultimate purposes as well as pointing out their limitations and pitfalls. He also affirmed and clarified the practices of other traditional paths of enlightenment. He pointed out the usefulness of spiritual practices even if they were considered auxiliary or complementary to the way of Self-enquiry and the traditional 'pathless' path of spiritual-knowledge. His dominant motif or recurring central theme was clear — the skilful practice of Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*) by qualified and 'ripe' spiritual aspirants (*adhikaris*).

All the notes in a symphony support, enliven and provide a framework for the motif to be truly heard and understood. In the same way, the traditional practices on the path of non-doership (*karma marga*), path of the spiritual-warrior (*raja marga*), path of divine-love (*bhakti marga*), and the direct path of spiritual-knowledge (*jnana marga*) provide a framework for the successful practice of Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*) in the way of Self-enquiry (*vichara marga*). Each note, if properly placed, can assist spiritual aspirants to quiet their minds and prepare for the direct experience (*anubhava*) of Self-realization, God-realization and the eternal Truth of their primal Existence. Remember, when the illusory mind becomes disturbed due to the arising of personal tendencies (*kuvasanas*) during spiritual practice, it is the music of the full symphony with its harmony and melody which carries the hidden motif until it comes to the forefront and dominates once again.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., §282, pp.251-2.

When spiritual aspirants fall from their correct practice of Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*), Sri Ramana Maharshi's full and complete teaching gently supports the spiritual aspirants and brings them back on course. This is the nature of the authentic *Sat Guru* and His mysterious destiny (*dharmā*). In contrast to the true *Sat Guru*, the pseudo pop-guru characteristically lacks the practical wisdom gained from lifetimes of experiences necessary to play a leading part in the symphony — except perhaps, to whistle the motif! In itself, the motif is a simple and catchy tune. However, it lacks the orchestral support to carry the theme to its natural conclusion. Many 'neo advaita' pop-gurus market this catchy tune because of its simplicity. And, deceived by the motif's simplicity, they unwittingly transform it into a somewhat deceptive and simplistic teaching. Sincere spiritual aspirants need to be careful of such deceptions of their minds. They may at any time get snared in a mental pitfall caused by their subtle negative personal tendencies (*kuvasanas*) or incorrect practices. Deluded or snared spiritual aspirants need fully qualified spiritual preceptors to lead them back on track or to be come back in tune with their *Sat Guru's* full and complete teaching symphony.

One way to recognize a *Sat Guru* or pseudo pop-guru is to observe his or her spiritual aspirants in action. Are these spiritual aspirants quietly engaged in spiritual practices? Are they truly qualified spiritual aspirants whose questions are primarily related to spiritual practices and permanent Self-realization? Are they overly concerned about their physical body and emotional health issues, romantic and family relationships, or the power of money and finances? Are they living in harmony or competing for their spiritual preceptor's personal attention? Does the spiritual community's (*ashrama*) politics occupy an inappropriate amount of time and energy? And above all, has the community of devotees deteriorated into a semi-hysterical devotional cult? Remember, it is a good idea to carefully observe the spiritual aspirants within a spiritual preceptor's community to make sure they have turned to quieting their restless minds and lapsing into a deep contemplation of inner Silence (*antara mouna*).

Despite the dangers and pitfalls of a pop-guru's teaching, some pop-gurus have made a positive contribution to the psychological development of many spiritual aspirants' lives and render a good service to society. However, most pop-gurus lack the depth and breadth of spiritual training and experience needed to lead their spiritual aspirants through difficult states of mind and emotions. Such difficult states of mind and emotions may have been brought about by old tendencies and improper spiritual practices. Subsequently, it is common to find that the good work of a pop-guru can be offset with irreparable psychological harm to some sensitive and sincere spiritual aspirants that may take many lifetimes to undo and heal.

Remember. The mature and unfolded flower needs no spiritual preceptor — not even a *Sat Guru* — to proclaim to the flower that it now has fragrance! True enlightenment is and always has been everyone's ever-existent true *Self* in the here and now! There is no need for an authentic *Sat Guru* to tell any spiritual aspirant that they are now somehow Self-realized, awakened, or enlightened. As in a mature and unfolded flower, the devotee whose Self-realization is perfect can be recognized by its "fragrance" alone. There is no need for a certification from another spiritual preceptor — not even a true and authentic *Sat Guru*! A *Sat Guru* has no motivation nor need to tell spiritual aspirants that they are now, in particular, Self-realized. Especially if this declaration is merely to achieve recognition and credibility in the company of his or her followers. Remember that a pseudo pop-guru is a contemporary being with a hidden subtle spiritual ego (*ahamkara*) in the disguise of an ego-less *Sat Guru*. The pop-guru is always looking for ways to establish credibility as a person who can give the 'other' person Enlightenment. To gain credibility, the pop-guru must always make an inference and linkage with an authentic *Sat Guru* and His or Her reputation. Despite a pop-guru's characteristic charisma and social popularity, the pop-guru has little or no 'fragrance' of his or her own.

In conclusion, the true and authentic *Sat Guru* is like a flower — He or She just 'Is'! His or Her natural and permanent perfection is known only by the purity and permanence of His or Her innate 'fragrance'. The true *Sat Guru's* transcendental fragrance and peace-fulfilling

Grace (*anugraha*) uplift all mankind without any sense of doership or public display whatsoever! Such are the classical nature and mystery of the traditional spiritual preceptor teacher-student relationships. Salutations to true and authentic *Sat Gurus*! For there is no greater gift to mankind! Fortunate are spiritual aspirants and true spiritual Heroes (*adhikaris*) who truly recognize such divine Beings! With this divine recognition, permanent inner peace, happiness, Self-realization, and God-realization are at hand! ▲

### The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Mountain's daughter, who  
yet lie at love in the cave  
on white Kailasa;  
four yugas will have gone by,  
*Parvati*, when he grows still.

Who've never known rest,  
wakeful, vigilant mother,  
*Jagarini*;  
you mend the fine maze of dreams,  
who hunt with the night leopard.

Then, at the edge of  
a phosphorescent ocean,  
she is the fourth shore;  
the lone gull's white cry, *Turiyaa*,  
the bright water's last embrace.

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

# Anger: The Greatest Enemy

SILUVERU SUDHARSHAN

All of us, except for a rare few, have experienced the destructive power of anger. We meet it at home, in the street, the office, in public assemblies and frequently within ourselves. Many try to rationalize their anger. Some so-called intellectuals speak approvingly and justify anger. In political battle anger has become a weapon to stir the masses and bring on a revolution. The leaders of labour and vested interests in society use anger to threaten and bargain with the 'do this or else face the consequences' approach. In the world of criminals, anger becomes a status symbol.

This kind of mentality and attitude has an extremely harmful effect on society. Anger has been defined as momentary madness. In spiritual language anger is the outcome of strong unsatisfied desire. Whatever the cause or the definition, we must remember that anger causes more harm to oneself than to others.

Anger is a sudden impulsive and forceful emotion with destructive potential. In human beings it springs up due to a *rajasic* nature. Soothing words are the water hydrants needed to quench this dangerous fire. An angry person loses wisdom, loses balance and control over his thoughts and emotions. Controlled by a blind self-centred ego we become over-identified with our desires and fears and due to this unconscious activity we lose the power of discrimination and become aggressive. Balance of mind is lost and inner peace vanishes. Anger destroys friendships, disturbs families and breaks relationships. It adversely affects our own physical health; riots, arson, wars, suicides, murders are all a result of unbridled anger which make the world an ugly and fearful place to inhabit. Parents try to control children with anger but, in the long run, it is counter-productive and does no good at all. In fact, ultimately the parents themselves will be the victims of their children's ire, for children learn from their parents' behaviour.

Anger warps the mind and lies in wait to produce future negative behavioural changes. Anger is destructive of life, worldly or spiritual. Uncontrolled anger is akin to insanity. To utilize anger masterfully and deliberately to control a situation with a positive outcome in mind, is a science and a difficult art. Sri Bhagavan was able to do this but like the proverbial knife through water, there was no residue of anger after the harsh teaching was given. But it would be foolish to think we can act like Bhagavan.

How does anger arise? It occurs when a person unduly dwells on something or becomes attached to a state of mind to the point where he loses all discrimination. This gives rise to obsessive thinking which in turn breeds anger. Anger leads to delusion and the failure to remember previous hard lessons. This in turn, dullens the sword of discrimination and finally the man, overwhelmed by animal instincts, is lost.<sup>1</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* describes lust, anger and greed as the three gateways to hell, leading to the ruin of the self.

How to control anger? It is possible through methodical and sustained self-effort. We can change our attitudes by restructuring

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 62 & 63.

our priorities. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna says "Undoubtedly, O Arjuna, the mind is restless and hard to control. But by practice (*abhyasa*) and dispassion (*vairagya*) it can be controlled."<sup>2</sup> Spiritual sadhaks should be more forcefully motivated to overcome anger.

Anger is our prime enemy. We commit many sins propelled by *kama* and *krodha*, desire and anger. It originates from *rajas guna* and should be cleansed at this point. Bhagavan's enquiry goes right to the cause of each thought and roots it out. By forsaking the evil passions one will become tranquil and be thus imbued with an inner atmosphere of *satva*, inner peace and harmony.

There are two types of anger; our anger against somebody and somebody's anger against us. We should address our mind's attitude and say, "My mind, if you must be angry with that which causes me harm, then get angry with anger itself. For it does the greatest harm by destroying the cherished values of life. It ruins my pleasure in being alive and the desire to salvation. While angry, I live through hell even before death. I have no enemy greater than anger." This truth must be repeatedly reflected upon.

The other type of anger can be avoided by not being provoked by the anger of others. We should regard those who get angry with us as our benefactors and be thankful to them for their attention. They reveal our faults and thus strengthen our non-attachment. For this they sacrifice even their own peace of mind. We should really be all the more grateful to them.

The greatest remedy for anger is delay. When angry we are advised to pause and even count up to ten before we speak: if very angry count up to hundred. The idea is to put a brake on the flow of anger. Patience is essential.

Anger is a quality of the demoniac part of human nature. When we observe a rogues gallery of unsavoury characters, we notice their arrogance, self-conceit, harshness and ignorance. All these move hand in hand. It is a powerful gang. We must be determined, courageous, innovative and skilful in dealing with members of this gang, not

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.35.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

only externally but also internally. For the battle of Kurukshetra symbolizes not merely a physical battle between two enemies but an inner struggle to overcome the forces of deceit and delusion we harbor about ourselves and the world.

He who is not perturbed by adversity, who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is a man of wisdom. ▲

### The Advent Of Venkataraman

Ana Callan

Exploding out of the centre of the centre  
of the kernel of the sun, he took on form  
for everyone. A rainbow merging light  
and dark, he flew into our universe  
to remind us of The One, the Only  
Light of our True Being, the chance  
to forever free the chains of needing,  
He was born to bear the love  
we were born out of and still long  
for, a shimmering shuddering  
boy-sage in the making, in  
the conveyance of his mother  
for nine months until the moon  
was in position and the stars  
arrayed in shimmering bouquets,  
and sun o sun o sun waiting  
to embody He Who Is Most Bright

to shine His infinite rays on  
every finite one.

# Captivating Kailash, Mesmerizing Manasarovar

SAVITHRI KRISHNAN

In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee, the glories  
of (the Himalaya)... There is no mountain like (the Himalaya),  
for in it are Kailash and Manasarovar. — *Ramayana*

In all the great religions of the world pilgrimages have always been considered sacrosanct. In Islam, *Haj* or the pilgrimage to Mecca has been considered the ultimate act of worship and a sacred duty of every Muslim. Hinduism lays great stress on the importance of pilgrimage. From time immemorial, great ones from different walks of life like Arjuna and Adi Shankara have embarked on a pilgrimage to places like Varanasi, Rameswaram, Mount Kailas among others. It has been the fervent desire of every devout Shaivite Hindu to visit

Savithri Krishnan was introduced to the teachings of Bhagavan at a very tender age through the Ramana Bala Kendra, founded by the late Sri A.R. Natarajan at Bangalore and has been an ardent devotee since then. A post graduate in science, she is at present working as a senior manager with Oracle India Pvt. Ltd.

Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, considered the ultimate of all pilgrimages, by virtue of being the only heavenly abode having its presence on Earth accessible to mankind. The abodes of Lord Vishnu and Brahma (the other two Gods of the Hindu Trinity), *Vaikunta* and *Satyaloka*, respectively, are said to be extraterrestrial. Scriptures are replete with instances of Kailas yatra by great souls such as Karaikal Ammaiyar, Sundaramurthy Nayanar and Avvaiyar.

In the vicinity of Mount Kailash is the sacred Lake Manasarovar, supposedly conceived by Lord Brahma and is praised as the 'Lake of Consciousness and Enlightenment'. The celestial beings in their astral form are believed to descend to this lake in the pre-dawn hours for a ritual cleansing. The *Shiva Purana* declares that there is no sin that cannot be washed away by a dip in Lake Manasarovar. Adjacent to this beautiful lake is a strikingly similar lake called Rakshas Taal, the Lake of Demons, created by the legendary Ravana, the foe of Lord Rama.

At the base of Kailas is the Saptarshi cave, where the Saptarshis (seven rishis) are believed to be perpetually performing *tapas*. A host of other great sages are believed to be meditating on the banks of Manasarovar in their subtle form, blessing the visiting pilgrims. No wonder that the entire region pulsates with tremendous spiritual energy. Apart from the spiritual benefits, the region is famed for its medicinal values. The pristine waters of Manasarovar and Gauri-Kund (the ablution spot of Goddess Parvathi) are said to possess miraculous healing properties.

Mount Kailash has the unique distinction of being revered profoundly by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Bonpo-Tibetans alike. Hindus consider Mount Kailash to be the earthly manifestation of the mythical Mount Meru, which is reputed to be the centre of all manifestation. The Jains hold that their first *Tirthankar*, Rishabadev, attained enlightenment here, and refer to the region as Astapad. Bonpos call the mountain Tise and believe it to be the seat of the Sky Goddess Sipaimen. The Buddhists recognize this mountain to be the navel or axis of the earth, and call it mountain Gang Rimpoche, meaning 'Precious Jewel of Snow'.

The snow-clad mountain, amidst a picturesque landscape, stands majestically in all its grandeur and unsurpassed beauty, in the remote corner of western Tibet. It soars to a height of about 22,000 feet. The circumambulation of this Holy Mountain, known as *kora* in local parlance, is believed to bestow the pilgrim with enlightenment.

The inclement and inhospitable climatic conditions, rough and treacherous terrain of the mountain range, and the isolation of the mountain results in a gruelling overland journey. It is heartening to note that what was accomplished by spiritual giants such as Adi Sankara through their yogic power is now being achieved by ordinary mortals, thanks to modern transportation.

As a devotee of Bhagavan, I understand that Arunachala is Lord Shiva while Mount Kailas is his abode. Devotees have often quizzed Bhagavan about the existence of celestial worlds like Vaikunta, Indraloka and Kailas. Though Bhagavan vouches their existence, he points out the futility in hankering after them. He says that the scene there wouldn't be any different, in that there too would be a Guru seated on a couch surrounded by disciples seeking clarifications on various spiritual matters. He further says that having seen Vaikunta, one may want to see Indraloka, then Kailas. The mind thus goes on wandering aimlessly. If the objective is to attain Peace, then the best way to secure it is through Self-enquiry which would result in Self-Realization and thereby enable one to see all these worlds within oneself as it is the source of everything. To elucidate this, he aptly recounts Tamil saint-singer Appar's experience of seeing Kailas within himself.<sup>1</sup>

But akin to the joy of visiting a dear friend's residence despite meeting the person frequently elsewhere, I feel it is truly a heavenly experience to visit Kailash though Lord Shiva has blessed me with the opportunity of visiting Arunachala ever so often. Moreover, it's a well known fact that though Bhagavan strongly advocates the path of Self-enquiry, he has never refuted the efficacy of any of the other means like puja, japa, dhyana and pilgrimage, in eventually leading to the goal.

<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2009. §278, p.246.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

In fact, in one of his conversations with a devotee who had returned from Kailas, he has remarked that “To go to Kailas and return is just a new birth. For there the body-idea drops off.”<sup>2</sup>

Both the Indian Government and Private Tour operators conduct the yatra every year from May to September. The stringent registration process of the government operated tour starts nearly a year in advance and is quite cumbersome. For those who cannot cope with the bureaucratic hurdles there are alternative private yatra tours which have less time consuming and tiresome procedures. I signed up with a private tour operator, which although slightly more expensive, was quite efficient.

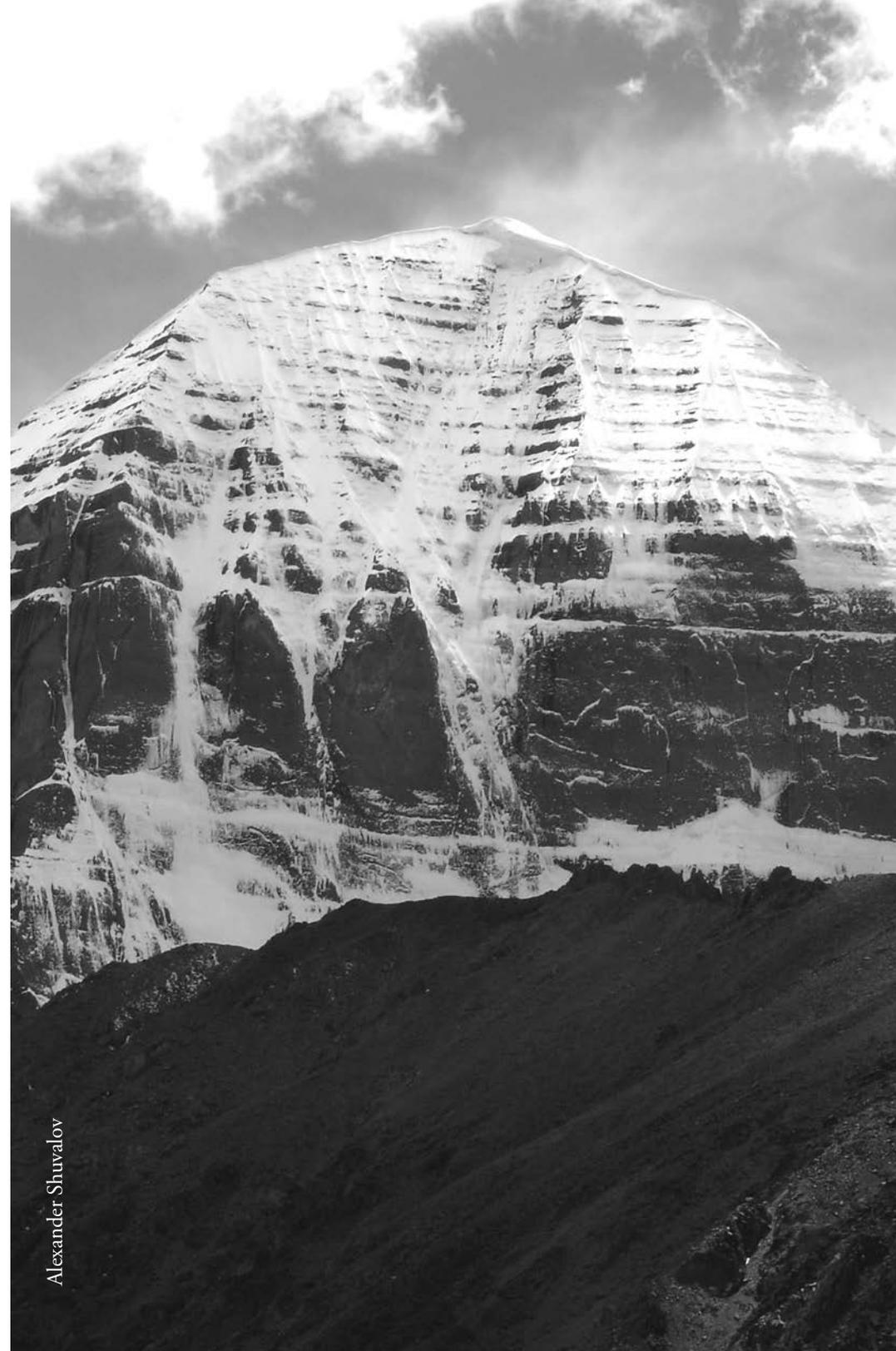
As the travel itinerary starts and culminates at Kathmandu, Indian pilgrims are required to make it on their own to Nepal. Our group comprised thirty members and had a good representation of the entire Indian subcontinent. The sixteen day trip typically starts with the sightseeing tour of Kathmandu on the first day, covering some of the important temples such as Pashupathinath, Neelkant Vishnu, Swayambhunath and Guhyeshwari (one of the Shakti *peeths*). Nepal is renowned for its semi-precious stones, *thankga* paintings and genuine *rudraksha* beads.

The yatra commenced the next morning amid fervent chants of *Har Har Mahadev Jai Bholenath*, to invoke Lord Shiva's blessings for a safe journey. To reach Nepal-Sino Tibet border, which is about a five-hour drive, we headed towards Kodari, via Tatopani (well-known for its hot spring), and drove through the lush green scenic Nepalese countryside with its numerous small waterfalls that speckled the mountains. We reached the border, where one side of the valley is Nepal, and the other is Tibet with river Kosi flowing beneath. A sturdy bridge called the Friendship Bridge is the main link connecting these two countries in this region. We had lunch at an open air motel, enjoying the cool breeze and the panoramic view of the bridge and Tibet across the valley.

On completing the Immigration and Customs formalities, we board Land Cruisers in groups of four at a place called Zhangmu on

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., §635, p.619.



the Chinese side. The entire crew of drivers was warm-hearted and efficient, skilfully traversing the rough terrain with ease. Meandering a distance of 35 km, we head towards Nyalam, a small hamlet at a height of 12,000 ft, for the first overnight stay on the Himalayas. Nature was at its scenic best with waterfalls dotting the hills. On reaching Nyalam, the Sherpa team of skilled cooks swiftly unpacked the provisions and prepared a sumptuous dinner.

The whole of the next day was reserved for acclimatization - a process where the body tries to adjust to the conditions of high altitudes like lower oxygen content, lower atmospheric pressure and temperature and high wind velocity. To prevent altitude sickness, which generally shows in the form of nausea, dizziness and headaches, it's generally recommended to take diamox, a medication, which hastens the acclimatization process (although it is a diuretic). One also has to start accepting the poor hygienic conditions and deplorable sanitation facilities as the daily routine. Using the highly primitive and substandard toilets is a nightmare. Added to this, there are no bathrooms in the hotels and guest houses, and the only saving grace is the availability of hot showers on a rental basis. For the cushioned urban class that we are, these conditions were only introductory indications of what it takes to reach the most revered Peak of the Hindus.

The acclimatization day could well be utilized to explore this part of Tibet. One can see the sober market scene, confined to a single lane with about two dozen shops. Those with inadequate warm clothes and other trekking paraphernalia like shoes, torch and gloves can shop here. The rest of the day was spent lazing around, getting better acquainted with fellow yatris, chanting hymns and singing bhajans. Our Bengali brethren enthralled us with the famed Rabindra Sangeeth. The daytime weather was quite hot and it's good to protect one's eyes with sunglasses, as the ultra violet rays and also the sunrays reflected from snow-clad mountains could severely damage the eyes.

We continued with the marathon drive early next morning, and proceeded towards Saga, which is at a height of 14,700 ft and 220km from Nyalam, for our next overnight halt. Having just started getting used to the rustic way of life leaving behind urban comforts, the

accommodation at a star-hotel with facilities such as clean attached toilets with hot water shower comes as a pleasant surprise, and one feels thoroughly pampered, albeit for but a night. Thanks to the presence of Army cantonment here, decent facilities were available. Lower oxygen content was more evident in this place, as climbing up just one storey left us panting for breath. The next morning, we headed towards Paryang, which is at a height of 15,000 ft and drove for about seven hours covering a distance of 235km. The halt was at Paramarth Ashram, reportedly donated to Tibetan authorities by a Hindu Swami, which was converted into a Guesthouse.

The much-awaited D-day finally arrives. We start after breakfast and drive through the Mayum La pass, the highest point of the drive, and reach Lake Manasarovar past noon. As per local custom, before coming to a halt, the driver goes three times around a large pole (supposedly an altar) with colourful prayer flags radiating like sun's rays in all directions. It's here that one catches the first glimpse of the sacred and captivating Mount Kailash, which truly is awe-inspiring and a moment of overwhelming unbridled joy. Words can't adequately describe the rich scenic beauty that abounds the place. The serene, extremely cold, placid-blue waters of Manasarovar too were a mesmerizing visual pleasure. We camped on the banks of the calm and graceful lake and savoured the fleeting moments for the rest of the day. In stark contrast to the fierce sun during the day, the night was numbing cold as we slipped into our sleeping bags inside the cozy tent. The next day was reserved for a ritual bath and prayers. Some of the yatris had come well equipped to perform *havan*. The cooks enthusiastically prepared a sweet dish as *prasad*. We then started for *Manas Parikrama* and covered nearly 70 percent of the 88km circuit before reaching the base camp at Darchen. *En route* we come across a few Buddhist stupas on the banks of Manasa and the eye-catching Rakhas Taal Lake, on the left. Darchen also happens to be the last point to make any last minute shopping like ponchos and shoes. There is no telecommunication network available beyond this point.

After the initial ordeal of reaching this place, we are then faced with a more arduous task of circumambulating the sacred mountain,

which generally takes three days to complete, although a few tough Tibetans can accomplish this feat in a single day! The total distance is about 54 km, part of which is covered by jeep. The remaining 45km distance could either be covered by foot or on a pony or a yak with an encampment for two nights enroute. During the *Kailash Parikrama* the altitude varies from 15,000 ft to 19,500 ft. Traditionally one first visits Yama dwaar at Tarboche, up to which point the path is motorable. A slight detour of about an hour, leads to Astapad from where Nandi parvat can be viewed from close quarters.

The first day's trek was 12km long. The numerous brooks and streams with pristine fresh cold water quenched our thirst and also soothed us from the tiring walk. Most of the trekkers had come well prepared having practised physical exercise for months in advance, including long distance high altitude walking. Having practically no prior preparation, I naively set out with a horse as a standby, though it was never used. My yatra was unplanned and evolved in a most unexpected manner after my chance encounter with a Kailash video, and the subsequent garnering of required data, choosing the tour operator, applying for leave and taking off, all of which happened in just 37 days! However, it didn't take long for me to realize that though a sound physical fitness is cardinal for this challenging high-altitude expedition, it has more to do with one's will power and inner strength. Firm mental resolve and a burning determination to complete the *Parikrama* coupled with His grace undoubtedly carries one through.

The first overnight halt of the *Parikrama* trek was at Dirapuk. The fascinating northern face of Mount Kailash, called the *sheshnag* view (as the summit appears as a serpent hood) is enchanting. This is the closest view of the sacred mountain that one gets on the entire *Parikrama* route. We camped in a mud house for the night.

The second day's trek was the most difficult one, with a steep 6km ascent, followed by a 4km descent and an 11km trek on plain meadow, covering a total of 21km before halting at Zhutulpuk. The golden rays of the early morning sun on northern Kailash are spectacular. The mountain that otherwise is hailed with its cloak

of snow as a silver mountain (*rajatha giri*), looks golden hued. We set out well before sunrise equipped with the miner's torch placed comfortably on each of our heads. One is advised to cross the truculent Dolma-La pass (the highest point at an altitude of 19,500ft) well before noon because as the day proceeds there is a marked reduction of the oxygen level. The rarefied atmosphere of this region is also infamous for its sudden blizzards which occur with insufficient warning. After crossing this point, the view of Kailash is completely hidden during the rest of the trail. At Dolma La, one literally feels one is on top of the world! During the steep climb, it's advisable not to look at the summit of Dolma pass as it could dampen one's spirit and arouse the doubt if one can accomplish the feat at all. Instead it is always motivating to look backward and take delight at the distance covered thus far.

Power drinks greatly help in rejuvenating. Descending is not as easy as one generally imagines. Trudging through the gentle marshy slopes with no well defined trail, or over a mass of loose tumbling stones with water gurgling beneath, or even on a glacier — without losing one's balance or getting one's socks wet is indeed no mean feat. Slightly off-route on the way downhill is an emerald-green oval-shaped lake, which appears frozen due to a layer of ice. It is called Gauri Kund which supposedly is goddess Uma's ablution spot, and also the site where Lord Ganesh is said to have become Elephant-headed. Except for a couple of welcome tea-tents, trudging the last stretch of 11km was frightening due to the absence of shelter such as trees or caves in which to seek respite from regular snowfall and rain. The hardships of the trek were more markedly felt as the mind was no longer preoccupied with the immediate challenge of manoeuvring the ascent and descent. We were lucky to get away with just a short spell of snow and rain. The final stretch appeared never-ending. With no milestones around and it being next to impossible to elicit any clue from the accompanying horse-keepers due to the communication gap, we had to simply keep walking till the camp was sighted. We finally reached Zuthulpuk after a continuous walk of about nine hours. Strangely enough there was hardly any fatigue given the magnitude

of the arduous trek. A few hours of relaxation revived me, and geared me up for the next and final day's trek.

After the rigours of the first two days, the third day's trek seemed like a child's play. The 8 mile trek is more or less on a plateau, except for a couple of small hillocks. Meadows spangled with the flow of streams had a soothing effect. Our joy knew no bounds on spotting the jeeps parked at a distance signalling the completion of the trek! The team celebrated the success of the pulsating *Parikrama* by greeting and hugging one another, and posing for group-photos to be treasured. We had accomplished the world's most arduous pilgrimage which many dream of, but only a few realize! We then boarded our jeeps to complete the remaining one third portion of Manasarovar *Parikrama*.

Upon our return to Manasarovar, we were left bewildered as a vast blanket of thick clouds and snow completely veiled the entire mountain range and left no trace of Kailash. Had it been so just a couple of days back, it would have been impossible to undertake the *Parikrama*. Our captain proclaimed our batch of pilgrims to be very lucky, for in his experience there have been quite a few unfortunate cases where yatis after making it all the way to Manasarovar had to return without performing the Kailash *Parikrama*, or worse still of not even having the darshan of Kailash! With biting cold and speeding winds, it was too risky to spend the night in tents and we were forced to take refuge in a mud house. The entire region, ranging upto Nyalam experienced a very heavy snowfall.

Next morning we prepared for the return journey, and traced our way back through the same places from which we originally came. Touted as the World's toughest Pilgrimage, this Holy Yatra cannot be successfully completed without the grace of Lord Shiva, the time-tested hospitality of the affable Sherpas and the tour Captain, and the highly efficient Chinese Land-cruiser drivers, in one of the most inhospitable terrains of the planet. ▲

# Did Adam and Eve Have a Choice?

SOL SANDPERL

It is often thought that the story of Adam and Eve is simply about being disobedient towards G-d<sup>1</sup> and being subsequently punished (the 'original sin'), but did Adam and Eve have a choice? It is not often that people remember that there were in fact two trees in the Garden of Eden. They were the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. We are all focused on the Tree of Knowledge which we know as the tree from which the forbidden fruit was eaten. (It was not called

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<sup>1</sup> One of the appellations for God in the Jewish tradition is Hashem which simply means "the Name". This goes a step further than the Biblical injunction to not take the name of the Lord in vain. It also points to the sacredness and unutterability of the Name. Thus, in writing God's name it is not fully spelled out. Instead it is written as G-d out of respect.

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an apple, simply fruit). Interestingly enough, the Tree of Knowledge was placed in the very centre of the Garden — you couldn't miss it. In case Adam or Eve were not aware of it, their attention was drawn to it by the warning they got from G-d. "Whatever you do, do not eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge."

It is not implausible to surmise that Adam and Eve were like children in terms of their development as human beings. They represent humanity in its infancy — largely unconscious, innocent and as yet unburdened by the ego, the sense of separateness.

It is a state that we can refer to perhaps as pre-thinking. Conceptual thought is not a problem for Adam and Eve. In that sense they are below thought. The discriminatory world that arises with the ego is dormant and not yet appearing. But unfortunately it must. As a Jewish devotee of Ramana Maharshi, an interesting aside here is that one of the great rabbis of the Jewish tradition, the Baal Shem Tov was said to be present but not in the Garden of Eden when it was being formed an allusion to his eternal, already enlightened state. The Baal Shem Tov like other great sages had completed the journey long before... the journey that human beings have to undergo to get to the Tree of Eternal Life.

Returning to Adam and Eve — to say to them, "Whatever you do, don't eat from this tree" is tantamount to telling them to do it. In hypnosis, this is referred to as a negative suggestion which can be more powerful than a regular suggestion. It was inevitable that they would do this, and in reality, it was also necessary that they do. They needed to move from unconsciousness to the light of full consciousness, the Tree of Life. In this context, this other tree comes to the foreground and we begin perhaps to see the significance of the whole story. It is profound and beyond a simple narrative of creationism. The 'fall' of Adam and Eve was inevitable and necessary, and G-d knew this was to happen. The snake was perhaps an unwitting catalyst used in this story because it is associated with evil and baseness and yet, in many cultures, is also a symbol of wisdom. In many myths the serpent is said to live in or be coiled around the Tree of Life which is also in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps the snake was doing what was necessary. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that in order to develop towards independence and

freedom in the fully conscious state, Adam and Eve needed to develop an ego. They needed to become separate and lose their innocence and become suddenly aware of their nakedness, aware of good and evil. It is ironic that in order to know ourselves as G-d we need to adopt the illusion of separateness before returning to the original state of oneness (which we never actually left).

The Tree of Knowledge sets up a duality. Eating from it gives Adam and Eve an ego. They separate themselves from the One. They eat of the fruit and now they are aware of themselves as a separate subject to the world as an object and "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

It is interesting to note that G-d banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden before they have a chance to partake of the Tree of Life and live forever. The Tree of Life which represents the return to Oneness is inaccessible. It is too dangerous for them to eat from it initially. A fiery angel with a sword is stationed to guard from all directions. They need to undergo a long process of purification and cultivation of self awareness before they can even contemplate a return. But the return is inevitable. The Oneness is calling them to Itself. And when they return and are ready perhaps the Angel will let them pass, and they will have returned to the Garden of Eden (Source) but now they are conscious, awake, enlightened — aware of their true identity. They couldn't get to that self-awareness without initial separation.

They were not ready for the Tree of Life at so early a juncture because it is in fact the tree from which Eternity or G-d is attained. After eating from the Tree of Knowledge, they were to undergo many years of hardship. Just as it is with us as individuals, we do in fact have no choice but to eat the fruit and embark on the journey of return. It takes many years, lifetimes, before we see through the powerful illusion of the ego and return to Oneness. The most fundamental prayer in Jewish life is "Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One." This is the prayer said just before death. In the words of Zen Master Huang Po, "A perception sudden as blinking that subject and object are One will lead to a deeply mysterious wordless understanding."<sup>2</sup> ▲

<sup>2</sup> Blofeld, John, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind*. Grove Press, 1958. p. 92



Lake Manasarovar

# The Audible Life Stream

## The Key to Solving the Mystery of Death

ALISTAIR CONWELL

Death's stamp gives value to the coin of life...  
— Rabindranath Tagore

Death is the event most heavily pregnant with spiritual potential because it is the time when consciousness undergoes a significant transition. It is a transition from perceiving a physical reality through the five senses to perceiving a spiritual reality without sensory input. So in light of the spiritual significance that death represents, the question must be asked: Do you have any idea what will happen at the time

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of your death – whenever that may be? Sadly, for the vast majority of us, death is a perennial mystery. Most of us do not have the faintest idea of what will actually happen at the time of death — not in terms of the shutting-down of the physical body’s organs but in terms of our perceptual faculties or consciousness. Many who have spiritual or religious beliefs will intellectually accept that consciousness will continue after the physical body dies but they probably have no idea as to what the experience will actually be like.

Paradoxical though it may seem, mystics throughout history have said that it is possible to solve this mystery of death while being very much alive — to die while living. The secret is to consciously tune into and eventually merge with the phenomenon known in the West, at least, as the Audible Life Stream, or Primordial Sound Current. The Audible Life Stream is the central tenet of the most ancient spiritual teachings known. Mystics say it is the quintessential fabric of the entire universe — physical and spiritual. Without it nothing would exist. It is the essence of all things and, in fact, resounds continuously within each and every one of us. Put simply, this stream of conscious vibrating energy, which can be perceived as many different types of sounds such as, for example, thunder, running water, ocean waves and even the most enchanting music, is our immortal spiritual essence.

While being inaudible to the physical ears because of its inherent spiritual nature, the Audible Life Stream is said to be perceivable within absolute silence. Being all-pervasive, the Audible Life Stream is regarded as the Universal Principle, or the Absolute, upon which mainstream religious teachings are unknowingly based. There is evidence to support this claim.

### **In the Beginning was the Audible Life Stream**

Although often unscrupulously edited, or else misunderstood by well-meaning translators, major religious scriptures still contain references to this spiritual Sound, although it seems that the guardians of mainstream religions are unaware of this. For example, in the oldest known scriptures, the Vedas, the mantra *Nada Brahman* literally means ‘God is Sound.’ In fact, the Vedas refer to the Audible Life

Stream as *vak*, which translated means ‘Word’ (but not any ordinary word, as is explained below). The *vak* was regarded as being of equal importance to the spiritual Light, which was sometimes called *agni*. Scholars have concluded that the *vak* and the *agni* were regarded by the ancient Vedic sages as two aspects of the one universal spiritual power. Further, Vedic sages distinguished between physical mundane sound, which they referred to as *ahata*, and the non-physical cosmic sound, which they named *anahata*, literally the ‘unstruck’ sound. The mantra *aum* symbolizes that cosmic sound and is regarded by Hindus as the sound of ultimate reality.

Similarly, in the Gospel of Saint John, the Audible Life Stream is also referred to as the Word:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>1</sup>

The term ‘Word’ was translated from the original Greek word *Logos*, which can mean both word and sound. An ordinary word is essentially a source of vibrating energy. But being true to the original Gospel text, Biblical translators and editors have left the capital ‘W’ unchanged, indicating that the Word is not merely a symbol of language but rather the Voice, or Sound, of the Universal Principle.

Indeed, when the late Dr. Edmond Bordeaux Szekely, a philologist, archaeologist and co-founder of the International Biogenic Society, accidentally came upon secret Hebrew and Aramaic texts in the Vatican and in what was formerly the Royal Archives of the Hapsburg family, he translated a revealing document called the *Essene Gospel of Peace*. In it we find the following passage that corresponds exactly to the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John; however, rather than using the term ‘Word,’ the term ‘Sound’ is used, clearly suggesting a reference to the Audible Life Stream as the God-force:

“In the beginning was the Sound, and the Sound was with God, and the Sound was God...”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible*, John 1:1.

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Szekely, *Essene Communions with the Infinite*, International Biogenic Society, 1979, p.26.

There are numerous other references to the Audible Life Stream in the Christian Bible. In the *Book of Revelation* a 'voice from heaven' is described as many different types of sound, including music:

"And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps..."<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism's *Surangama Sutra*, of the Mahayana tradition, appears to refer to the Audible Life Stream as being the most effective way to achieve enlightenment and thus penetrate the illusion of death. Moreover, the sutra records that all of the Buddhas of the past used spiritual sound to escape from the wheel of birth and death. This is said to be achieved only when material sounds are sublimated and the spiritual sound is heard. Explains Manjushri, who is believed to have been a Buddha in his own right and is noted for his immense wisdom:

I now submit to the World Honored One [Buddha Shakyamuni]  
That all Buddhas from this world escaped  
By following the teaching, here most suitable,  
Which consists in sublimating sound...  
Realized by means of [spiritual] hearing.<sup>4</sup>

Later in the same sutra, Manjushri is quoted as saying that when the sounds of the physical world are sublimated, the sound of the drum emanating from the higher deathless dimensions of reality can be perceived:

...When one dwells in quietude,  
Rolls of drums from ten directions  
Simultaneously are heard...<sup>5</sup>

Tibetan Buddhists refer to the Audible Life Stream as *bden tshig*, and it is interesting to note that the correct translation of the title of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Todrol Chenmo)* actually means the great liberation (from birth and death) through *hearing* in the

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Revelation 14:2.

<sup>4</sup> Luk, Charles, *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation*, Rider & Company, 1964, p.37.

<sup>5</sup> Luk, op.cit., p.37.

*bardo* (the after-death realm), highlighting the importance of spiritual sounds at the time of death.

The prophet Muhammad is also believed to have perceived a mysterious Sound at the time of his divine revelation in a cave, and the original Sufis (the mystical branch of Islam) called the Audible Life Stream *Saute Surmad*, which means 'the tone that fills the cosmos.'<sup>6</sup>

Lao Tzu, who is believed to be the founder of Taoism and author of the *Tao Te Ching*, described the Tao, or Way, as the source of all things and as 'unimpeded harmony,' implying that this universal principle has a musical quality.<sup>7</sup> He also wrote about the Great Tone "that goes beyond all usual imagination."<sup>8</sup>

It's also apparent that Chuang Tzu, who lived some three hundred years after Lao Tzu, expounded the merits of contacting the Audible Life Stream when he said:

"...hear with the mind instead of the ears; hear with the energy instead of the mind. Hearing stops at the ears, the mind stops at contact, but energy is that which is empty and responsive to others."<sup>9</sup>

Also, in the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh sacred text, the phrase 'Divine Music' is often used to refer to the Audible Life Stream, and in the following excerpt the point is made that it resides within each and every one of us:

"Divine Music is heard  
In every soul reverberant,  
Continuous, self-sustained, a revelation!"<sup>10</sup>

If, as the scriptural evidence suggests, the concept of the Audible Life Stream is the basis of mainstream religion, then perhaps the contrived religious divides that have been seeded in the minds of many over the centuries can be usurped by a new paradigm of religious unity.

<sup>6</sup> Berendt, J., *The World is Sound: Nada Brahma*, Destiny Books, 1983, p.38.

<sup>7</sup> Cleary, Thomas, *The Essential Tao*, Harper & Row, 1991, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> Berendt, op.cit., p.171.

<sup>9</sup> Cleary, op.cit., p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Singh, T., (trans.), *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, Allen & Unwin, 1960, p.75.

### Superstrings — Ultimate Reality

Is there other evidence of the concept of the Audible Life Stream? Indeed there is and from an unlikely domain — the world of science. Historically science and religion, or spirituality, have been regarded as mutually exclusive (notwithstanding the fact that some regard science as a modern-day religion because of the way that its proponents rigidly adhere to its models). Yet the cutting-edge quantum physics theory known as String Theory is wholly consistent with the concept of the Audible Life Stream. String Theory is believed by an increasing number of physicists to be the Theory of Everything, a theory that unifies the four primary forces of nature. Superstrings, upon which the theory is based, are believed to be one-dimensional vibrating strings that are the fabric of the universe — ultimate reality. Superstrings can be conceptualised as closed looped much like rubber bands or open ended-like a typical piece of string. What is significant about superstrings is that they have an infinite amount of energy because they are not limited by space or time, and most interesting is that they are believed to vibrate in musical patterns. Clearly, ancient mystics and modern-day physicists are describing ultimate reality as the same vibratory phenomenon, even to the point of agreeing that the phenomenon can vibrate in musical patterns, although the terms they use to describe the phenomenon are different. Another difference is that mainstream physicists would not attribute any hint of consciousness to superstrings, whereas mystics contend that the Audible Life Stream is essentially the Universal Consciousness.

Evidence of the musical qualities of the Audible Life Stream can also be gleaned from accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs). According to Dr. Joel Funk, a psychology professor at Plymouth State College in New Hampshire in the United States, as many as 50% of people who have had such an experience report hearing enchanting music — bearing in mind this would be after their physical sense of hearing has shut down. Supporting this statistic, there are numerous books available today that document accounts of NDEs and out-of-body experiences (OBEs) in which mysterious yet enchanting

spiritual music is perceived, including some well-known cases like the one made famous by Betty Eadie in her best-selling book *Embraced by the Light*. Seemingly equally unaware of the phenomenon, it was apparently through the vibrations of the Audible Life Stream that an OBE research pioneer, Robert Monroe, was able to astral travel at will. When he heard its other-worldly musical tones, he was left to ask himself if it was God that he had encountered. Also, an internationally renowned music therapist and author, Don Campbell, was profoundly moved after being miraculously healed of a life-threatening condition by what he refers to as an ‘inner sound’ not perceived by the physical ears.

If the mystics throughout the ages are indeed correct, then the Audible Life Stream is the means through which one can prove for oneself that consciousness can exist independently of the physical body by safely inducing the experience of death without any threat to the physical body — to die while living by tuning into the spiritual Sound and experiencing while still alive and with full awareness the transition of consciousness that will eventually occur at death. The mystery of death can consequently be solved because the more consciousness that can be applied at the time of death, the greater spiritual development can be achieved since death is nothing more than a transition of consciousness when the physical body ceases to function. Through the cosmic, universal sound of the Audible Life Stream, the illusion of death can be finally shattered and life can be perceived for what it truly is — a conscious experience with really no beginning and ultimately no end. ▲



# Sunyata

JAMES JOHNSON (JAI JAI)

Sunyata was born Alfred Julius Immanuel Sorensen on a small farm near Arhus, Denmark, 27 October 1890. He left the body in Marin County, California, in 1984, at the age of 94. Between these bookends of his life, he worked as a gardener, lived for nearly fifty years in India, received his initiation and name from Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and was revered as a saint by many in northern India.

About seven years before he exited the stage of this life, representatives of the Alan Watts Foundation brought Sunyata to California from his Indian home in the Himalayas near Almora, Uttarakhand. The foundation would take care of all his needs as he aged. When he asked them what he was expected to do in America as he had nothing to teach, they replied that all he had to do was to 'teach silence'. Once there, he held well-attended satsangs once a week, mostly in silence, on Alan Watt's houseboat, the Vallejo, berthed on

Jai Jai attended the Chicago Theological Seminary. He spent his adult life in California working in horticulture and environmental restoration. Since retirement, he has lived for five years at Anandamayi Ma's Patal Devi Ashram in Almora, Uttarakhand, India.

San Francisco Bay. That is where I met him. I thought of him then as a friend and mentor and often visited him on Saturday mornings.

On one such sunny Saturday in 1981, I sighed and told him I wished that Anandamayi Ma were still alive as I was magnetically attracted to her. He gave a start and looked at me in surprise. "But she is alive!" he exclaimed, "Though she is not in good health and isn't expected to live much longer. You had better get over to India right away to see her. She is the real thing; I've had her darshan a number of times." Taking this almost as an order, I secured passport and visa and, having unexpectedly come into some money, I booked my trip; only weeks later I was doing pranam to Mataji in Vrindavan with tears of ecstasy pouring from my eyes. On *Dussehra*, her last in the body, in Haridwar I received a miraculous *diksha* from her through the vision of a mantra as I meditated that morning at dawn after dipping in the Ganga and through, that evening, a wonderful smile directed to me as she sat behind the Durga Murti to receive pranam from thousands of devotees.

Without Sunyata, that initiation would never have happened. Words cannot express my gratitude for his role in my spiritual unfolding. It was only years later that I came to view him as enlightened; he was credibly able to strike the spark that awakened that state in at least one other. But before that tale, let us return to the story of the young Sunyata.

Emmanuel, meaning 'God with us', as he thought of himself and was called in his youth, passed an uneventful and happy rural childhood, often silent and blissfully alone in nature. In his writings he describes how he largely escaped 'headucation' and 'churchianity', and successfully fought off the tumultuous rising of an 'egoji' in his early teens. These and other novel terms he later invented characterized his playful and joyous use of English in his speech and writing; for example, instead of such terms as 'egoless, thoughtless or deathless', he would always use 'ego-free, thought-free, or death-free' as closer to the true sentiments he felt. Moreover, he never spoke of being free *of* or *from* ego, thought or death, but rather *In* them, implying a 'joyous ease' in conditioned existence; for Sunyata it had lost its substance, its absolute seriousness, and was now a place of *leela*, not *maya*. 'Understanding' was always

'innerstanding' for him; he thought that this transliteration would one day become part of the English language.

From the age of 14, in lieu of secondary school, he was trained in horticulture, at which he worked for brief periods in France and Italy before settling in England. There he worked as a simple gardener, often in the nursery, on a succession of large estates. His inner silence continued all the while and he nurtured his love of life by a wide reading of world literature and poetry, branching out into Buddhist, Hindu and Theosophical texts.

He was employed at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England in his thirty-ninth year. That summer he met Rabindranath Tagore who had come to rest at the estate following a tiring lecture and reading tour in the West. They became friends, the young gardener clearly awestruck by the white-bearded Eastern sage and Nobel laureate in whom he sensed a depth of wisdom and 'innerstanding' of which he had only read. Tagore must have noticed something special in the younger man also; before he left, he invited him to come to India to teach silence at his university, Shantiniketan. Much to the poet's surprise, Immanuel showed up on his doorstep the very next year, 1930. He had taken his time getting to India, touring overland through Greece, the Middle East and Egypt on his way, revelling, as he always did throughout his long life, in the 'delightful uncertainties' of travel and meeting new friends all along the way. He states that from that time he never again had to work for his living; everything just came to him as needed, often in such abundance that he had to turn it away. But then he never wanted much and was content with what he had.

Never able to bear the Indian heat, he retreated to Darjeeling as *garmi*, the season of heat, came on. With Tagore's introduction, he spent time with the great Indian physicist and botanist Jagadish Chandra Bose, by whom he was initiated into Chan Buddhist meditation. In 1931, after a brief visit to Europe to settle his affairs, he emigrated to India where he spent most of the rest of his life, almost half a century, mostly in the Himalayas. There, he said, he felt most at home. After Independence, he became an Indian citizen.

These early contacts led on to others; he soon met Nehru, with whom he struck up a life-long friendship. Whenever he was in Delhi, 'Brother Alfred', as Nehru always called him, would be invited to stay with Nehru's family. For a year or so early on, he lived on the Nehrus' Khali Estate near Binsar in the Himalayas. Indira Gandhi, then a teenager, when informed of his passing many years later, wrote of her fondness for him and regretted that she had hardly been able to make any sense of the letters he frequently sent them, so full were they of his bubbling metaphysical musings and his personal reconstructions of the English language; they were, moreover, written in what he conceded was an almost indecipherable 'scribble'.

As his life progressed, through his contact with Nehru, Sunya the Silent would make the acquaintance of ambassadors, diplomats, high government officials and, at an official reception in Delhi, of the king and queen of Denmark who were delighted to meet this native son so honoured by the prime minister of India as an authentic holy man.

After a short time in India he settled near Almora where he built several stone cottages high on Kalimath Ridge very near the Kasar Devi Temple, an ancient Goddess pilgrimage site. He called his home *Turiya Niwas* (abode of the highest consciousness) and posted a sign in front: 'Silence!' This must have reduced the traffic considerably, although the naturally open Sunyata was friendly to all, communicated easily when outside his home and entertained many, presumably silent, guests over his long years on what became known locally as 'Cranks' Ridge'. It was so named because of all the very individualistic, often eccentric, expatriates who came to live there from this period on, many of them authors, artists and spiritually-oriented people. Swami Ramanagiri, the royal Swede who was brought so quickly to awakening by Bhagavan, was one of his guests, whom he introduced to the Maharshi in the late 1940s.

During the winters, when his unplastered and draughty stone kutir became quite uninhabitable, he descended to the plains, where he stayed with the many people he had met. As his stature became more evident, he conducted satsang wherever he was.

Sanyasini Atmananda, of Austrian origin and one of Anandamayi Ma's very close devotees, once told me that Sunyata had a following in India. In America, too, he had a considerable following in California and also in Chicago, where he visited annually as the guest of a Jungian psychologist. Osho conferred a Rolls Royce on him, though it is impossible for me to imagine him ever being chauffeured around in it. In Denmark, many people still honour him as one of that country's most famous sons and a true saint. I am always surprised how many people I meet know and revere him.

Sunyata's most 'Himalayan' and transforming experience, however, came through Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. On three occasions, Sunyata travelled south from his home in the mountains to Tamil Nadu to visit Bhagavan briefly during the cool and pleasant winter. He spoke only once to Ramana, on their first meeting in 1936, in answer to some cursory questions put by Bhagavan. Thereafter, he always sat silently in the back of the hall, intuitively aware that Bhagavan's power was in his silence. After he had left for the north on that first visit, Paul Brunton, whom he had met at the ashram, wrote to him that Bhagavan had stated that Sunyata was a 'rare-born mystic', one in whom the ego never really developed and who was, therefore, always very close to realization.

One day on a subsequent visit, while meditating with eyes closed, Sunyata, then still Immanuel Sorensen, suddenly felt the full power of the Maharshi fixed on him. Bhagavan's voice spoke to him telepathically and with power: "We are *always* aware, Sunyata." From that locution, he took his initiation and his spiritual name. Though he was never looking for a guru, he recognized this moment as the crucial point in his life. He always kept a large picture of Bhagavan in a place of honour and praised his precepts as the highest Truth, Truth that he, now Sunyata, was discovering through his own awareness of the One Self. He had *darshan* of Bhagavan only one more time.

Sunyata, as stated previously, also had *darshan* of Anandamayi Ma many times, especially when she came to her Patal Devi Ashram near Almora. She gave him yellow robes to wear. On two occasions he was called in to sit silently with her in private, once at her Varanasi

Ashram, an occasion which, he stated, “was a *shunya darshan*—a relief like death.”<sup>1</sup> Another time was when Mataji was visiting Sri Yashoda Ma at the latter’s Mirtoli Ashram, also known as Uttar Brindavan. Sunyata regarded Yashoda Ma almost as his own mother, often visiting her and the Englishman Krishna Prem at their beautiful nearby ashram which was dedicated to Krishna. Of that meditation with the two Ma’s, Sunyata said, “On this occasion there was inner silence for half an hour. The *shunya* silence is eternally here and now. The silence at Uttara Brindavan is one of my richest Himalayan experiences.”

He also spent some time with Gandhiji at his ashram at Wardha and participated in the life of the ashram. Bapuji’s simplicity and warmth resonated strongly with Sunyata. Sunyata’s silence and clear spiritual nature, his having adopted the Indian lifestyle fully, his friendship with Nehru, all must have made an impression.

Regarding Sunyata’s spiritual status, let us now return to the Awakening story I mentioned at the beginning of this article. I recently read<sup>2</sup> a Danish devotee’s account of the experience of one of Sunyata’s frequent winter hosts, S. N. Bharadwaj of Hoshiapur, Punjab. The Danish devotee visited and interviewed this now-elderly man. He writes that one winter as Sunyata was just about to leave Bharadwaj’s home, he, Bharadwaj, begged him for some personal *upadesha*. Sunyata stared at him intensely and in silence for some time. He then intoned with great emphasis, “You...Are...That!” Bharadwaj states, “In this moment I lost body consciousness. I realized the ultimate reality—being one with that.” At some point he was conscious of arms being rubbed by hands; he finally realized they were his hands and his arms. Sunyata was gone and so was Bharadwaj’s ego. From that point those who know him said that Bharadwaj has been joyous and always smiling through all these many years. To ignite that fire of Awakening in another must one not be enlightened oneself? That, in part, is what leads me to believe that Sunyata must have been realized.

<sup>1</sup> Sunyata, *Dancing with the Void*, Blue Dove Press, San Diego, California, 2001. Introduction, p. xxx. *Shunya darshan* means ‘vision of emptiness’.

<sup>2</sup> On the website [meditation.dk](http://meditation.dk)

After his passing, a few paragraphs were found among Sunyata’s writings which offer some insight into his Awakening process, about which he had been silent all his life. He states:

“When different stages of *sadhana* were being manifested through this body, what a variety of experiences I had then! I thought that there was a distinct *shakti* residing in me and guiding me by issuing commands from time to time. Since all this was happening in the stage of *sadhana*, *jnana* was being revealed in a piecemeal fashion. The integral wisdom (*vijnana*), which this body possessed from the very beginning, was broken into parts and there was something like a superimposition of ignorance.

“In my *sadhana* I was told by the invisible Monitor, ‘From today you are not to make obeisance to anybody.’ Later on, I again heard the voice within myself which told me, ‘Whom do you want to bow down to? You are everything.’ At once, I realized that the universe was, after all, my own manifestation. Partial knowledge then gave place to the integral, inherent wisdom, and I found myself face to face with the Advaita One that appears as many.”<sup>3</sup>

He further states that during this period many *vibhuti* (powers) were manifesting, though, to anyone’s knowledge, he told no one about this during his life. Sunyata seems to have had, among others, the *siddhi* of healing by touch. When he discovered this he was perhaps doing seva at a clinic, quite possibly that of his friend Dr. Ved Prakash Khanna, now deceased, who ran a nature cure clinic in Almora and who was the founder of the Sunyata Memorial Society. Sunyata describes how he found that whenever he touched a patient, that individual would be immediately cured. He says he tested this on a number of people and found it to be invariably true.

He must have soon discontinued this seva, because this power would otherwise certainly have become known and sensationalized. Sunyata abhorred such attention and, moreover, wrote dismissively about ‘Shakti business’ of various kinds as a distraction and as an impediment on the spiritual path. He was just not interested in

<sup>3</sup> Sunyata, op. cit., pp.7-8.

such manifestations and certainly realized that their display would invariably have attracted the wrong kind of attention, complicating his life considerably. He was clearly not averse to encouraging people on the spiritual path but he would have been appalled by hordes of miracle-seekers flocking to his humble door. That must be why he kept his powers secret and perhaps never exercised them thereafter. In his short essay he states, "...those powers are not meant for display. They should be kept carefully under control."

Always an enthusiastic exponent of the pure, Self-revealed Advaita Vedanta, Sunyata rarely spoke of gods or goddesses and didn't participate in religious ritual. Bhagavan and Nisargadatta Maharaj were his ideals.

And he lived his innerstanding. Near Almora I met a man, now in his seventies, who was a member of the Sunyata Memorial Society that built the simple samadhi for his ashes on Kalimath Ridge. He told me, with tears in his eyes, that he owes everything to Sunyata. He recounted that, as a troubled teen, he had broken with his family and was digging postholes for a tea-stall along the ridge road when Sunyata, whom he knew, passed by on his way to Almora market, a few miles away. Sunyata asked what he was doing and then went quietly on his way after being told. The next day Sunyata came by again and silently handed him an envelope, then left. Inside were 1500 rupees, a fortune in those days. The man has turned that gift, clearly some devotee's *guru dakshina*, into a general store, a restaurant and two guest houses. With real emotion he said, "Sunyata would let me come into his house and just sit. I loved him. He was the quietest man I ever knew."

In August of 1984 in San Anselmo, California, Sunyata, still bright and active at 93 and dressed as always in colourful clothes and turban, was struck by a car as he stepped out from between parked vehicles to cross the street on his way to the market. He died in a coma some days later, the first time he had ever been hospitalized. An autopsy was conducted. The doctors reported that all his organs looked like those of a man half his age; he might have lived for decades more. When his time came, it took two tons of speeding steel to kill his body. He was my friend; I loved him, too. All praise and honour to the silent shining Self in which Sri Sunyata is absorbed. ▲

## BOOK EXCERPT

# Leaving the Decision to God

MEG LUNDSTROM

This article is excerpted and adapted from *What To Do When You Can't Decide: Useful Tools for Finding the Answers Within* (Sounds True, 2010). The book is available online ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) and at U.S. bookstores (\$12, 325 pages, ISBN 1591798167).

In 1915 in Kerala, the father of a spiritually gifted 18-year-old brought the youth to a revered sadhu for guidance. The sadhu gave the youth the choice of being taught magic, medicine, astrology, the *Puranas*, or Vedanta. "I could not make up my mind," the young man wrote years later in *Living With The Master*. "So the sadhu felt that he should leave the decision to God. He wrote the name of each subject on a piece of paper and picked one at random. The slip turned out to be the one with *Vedanta* written on it." Instructions started that very day, and the youth, who came to be called Kunjuswami, in time became a personal attendant to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Meg Lundstrom has been regularly visiting the ashram since 1987. She previously wrote about synchronicity in *The Power of Flow: Practical Ways to Transform Your Life with Meaningful Coincidence* (Crown, 1997).

The sadhu was using a version of casting of lots, one of the oldest forms of divination (seeking spiritual guidance using tools). To invite an answer from the Divine by randomly tossing or choosing objects that can be read for meaning and direction seems to be a human impulse: historically, casting of lots has existed in some form in almost every culture, from Ur to Egypt to Greece, and it's embedded deeply in Chinese culture in the *I Ching*.

A. Devaraja Mudaliar, a devotee close to Bhagavan, once cast lots to seek Bhagavan's counsel on whether to undertake an action in his personal life "which it struck me any sensible or prudent man would do as a matter of course," he wrote in *My Recollection of Bhagavan Ramana*. The answer was No, and "no harm ensued." Later, he asked Bhagavan if casting of lots was okay for devotees to use. "Bhagavan was pleased to say, 'Yes. It will work if they have faith,'" he wrote.

Seeking guidance with this method can be highly practical for sadhakas, even today. When we're at a crossroads and don't know what to do, it is best, of course, to go deep within through meditation and prayer and find the answers there. But sometimes we're so caught up in our emotions, desires, fears and conditioned responses that it's hard to hear the still, small voice through all the clamour. In such cases, this approach — sometimes termed the chits — can come to the rescue. When done with reverence and a serious intent to align oneself with Divinity, it becomes an act of surrender that reduces the power and force of the ego, allowing the Self to shine forth.

In the last two decades, this approach has helped steer me through many spiritual shoals and given me direction and courage in following my path. I have found the chits and other simple divining methods so useful that I recently wrote a book on the subject, and in doing the research, I found that many sadhakas in Tiruvannamalai used some form of divining for simple decisions like travel plans and purchases. They said it helped them to make choices efficiently and to avoid endless loops of inner debating, thus freeing their mind for (one hopes!) Self-enquiry.

For me, the approach has been good training in surrender, which Bhagavan says can lead to Self-realization if done with full devotion.

Following divine counsel requires one to put aside one's ego and preconceptions, and over time one gets better at it, not just with the chits but in life. Often when I throw the chits, I will get an answer that runs counter to my hopes and assumptions, not to mention my financial plans. But I find that if I swallow hard and follow the counsel, things turn out very well. Inexplicably, things fall into place that lead to the best possible outcome. Paths open and obstacles melt away. Meaningful coincidences abound. This builds trust. You ask, you receive, and in this dance, you experience a dynamic Oneness.

For example, once I did the chits and was directed to go to India for seventeen weeks — when I had a fulltime freelance job at a women's magazine that involved heading a small staff that produced a weekly photo essay. I couldn't even imagine informing the editor-in-chief that I would be away a third of the year — losing the lucrative work was a real possibility. But immediately I found someone highly qualified who could step in for me temporarily and I was able to figure out ways to pre-produce much of it. The editor laughed, gave me her blessing, and told me she envied me the journey. The trip was rich with blessings, and when I returned to my office, I was welcomed with open arms.

Other examples: A friend of mine was giving scant thought to going to an expensive professional conference across the country that he wasn't even sure he had the credentials to apply to. His wife urged him to try the chits. They said Yes, and the event led to sterling contacts, a shift in his research focus, and a job offer. During one period when their marriage was in trouble, the two of them turned often to the chits; they were always directed to stay together, and today are most happy they followed that counsel instead of their churning emotions.

If you're interested in trying this approach, below you'll find five steps to do so. First comes one simple decision. The #1 chit — the one that advises you on the wisest action — can either be the one that falls closest to a sacred object that you're using, such as a photo of Bhagavan or a candle, or the one that falls closest to you yourself. Ahead of time choose whichever feels intuitively right.

**Step 1. Get quiet and connected**

This is a sacred process that demands a quiet space, inside and out. Find a place and a time of day in which you are sure you won't be interrupted or distracted for some time. Sit comfortably, either in a chair or on the floor.

Have in front of you a small altar. It can be as elaborate as a puja altar, or as simple as a lit candle. It should include something that represents the Self to you, such as a photo of Bhagavan, a lingam, a statue of Ganesha, a flower, a rock shaped like Arunachala.

Settle into the silence by breathing deeply, saying a prayer or mantra, chanting or visualizing light.

**Step 2. Write out the options**

With pen and paper in hand, write out the chits. You can use one of two options: multiple choice or Yes/No:

***Multiple choice option***

On a clean sheet of paper, write out all the options you're considering in rows down the left side of the page, leaving white space around each phrase. Let's say, for instance, that you want direction on visiting Tirupati. Some options you're considering might be:

*Visit Tirupati during Navaratri*

*Visit Tirupati another time this year*

*Visit Tirupati next year, not this year*

*Do not plan a visit to Tirupati at this time*

Now add in these three, which must always be included:

*Await another alternative*

*Do not choose this way* (meaning, do not use the chits for this decision)

*Wrong question*

As you write out options in a quiet, focused state, you may find new ones popping into your mind — include them too. Our receptivity invites in these intuitive jumps, which often hit us with an *Oh oh!* and sense of inevitability.

Make sure each option is precisely defined and so clear that if it comes up, you have no doubt what it means. It's also important to include options that you *don't* want: it's when we open ourselves to all alternatives that this approach work most profoundly to awaken us to our deepest truth.

Don't limit the number of chits in the hopes of raising the odds of the one you want rising to the top: this is not about odds, but destiny. Often I've written out more than a dozen chits and known deep down which one would land in #1 position, and it did. I was just loathe to accept it initially because it took a lot of courage, money or faith.

***Yes/No option***

On a clean sheet of paper, starting in the corner, write the following words in a column, leaving white space around each word:

*Yes*

*No*

*Wait*

*Wrong question*

*Do not choose this way* (meaning, do not use the chits for this decision)

After you've chosen one of these two approaches and written out your options, tear off each and fold it up. They can be folded any which way, just so they're more or less indistinguishable from each other. Put them in a small stack, ready for the next step.

Remember, also, that chits are about actions, *not* predictions. If you ask what job to take, that is an action and you will get the answer you need. If you ask whether you will be offered a certain job, that's a prediction, and because the future is veiled and often better left that way, you can't count on an accurate reply. The chits work great for action advisories, but fortune-telling is not their purpose or strength.

**Step 3. Pray or meditate**

For at least 10 minutes and as long as 30 or more, focus your energy in prayer or meditation, asking Bhagavan to show you the right answer. Gently release your attachment to certain options and accept the

possibility of others. (One way to do this is to imagine how something you want could turn out badly and how something you don't want could turn out well.) Pray or meditate until your mind settles down and you feel a deep calmness settle in and you feel viscerally connected to an expansive, deep energy. It might feel like deep silence, or a pervasive oneness, or a settling deep into your innermost self, or an opening wide of your heart.

#### Step 4. Throw the chits

No need to worry about the timing – you'll know when the right moment comes to actually throw the chits: it could be an internal *click* or shift or your hands moving on their own accord toward them. Pick up the stack of chits, shake them gently between your two hands, and then toss them lightly onto the surface between yourself and the sacred object. Pick up the one closest to you or to the sacred object, depending on your orientation decision. Open it up. That's it!

Sometimes a few will clump together, or two will be almost equidistant from you or the sacred object. Eyeball them and decide which one is #1 before you open them up.

Another option is to close your eyes, throw them on to a flat surface, and, with your eyes still closed, reach out and pluck one.

#### Step 5. Receive the answer

Check inwardly: on a gut level, does the answer feel right? Underneath the dismay or excitement, does it “click”? Does it “fall in the slot”? Does it have a sense of inevitability about it, a feeling of the unfolding of destiny? Getting this inner *Yes!* is absolutely key to moving ahead. Along with it might come a deep, profound silence, if only for a millisecond – and then your mind might get very noisy indeed.

The pattern in which the chits fall can be a source of more information, so you might want to open up a few more, especially the chits nearest your choice and the one or two farthest away.

I've found that more often than not, the chits line up in a way that supports the #1 chit: #2 will be conceptually the closest to it, #3 will be also close, and the last chit will be the farthest away from it conceptually. This gives me a reassuring sense of underlying order

and harmony. Other times, the way they fall together can be helpful in deepening your understanding.

If you get *Do not choose this way* in front, it means to decide some other way: intuitively, with prayer or dreams, through more research or discussions with others, or through the unfolding of events. I sometimes get this when I already know the answer and am simply looking for verification. Sometimes when I get *Do not choose this way* as #1, I open up #2 to see what it says, and treat that as more as a mild suggestion than a directive. Sometimes I consistently get *Do not choose this way*, and I back off the chits for some time, because it's clear I'm being encouraged to pursue other modes of learning.

Because you are opening the door wide with the chits, the counsel you receive can be a shock. The big question, of course, is, Do you always follow the counsel? I do about 95% of the time: I take it seriously, and it takes me seriously, and its guidance has been spot-on for a very long time. Some people tell me it works best for them as an advisory or a second opinion. The choice is always yours: if you feel intensely uncomfortable with what comes up, if it doesn't leave you with an *aha* sense of inner correctness, or if you just plain don't want to do it — it's your decision and your life! But if you feel Bhagavan's hand in it and can find the courage in yourself to move forward on something difficult but deep-down right for you, you will be rewarded beyond all measure — guaranteed.

#### Verification

Devotees who were around Bhagavan cite example after example of how obstacles melted away when they wanted to be with him and how his Grace brought harmony and fortuitous events to their families; today, many of us experience everyday yet remarkable miracles that bear his mark. Likewise, with the chits, the best way to verify an answer is to watch the unfolding of events to see how they support you in moving forward with the solution. Often an odd answer will reveal its wisdom with time and propitious occurrences, and sometimes an answer will be the first of several steps — it will take you where you need to go for the next part of the process. It's remarkable how smoothly and amazingly events can unfold.

I had a small example writing the book. In March 2009, as I was leaving the ashram for the last time before catching my flight back to the U.S.A., I passed an Australian friend at the front gate who had looked over the manuscript a month earlier. She pointed straight at me and said: “*Arunachala’s Ramana*, Volume 3, page 495.” At the afternoon reading that very day, she told me, the President had read A. Devaraja Mudaliar’s passage about the casting of lots — the first time I had heard Bhagavan’s words on the topic. It was 5:55 p.m., so we raced into the ashram bookstore, found the volume on the shelf, and got permission to run across the street with it and Xerox that page. It was the final touch the manuscript needed, and it felt like a blessing from Bhagavan. ▲

### Ever Present

Billy Doyle

it’s strange how we identify ourselves  
with the discontinuity  
the I-image that manifests intermittenly  
ignoring the continuity  
ever present awareness  
it’s stange how we identify ourselves  
with the contents  
the ever changing images of the personality  
ignoring the container  
consciousness itself  
we’re taken by the beads on the necklace  
ignoring the support of the string

This poem has been taken from a collection titled *The Mirage of Separation* by Billy Doyle. Published by Non-Duality Press, PO Box 2228, Salisbury, SP2 2GZ, UK. \$ 13.95. ISBN: 978-0-9558290-0-0

## SHORT STORY

# The Dark Rider

PREMA SASTRI

Mallika stood on her balcony. The sky was as black as an inverted Minkwell. A pinhead of light slashed the surface, like a moving nib, and went out of sight. A meteor, vanishing as mysteriously as it had appeared. Like human beings, like her own life: always in transit.

Her father was an officer in the Indian Administrative Service. With him the family went from one small town to the other, in Tamil Nadu. Coimbatore, Madurai, Salem, Tiruchirapalli: temple towns where people lived in the same way as their ancestors a hundred years ago. The addresses were different, the houses were the same. All of them had wooden trellised verandahs, stone floors with sand coming through the cracks, and high roofs with wooden beams. The men were mostly on tour visiting the smaller towns, particularly during the *Jamma Bandi*, the tax collection season. The women took part in

Prema Sastri is a writer of short stories, plays and novels and is the author of four books. She lives in Bangalore and is a devotee of Bhagavan who is the ruling force of her life.

welfare activities and the social duties that went with being the wife of a senior district officer. The children went to a variety of schools. In some cases they were sent to boarding schools in Ooty, Coonor, Yercaud or some other hill station. They had an ad hoc education that did not prepare them for any career.

Mallika and her younger brother, Srinivas, were left to their own resources. Srinivas occupied himself with cycling furiously around the compound. He flew kites, he spun tops, he rolled hoops; he played cricket with the peons, who were only too willing to leave their post of duty. When not thus engaged, he would tie his sister's plaits to a chair while she was reading, and laugh when he saw her get up with the chair trailing behind her.

Srinivas took advantage of his parent's absences to cycle into town and regale himself with revolting-looking coloured drinks. In spite of Mallika's admonitions, pink, green and yellow liquids went down his throat. He could manage two or three bottles at a time.

One day the drinks got to him. He cycled home, brought out a stream of rainbow- coloured water, and fell face down on the drawing room carpet. Mallika rushed in. She turned him over. Froth formed on his lips. His head lolled to one side. His eyes stared at her. He gasped, and stopped breathing. Mallika phoned her parents. The District Medical Officer was sent for. He went through a quick examination, and wrote out a death certificate. The body was taken out on a bier. It returned in an urn of ashes. The house became an envelope, enclosing the family members like torn scraps of paper.

Yama, the Lord of Death, had used his noose to take Srinivas. The Dark Rider wandered on his buffalo, ready to snare a helpless living creature. Nobody knew when he would come: he was the lord of the unknown. For Mallika he became a constant presence. The sound of hooves, the rattle of bones, and the picture of a stout, black muscular figure became part of her consciousness.

After her father retired, he built a small house in Indiranagar, Bangalore. Mallika had completed her master's degree in English

Literature from Presidency College in Chennai. She got a job near her parents in Domlur, editing the newsletter of a corporate magazine.

The move from Tamil Nadu to "Electronic City" was like ascending to a different layer of the stratosphere. Instead of temples, there were glass and steel malls. The fragrances of flower garlands, sandalwood and incense were replaced with the odour of popcorn and pizzas. Inside the mall it was like a beehive. Young men and women swarmed up and down the escalators, which buzzed under their heels. There were lines outside the cinema complexes. The restaurants were full of people eating snacks and drinking Coke. People came and went, like the tide.

Her father and mother accepted the change. Her father went walking in the senior citizens' park, where he sorted out the affairs of the world with his fellow walkers. Her mother joined the Chinmaya Mission and became immersed in temple visits, pujas, bhajans and lectures. Mallika absorbed herself in the company newsletter.

It was after working hours. Mallika sat in the canteen sipping a cup of coffee. Her hand shook. Hot coffee spilled over a black shoe. The shoe was attached to a young man with unruly hair and a moustache. He suppressed a yelp of pain and sat down opposite her, as he tried to repair the damage with a handkerchief.

"I'm sorry."

"No need to be. I've wanted to introduce myself for weeks. I didn't think it would happen this way. I'm Amar Shetty, from the accounts department. Let me drop you home, so that you can attend to my foot."

Mallika could not refuse. They climbed into his white Tata Indica. Mallika's mother opened the door. When apprised of the situation she brought out her first aid kit, rubbed ointment on the swollen ankle, and bandaged it. She forced Amar to wait while she went to the kitchen to fry bhajjis.

"It is the least we can do, after boiling your leg."

Amar laughed.

"It is not so bad. I exaggerated the pain to get attention."

After that Amar was a regular visitor at their house. Mallika's father saved newspaper cuttings to share with him. Her mother revived the

afternoon snacks that had been Srinivas' favourites. Srinivas would never follow in his father's footsteps. He would never bring home the bride her mother longed for. Yet, he came to life in Amar. Amar gave them a rebirth of dreams. He had a deep knowledge of the Gita and the Upanishads. He would discuss the concepts with her mother and give her practical suggestions. Her mother often asked for advice from Amar, something she had never done with any member of the family. He also had a shrewd understanding of current events. Her father, usually argumentative, would listen to the young man, and treated his views with respect.

Mallika herself felt calm and strong when she was with Amar. There were times she felt he looked at her with a questioning glance. Once he asked, "Mallika, do you have something to tell me?" She was ashamed of her fears before his strength. She gave him a vague reply.

Amar's father was a prosperous industrialist in Tumkur. He had two brothers in America.

"I thought I should hang around in case my parents needed me." He looked at Mallika. "I'm glad I did."

Amar laughed and joked a lot, yet she felt there was steel under the surface of his disarming manner. With Amar she almost forgot the fearsome figure that walked beside her. The Dark Rider seemed like a myth.

She was taking her evening walk in Indiranagar. On the road was a dead dog. It lay in a pool of blood. Its neck was broken. It was Sajjan, whom she had named when he started following her, determined to be her friend. Any time she was around, he would emerge from a ditch or shrub and dance in the air till she fed him with biscuits. She had some in her bag even now.

Yama had been waiting to snatch Sajjan, who would never again surprise her by appearing unexpectedly. The biscuits in her bag would remain uneaten. She was sure she could see Yama with the mace and the rope, dragging a reluctant black dog by the neck.

She dropped the biscuits near the corpse, and walked home. Her every pore was a pinnacle of pain, grief and fear. The rider not only had a mace and a noose but a network of minions, inflicting

illness, loss, despair and weakness, the outriders of death. She could not win.

Amar was dropping her home. He stopped the car near one of the parks, and turned towards her. She knew what was coming. For weeks he had been hinting that he had something important to tell her. As he drew closer, in her mind's eye she saw the Dark Rider standing behind him, with a complacent smile.

"No, Amar," she screamed. "Don't come near me."

His face blanked out. For a minute he sat rigid and silent. He started the car and dropped her at her gate without stopping the engine. After that he acknowledged her presence in the office only with a curt nod.

Her parents did not ask her what had happened to account for Amar's absence. They merely shrivelled. She buried herself in the company newsletter.

There was a shelf full of religious books on the landing. One Sunday afternoon Mallika decided to arrange them. As she was doing so, a thin volume dropped into her hands. It was a biography of Bhagwan Ramana Maharishi, the sage of Arunachala.

On the cover was an elderly man. Silver hair formed a halo round his head. He had classic features. His eyes brimmed with laughter, as if he were sharing some joke. She took the book to her room to read.

The story was about a young boy, Venkataraman. He lived in Madurai, spending his time going to the Meenakshi temple or playing with his friends. As he rested in his room upstairs one afternoon, he felt his legs grow numb. The numbness crept up his body, like a wet sheet. He could not move. The blood in his veins turned cold. He stopped breathing. He was dead. Yet he was conscious.

As he was wondering what was happening, he felt he was in the centre of a powerhouse of energy. Electric currents flowed through him. It was clear that he was the power house. From him pulsed knowledge, truth and bliss. The body was inert on the bed. His spirit was free.

While he was taking in the wonder of it all, he was pulled back into the body. The room looked the same. He no longer belonged to it. His heart was filled with yearning for his soul's true home, which he found on the sacred hill of Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai. His life, his silence and words brought peace to many troubled souls.

As she put the book down, she felt as if a hand were untying the ropes that bound her. Sadness, dread and shame dropped away. The hand rested on her head in blessing. The heavy thoughts that weighed her down turned into cottonwool. She was in the presence of a man who had overcome death. She sat up to hear a low chuckle. She understood the joke. There was no Dark Rider. He was an invention of the mind. There was no death, only change. Srinivas had gone to the next stage of his soul's journey. A kindly fate had saved Sajjan from foraging in garbage bins and given him green fields in which to play and eat. The Lord of Death was also the Lord of Life.

She went out on to the balcony. The sun was a red ball sinking into the horizon. The earth would be in darkness for a time. In the morning the sun would reappear to spread its rays on the planet. It came and went, like all human beings.

She called Amar on her cell phone.

"Amar, I want to see you. Please come."

"I'll be with you in half an hour."

When he came, she blurted out explanations.

"Mallika, I knew your doubts, but you would not confide in me. I too have gone through the sunless path. I lost my best friend in school, in a boating accident. I have relived that day many times. I looked for balm for the pain. I read books. I met religious masters. Suddenly I understood that life and death are two sides of the same coin. If you hold one, you hold the other."

Mallika looked at Amar. She had never seen him so serious. She knew that he was sent to be her truth. Neither life nor death could have a hold on them. Grief had killed the joy in her family. With Amar they would find rebirth. ▲

# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## The Descent of the Trimurtis and Adishakti

NABAJI SIDDHA

Overjoyed at the sight of his son-in-law, Sidhopant received him like a long-lost son, pouring his boundless affection on him. To celebrate the occasion, he invited all the relatives and Brahmins in Alankavati to a grand feast. Unfortunately, his joy was not shared by all. The Brahmins, enraged by his invitation, gathered at Sidhopant's house and yelled at him, "O Brahmin, your act is like that of the monkey which brought destruction unto itself as well as the forest where it lived. You gave shelter to the wicked man Vithoba who embraced sannyas in Varanasi, taking food with all kinds of people, and then returned to Grihasthashram shamelessly, bringing disgrace upon the age-old tradition. He has thus lost his place among the high-caste, but you have the nerve to invite us brazenly to rejoice in the evil. Just as a man who favours liquor over nectar, or one who recites Vedas but reads depraved literature, or a Brahmin who became

an outcaste, similarly your son-in-law has turned away from sannyas and embraced grihasthashram. O unrighteous one, do you want us to succumb to your hospitality, acquiesce in unorthodox ways and lose our high caste? If you want us to partake of food in your house, throw him out or else we will expel you from the society. You should perform expiatory acts to be accepted back amongst us.”

Sidhopant replied, “O noble Brahmins, I prostrate before you. Be kind enough to accept the feast and honour us. Be not prejudiced against Vithoba. Please do not reject our invitation.” Incensed further, the Brahmins hurled abuses at him, blaming him for bringing disrepute to the tradition.

Witnessing these developments, Vithoba mused, “Alas, living in the midst of these people who are submerged in sense-pleasures, mesmerized by Maya, ensnared in the web of worldliness, seized by bigoted madness, blinded by hostility and orthodoxy, and poisoned by egoism would vitiate my reason and perpetuate my ignorance. Before it gets out of control, let me flee from here.”

Bowing to Sidhopant, he said, “O wise one, if I desire to live here even after encountering so much hostility on the very first day of arrival, it will be like eating food without revulsion in spite of finding flies in the first morsel itself, or like the woman who lives amicably with the husband who meted out kicks and blows to her on the very first day of marriage, or like an honourable man trying to make peace with the quarrelsome in-laws of his daughter, or a wise man being friendly with a wicked person rearing for a fight. My abiding welfare lies in quitting the society and living in the forest.”

When Sidhopant pressed him to stay back, Vithoba said, “I am indeed an outcast for having strayed from the sannyas way of life into grihasthashram. It is not fair that you and your family should suffer on my account.”

However, Sidhopant and his wife also got ready to accompany him to the forest. Their daughter Rukmabai, barring their way said, “It will be a rough life for you if you come and reside in the forest in your old age. Please stay back where you are. I will visit you as often as I can.”

She then proceeded with her husband to the forest. Vithoba would spend his days in a cave immersed in the bliss of the Atman, oblivious of the world around. At such times, Rukmabai visited her parents and collected food materials from the village to feed her husband.

In Varanasi, Sripada Swami’s mind dwelt on Vithoba one day. He mused, “It is excessive love for my disciple that made me bless the couple with the birth of rare souls. I have to ensure its fulfilment.”

As he meditated upon the Lord with this intention, Trimurtis and Adishakti appeared before him and said, “O Brahmajnani, abiding in the undifferentiated state! What can we do for you?”

Bowing to them and worshipping them with words of praise, Sripada Swami said, “O Protectors of the Universe, Omniscient Ones, you are well aware of my prayer. O Embodiments of Compassion, will you kindly fulfil the wish of this humble devotee and be born to my beloved disciple Vithoba?”

The blessed Lord Sri Hari replied, “O exalted soul! We have already decided to incarnate on the Earth, in order to establish the essence of Dharma of different stations of life, i.e. of varnashrama dharma, and bring about a sense of balance in saguna and nirguna upasana. This wish of ours has emanated as your blessings on the couple. Whom do you take Vithoba for? He is the very manifestation of sage Vasishtha.”

“When I was born in Ayodhya along with Adishesha, conch and disc as the four children of King Dasaratha, an incident occurred which caused Vasishtha to be born later as Vithoba. One day, I was sitting on the lap of the king. The three brothers, also wishing to sit on his lap, vied with each other. To pacify all, the king seated two of us on his lap and the other two on his shoulders. Lakshman and I aspired to sit on his shoulders. While we tried to pull Bharatha and Shatrugna down, they clung to the king’s shoulders, not wanting to climb down. Lakshmana and I hugged the king from the back and front. Thus we were pulling him from all four directions. This scene created joy and peals of laughter among our mothers. The king, who had been childless for a long time, now blessed with four children, shed tears of joy and gratitude for his good fortune. This wonderful scene touched a deep cord in Vasishtha, who was witnessing the play

of the children, and it triggered a yearning in his heart to embrace Me, the Lord, as his child. Immediately, I appeared to him in the form of Trinity. Kissing My feet, he said, 'Though You are One, You have appeared before me as three. In the past, You were born as Dattatreya to the sage Atri. Will you bestow a similar fortune on me and gladden my heart?'

"Soon Vasishta was overcome by a sense of shame for having indulged in worldly thought. Coming to his senses, he steadied his wisdom. After reaching home, he confessed to his wife, Arundathi, as to how he had briefly succumbed to a worldly desire to beget the Trimurtis as his children. In turn, Arundathi disclosed that she too was overtaken once by a similar desire to have Goddess Parvati as her daughter, when she was witnessing the wedding of Siva and Parvati.

"At that very moment, sage Narada appeared before them and said, 'O supreme among the sages, your wish, as also the prayers of other sages, will attain fruition in the Kali era.' Since sage Narada was known to reveal even closely held secrets in all the four quarters of the world, Vasishta wanted to restrain him. He beseeched the celestial sage to take birth along with them as his Guru and reveal this message only at that time and hold it a secret until then. Consequently, Vasishta and Arundathi were born as Vithoba and Rukmabai; you were born as Vithoba's Guru, Sripada Swami. Be assured that we will be born soon to Vithoba and Rukmabai as per your wish."

Then Lord Narayana requested Lord Mahadeva to incarnate soon as the first son of Vithoba so that they could follow suit.

Lord Mahadeva said, "I came to the Earth in the form of sages like Durvasa puffed up with my own importance. You made your appearance as Vyasa and others and elevated yourself. Later, the Rishis divided our followers into Saivites and Vaishnavites and expressed their own views through puranas and shastras, thus strengthening karma kanda of the Vedas and elaborating on saguna upasana. They taught the Vedas partially, obscuring the teaching of the Upanishads, which have made but oblique references to the final beatitude of Brahman, i.e. nirguna or formless aspect. Consequently, aspiration to attain the ultimate state of pure knowledge became low. The path of jnana was

pushed to background and ignorance led to widespread practices of karma based on obtaining the fruit of action. Later, people became totally absorbed in rituals and completely lost touch with the main aim of life, which is the highest attainment of the Absolute. Further, strangely, some people were also lured into new religions which emphasized solely the formless aspect of reality, slandering the ancient religion. Therefore, we will incarnate to restore the glorious path of jnana to its premier status and destroy the lowly religions and their evil practice of five deadly sins like cow-slaughter."

Lord Brahma and Adishakti were totally in accord with Lord Siva. Sri Hari said, "I agree with you. However, even exalted souls abiding in the formless Absolute become ecstatic while contemplating on the attributes and glories of the Personal aspect of God. Therefore, We will reveal the glory of the path of bhakti. This will counteract the fanatical attitude of those who swear by the formless aspect and detest the other side of truth, which act will doom them to be born in lower types of inferior wombs. We will bring about a synthesis between jnana and bhakti, which will plant the seed of bhakti in the heart of adherents of the jnana path who have a lop-sided approach and thus elevate them. Promoting bhakti will sustain unripe aspirants who cannot directly take a leap towards the formless, impersonal aspect of reality and change the biased vision of those who abhor the path of devotion, i.e. the personal God, and redeem them. Further, the scriptures ordain that even those who are fixed in the Undifferentiated state, transcending all sense of duality, should also necessarily engage in devotional practices such as japa, austerity, dhyana, and dana for the welfare of the world. Therefore, we will establish the rightful place of both bhakti and jnana in man's ascent." Turning to Lord Maheshwara, Sri Hari said, "O Vamadeva, You may spread the glory of the path of jnana in Your incarnation."

Lord Siva set about disturbing the samadhi of Vithoba, brought the couple together, and incarnated in the womb of Rukmabai to uplift this world as well as other worlds. Sounding the trumpets of victory, celestial beings showered petals of flowers on the child. Vithoba and Rukmabai became jubilant on the birth of their child and the consequent shower of blessings from heaven. They swam in

the ocean of bliss and held the child with great love. They named him Nivrittidev as he remained always silent as if in meditation.

In due course, casting the spell of Maya on Vithoba once again, Lord Hari incarnated as Jnaneshwar. The couple was transported to the realm of limitless joy. Since this child entered the world uttering words of Jnana, the blessed parents named him Jnaneshwar. When Rukmabai gave birth to the third child, who was Lord Brahma's aspect, all the dead leaves turned green, withered plants and trees burst forth with green shoots, and dead insects came to life, and therefore he was named Sopandev. Lastly, when a daughter was born, she came into the world uttering, "Absorption in the Absolute is liberation." Therefore, she was named Muktabai. Thus the four children immersed their parents in waves of bliss. ▲

(To be continued)

### Doctors for Free Dispensary

Sri Ramanasramam has recently inaugurated a new, larger dispensary for ashram inmates and the poor people of the surrounding area. It has proven popular with many villagers who are unable to afford the services of private doctors.

The ashram requires the services of doctors who can work in the Out Patient Department.

Free Boarding and Accommodation will be provided. Adequate compensation will be paid. Doctor couples preferred.

Local doctors also may apply to serve on a part-time basis.

Those who are interested may apply with their bio-data to:

The President

Sri Ramanasramam

Tiruvannamalai – 606 603

ashram@sriramanamaharshi.org

## VEDANTA TEXT TRANSLATION

# MAHARAJA THURAVU

## Glory of *Sannyasa*: The Life and Teachings of the King-turned-Ascetic

SRI KUMARA DEVA SWAMIGAL

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI TANMAYANANDA SARASVATI

(...*The enlightened king-turned-ascetic continues his teachings to his former devout minister...*)

91. The proponents of *bheda vaada*, namely the dualists, assert that the triad of world, soul and God (*jagat, jiva and Isvara*) are eternally distinct entities and enjoy independent reality. If we accept such a proposition, this creation which deludes us, will never relinquish its hold over our minds and we will be subject to all its miseries. One should develop the vision of wisdom and see the entire creation as a superimposition upon the substratum of Self, like the snake superimposed on a harmless rope. This purifying vision of wisdom enables one to renounce all attachments to this delusory phenomenal life governed by Maya. A life of holy renunciation alone is exalted and bestows all good to the soul. When such renunciation blossoms in our heart, all the heat of transmigratory life will leave

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati has long been associated with Arunachala and lives by the western foothills of the sacred mountain.

our bosom and our mind will become cool like the full moon and be filled with great peace and joy.

92. Oh minister, you admonished me that one can remain wherever one is, and while engaged in performance of one's duties of householder's life, one can still attain *moksha* from bondage. A householder, however courageous and discriminating he may be, still has to mentally discard all the burdens of family life and seek a solitary place to conquer his mind by dropping all thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'. It is almost impossible for a person who is constantly caught up in the cares of a demanding family life to accomplish this tremendous task. Amidst all the distractions of worldly life, he cannot engage in the whole-hearted sadhana necessary to attain the bliss of the Self.

93. Great souls who had completed all jnana sadhana practices (such as *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*) in many previous births and attained true knowledge in this last birth might be leading a householder's life now, living amidst their relatives as part of their residual *prarabdha karma*. But such *jnani*s, even while leading an ordinary family life will never swerve from the non-dual vision of 'all this is filled with Siva'. If such be the case, then can someone who has realized the truth of the Self and abides in the knowledge of "I am Brahman", ever nourish an attitude of deriving happiness from the world? For a person travelling from the southernmost coastal town (say, Tuticorin in Tamilnadu) by a ship towards Jaffna (a Sri Lankan town on its northern coast), slowly the vision of the former town disappears completely and is replaced in turn by the sight of Jaffna approaching. In the same way, for a person who has steadily given up the conviction of reality and happiness in worldly life, there will inevitably rise in his mind the non-dual knowledge of total identity with the all-pervasive Brahman.

94. Suppose a mighty king picks up a person from a small town and makes him, out of affection, the ruler of a province carved out of his own empire. The new governor would then leave his native town

and rule his province from its capital. Can he again function from his native place? In the same way, a person who has gained sufficient *vairagya*, and therefore renounced the family life, can never again revert to the lifestyle of a householder. Enlightened sages established in the knowledge of Brahman will never again fall into the delusion of treating this world as real and experience its sufferings.

95. It is natural for a householder to find pleasure and comfort in the felicitous company of his wife and children, as also in accumulating wealth. Deprived of these comforts, he is prone to feel disheartened. For a normal householder, there will be at least a minimum level of desire for enjoyment of pleasures and he will make all efforts to facilitate his gratification. If there is a rare soul, who while leading a family life becomes devoid of such hankerings, then it is best for such a ripe soul (aspiring to devote himself to the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment through *shravana* and *manana*), to renounce the life of a householder without hesitation and embrace the life of a *sannyasi*. This alone is the prescribed course of action for a fully committed seeker.

**Note:** The *Jabala Upanishad* says that the day one feels *vairagya* for the world, that very day he should resort to renunciation and quit worldly life! — *yadahareva virajet, tadahareva pravrajat*.

96. Loathing the householder's life which is beset with evils and distractions, when a person seeks the bliss of realisation of absolute truth, and accordingly embraces spiritual practices, then any lingering indulgence in worldly pursuits will pose a setback, causing obstacles in his *sadhana*. When he begins to experience that incomparable bliss of the Self, all worldly joys would appear to him as trivial. Therefore sages say that, without renunciation, the wisdom that one can attain while remaining in household life is deemed to be *ajnana* only.

97. Further, even if the householder saint attains the impeccable knowledge of the Self, it will not appear in splendid glory, verily like a precious gem embedded in a crude ornament made of iron. On the other hand, when the supreme knowledge resides in a person who

has given up family life and embraced total renunciation, it dazzles like a diamond set in a shining golden ornament. Thus for a sage revelling in Self-abidance, family life muffles his lustre and ill-befits his stature.

98. The discriminating householders, dreading the miseries of transmigratory life and desiring to put an end to the same, eventually take recourse to renunciation as a *means* for gaining Self-knowledge. Thus for everyone the life-style of a householder is a natural, and often necessary precursor to attaining *vairagya* in the form of *sannyasa*. Remaining in the family life itself, there have indeed been cases of rare seekers who have done great sadhana and attained liberation. Sometimes when such illumined souls continue to remain as householders even after realisation of the supreme truth, other people in family life will argue with renunciates, raising the query why they also cannot attain liberation similarly, even while remaining as householders. However, such deductions are totally flawed and unwarranted. Will anyone who has renounced all attachments in worldly life, ever say that family life is superior to a life of immaculate renunciation? Dear minister, the life-style of a householder does not bring any merit or effulgence to a *jnani*. Please ponder over this.

99. The sages who have attained the supreme *jivanmukti sthiti*, have transcended the three states of waking, deep sleep and dream, and by the luminous weapon of *tattva jnanam*, dispelled the darkness of *ajnana* completely and roam about like an innocent child, or a mad man or even like a ghost-possessed soul. Having effaced the ego, they will cheerfully perform menial jobs too, in the houses of ignorant town folks, as if they were daily wage earners!

100. When a deep foretaste for Self-knowledge sprouts within a discriminating seeker, he will regard with equanimity the effects of both good and bad deeds performed in the past and be indifferent to them. If at that time, the pleasures of family life appear disgusting like food that has been vomited, he will quickly renounce family life for good! Will it be right to say that, *after* attaining the knowledge of



Swami Vivekananda

the Self and revelling in the bliss of supreme truth, he will once again covet and engage in the petty pleasures and comforts of householder's life? Think well and tell, Oh minister!

101. Even those who have a taste for habitual sensual indulgence, will feel like renouncing worldly joys when they listen to eloquent and inspiring expositions about the supreme bliss of Self-knowledge. If such be the case, can those who have actually experienced the beginningless and endless bliss of the knowledge of Truth, ever revert to the thoughts of the contemptible worldly life? Will not people laugh if they hear such drivel?

102. Dear minister, you may see some exalted householders and quickly conclude that they are enlightened sages and hence freed from all attachments. If they are truly free from all attachments, why would they stick to family life? Suppose you advance the reason that it is because of their residual *prarabdha* karma, then is it not a fact that such a karma will produce at least an iota of desire in them and make them enjoy the pleasures and comforts of household life? Can sages who have realized the Self entertain even the slightest desire for such worldly objects of pleasure? For such exalted *jnanis*, the endless bliss of *samadhi* alone is worthy of ceaseless abidance. The least break (*pramada*) from such a *nishta* will promptly remind them that this phenomenal world is only a mirage-like illusion and such remembrance will drive their mind inward again and restore their abidance in *samadhi* of Self-awareness.

103. Those who pursue a worldly life under the delusion of obtaining permanent happiness thus, will over a period of time, slowly develop discrimination and realize the hollowness of such a pursuit; they then give up the pursuit of worldly objects of pleasure and try to attain release from *samsara* through the teachings of an enlightened guru. If such be the case for even genuine seekers, would those who have *actually* attained the goal of everlasting happiness, through the Grace of the guru after doing proper sadhana following his teachings,

ever come to think once again that a worldly life is full of sweet joy and worth going after? Only if the sages, ever revelling in the bliss of the Self, once again start believing that a worldly life indeed gives enduring happiness, can they work towards fulfilling worldly desires such as acquiring land and a house. Such a possibility can never arise, dear minister! Think deeply and tell me.

104. If a flower creeper is uprooted, it will quickly wither away. It will be an impossible miracle for that dried up creeper to once again sprout forth leaves, flowers and fruits. In the same way, it would be equally impossible for sages, who have realized Brahman as their very Self and thus completely rooted out all desires from their bosom, to once again develop an interest in the perishable life of worldly pleasures and indulge in household life.

105. Normally a person, who is sunk in the deep well of ignorance, takes himself to be the body; for the upkeep and happy maintenance of the body, he seeks to acquire land, house and other creature comforts and also exerts himself for their maintenance, finding fulfillment in such mundane pursuits. When he stumbles upon the desire for *moksha*, which is absolute release from all suffering, he adopts the means of renunciation to achieve that final end and thus he will eventually climb out of the deep well of Self-ignorance. For, by means of a steadfast adherence to renunciation, he would gain the knowledge of Truth through the Grace and teachings of a *Sadguru*; his finite individuality will be lost and his mind will forever be immersed in the blissful, limitless *svarupa* of the Self and there is no possibility of his desiring again the life and petty pleasures of a householder. *If at all he develops the desire for a worldly life and reverts to the enjoyments of a family life, please know for sure that he is not a knower of Truth* (having swerved from its abidance and lost his knowledge of the Self).

**Note:** The above verse echoes beautifully the following famous verses of the Upanishads: *jnanamrtena trptasya krtakrtyasya yoginah, na ca asti kincit kartavyam, asti cet na sa tattvavit*. "The yogi, who is fulfilled with the ambrosial knowledge and thereby has accomplished

all his tasks, has no more duties to perform. If he has any, then he is not a knower of Truth.” (Jaabaala Darsana Up. 1.23) And, *atmanam cet vijaniyat ayam asti iti poorushah, kim icchan kasya kaamaaya sariram anusanjvaret?* “Upon knowing the Self in direct experience, desiring what and for whom, would a person trouble his body?” (Brhadaranyaka Up. 4.4.12)

106. Everyone knows that all the objects of the dream-world are unreal; in the same way, all the sights that appear in the waking world are also equally unreal and only a dream-like illusion. Like the illusory snake superimposed on a rope, all objects of the world beginning with one’s own body and the senses are also mere superimpositions imagined upon the pure *caitanya svarupa* of the Self. Those who investigate the reality of the waking world and conclude that it is as illusory as one’s own dream-world, will never get infatuated with this worldly life and its fleeting joys. A *jnani* who has realized the truth of himself as pure *sat-cit-ananda svarupa* through direct experience in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, knows that this entire waking world is but a ‘play of mind’ (*maya*) upon the screen of Self, as even the dream world is nothing but an illusory projection upon his consciousness. He will be forever free from the delusion that this world is a source and repository of joy.

107. It will be a disgrace for the sun if darkness can survive in its presence. It will be a disgrace for a person with good eyesight to fall into a pit in front of his eyes. It will be shameful for a valiant knight to flee the battlefield out of fear and it will be stupid for a gourmet to pine after a tasteless coarse porridge, after enjoying cupfuls of delicious sweet-milk preparation (*payasam*) made with ghee, honey and sugar syrup. Similarly it will be disgraceful if an enlightened *jnani* allows his mind to run after the objects of the world. [The meaning implied is: A knower of Truth can never be deluded to pursue a desire-ridden worldly life, as a means of gaining happiness.]

108. For sages revelling in the vision of truth, there are no *vasanas* (desires in the form of mental impressions) left over as a residue.

Oh minister, do not ever entertain the idea that, just as there is the lingering smell of asafoetida in a vessel which had contained asafoetida for a long time, there would be weak, residual *vasanas* even for *jnani*s (like *deha vasana*, *shastra vasana* and *loka vasana*)! Sages can perform many actions for the good of the world without even a vestige of such *vasanas*. It is their very nature to work for the upliftment of the world without getting bound or affected by it because they have no hankering for the fruits of their actions. It is similar to the case of a person who has gained control over fire by the power of mantras and therefore can handle fire without getting burnt by it. But do *not* imagine that when ignorant people are driven to perform actions by their selfishness and attachment to rewards of actions, they will not be tainted by likes and dislikes, and desires and frustrations.

109. The actions of a *jnani* do not bring any blemish upon him as his actions are always meant for the upliftment of the world. When peevish people speak ill of a *jnani* and his actions, they only bring disgrace upon themselves. Only ignorant people perform actions for selfish ends and get caught in bondage and suffering as a consequence of their karmas and are fit to be censured as evil. There is no blemish at all either for a *jnani* or for his *jnanam*, just because ignorant fools cannot understand the depth and significance of his actions. After all, a person is deemed to be a *jnani* only when he has attained *jnanam* [by adopting the proper means of gaining that knowledge of Truth] and not otherwise.

110. A woman in advanced pregnancy can be distinguished from a woman suffering from the illness of *mahodaram*, which is indicated by a swollen abdomen, by observing carefully the characteristic features of the women that mark out the healthy from the sickly. *In the same way, one can distinguish the genuine jnani*, who through proper self-enquiry has attained the direct knowledge (*aparoksha jnanam*) of the Self in *nirvikalpa samadhi* by the Grace of the Guru, *from the self-proclaimed, pseudo-jnanis who pose as enlightened gurus* in order to win cheap popularity and material prosperity through cultivated

practice of hypocrisy. If you ask how, the distinguishing mark of a true *jnani* is utter desirelessness while a pretender is easily exposed by the display of his gross and crude desires for self-aggrandisement.

111. Lord Krishna taught the *Bhagavad Gita* to his friend and disciple Arjuna, and the royal sage and preceptor Vasishtha Muni taught the *Yoga Vaasishtha* to his disciple and heir prince Lord Rama, according to their vastly different ripeness of mind and competence in discrimination. Oh minister, you have not grasped the essential message of that truth, which is the same in both the teachings. Knowledge of the Self alone is to be gained primarily through the study and contemplation of these texts. The historical accounts and the contexts of the teaching are secondary and incidental. Renunciation of the desire to earn wealth for the sake of enjoying all worldly pleasures and comforts, and abidance in a pure, truthful life steadfast in the wisdom of the Self are the marks of a true *jnani*. On the other hand, a house-holder's lifestyle dwells on priorities that are wholly contrary to the characteristic features of the *jnani* and his way of life. Dear minister, you should develop the courage of conviction to analyse this matter in an objective way and accept the truth of this conclusion."

112. In this manner, the king Maharajan who had become an adept *rajayogi*, expounded to the minister in various ways, the essence of all the teachings elaborated in sacred texts. Finally, he decided to withdraw himself into *yoganishtha* and accordingly in a minute's time, stilled himself in *sukhasana* posture and restraining the breath and lapsing into *mounam*, he detached his mind from all objects of the world around him and attained the void space of consciousness where there is no appearance of names and forms, which is extolled as *nama-rupa rahita nirvikalpa samadhi*. The minister, who observed this spontaneous accomplishment of the king in a short time right in front of his very eyes, was struck with wonder and exclaimed, "This state of *samadhi* is a novelty and astounding indeed!"

113. The astonished minister thought to himself, "This experience of Truth has not arisen in me. What knowledge do I have that can help me remain in this presence?", and wended his way back to the capital city of Mapuram. He stayed with the close relatives of the erstwhile king and narrated to them in detail the great attainments of their former ruler, in the realms of yoga and jnana.

114. Listening to the minister's eye-witness account of their beloved king, all the close relatives of the king exclaimed in wonder that such an exalted *rajayogi* and *jnani* is the rarest to behold in this world, and with an intense longing to have his *darshan*, they journeyed to his abode and fell at his feet in great devotion. The king's parents and his former queenly consort too followed suit and prostrated before him, though they were smitten with sorrow [because of his renunciation]. Looking askance at all this, the saintly king smiled in amusement and unshaken in Self-abidance, remained in blissful silence.

115. Seeing his unmoving repose in *mounam* and his disinterest in talking to anyone among the assembled near and dear, they said among themselves, "We are all still having much attachment to this world. Even if our saintly king bothers to talk to us, what can we make out of his words of advice or teachings, given from such lofty heights?" and with heavy hearts all of them returned to their dwellings. The king who was a great *tapasvi* and *yogi* continued to remain in *nirvikalpa samadhi* for a number of days and then spent his remaining days of life in *sahaja nishta* and finally attained *videha mukti*, the supreme state of being, where there is no admixture of any of the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain, likes and dislikes, merit and sin, virtue and vice.

Thus ends the narration of the life-story of the king Maharajan and his renunciation *nonpareil* by the famed exponent Suta Maharishi. The ascetics of the Naimisharanya forests, who listened to this absorbing and ennobling account praised and thanked Suta Maharishi for his enlightening narrative and after prostrating to him in deep devotion,

they took leave of him and returned to their humble abodes and ashrams, with elevated minds and joyful felicity.

### 116. *Phala Shrutu* - Benefits of Reading this Sacred Text

Those who study this history of the great king and *mahayogi* Maharajan and the manner in which he attained the final emancipation and appreciate the truth of his supreme attainments through renunciation will surely renounce all thoughts of this world and become blemishless *sannyasins* themselves and realize the true nature of their own Self as the birthless, immortal and immaculate Brahman. Praise be unto the most charming goddess and our Guru, the divine Mother Parvati, hailed as Perianayaki in the holy Vrddhachalam, who redeemed us by Her loving Grace! Long Live our Divine Mother forever!!

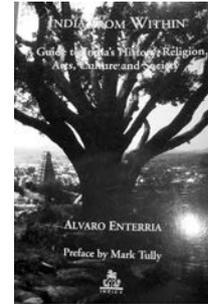
[As the author Sri Kumaradeva Swamigal was an ardent Devi Upasaka (worshipper of the Divine Mother), he expresses his gratitude to Her Grace which prompted and enabled him to complete this work with smooth felicity and hails Mother Perianayaki as the supreme goddess of Self-Knowledge.]

### 117. THE GLORY OF *SANNYASA*

Among all human accomplishments, there is no greater or rarer attainment than *perfect renunciation* as a means for *moksha purushartha*, the goal of human life. If the great sage who had adopted this supreme means of renunciation and dispassion, and thereby gained liberation and final beatitude, for some strange reason abandons this renunciation itself in order to become the emperor of this world, and then rules over the whole earth with a dazzling crown adorning his head, and thus fritters away the priceless treasure of the power of the Self, it is equivalent to exchanging in barter a most precious gem or diamond stone for no more than a paltry oil cake residue for cattle-feed!

OM TATSAT!  
SRI RAMANARPANAMASTU! ▲

## BOOKREVIEWS



INDIA FROM WITHIN. A Guide to India's History, Religion, Arts, Culture and Society by Alvaro Enterría. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. 2010. pp586, Rs 750. ISBN 81-86569-91-X [indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in)

When I began to read this book I was daunted by its size, but it is such an absorbing read that it's difficult to put down. That may seem a strange way to describe a scholarly work, but it is true. Even considering the

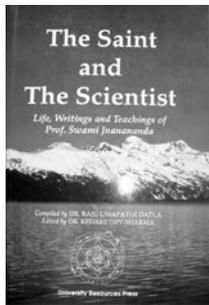
huge volume of information that is presented, I was reluctant to stop in order to digest the fascinating data I had read, my gluttony forcing me to keep going back — quite happily, I might add — to re-read for proper digestion! For me the only jarring note in the book came right at the beginning, in the Introduction: "...but if there is a country that is more unlike what we are familiar with in the West..." For a man who has adopted India as his own and whose understanding and love of India are so deep, to use the pronoun "we" seemed inappropriate. The more detached third person pronouns, used in the rest of the book, would have been more suitable. Once I put this minor irritation behind me, I was lured into the labyrinth of India and Indian-ness, which was so unconsciously a part of me that, until I read Enterría's book, I was not fully aware of it.

I like the way the book is organised. Rather than being arranged chronologically, each chapter deals with a different aspect of life in India and chronological narration happens within the chapter. The language too makes this book a pleasure to read; it is confidently simple, never boring. Photographs accompany the text, bringing the past into the present and making it come alive and reachable. The first chapter is HISTORY. It charts India's past and merges it into the present seamlessly. This first chapter provides a quick cross reference for the rest of the book. Intentionally or not, the other six chapters come in descending order of their impact on life in India.

There is an abundance of detail for the interested reader, and enough to hold the attention of the more scholarly. The book would be an excellent basic source for research on all aspects of life in India and provides plenty of pointers for the serious scholar to go further. Although the last chapter —

TRAVEL — is the shortest, this is a book for travellers, be they Indian or from abroad. It reveals India in all its fascinating aspects; it introduces the people who have made India what it is and who shape its future. The book also asks important questions about where India is headed; it gives valuable insights that help Indian readers create the larger canvas on which they will paint the future, and that make the foreign reader want to stay connected. Alvaro Enterría does not gloss over India's defects neither does he exaggerate its beauties. His love for and fascination with India are obvious.

— Jayashree Kumar



THE SAINT AND THE SCIENTIST. Life, Writings and Teachings of Swami Jnanananda. Comp. Raju Umapathi Datla. Ed. Keshav Dev Sharma. Pub. University Resources Press, Washington DC, USA. Available at Sri Rama Jnananandamandir Pub. League, Gargapuram (via Bhimavaram) Dist. W. Godavari, A.P. (HB) pp.331, Rs250. ISBN: 1-879573-01-3

Born Lakshmi Narasimha Raju in 1896 to a wealthy agricultural family in Andhra Pradesh, he was blessed when a boy by Swami Sivanada who predicted he would become a sannyasin. He eventually left home and ventured into the Himalayas where he wandered and practised yogic techniques before being initiated by Swami Purnananda at Swargashram. After performing severe penance he wrote his magnum opus, *Purna Sutras* which is modelled on the *Brahma Sutras*. To get the book printed he travelled to Germany in 1927 where he gave lectures. Due to his superb mental powers he then went on to gain a PhD in mathematics and physics at Dresden. He travelled back and forth from India and finally during WWII worked under Chadwick, the discoverer of the neutron. Later he went to America and worked on the cyclotron at Ann Arbor.

After Indian independence he returned to India and worked at the National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi. He eventually returned to Andhra Pradesh as Professor of Nuclear Physics until his passing in 1969. His samadhi is maintained at Goraganamudi, his home town. It was an extraordinary life.

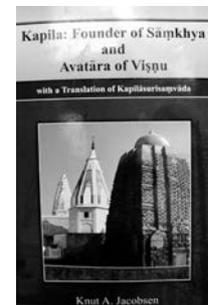
The book contains his autobiography up to his return to India in 1947. It graphically relates his arduous travels and adventures in the Himalayas and

his academic career in Europe and America. The second part is a translation of his *Purna Sutras* and spiritual poems. The third part is a collection of his lectures given in Dresden, Ann Arbor and India. Reading through his lectures one sees a powerful, methodical mind at work. The emphasis is as much on scientific epistemology, the means to knowledge in contrast though not opposition to yogic intuition and tradition.

What is fascinating about his life is that he saw no contradiction between science and spirituality. Too often we have parties on both sides of the debate disparaging the other for their incapacity to understand the mechanics and underlying philosophy of their respective disciplines. Swami Jnanananda is a shining example of their reconciliation.

The book is a testament to the love and respect his PhD students felt towards their teacher.

— T. V. Ramamurthy



KAPILA: FOUNDER OF SAMKHYA AND AVATARA OF VISHNU with a translation of Kapilasurisamvada by Knut A. Jacobsen. Munishiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi. 2008. (HB) pp.250, Rs650. ISBN: 978-81-215-1194-0 [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com)

Kapila is celebrated as the founder of the Samkhya, one of the most important *darsanas*, or systems of philosophy in India. It is considered the oldest systematic presentation of religious thought. All the main schools of India use the Samkhya to elaborate their own viewpoint. It is essential for an understanding of Yoga. Kapila is a significant figure in the Puranas and in a number of stories in the *Mahabharata*. But it is doubtful if all the references to him are to the same person. There is considerable controversy about his identity and Sankara distinguishes between two Kapilas.

The book traces the history of Kapila through the *Vedas*, the *Sramana* tradition and the *Mahabharata*. There are several Samkhya systems of thoughts in the Hindu tradition: Samkhya, Samkhya Yoga and Vaisnava Samkhya. There is a tension between the theism and atheism aspects. In the popular Yoga system *Isvara* is a passive witness, never bound to rebirth and eternally liberated. He is not a god one can pray to for liberation.

The author then goes into some detail about the historical development of Samkhya and the conflicting information about several sages known as Kapila. One was said to be an *avatara* of a polytheistic religion and an incarnation of Krishna. There is another Kapila who espoused the concept of monotheism, an impersonal set of principles, a critical approach to sacrifices and rituals and a tradition of *ahimsa*. He is regarded as a sage who had perfect knowledge of the two ultimate principles, *Purusa* and *Prakriti*.

The great tradition of Samkhya Yoga was revitalised by Swami Hariharananda Aranya of Bengal, in the early twentieth century. The principal math is at Madhupur in what is now Jharkhand. The central core of this book is a translation of the *Kapilasurisamvada* which records the dialogue between Kapila and his student Asuri. Most of the questions ask about the identity of pairs of opposites.

The author also investigates the sacred sites connected with Kapila and his worship. Though scholars would find much to interest them, the lay reader who is interested in Samkhya also will find this well-researched investigation worth reading with its use of common sense coupled with academic depth and clarity.

— J. Suresh Kumar

THE BOOK OF ONE The Ancient Wisdom of Advaita by Dennis Waite. O Books, Winchester, UK. 2009. 427pp, US\$13.95 ISBN 978-1-84694-347-8 [www.o-books.net](http://www.o-books.net)

This is an extensively revised second edition of a book first published in 2003. It has the benefit of six years of further study and understanding by the author, who is one of the best interpreters of Advaita currently writing in the West. Substantial changes have been made and in total, some 35,000 words have been added to the text. Undoubtedly this is one of the best introductions to Advaita now available to those who are confused by the subtlety of the ancient Sanskrit texts as well as the often contradictory notions of writers and lecturers, many of who are unqualified to teach in the first place.

I have read this new edition with admiration at the author's ability to clarify many abstruse concepts in Advaita. Dennis has studied with authentic teachers in the tradition and has a firm grasp of the fundamentals. He is able to explain key points without dumbing down or indulging in unnecessary or obscure scholarship. I heartily recommend this book to all who seek proper understanding of Advaita.

— Christopher Quilkey



## ASHRAM BULLETIN

### Karthigai Deepam

The Karthigai Deepam festival is celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthigai (November - December). It begins with the flag hoisting at the Arunachaleswara Temple and goes on for nine days. In the early hours of the tenth day *Bharani Deepam* in five *agantams* will be lit in Arunachaleswarar's *sannidhi* (sanctum). In the evening, the *Pancha Murthis* (five forms) will be brought to the Katchi Mandapam in the temple precincts. At dusk (*pradosha*) on the Karthigai day synchronizing with the full moon day, the deity, *Ardhanareeswarar* is taken out along with the five *deepams*, which are placed near the flag-staff. The holy beacon is lit on top of Arunachala. The huge concourse of devotees in a million voices raises a cry simultaneously "Harohara to Annamalai". It is a soul stirring sight which spontaneously grips all who come to witness the lighting of the sacred fire.

The image that comes to mind when we think of Karthigai Deepam are the rows of *agal vilakkus* (lamps) which are lit in front of every house to celebrate the festival of lights throughout Tamil Nadu. It is an ancient festival and unlike many other Hindu festivals, Karthigai is basically a Tamil festival and is virtually unknown in most other parts of the country.

### Sri Vijnana Ramaneyam, Palakkad

In 1947 a spiritual library was started in Palghat by Sri Damodaran Nair who had received the darshan of Sri Bhagavan. He then initiated activities to propagate the teaching of Sri Bhagavan. A puja room was built over a vessel containing *vibhuti* of Sri Bhagavan and a prayer hall also constructed and discourses on the teachings of Sri Bhagavan started. In 1958 he received *sanyasa* from Swami Purushottamananda of Vasistha Guha and the name Swami Sureshananda.

In 1980 Swamiji transferred the ownership of this Ashram to Sri Ramanasramam as a 'Gurudakshina'. On 20.11.1983, Kartika Deepam day Swamiji attained Samadhi and was interred inside the Dhyana Mandiram. In 1999 the affairs of the Ashram is fully taken over by Sri Ramanasramam.



Thanks to the efforts of the administrator, Sri Eswaran, there was recently a thorough renovation of the Palakkad ashram buildings. The inauguration of the Sri Vijnana Ramaneyam occurred on the 25th November in the presence of the ashram president, V.S. Ramanan and other distinguished guests.

#### **New Building for Ramana Granthalaya (Ramana Library)**

*Bhumi* (Earth) has been worshipped in India since the Vedas as Bhudevi (Goddess Earth). *Bhumi puja* (Worship of Earth) is done to inaugurate a site for the construction of a building.

The Ashram management has decided to construct a new library for inmates and visitors. A *Bhumi puja* was performed in the Ashram grounds at 9 a.m. on Thursday, the 18<sup>th</sup> November, on a site which is to the north of the Ashram dining hall, close the boundary adjoining Arunachala. The Ramana Granthalaya will house more than 30,000 volumes.

Pundits chanted the beautiful and resonant *Bhusuktam* from *Rg Veda* which hails the Earth as Medini, Vishnupatni (Consort of Lord Vishnu), and Lakshmi Priyasakhi. May Bhagavan Ramana and Goddess Earth bless the new Granthalaya project.

#### **Ashram Dispensary**

The dispensary inaugurated during Bhagavan's time in the early 1940s was adequate to serve the small community in and around ashram. The ashram establishment has since grown over the years and the neighbourhood has experienced phenomenal growth. The need to have a larger dispensary, easily accessible for all, was keenly felt.

Though such a dispensary was being planned for the last two decades or more, it could only be built now. It was delayed mainly due to acquiring possession of a plot of land inside the ashram that had the

advantage of being close to the main road. The new dispensary was opened on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2010. By Bhagavan's grace, the new dispensary has come up beautifully and functions well. When the construction was in progress, seeing the interest and enthusiasm the project was generating, it was decided to add a first floor. But by then a rather narrow staircase had been cast, which had to be reworked; this became a mini project by itself. An elegant wide staircase is now in position.

The ground floor of dispensary consisting of 2,000 square feet is now fully utilized. It consists of front verandah, foyer with reception & nurse's desk and space for waiting patients, two consultation rooms for doctors, pharmacy/dispensing room and a spacious treatment hall with two beds. Attached toilets have been provided separately for the consultation rooms and treatment hall.

The un-partitioned first floor can be used as required in future. And from the open terrace, the view of the Hill, Pali Tirtam and shrines is indeed panoramic. Adjoining the dispensary quarters for the resident doctor has also been built.

The resident doctor is Dr. Chidambaram, an experienced general physician and a devotee for two decades. The supporting staff consists of two qualified nurses, two qualified pharmacists and a helper maid, with two persons at the reception counter.

In a short span of time, the dispensary has become very popular. Though it is opened at 8 a.m, patients start queuing up from 5 a.m. onwards. So much so, tokens have to be issued to limit the numbers to 50. In addition, around 20 ashramites have to be treated. So, on an average 70-75 patients are given treatment daily. The ashram is on the lookout for additional doctors with experience preferably in gynecology and pediatrics.

Only out-patients are treated in the dispensary. However two beds are provided to treat emergency cases requiring IV injection, use of nebulizer etc. All quality medicines made by leading pharmaceutical companies are purchased from local main stockists. The treatment is provided to all patients absolutely free of cost; the expenses are borne from ashram funds.

We are happy that an activity inaugurated in Sri Bhagavan's presence has now been upgraded and improved well in keeping with the requirements of present times. ▲