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Ramana Ashtottaram

73. ओ गीतोपदेशासारादिग्रन्थसंचितसंशयाय नमः

Om Gitöpadëśasărädi grantha samchinna samśayäya namah.

One who dispels all doubts by his Gita, Upadesa Sara and such other works.

Kavyakantha’s Ramana Gita in eighteen chapters and 300 slokas is a modern masterpiece answering many questions raised by Ganapati Muni, his wife and other disciples. It is absolutely original in many parts and has high metaphysical and practical value for earnest seekers because it explains the most profound truths in simple, clear, precise language.

If Ganapati Muni was responsible for Ramana Gita, another bee which sipped honey and made music at the lotus feet of Bhagavan was Muruganar, who elicited Upadesa Saram and Ulladu Narpadu. The former was translated from Tamil into Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam by Bhagavan and the latter into Sanskrit by Kavyakantha. The common feature of these works, brief but clear, precise and definitive, is that they face and solve all the honest doubts that trouble earnest seekers. They are not theoretical or speculative treatises for study, but practical guides for sadhana and direct experience of Reality. They take the reader firmly by the hand and convince him that jnana is the all-pervasive basic or turiya element underlying and transcending karma, bhakti and yoga, and while these other methods are concerned with ‘becoming’, jnana, concerned with ‘being’, includes and harmonizes these three modes of becoming. Bhagavan dispels every shadow of doubt by the light of jnana.
There is nothing intrinsically wrong with doubt. It all depends on how we use it. If it is a tool in our quest for truth, it will serve us well. If it dominates our attitudes, then it becomes a monster and twists our thinking with a blind, negative spin. Used aright, it helps us avoid mistakes that are presented in the guise of helpful advice and are often nothing more than jargon; discrimination is crucial and that involves doubt. We need to learn how to distil the pure truth from the dross; that too involves doubt. We also need to learn to identify valid doubt as opposed to mere cynicism. Eventually we realise that doubt is a double-edged sword. It can mindlessly slash and damage our well-being and it can, if properly utilised, sever the knots of our foolish attachments and free us from ignorance.

There are many stories or myths to describe the journey the hero or heroine makes in quest of Self-consciousness: the youth often goes out in search of his father, redeeming a wrong inflicted on his family
or facing demons of fear and doubt. The early lives of Buddha and Krishna illustrate this quest. Today we know of another hero who transcended doubt, the conflict of light and dark. He burned with an inner light and sought and found at journey’s end his father who, as a pillar of fire, lit his spiritual heart. He never again left the company of Arunachala in body, heart or mind.

We are all called on a journey of Self-discovery, whether we realise it or not. Often when the call is heard, we refuse to heed it, either for what we consider to be valid practical reasons, or even because of our doubts. The myth of the Cretan Minotaur exemplifies this. Hampered by boredom, hard work and pointless obligations, the hero loses the power of positive initiative with no place to turn in the labyrinth of his own mind and becomes a victim, a bull of unresolved confusion and anger. More often than not, we find ourselves in this position at the beginning of our quest; otherwise, if we are happy with our lot, what motivates our search?

Deep into the unlit maze
I move with every year
Behind, what inconclusive ways,
Ahead, what formless fear!

Mischance, or some malignant hand,
May snap the trailing thread
That links me to the light: I stand
In utter dark and dread.

That stealthy breathing, is it mine?
Are mine those sounding feet?
Am I myself, in this design,
The quarry I must meet –
The monster in its lurking place,
The thing that I must kill,
The central nightmare I must face
With failing powers of will?
Now grant me, Lady of the Maze,
In whose hand the heaven give
The unseen issues of my days,
That I may die and live.”¹

We all wish for a finer world in which to live, for who does not think their personal world can be improved? However, we are not always truthful with ourselves, and our desire for a better world is generally tailored to our own demands for satisfaction. The world is not what it seems to be and we spend a lifetime learning to recognise the gap between our dreams and reality. Joy and peace of mind and heart can be rare interludes in our quest for that elusive wisdom that resolves conflicts, disbelief and doubt. The union of body, heart and mind in one harmonious whole is a rare blessing which some find easier to discover in the quiet presence of the sacred or with a genuine guru than in the rough, noisy world of the marketplace where we are forced to earn our sustenance. We seem to be caught between an idyllic contrived world and the sharp edge of an unforgiving one where merit is based more on expediency than ideals. The trick is how to be flexible without falling into the error of compromising one’s principles. We walk what the Katha Upanisad memorably calls ‘the razor’s edge.’

What is it that propels us to walk that narrow and, at times, treacherous path? It is faith; it is belief in the words of the teacher or sacred writings. Right belief is like a sail that carries the ship of our life forward; without it, no matter how inspirational the words and lessons, they pass through us like an empty wind that neither moves nor refreshes us. What we think, feel and wish for is the fabric of our sail and this determines whether we ride the waves in a joyous rush or sink into a listless, false calm that has no meaning or delight, although it is no-one’s fault but our own. Whether we are aware of it or not, we build a heaven or hell wherever we are, right now. We always have a choice no matter how trying the circumstance. Even in abject defeat, we have a choice whether to

be despondent and blame everyone else or to see it as an opportunity to grow and never fall into the same trap again.

No one however ‘bad’ is beyond redemption. No one is so great a sinner or idiot that they cannot receive grace or learn a harsh, unforgettable lesson and move on. It is essential that we reach and understand that point where we doubt our own ability to escape the wheel of life and death. This kind of doubt is the beginning of humility and the opportunity to open up to a higher power. We, who are devotees of Sri Ramana, call that Grace, Arunachala.

There are many instances in the history of spirituality in which an aspirant is apparently unfit either by circumstance or personality yet with faith and resolve rises above the wall of blind constraint through the grace of the guru. There are two traditional approaches to the guru epitomised by the concepts of marjarakishoranyaya (cat-baby-logic) and markatakishoranyaya (monkey-baby-logic). In one method the kitten makes no effort when carried by the mother cat, comparable to liberation due entirely to the efforts of the guru or God. In the second, the young monkey makes an effort to cling to its mother, that is, liberation is possible only when human effort prompts the grace of the guru or the Supreme.

The second way is shown in the life of Kabir. Think of the clever, forceful Muslim youth Kabir in caste-ridden Varanasi, whose burning impulse was to seek a legitimate guru who could deliver him from the wheel of samsara. He laid an artful trap for Swami Ramananda, who walking down the ghat steps to the holy Ganga for his early morning bath, stumbled over the prone body of Kabir and spontaneously uttered ‘Ram Ram’. He had unwittingly given Kabir the key to salvation, the Ram mantra, and like a monkey Kabir tenaciously held onto the diksha of his guru.

At the other end of the scale, we can see even the apparently irredeemable hoping for release. Like a kitten, they have no will of their own and can only wait for the grace of the guru to raise them above their predicament. One such example was the Bengali playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh. Eminent but socially despised, he seemed to be an unpromising proposition: he was a drunkard
addicted to visiting houses of ill-repute. However there was a ray of light that had not been killed by cynicism. He struggled for a remedy despite the turmoil of his misgivings and doubts. He lacked the will power to redeem himself but knew from observation and conviction that it was Sri Ramakrishna who could deliver him from the polluted life he led.

“One night, in a euphoric and drunken mood, I was visiting a house of prostitution with two of my friends. But suddenly I felt an urge to visit Ramakrishna. My friends and I hired a carriage and drove out to Dakshineswar. It was late at night, and everyone was asleep. The three of us entered Ramakrishna’s room, tipsy and reeling. Ramakrishna grasped both my hands and began to sing and dance in ecstasy. The thought flashed through my mind: ‘Here is a man whose love embraces all – even a wicked man like me, whose own family would condemn me in this state. Surely this holy man, respected by the righteous, is also the Saviour of the fallen.’”

Later in life, Girish attempted to speak of the wondrous event. Though a radically changed man, he still retained a vivid sense of humour. He said, “The Master gave shelter to a horrible sinner like me. If I had known that there was such a large dustbin to dump all my sins in, I would have enjoyed more pleasures in my life. Look at me, I am Ramakrishna’s miracle!”

Though doubt can be a cancer that eats up our confidence, used aright it is a necessary step in our spiritual growth. In our everyday life, there seems to be nothing but shifting sands that bitterly disappoint or render one insecure. Doubt is a sharp weapon that can clear our path of half-truths and self-deception. It goads us to dig deeper for an unshakable foundation on which to build self-reliance and belief in a higher power. It is a doubt that ends in certainty born of experience. Lord Krishna referred to this doubt when he told Arjuna that a doubting man perishes.

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3 Ibid., p.467.
4 *Bhagavad Gita*, 4.40.
We all wish for some degree of control over what happens to us, and it is when we realize that we have little or none that we seek some higher authority to protect and guide us. There are stirring examples, in all the spiritual traditions, of sincere seekers who through sheer faith in the right guru attain freedom. What they show is that, however desperate our situation, salvation is never far away if we have the conviction of our faith. If we cannot be true to ourselves, then what is the purpose of our life? It is a betrayal of our noblest ambitions.

We all have experienced that epiphany that surges up in the heart either at the sight or thought of Arunachala or Bhagavan. We know without the least trace of ambiguity that this is what we have been seeking. Once established in this firm belief, we use the weapon of doubt not to slice ourselves in pointless, negative swipes but skilfully to slowly peel away our delusions and false identification.

“D.: What is that one thing, knowing which all doubts are solved?
M.: Know the doubter. If the doubter be held, the doubts will not arise. *Here the doubter is transcendent.* Again when the doubter ceases to exist, there will be no doubts arising. From where will they arise? All are *jnanis, jivanmuktas.* Only they are not aware of the fact. Doubts must be uprooted. This means that the doubter must be uprooted. Here the doubter is the mind.”

Behind the light of apparent certainty is the shadow of doubt. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Doubt keeps us honest and as we see in the above quote of Bhagavan, it is a necessary tool to eliminate the debris of the mind, its arrogance, its complacency. We reach the point in discrimination when we begin to doubt the doubter. Like the ancient adage of using a thorn to remove a thorn, we finally root out the doubter and remain fixed in the light of pure awareness. There is no shadow when that light shines, for all is revealed in a sustained self-sufficiency. We need nothing, we ask for nothing. All is as it should be. We remain free in our heart and clear in our mind.

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Anandamayi Ma

A Wonder of Our Times

Swami Mangalananda

Anandamayi Ma is considered by many to be one of the greatest luminaries of the twentieth century. Her uplifting influence spread through many generations, and millions of people came for her darshan. All the major political figures of modern India sought her blessing, and among the populace she was shown reverence by the full spectrum of society from simple villagers to renowned saints and religious leaders. Though named ‘Nirmala Sundari’ from birth, she was known throughout India and abroad as Anandamayi Ma, ‘the bliss-filled Mother’ – and addressed simply as Ma, ‘Mother’, by her devotees.

For a more complete life of Ma, please see the book A Goddess Among Us by Swami Mangalananda. Available from www.yogiimpressions.com Also see: www.anandamayi.org and the Omkareshwar ashram site: www.SriAnandamayiMa.org You may also wish to see our school project in Ma’s Name: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0SotjcyAJU
But who was this remarkable figure, who by the standards of the world was a simple, uneducated Bengali widow? Many people know of Ma from various sources, the main one being the spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahamsa Yogananda, but few know the full and inspiring details of her life. Her presence among humanity is a miracle and an inspiring wonder that should be witnessed from generation to generation. Her fame and influence are steadily growing as people find that she can still be contacted through heartfelt devotion and prayer.

Ma was frequently asked the pertinent question: ‘Who are you?’. She replied in different ways according to the capacity of the questioner and would most often simply state, “I am your little girl.” Many times she would say, “I am whatever you think me to be,” leaving the definition open to infinite possibilities. But the most relevant self-revelation was to an intimate disciple in Bengal. Ma stated, “This body is the *vyakta roop* (manifested form) of the pure aspiration of all true spiritual aspirants.” By this definition we see that her manifestation was the Divine response to the longing for truth of all mankind. Ma thereby belongs to all seeking the higher life. Throughout her life she stated that her body was not the result of karma (past actions) as is our own. Thus she was a free Being, led only by Divine Will and the spiritual necessity of mankind, hence making every action of her life of great value.

Ma was born in 1896 in Bengal in the area that is now called Bangladesh. Throughout history many great Masters have attained spiritual Realization after long and austere penance and meditation, but we see in the life of Anandamayi Ma an unprecedented phenomenon. Ma stressed repeatedly that her awareness was unchanging from birth, and there was never a single moment or event in her life when she received Self-realization; it was always her natural state. Relatives have related that at birth Ma didn’t utter a single cry but lay peacefully with a radiant countenance, quietly observing all around her. After a few months, when she began speaking, she named all the relatives that had been present at her birth.

Before having any idea of her daughter’s unusual nature, her mother one day found a striking-looking holy man with long matted
locks and shining face standing in reverence before the infant’s crib. He bowed to the ground and touched the baby’s feet, and then addressed the mother with the words, “This is no ordinary child, and she will not be confined within an ordinary life. This is none other than the Mother of the World!” He then turned and left the house, and when the mother looked out of the door, he was nowhere to be seen.

Throughout her infancy and youth, Ma manifested states of yogic trance known as *samadhi*. Sometimes while playing with her friends, she would suddenly be transfixed and her face would begin to radiate light as divine *mantras* issued from her lips in flawless Sanskrit.

Two major traits manifested from Ma’s birth and were dominant throughout her life. The first was her power of Divine attraction. From her infancy she captivated the hearts of all who beheld her, and her neighbours flocked to her home to see her and play with this radiant and joyful child. As she grew into a young girl, the villagers called her ‘Ranga Didi’ (beautiful sister) and commented on how her presence lit up any area when she arrived. They even noticed that as she walked at night without a light, a gentle radiance enveloped her. This continued throughout her life as Ma’s simple being charmed, drew and transformed the minds of all wherever she travelled. Even till the end of her life, Ma’s arrival anywhere brought joy and her departure drew the sobs and longing of all who had been with her. Thus without sermons or exhortations but with only the sweetness of her presence, she began to release people from the bonds of worldliness and fill them with longing for the fulfilling joy of the Divine Presence, which she often said was itself the path to the Divine.

The second trait was her complete and utter desirelessness. If left alone, she reposed blissfully within her own Self in complete contentment. From infancy her every movement and motivation sprang from the needs and necessities of others. In youth this manifested as an untiring spirit of service to all, and in later years, Ma’s whole programme of travel was only in response to the longing call of the devotees’ hearts. So many tales of devotees relate to Ma suddenly appearing unscheduled in their midst to fulfil their deep desire or to give a *darshan* at a crucial time of their life or immediately
before a death. Ma later stated, “Anything that this body does is only for all of you.”

Ma was married at a young age to an older man to whom she later gave the name Bholanath. He revered her as a divine child and felt himself to be her guardian, never approaching her for consummation of the marriage. Later he became her disciple and revered her as his Guru. Through her guidance, he attained an exalted spiritual state and became the loving father of the devotees that flocked to Ma.

Beginning in the year 1918, Ma entered a profound period of her life. According to her own description, she herself slightly veiled the perfect vision of Divine Reality that she had enjoyed from birth just to see how this obscuring veil could be pierced. Thus began the play of spiritual discipline which extended for six full and intense years. During this period, every spiritual practice ever revealed to mankind spontaneously and effortlessly manifested in her body and played itself out to its final goal. Intricate yogas that take aspirants lifetimes to master worked through her in minutes bringing full illumination. Her body spontaneously assumed difficult yoga postures; yogic breathing exercises and movements naturally came and went; Deities and mantras were revealed within her spiritual vision. Her husband observed this nightly phenomenon with some concern and alarm. He consulted both exorcists and saints but was told that this was not to be interfered with. None of the practices were done deliberately by Ma, but all manifested spontaneously. Since Ma had nothing to obtain herself, she later related that all that happened was for all of us.

In later years when people from every path and tradition came to Ma for advice, she was able to immediately give perfect direction as all spiritual practices had merged into her body, thus making her the Patroness of anyone who practices spiritual discipline.

In 1924, devotees began to be spontaneously drawn to Ma as she and Bholanath resided in a garden estate near Dacca, East Bengal. People from all walks of life surrounded Ma, and the small garden became a place of spiritual joy, filled with kirtan (devotional chanting), meditation and the ever-joyful presence of Anandamayi Ma. During this period, during the singing of kirtan, Ma spontaneously manifested
the divine state known as mahabhav in which the power of the Names of God that were being sung would completely take over her body. Standing just on the tips of her big toes, with hands raised overhead, her body would float and sway gracefully with the cadence of the drums and music, then suddenly roll across the floor in a blur of white motion, then, once again, only to be drawn up into the air. All who witnessed this extraordinary sight were moved to their depths by its beauty and power and felt the dynamic power of God in her presence. When the kirtan finished, she would sink to the floor in a state of deep samadhi, and mantras resembling the Vedas would issue from her mouth in quick cadence with perfect articulation. But shortly after this, Ma would be in the midst of everyone, talking and laughing, cooking and serving food to all.

After eight years in Bengal in the company of her devotees, Ma left with just Bholanath and one other disciple and for the next fifty years, roamed the length and breadth of India, never staying in one place more than a few days or weeks, drawn only by the needs and call of suffering humanity.

Throughout Ma’s life, countless miracles are recorded, as the line between natural and supernatural seemed to simply vanish in the natural spontaneity of her outpouring of grace. But the greatest miracle was the transformation of people’s lives and minds. People found that their lives were not separate from Ma’s, and she guided them in matters from the sublime down to the most trivial.

What attracted all to this radiant personality of Anandamayi Ma? People found in this delicate woman all the love and sweetness of their own mothers combined with the power and authority of the Divine Mother of the Universe.

I came to Ma during the last years of her life, having read about her while living in America. I was only nineteen years old, but came to India specifically to meet her. Full of expectation, I came to her ashram in Vrindavan, northern India. I was with several other Western devotees, and we were escorted to Ma’s private room in the back of the ashram and told that all morning Ma had been lying in a state of inward samadhi in her room, but that they would inform her that we
had come. After a few minutes, Ma came out and sat on a small dais in front of us. As always pictured, she was clothed all in spotless white, her long black hair falling loosely on her shoulders. For quite some time she didn’t speak, but looked deeply into the eyes of each one of us. When her gaze met mine, I was as if shaken from sleep and realized that for the first time in my life, someone was actually looking at ME, the real me. Ma gazed past the body, mind and personality and looked and touched the deepest inner essence of my being. For the first time I truly experienced my immortal consciousness, as this was what Ma directly perceived within me. I realized that no experience that the world could offer could reproduce the feelings I was experiencing at that moment as they were totally unique. The most striking impression that came from that first meeting and every darshan afterwards was the uncanny feeling of familiarity. I was seeing Ma for the first time, but somehow I felt she was so very familiar to me, as if I had known her through all eternity. I knew with my whole soul that Ma knew and recognized me from eternity also.

Ma frequently stated that no one was new to her, but that all were familiar. All who met Ma experienced this deep and satisfying soul recognition. Once when an attendant came to Ma and told her that some people had come for her darshan, she replied, “They have come for darshan of their own Self.” This spiritual fact could be understood only in Ma’s presence. One felt that Ma was the Self of their self, somewhere deeply inwardly connected with them forever, despite any distance that came between them on the material plane.

After my first darshan of Ma, I joined the ranks of the captivated, and would sometimes wait for hours at the ashram just to be with Ma. Ma was always available to answer questions and give any guidance needed, and every interaction was an occasion of joy and bliss. The smallest sidelong glance from the eyes of Ma would fill the mind and heart with the sweetness of honey. Every night as we sat in front of Ma and sang kirtan, we would all wonder if we were still in this world or had ascended into the heavenly realms.

Ma didn’t start any new sect and did not bring any new startling teaching. She emphasized the traditional and ancient way, and gave
new empowerment and relevance to the tried and true teachings of the past. Every teaching she gave had been demonstrated to perfection in her own life. Her words are filled with practical, relevant advice to enable us to lift the mind to God and discover the truth of our own nature.

Ma visited Ramanasramam during a tour of South India just about a year after Bhagavan’s mahasamadhi. All who met her felt the same dynamic power of timeless spirituality in her presence that they had felt in Bhagavan Ramana. At that time, the foundation of the large new Samadhi Hall was laid by her, and Ma strewed flowers over the platform in blessing. All of Ma’s companions commented on the depth of intimacy they felt with the disciples and devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Though Ma left her mortal form in 1982, her presence in the world and her interaction with suffering humanity to whom she gave her life has not lessened but increased. I continually meet people who never met Ma in the body, but who have a deep and intimate relationship with her and true and sure guidance and inspiration from her in their daily lives. Ma many times appears to people in dreams and visions, giving advice and sometimes even mantra diksha (initiation).

Anandamayi Ma is a living contact point with the Eternal Being of God. By tuning our minds and hearts to her, we can receive an infinite flow of blessings into our lives, and by studying and living her teachings, our lives can come to fulfilment. Jai Ma!

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**An Appeal to Ashram Devotees**

Major renovation of one of our guest compounds will begin on the 5th March. The Morvi Guest House area which presently contains some 44 rooms and represents some 40% of our rooms, will not be available for accommodation for about 18 months.

For the immediate future, we appeal to our fellow devotees to make their requests at least two to three months in advance and to keep their stay with us to the minimum extent possible.
The Bare Knee and the Bald Head

Part Two

Nonduality in Advaita and Children’s Fiction

Sharada Bhanu

Among the practitioners of Advaita the use of traditional tales is common. A tale used for spiritual instruction connects with life and comes with the authority of the guru. The text is intended to function as a process, an event in the interior life of the hearer. Such texts are overtly simple, often involving characters that are apparently at a lower level of intelligence than that of the listener. A tale used by Ramana Maharshi belongs to a group of stories perceived in contemporary South Indian culture as suitable for children.

The story is about the ten stupid disciples of the foolish Paramartha Guru (the name ironically stands for ultimate meaning). The ten fools forded a stream and on emerging, anxious to check that all had

Sharada Bhanu has been a devotee of Bhagavan since 1977.
survived, counted the group but could arrive only at the number nine as each man forgot to count himself. A wayfarer to whom they appealed solved the problem by delivering a slap and a number to each and successfully ‘found’ the missing tenth man. Ramana Maharishi used this story to point out that all unenlightened human beings commit the same mistake as the ten foolish disciples – they all overlook the perceiver, the ‘I’. However the Self is ever the same and when moksha, realization, happens, it is not attained any more than finding the tenth man “anew.”

Stories such as this one are used not merely with an awareness that people with different levels of spiritual attainment will hear the texts differently, but also with the intent that the same attentive listener, through study (sravana), reflection (manana) and steady contemplation (nididhyasana), can evolve to hearing it in the way the guru intended, travelling from conceptual understanding to experiencing a vital shift in the perception of the Self and the world.

Children’s literature sees the child as a person separate, different from and superior to the adult, as well as on a path of natural growth which will result in becoming an adult with all the resultant gain and loss. This mode of visioning is essentially Advaitic in approach. The tales can make a deep impression on the fertile child’s mind that often lasts a lifetime, whether the author consciously intends it or not. This literature can create an organic process in the interior life of the child that enriches and widens his or her understanding for years to come.

Children’s fiction captures a child’s vision while presenting a hopeful picture to the child reader that growing up may involve difficulties but is natural, inevitable and good. It also sees the two terms adult and child as states that can exist simultaneously, interpenetrating each other. The state of a child forms the core of human existence. This constitutes a state which is never left behind but is enduringly alive and important to the adult.

Research in this branch of literature has convincingly proved that much of children’s literature is of high literary worth and that its

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influence is incalculable as the texts that are best remembered and affect readers the most may be the ones read in childhood.

Writing so that the text can be enjoyed equally by both adults and children is common today in children’s writing. Some writers have readers of all ages and exhibit mastery of such a mode of address. Philip Pullman, who wrote the trilogy *His Dark Materials*, remarks, “If horses, dogs, cats or pigeons could read, they’d be welcome to it as well.” However, some authors manage to write in such a way that children and adults are offered the same text but they receive it at different levels. Such a mode of address is similar to narrative practice in Eastern religious traditions. The same entertainment, often in the form of oral texts that are performance-oriented in nature, would be offered to both adults and children. The tale would be heard at one level by the child and understood at another level by the spiritual aspirant. In such traditions the text is clearly an event within the experience of the reader. Bhagavan’s tales, the narratives embedded in Rumi’s poems, and the stories circulated about Nasruddin Mullah all belong to this category.

Some texts are structured on an overtly dualist scheme of values, which is challenged by a hidden sub-text that is non-dualist. The battle between good and evil is one of the most common themes in children’s literature. This facilitates the clarifying of moral values, always important in children’s fiction and in keeping with a didactic purpose. In C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*, good and evil are pitted against each other and seen as irreconcilable opposites. Lewis is one of the very few twentieth century writers of children’s fiction to take a specifically Christian viewpoint, presenting a Christ figure in his novels, the lion Aslan, whose death and resurrection form an important theme in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). *The Last Battle* (1956) ends with an account of Judgment Day – all the inhabitants of Narnia are evaluated by Aslan and are accordingly punished or rewarded. The texts are committed to maintaining the difference between good and evil and the importance of a moral choice. However sub-texts within these novels subvert this stand through strategies such as
supplying ambivalent characters, erasing boundaries, and collapsing good into evil and vice versa.

The charm of Narnia is its talking animals that are anthropomorphic, yet remain animals. These are given near human importance, yet are seen as subtly inferior – only sons of Adam can rule Narnia. Animals who do not talk are used, abused, freely eaten and are denied entry into heaven in the last novel. Though *The Chronicles of Narnia* are overtly dualist, implicitly sexist and undoubtedly hierarchical, a non-dualist subtext permeates the whole series. As a critic, Lewis consistently asserts the importance of a unified sensibility and the folly of adult/child divides in reading tastes. In his essay ‘On Three Ways of Writing for Children,’ Lewis asserts “When I was ten I read fairy stories in secret… Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.”² In the Narnia series, the alternate world of Narnia is a space in which the child protagonists can be simultaneously both children and adults.

In *Prince Caspian*, Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy are children in their wonder – they are sexless, they love animals and take sheer delight in the play world of Narnia; at another level they are rulers and responsible warriors fighting for certain values in the name of Aslan. At yet another level they are developing beings, learning, among other things, to be honest and to act on belief, maturing gradually like Ernest in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952).

Another non-dual feature of the texts is the treatment of animals. The talking beasts of Narnia are very human and characterized with high individuality and psychological realism. Among the most memorable are the valiant mouse Reepicheep and that gloomy pessimist, the Marshwiggle Puddleglum of *The Silver Chair* (1953).

In *The Last Battle*, one of the characters, Diggory, says ecstatically that “it’s all in Plato, it’s all in Plato” when he sees the real Narnia in heaven that preserves all that mattered in the old Narnia but is

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“different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.” Lewis arrives at Advaitic insights through Plato. There is an eerie moment in *The Silver Chair* when the children, Ernest and Jill, and the Marshwiggle Puddleglum are deep below the earth in the underworld of Bism seeking the lost Prince Rilian, at the command of the lion Aslan, who is God, king and moral arbiter of Narnia. A witch tries to keep them and the newly released Rilian in her toils by persuading them that there is no upper world, no Narnia and no sun. Which is shadow, which substance? Lewis captures the agony of the spiritual quester: If the materialists are right, a lifetime would have been wasted in the pursuit of a dream. Under the witch’s baleful eye, the world of sunshine is a dim memory and there is nothing but darkness. It is Puddleglum who wins freedom for himself and his friends by deliberately thrusting his foot into the fire, thereby extinguishing the magic powder of the witch but also producing a pain that militates against the pervasive unreality of the moment. Pain reminds one that there is one undeniable truth – one exists. Puddleglum chooses to trust himself rather than his world and asserts that he would rather believe in the sun and Narnia even if they were untrue than in the hopeless vision offered by the witch.

Advaita and Indian spiritual traditions in general insist on the importance of a guru precisely because in the face of doubt, the seeker must be able to place absolute faith in the master’s assertion and conviction rather than on external evidence, which because it belongs to *maya* is inevitably misleading and can be interpreted in multifarious and contradictory ways. In the scene immediately preceding the one narrated above, the children have been told by a knight whom they dislike and are unable to trust that he will be bound to a silver chair for one hour of the night, for at that time he turns mad; they must on no account release him or he would then turn into a serpent and kill them all. But when they see him bound, he now begs to be released – it is only for this one hour that he is sane and free of enchantment. They prepare to be deaf to all his entreaties but then he asks them in the name of Aslan, and they had been told by Aslan himself that they must do the act that was commanded in his name. Which is the truth,
what the knight spoke when he was apparently normal or now when he is writhing, bound to the chair? Lewis has great skill in showing that belief is always a matter of choice and is always risky – that evidence can be ambiguous. The children free the knight (who is really Prince Rilian) and themselves, in deciding to trust the word of Aslan irrespective of the consequences.

The two scenes coming immediately one after the other are not duplicates; both are about faith and moral choice, but in one the protagonists trust themselves and their heart’s longing, in the other they trust the word of the master. Both choices discount, as in Advaita, materialist assumptions and the reality offered by the senses. Lewis in The Last Battle dismisses several characters to eternal perdition, but it is interesting to note that one character that is saved is testimony to the power of non-dual thought even in a novel committed to a dualist philosophy.

One of the Calormenes, a devotee of the false god Tash, had fought the Narnians loyal to Aslan, but also enters heaven. Aslan accepts the services done to Tash, not because the two are one but because all true service reaches Aslan. The Calormene has been searching for the god Tash all his life but Aslan tells him, “Unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.” In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that “Even those who in faith worship other gods, because of their love they worship me, although not in the right way.” Lewis’s texts are a long way from admitting that good and evil spring from the same source in the consciousness, but there is an approach to non-dual awareness in recognizing that all true worship reaches the same source.

The Chronicles of Narnia perhaps illustrates the power of the genre of children’s fiction that asserts its non-duality, subverting the overt dualism of the author’s world view. On the surface there is waged a war between the irreconcilably different; at subterranean levels the two are acknowledged to be one. Lewis’s novels also show that it is

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perfectly possible to write simultaneously at one level for children (or any adult not cued into the spiritual) and at another level for the initiated reader for whom the text resonates with deeper significance.

This is an excerpt (slightly edited) from the author’s doctoral dissertation, “Not Two: An Indian Perspective on Western Fantasy Fiction for Children”.

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Unmesa Nimi-
shot panna vipanna Bhu-
vanavali: when
she opens her eyes the stars
sprout, when she shuts them they wilt.

Queen of the jungle,
which is the dark catacomb,
this unsimple world;
take us, Bhuvaneshwari,
by the hand, lead us to light.

You are the great germ
from which the cosmic plant sprouts,
with its blooms of glory;
Jagatikandaa, you are
the root of the universe.

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.
The Vision of
the Juki

Part Two

Entering A Sacred Arcanum:
The ‘Gypsy Camp’ in The Pinewoods

Douglas Halebi

What do we see when we gaze into the forest? Are we not summoned to a
divine liturgy, which some call a quddas, or ‘forest liturgy’? And are the
tall trees that drip with light part of this service? And the rock from which
water gushes forth, the honey dripping from a bee-hive perched on an oak
limb? What are the turning stars if not our celestial guests, summoned by
nightfall to participate in this divine sacrament? And what are we if not
living heirs of the Ancient Shades, called to their service, remembering
them with strong brandy and kumiss, the fermented milk of a mare?

Douglas Halebi 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.
With respect to the Juki, who are also called Jogi, Liuli and Maznung in different habitats, they are a high-flowering branch on an ancient, many-sided tree. That tree is laden with ripe and succulent fruit in the parent-group known as the Doma, or Domari. And in the same rich soil there are also trees called the Roma and the Lom, or Lomarven. Defining their origins, establishing their ancestral relationships, isn’t very important to any of these tribal communities. And whether they should be seen in this way, as a series of self-renewing trees in an ancient forest, or as a single tree with limbs that extend to the five continents, is of almost no concern to them. What has value to Gypsies is the living flower of life as it hastens to blossom and then, all too soon, fade away and not return. Aided perhaps by the awareness that life cannot be understood by what befalls only a single generation. That the life of man is a vast, ever-expanding narrative, a tale not yet concluded, in which we ourselves see and experience only chapters. Yet we are connected to the most ancient of ancestors, the living men and women of the present day, and the as-yet-unborn children. The tale only assumes clarity, purpose and direction if we consider it as a whole.

To illustrate a point, then, let us consider the calling of the oral bard among the Juki. It is through the vast retentive powers of the bakshy, or singer of tales, that he is able to preserve and so transmit anew the epics and romances that are a repository of collective memory, ethnic identity, beliefs, customs, loyalties, social attitudes and honoured ways. But these oral epics are also something more. The irresistible grandeur of the long epic and the grand romance appeals to something still deeper within us. The tale is never invented, though it may sometimes be embellished. Rather, the pure, the high, the original story is handed down, generation to generation, like a gold staff that was forged in an immemorial, ever distant, primordial

What is the earth if not a material surface permeated in spiritual wine? So let us purify our aspiration, that we may become worthy of sharing in this divine repast. – Uncle Noah

April - June
past. This is not a ‘past’ that can be retraced or discovered by means of an historical investigation. It is not historical at all; rather, it is the idealized past, the past of a mythical golden age, beyond our power to draw nearer to us in time or to push back into a more remote setting. These stories are as close to us as they were to the people of Fatimid Egypt or Renaissance Florence. As close, and as far away. They typify an ideal, a dream of perfection, a world in fullest flower, attaining the plenum of its development, beyond anything that is possible in the historical reality known to us. Even the language used to recount such a tale is purposefully archaic, solemn and ceremonial. It is the language of ritual, of a sacred lore that can only be spoken of in words that resemble an ancient incantation. The bard himself does not create these sacred tales; he recounts them with scrupulous accuracy, in minute detail, leaving out nothing, even if it is a word, a sound, a phrase that is no longer understood. And the richest and ripest lines of these recitals are sung or chanted. They flow forth in such vast and irresistible torrents that they overpower and transfix the audience.

The listener is spellbound, stupefied. He feels within himself the deepest, most ineluctable bond with the mythic characters in these epics, as if he had joined them in battle, or been invited to drink *kumiss* in the tents of a nomadic aristocracy. As if he were sitting among the assembled heroes even now, while they drink libations and regale one another with boasts of fabulous deeds and astonishing adventures – these ritual boasts are called *shaath*. Or as if he himself had been wounded in battle, fallen off a horse, or plundered the horses of an enemy’s herds. Or even as if he were the most cunning and skilled of horse-traders, who relished the opportunity to barter with Turkish princes and Persian kings.

This, however, barely begins to describe the allure of the bard’s sing-song recitations or the wealth of content in these extensive narratives. This narrative heritage has proven undiminished across time and space. These recitals do not belong to history, which can neither invalidate nor confirm them. They belong to a world of eternal spring, a land that can be invoked and ritually re-created wherever
the Juki may happen to dwell. These tales are immortal and almost unchanging. They could perhaps be preserved so perfectly only in a nomadic or semi-nomadic environment, where the pattern of living and speaking about life changes much more slowly than in a sedentary world. But like everything beautiful that man creates, they are a worthy part of the universal heritage of humankind. And this is how they should be seen.

As related in a previous article, I lived with Uncle Noah and our extended family in Lebanon, Syria and the Turkish borderlands when I was young, impetuous and ever open to impression. My brothers and I, connected to Noah through our paternal relatives, had strayed far from ‘Gypsies’ for many years, immersed in the life of the modern, Western-oriented world. Nevertheless, we were only too familiar with the ritual life of the Juki, the intricate and demanding customs, the heightened sense of tahara (ritual purity) and marhime (desecration, impurity) that prevailed among them. We assumed that our standing in this tribal community would have to be re-earned slowly, over time, by living among them, partaking of old ways and honoured traditions.

However, we found, to our surprise, that our Uncle welcomed us as if we were princes returning to an ancestral courtyard. His generosity, his sweeping hospitality, was surpassed only by his ability to find living significance in everything around him. Even stones, he said, are not empty of inner content. The leaves on an ancient cedar tree, the light that was poured across the ripening fruit orchards, the tall green grass and the turning stars were so many ayat, portents or similitudes of a supernal reality that impregnates but also far surpasses them. And the earth itself, all life, should be seen like hieroglyphics, waiting for man to decipher it. And we ourselves were mysterious beings, since every soul is capable of a unique and unrepeatable flowering. And this, he said, is indicated even by the fact that a soul born in one instant of time, when the stars exist in a certain position, will have a destiny totally unlike that of another soul, born even one instant later.

Uncle Noah and his friend Magrupi, the bard, welcomed us into our father’s ancestral domain with a generosity that was touching, gratifying and memorable. And after we had lingered in his company
for a short time, he began to speak to us like a favourite teacher to his most beloved students. As we drank thick, hot, unsweetened coffee, he paced to and fro, beginning what was to become an almost daily commentary.

“According to our fathers,” he assured us, “we humans are all travelling on the same path, journeying toward the same goal. Only some of us interpret this journey from a point of view not familiar to us, and some display a kind of affinity with our own assessments of it. Every soul and every people embarks on this calling, but each one experiences it uniquely, in an unrepeatable and singular manner. We are all the children of our father, Adam. And we will one day be taken back into his company. For the Juki, this is called ‘crossing the frozen river that never thaws,’ proceeding into the Village of the Ancient Shades and being welcomed by noble ancestors who offer us libations of red wine and kumiss. But this is only how the journey is conceived of from our own perspective. Some embark on the quest knowingly, with purpose and direction. Others, less ripened inwardly, are unaware that they are advancing on the same road. And yet they are already hastening toward its consummation! So let us not be too anxious to reach the end of the road. Let us pause and linger over the treasures placed before us along the way. And let us remember that the Tree at the End of the Road hasn’t yet come into full flower. It isn’t like a tree that has already ripened. Only the fruit and flowers we ourselves cultivate along the way will be waiting for us when we finally reach this alluring tree.

“The goal matters, but how it is attained defines the extent to which it enriches or impoverishes us. The time is always now, the place here, the calling always our own. And we ourselves already possess everything we need to proceed in a wise and worthy manner. So wherever we may be and whatever may happen to us, let us gaze on the world as if it were soon to be taken away from us. And let us take pride only in what we can control: the grandeur of our gestures, the extent of our hospitality and generosity, the passionate strivings that cause us to live well instead of poorly. Honour your ancient fathers (the pitare, Ancestral Shades), love life, serenade beauty, and
cultivate the richest and highest aspirations. And leave those who are deluded by greed and suffer from fascination with power to themselves. Even if they drink from a gold cup, still they don’t know if they’ll even be alive to see the sun set tonight or rise tomorrow morning, any more than we do. They don’t know if they’ll ever hear the birds sing to the rising sun again before they pass out of this world. So don’t concern yourselves with their promises or consume your existence following their guidance. Like us, they’re swiftly approaching the frozen river. But unlike us, they are unaware even of its existence.

“People who have lived at the North Pole since the time of Noah’s Ark,” our teacher suggested, “would perhaps have no awareness of something like the Amazon River, winding its way through South America. And were you to describe the Amazon jungle to them, they might have grave doubts about your sanity. So man, this creature of such inner richness and outer diversity, will always flower beyond the limits of all our assumptions about what can or cannot exist, somewhere and some way.”

For my part, I am suspicious of the precise, lucid, exacting descriptions of “Gypsies” that seem to occur and recur in academic studies. Uncle Noah once told us that according to a learned consensus, there once existed, many millions of years ago, a certain kind of rare and exotic fish. However, this fish had not been seen since prehistoric times and was presumed to have died out. Then one day it was discovered in shallow waters, having escaped the notice of all the ships on all the oceans throughout history. Presumably that species of fish had survived so deep in the sea that we could not detect it? Or else we were not looking, having already decided that it vanished long ago? And yet it endured and maintained itself well, in no need of official recognition by man.

“We, the Juki, are like that fish,” Uncle told us. “Learned judgment denies us the reality we experience every day, drinking the water of knowledge from all the wells of the earth, supersaturated in impression from our own ancient fathers as well as our neighbours, our hosts in Central Asia, Anatolia, Syria and now the West. And yet there is an East and a West inside every one of us, waiting to be coaxed into
flower, waiting for the propitious hour, the appropriate setting in which to be nourished and cultivated. And our fathers were like the bees that gather pollen from all the flowers of the world and then turn it into honey. The bees pay no heed to where the flower is planted or what it is called. To them the value of honey is self-evident, like the value of water to the thirsty and bread to the hungry.”

It so happened that when we lived in Lebanon, a creative abundance was bestowed on the land, prosperity grew like the roses of spring; we were stirred and moved by a cosmopolitan harvest of culture such as we, guests from a distant land, could never have anticipated. Beirut pulsed with life, like the grass and the trees in the hashi nura, or Gypsy Camp, where we lingered so long. And when we finally parted from Uncle Noah, we went away well-filled, like someone who had feasted on endless delicacies at an elaborate feast. And though we did not understand it then, this ‘feast’ became for us an everlasting nourishment.

Rama Appears To Me As A Wild Animal

Ana Callan

as a sleek mountain lion traversing the road,  
jewel eyes drinking me in, or me winking back  
at the vast fountain of his love, ferocious  
and true, and we feast on each other  
until both are subsumed in the fire  
that rips through all separation,  
until all rules of me and you  
are shredded, eaten alive,  
both stalker and prey  
leaving nothing but holiest grace,  
nothing but cinders, dying  
into the light, in its wake.
Bhagavan Ramana said, “There is the body which is insentient; there is the Self which is eternal and self-luminous; in between these two there has arisen a phenomenon, namely the ego.”\(^1\) According to Advaita, the antahkarana (dependent, inert, inner organ) reflects the light of Consciousness that is the Self and is illumined by it. With no light of its own, it appears luminous and seems to cognize, though it is not a cognizer, only an instrument of cognition. A crystal appears bright because of the light it absorbs, an iron ball glows with the fire that permeates it; similarly the mind shines with the borrowed light of Consciousness. Sri Ramana remarked, “The ego is simply wrong identity of the Self with the non-self, as in the case of a colourless


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crystal and its coloured background. If the background is removed, the crystal shines in its original purity. So it is with the Self and the antahkaranas.” In Advaitic thought, the terms antahkarana and manas (mind) are often used interchangeably and in many respects, the Sanskrit term manas resembles the English word ‘mind,’ though with a number of important differences.

The antahkarana is constituted of the five elements (prithivi, ap, tejas, vayu, and akasa) though tejas predominates, thus rendering the mind active and unstable, always altering its form; thus the familiar expression, ‘monkey-mind.’ The antahkarana is the seat of the functions of the senses as distinct from their outer organs. It receives and arranges what is presented to it through the senses. It reflects objects by its relation to the Self. The perceived variations of different individuals’ cognitions are due to the differences in their respective antahkaranas.

The antahkarana is said to have four states or functions: doubt/deliberation/sense (manas), discrimination/determination/certitude (buddhi), egoism (ahamkara), and memory/recollement/retention as well as the arising of almost all dreams (citta). In every external perception, these four are involved, though so rapidly that they invariably escape one’s detection as four distinct functions. The manas

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2 Ibid., §398 p.382.
3 In Western philosophy, the mind is articulated both as a subject and as an object. In Advaita, the mind is an object designated as either manas or antahkarana. In the West, the mind is stationary and only receives sense stimulation never coming into direct contact with an object but in Advaita epistemology the mind assumes the form of an object upon meeting it.
4 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §392, p.375 and §510, p.512.
5 Vedantaparibhasa 5.32 Vedanta Paribhasa of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, Text and Trans. by Swami Madhvananda. Belur Math, Howrah: The Ramakrishna Mission Sharada Pitha, 1972; Vivekacudamani 95 Crown Jewel of Discrimination: The Vivekacudamani of Sankaracarya. John Grimes. Tr. With Comm. Ashgate Press, London, 2004 and Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 2004. Also see Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §392, where he says that some people say the antahkaranas are five (jnana, manas, buddhi, citta, abamkara), some 4 (all but jnana), some two (manas and abamkara), and some, one (manas); also see Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §473, p.467 and §510, p.512.
KEYWORD

represents the indecisive state of the mind as found when one cannot ascertain whether an object is ‘this’ or ‘that.’ The buddhi stands for the antahkarana in its state of decision, as when one decisively knows a thing as ‘this.’ Ahamkara is the state of the antahkarana having a reference to the empirical self, as in ‘I am X’ or ‘I did Y.’ Citta is the antahkarana in its state of remembering.

According to Advaita, the function of the antahkarana is analysis and synthesis of whatever is perceived by the sense organs. When a tree is first perceived, the manas receives unnamed pristine impressions of colour, shape, size and so on. The buddhi then synthesizes them and separates the total unified object thus constructed from other objects. Until the buddhi does its work, the object is an object of my experience and not an object of the everyday world. Buddhi functions to make this particular object an object of the objective world through an assertion or decision. ‘That is a tree’ is the result of a decision of the buddhi. The function of the ahamkara is to appropriate the object as its object, as in ‘I see a tree.’ After the perceived sensations are synthesized into a unified object, citta brings in past experiences (memory) and relates the tree to the earth, seeds, wood, and so forth. Different ideas about the object are then collected and related, though it must be understood that all this takes place virtually simultaneously for an individual due to the ability of the inner organ to coalesce all the information gathered.

To this analysis, Advaitins add another factor. Before the inner instrument functions, before the perceptual cognition of the tree arises, a person is ignorant of, unconscious of, the object’s existence. The darkness of ignorance or unconsciousness must be lit up in order for a perception to arise. This light comes from the light of Consciousness, either reflected or limited in the senses and mind, when coming into contact with an object. The light of a person’s consciousness, reflected in one’s mind and senses, lights up an area, thereby disclosing any object therein. The disclosure takes place in one’s mind. Further, one’s mind has the power to take on exactly the same form as the object and, if necessary, can abstract the mental form later as memory. Sri Ramana said, “The Self is the Heart. The Heart is self-luminous. Light arises from the Heart and reaches the brain,
which is the seat of the mind. The world is seen with the mind, that is, by the reflected light of the Self. It is perceived with the aid of the mind. When the mind is illumined, it is aware of the world. When it is not itself so illumined, it is not aware of the world.”

There exist only two things that cannot be logically denied: The Self and the Shakti (power). One cannot logically say, ‘I don’t exist,’ for to do so one must invoke the ‘I.’ Likewise, one cannot logically deny ‘power,’ for to do so one must employ it. Sri Ramana said, “There is no one who does not say ‘I am.’ The wrong knowledge of ‘I am the body’ is the cause of all the mischief.” How is it that the one, indivisible, non-dual Consciousness appears to divide itself into the constituent parts of the knower, the known, and the resultant knowledge? Sri Ramana said, “The essence of mind is only Awareness or Consciousness. When the ego, however, dominates it, it functions as the reasoning, thinking, or sensing faculty.”

This pure Consciousness does not act in any way whatsoever. Action, on the other hand, always and necessarily involves a fluctuation or modification (vrtti) of the internal organ. In any and every act, an individual who is the agent uses some instrument(s) to bring about a change in some object. Acting requires differentiation, while pure Consciousness is forever undifferentiated. There are no instruments, nor are there any objects to contrast with the Self as knower.

The Advaitin assumes the necessity of the internal organ (antahkarana) for the sake of associating the Self with objects. Without this association, no knowledge is possible. The antahkarana is necessary for consciousness to contact external objects. The functions of the modifications of the mind (manas) are three-fold: for the sake of contact with objects by consciousness; for the manifestation of non-difference of the Consciousness-Self and the object-defined Consciousness; and for the removal of the obscuring ignorance with regard to the particular object.

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6 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §98, p.96.
7 Ibid., §96, p.94.
8 Ibid., §188, p.159-60. See also Maharshi’s Gospel, Book Two, ‘The Heart is the Self’.
Thus, we observe that the antahkarana is necessary for an association of consciousness with objects, and without such association no cognition is possible. As well, besides the antahkarana being necessary, the mental modification must reach and take the form of the object. Even in internal cognitions, it is the antahkarana that has transformed itself into a mental modification (i.e., happiness, anxiety etc.)\textsuperscript{10} and is manifested by the inner witness-self (saksin).

Quoting from the Kaivalya Navaneeta, Sri Ramana remarked:

“The modes of mind take shape as external objects and the light reflected on the modes illumines the objects. Now neglecting the modes of mind, look for the light illumining them. The mind becomes still and the light remains self-shining. The undulating mind (i.e. the mind associated with rajas = activity and tamas = darkness) is commonly known as the mind. Devoid of rajas and tamas, it is pure and self-shining. This is Self-Realization. Therefore the mind is said to be the means for it.”\textsuperscript{11}

The antahkarana, in conjunction with the sense-organs, perceives sense-objects. It is impelled by its outgoing tendencies as induced by the impressions of previous actions. Both the mind and a sense-organ are necessary to complete the connection between the subject and the object in external perception. This is obvious from examples where the connection is lacking, i.e., where the sense-organ is defective or where the object is too near or far away and thus no perception is possible.

The process may be summarized: 1) The mind of the knower, in conjunction with a sense-organ, reaches out to an object, identifies with it, and assumes its form; 2) The modification of the mind removes the veil of ignorance that was hiding the object from the knower; 3) The consciousness underlying the object, which is being manifest through the mental modification, illumines the object; 4) The mental modification associates the object-consciousness with the subject-consciousness; 5) The knower perceives the object.

\textsuperscript{10} There are some Advaitins who do not admit a vrtti in the case of pleasure and pain; regarding them as kevalasakshi–vedya.

\textsuperscript{11} Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §100, p.97-100.
Finally, to conclude where Ramana and Advaita conclude, their final position, the *siddhanta*, Sri Ramana said, “Has anyone ever seen the *pranas* or the *antahkaranas*? Have they any real existence? They are mere conceptions. When and where will such conceptions end?”\(^{12}\)

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., §392, p.976.

**Hollowed by Shiva**

Ana Callan

Holy mountain is eating my face  
from the inside, peeling its layers  
clean away until what is left  
is luxurious, unmoving space  

until the quiet inside  
is all heart overflowing  
soft as snow and still  
growing until it consumes  

the whole world, thought,  
emotion useless now  
in its thrall. Once  

there was an image  
of me, a grand, trumped up story, and now there  
is only That, love’s  
seamless sanctuary
Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s Commentary

Verse Thirty

S. Ram Mohan

We now begin the third section of Ulladu Narpadu, as classified by Sri Lakshmana Sarma. It deals with ‘Experience.’

By means of vichara (Self-inquiry) the experience of the Self arise due to the extinction of the mind or ego. This experience can be neither conceived by the mind nor articulated by speech. It is beyond all these and is truly indescribable. This is the implication of the anecdote about Lord Shiva who manifests as Dakshinamurti and through Silence teaches the four sages the Truth of That (tat). Even though that state is beyond comprehension, it is possible for us to realize that it is the most desirable of all. There is a great difference between the mukta (liberated one) and the baddha (bound one).

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The first verse of the third and final segment of ‘Experience’ states that as soon as the mind (which is turned inward through vichara) reaches the Heart, the Pure Consciousness, the Self, shows forth.

Verse 30

When the mind, turning inward through the Quest ‘Who am I?’, reaches the Heart, the ego (the false ‘I’) sinks crestfallen, through shame. The One Reality appears of its own accord and shines as ‘I-I’. Though it appears new, the ‘I’ is not an object or ego; it is the Whole, the Infinite Reality, the Self.

Commentary

Bhagavan explains that by the quest of the Self through ‘Who am I?’, the mind is turned inward and thereby reaches the Heart. Thereafter, the limited or false ‘I’ is overwhelmed with shame (as an impostor) and ceases to manifest itself; that is, it becomes extinct. Something shines as ‘I- I’ (the Infinite ‘I’) by its own light of Consciousness. Unlike the limited, false ‘I’ of ego, it is an all-embracing, infinite Reality.

The moment the mind sinks within and penetrates to the root of consciousness, the head of the ego falls down and disintegrates into pure Consciousness. The subject-predicate-object triad (triputi) disappears and Self-realization dawns, which can only be experienced but not described.

It is said here too that in the experience of the Self, the Consciousness nature, the Self shines as ‘I-I’ and is shown to be different from the ego, the false self. The ego projects itself as ‘I am this’, ‘I am that’, thus objectifying itself and identifying itself with the body and the world. As it has been explained earlier, all the five sheaths are the body; the self (ego) that appears by identification with any one of these sheaths is the false self. By contrast, in Self-experience or Self-realization, the Light of the Self is manifest as ‘I-I’. It does not objectify or identify itself with any object. It is free from the adhyasa (superimposition) described above, and is therefore unlimited and infinite. The Self is unconcealed, as the five sheaths no longer obscure the I-Consciousness which is the Self; it is boundless and free.

The state of Self described here is called nirvikalpa samadhi. But, as explained by Bhagavan himself, there are two kinds of nirvikalpa.
samadhi. One is called kevala nirvikalpa samadhi and the other is sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi. In kevala nirvikalpa, the ego and the mind remain latent and unmanifest for some time during the course of the samadhi experience; afterwards, they are revived by the force of the prarabdalha karma samsara and continue to express themselves.

In the sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi, the ego and the mind become once and for all extinguished and are dissolved in the Self; they cannot be revived. Sahaja nirvikalpa is the ultimate stage achieved through jnana-marga.

It is possible for one to remain for years in the kevala state, the mind remaining dormant all the time, but sooner or later it comes to life again. To illustrate this, Bhagavan told the following story. A yogi awoke from his kevala nirvikalpa and asked his disciple to bring him water to drink, but before the water was brought, the yogi again went into samadhi. Thus centuries passed by, and in due course, the disciple died. At last, after three centuries, the yogi awoke, and at once, remembering that he had asked his disciple to bring water, cried out, “Have you brought water?”. The story shows that during the kevala samadhi, the mind has remained latent with all its vasanas (latencies) intact and, after the samadhi state ended, became immediately active again. This does not happen once you attain sahaja state.

The yogi, while he is in his kevala state, is incapable of any worldly activity, just like one who is in deep sleep. In sleep, the mind merges in the darkness of the primary ignorance. In the kevala state, it merges temporarily in the Consciousness of the Self; however, at the termination of the kevala samadhi, it returns to the phenomenal world.

Bhagavan gave the following analogy to explain the difference. The mind that is latent in the kevala state is like a bucket let into a well with a rope, the other end of which is above, so that it can be pulled out again. The mind in the sahaja state, on the other hand, is like a river that has flowed into the ocean and has become one with it.

The sage whose state is the sahaja nirvikalpa is ever in the waking state – the True Awakening – which is different from the mere physical wakeful state of the ignorant; the physical wakefulness and sleep of the jnani is only for the mind. He is always awake in the Conscious;
there is no individuality. Without swerving from that state, he can carry out activities in the world such as teaching disciples or ruling a kingdom according to the residual prarabdha. But he is absolutely untouched by his activity as it is not propelled by ego.

The yogi who has achieved the kevala state can later obtain the sahaja state by extinguishing the mind (and the vasanas) once and for all by suitable sadhana, such as vichara. Sahaja is the ultimate mukti. A jivanmukta who is always in a sahaja state instructs the disciples about the nature of that state and the sadhana for reaching it. And he does this without swerving from his natural state.

The following verses describe the uniqueness of the jivanmukta.

Lord Ganesha was instructed by his mother, Parvati, not to let anybody in her private apartments. He took the instruction (upadesa) literally and stopped Lord Siva Himself from entering. Lord Siva, annoyed by the apparent arrogance of the boy, cut off his head. Later, the tearful pleas of Parvati caused Him to revive the boy by placing an elephant’s head on the shoulders of the slain boy. He made him commander of His troops. It happened on a chaturthi day, and is now celebrated as Ganesha Chaturthi.¹

This story has a parallel to Bhagavan’s teaching. Man, out of egoistic arrogance, does not let God into his inner-chamber (heart). The head symbolizes thought or the mind. When the mind flows outwardly, the Universe is created (jaga). When the mind is turned inward, to the Heart, divinity is attained. Turning inward is from jaga to gaja. Gaja means elephant. When the mind is turned inward, jaga becomes gaja; that is, the turned-inward mind becomes the Self. Hence the elephant-head that replaced the egoistic human head refers to the inward-turned mind. The Self is then born in the turiya state of Self-awareness. In Sanskrit chaturtha means the ‘fourth’ or turiya. It is in this state that Ganesha (wisdom or jnana) is born.

The very form of Ganesha reminds us of the pranava, Om.

¹ The name of the fourth tithi (lunar day) of each of the two fortinights of the moon’s cycle.
Sri Ramana Dasa (K.S. Seshuiyer) was an advocate who lived in Cocanada, now called Kakinada, which is in coastal northern Andhra Pradesh. He wrote and privately published several books in English and Telugu on Bhagavan’s teachings in the 1930s. He should not be confused with another contemporary devotee, Ramana Dasa whose given name was also Seshagiri Iyer. He too, was an advocate, but lived in Mylapore, Madras. He wrote a number of songs about Bhagavan.

The author felt a pamphlet was needed in English on Tiruvannamalai containing its topography, tradition, its spiritual significance and because of its being the abode of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He wrote briefly on Tiruvannamalai and its traditional importance before beginning his description of Sri Ramanasramam based on his personal experiences. He writes that he had been in contact for some thirteen years with Bhagavan prior to writing the pamphlet which is dated 02.04.1933. As far as we know it was never published.

We have retained the original grammar and spelling as much as possible with few editorial interpolations. Though many of the details will be familiar to well-versed readers there are some details that may be new and interesting.
In May 1922, Sri Bhagavan’s mother, the blessed Azhagammal, attained her liberation, and her remains were interred at the place where the Asram Temple is now situated. Over her very body a Lingam (idol of Siva) is now set up called Mathrubhuteswara, and daily worship and offerings are being performed with Vedic rites by Asram devotees, at Asram expense. During the close of that year, one day Sri Bhagavan left Skandasram, his former abode, came down and stayed away at the place of his mother’s Samadhi (place of interment). The ways of God are mysterious and likewise of Jivanmuktas. Though they are in fact devoid of all sankalpas (strong will, resolves), their actions sometimes are mysterious and inexplicable.

Why he left such a delightful place as Skandasram, without even the slightest hint and came down to a then forlorn place, set apart for burial grounds, nobody knows. At that time there was only a small thatch [hut] up over the Lingam to protect it from sun and rain. Pujahs used to be performed by his younger brother coming all the way from Skandasram, and so at times, he used to stay here for some time.

When Bhagavan came away here, his devotees and attendants who were living along with him in Skandasram also came, and prayed that he may be pleased to return to his Asram, lest he might be exposed to the inclemencies of the weather and the scorching heat of the sun. He did not move, and all the devotional remonstrances were in vain. Consequently, the higher Asram above was obliged to be abandoned all of a sudden, and the resident bhaktas also came down and lived here with Bhagavan.

The thatch was extended, enclosing a small hall in front of the Deity and a pial [raised platform] to the south of the temple, with a narrow veranda in front. In this hall, Bhagavan used to sit on his tiger skin and cushion strewn on a sofa-like bench, and grace the devotees. The kitchen arrangements also were poor and meagre, as it had not attracted visitors in such large numbers as now. The cooking also was attended to by Bhagavan himself. A small thatched shed was put up, to serve as a kitchen by the side of the temple. A small garden was grown in front of the temple, subsequently enclosing the space opposite; a few coconut [and] areca nut trees were planted along
with some flower plants. The temple hall was gradually found to be insufficient to seat the visitors that go there for darsan. During the festival season, the pial on the southern side was used for Bhagavan’s seat, and visitors were accommodated there, in [the] open. The kitchen shed also was extended.

About November 1929, the present hall was constructed at a great cost, with feverish haste. It lies on a raised ground, lying to the extreme north of all the sheds and structures that are there now. It is a spacious single hall with two doorways on the southern side and big windows on the other three sides. The roof is tiled and in-laid with mortar and tile-like bricks, resting on teakwood beams and trusses. The flooring is all paved with Cuddapah slabs; behind the hall, there is a big open ground extending many hundreds of square feet. To the east of the hall is the Asram well that may well be called Sri Ramana Thirtham, as, on account of his Grace, pure crystalline water, sweet and refreshing and healthy had been found in such a parched, rocky place. Wells in this town are to be dug several feet deep by blowing up the rock by dynamite and removing the broken stones in order to find water, and that too generally brackish. This Asram well was only a big cleft in the rock, originally dug at the place pointed out by Bhagavan. During the rainy season the water will be at arms-depth, and in summer it will go down. As the Asram was improving and expanding, the material needs also are increasing so as to suit the convenience of the visitors, all of whom do not go there solely to whet their spiritual aspirations. As Bhagavan is impartial and loving to all, the material comforts of visitors also are to be attended to. Water is one of the most important needs. So this well was dug deeper, by dynamite blowing etc., parapet walls were raised and built with stone and mortar, and [a] Meyers hand pump was fitted into the well to pump water, into a masonry tank constructed at a great cost, where the water pumped out is stored. Pipes are fixed into the tank to lead to the kitchen for daily use, and also for the kitchen use on the occasions of Jayanti and Mahapujah celebrations.

In front of the temple there is a big commodious shed put up to accommodate the larger number of visitors, with a neat and cemented floor. The ordinary kitchen, though thatch roofed still, [and] the
dining hall are Mangalore tiled and cement floored, with a small dais in the middle for Bhagavan’s use. At the other end of this shed, opposite to [the] kitchen, there is the storeroom for provisions. By the side of the water tank, to the south of it, is the cattle shed for Asram cows and bulls. Lakshmi was the first cow of the Asram and a pet of Bhagavan; she had come to the Asram along with her mother while yet a tender calf. In those days, Asram people did not venture to have cows for fear of cheetahs. So Lakshmi and her mother were entrusted to a milkman who reared them. When Lakshmi became the mother of two sons, she was handed over to Ashram, [he] expressing his unwillingness to keep them anymore. Even when they were under his custody, Lakshmi will always be in the Asram during daytime, fed completely by Asram with plantains, rice and straw etc. After the advent of Lakshmi, four more cows are [have] come to Ashram, the total number, including children, are now more than a dozen. Now a pucca cattle shed with tiled roofs, supported by teakwood beams and concrete flooring, are under construction.

The garden has now become greatly improved and expanded on all the three sides of the Asram, except to the north, extending nearly to more than 2 acres of ground, containing rarest and ordinary varieties of plantains, coconut plants, and a variegated collection of flowers. Kitchen vegetables are also grown. More than a thousand to thousand-five hundred rupees had been spent in the laying and improvement of the garden. Water is baled out by paid labourers, and sometimes by Asram bhaktas themselves, from the tank Pali Thirtam, by means of a baling lift fixed in front of the temple to the south of it.

There are two festive occasions in the Asram: one is the celebration of the birthday of Bhagavan called Jayanti, and the other the anniversary of the death of Mother; the former falls on Purnavasu star in the month of Tamil Margali (13th December to 13th January of next year), the latter falls on Navami Vaisaka Bhaghula (9th day in the dark night in the month of Tamil Vaikasi from the 15th of May to 15th June). Printed invitations will be sent to all the bhaktas scattered all over India and even foreign countries; those that feel it convenient will attend. Donations and contributions both in cash and in kind, will voluntarily
and spontaneously pour in from all directions as a token of their abiding devotion to Bhagavan. On the night, previous to Jayanti day, all the townsmen, along with those that had come for the occasion, will be given a sumptuous and delicious dinner with the choicest menu, and Bhagavan will grace the occasion by partaking in the dinner. Pandals will be erected over the open ground behind the Asram hall, and it will afford seating accommodation for over a thousand at a time. Guests will be served in two or three batches, according to the exigencies of the occasion. The whole function will be over by 11 p.m., and after that, cooks and other devotees will be engaged in cutting vegetables for the next noon function, the Jayanti celebrations. Hillock-like heaps of all kinds of vegetables got from various places will be cut by several batches, and it will go until daybreak. There will be no sleep for anybody there that night, and the whole Asram will present a shining spectacle of brilliancy under the illuminations of powerful gaslights.

Next day morn, streams of visitors will pour in, and breakfast will be served to all. The temple will be decorated, and elaborate pujahs [will be performed], commencing with Abishekams (holy bath of the idols with Ganges water, milk, sugar cane juice, oil); Thirumanjana, a mixture of drugs capable of removing grease, lemon juice, curds; Panchamrithams, a mixture of hill plantains, dates, milk, honey, sugar candy, sugar, ghee, currants, etc; rose water, coconut juice, sandalwood paste, scented fire [of] holy ashes, sandals and cooked rice; adornments, Archanas (recitations of the various names of gods), burning finest scented incense, offering of various dishes of food and fruits (Nivedana), and ending with burning of camphor (karpuwa arathi), and distribution of prasadam [blessed food].

Meanwhile, the hall will be engaged with all kinds of music, piping and bhajanas, [and] spontaneous outbursts of bhaktas, displaying their literary and devotional compositions for the occasion, in all languages. Bhagavan, after having had his anointment and bath in the early morning itself, will be seated in the hall on his usual sofa, spread with cushions and tiger skin, and bhaktas will be coming and going like waves in the ocean. He will shine in all his spiritual glory, and radiate his Grace and Love towards all with his serene calm and
blissful quiescence. At about 11 a.m. Jayanti dinner [lunch] will be served, and all will devoutly partake in all the functions. Simultaneously with this dinner [lunch], distribution of Kadambam will commence. Kadambam is a mixture of cooked rice with dhal, soup, containing all kinds of vegetables boiled into it, strewed with the viands [foods] that are made for the occasion. All the helpless poor, belonging to the so-called lowest scale of society, will be given large doles of this Kadambam. Not less than four-to five-thousand of such poor, including children and women, will assemble, and all will be given. There used to be a regular scramble for it and distributors used to be sucked into it. The crowd used to be unmanageable and uncontrollable. People who had once received will again come as if they had not received, and it will not be possible to identify which had already received and which not. Might was right among them, the more sturdy receiving a larger share. From this year, thanks to the selfless zeal and organizing capacity of Sri M.S. Kamath, a bhakta of the Asram and editor of the Sunday Times, Madras, this function of poor feeding was conducted without the least scramble and buzzle and confusion, and each had his sumptuous share in the doles, though it could not be avoided the receiving of dole twice over by the same individual. All these will be over before 4 p.m. when all will depart. Such of these as could afford to stay will remain in the Asram for a few more days and then depart to their respective places. The Sarvadhikari shall have to be engaged for some days in sending holy ash and kumkuma prasads by post to all those countless bhaktas that had not come. Mahapujah will be only a repetition of Jayanti celebrations, with the exception of the previous night dinner.

It is not possible to describe in words what one feels in the spiritual and devotional atmosphere on these occasions, and so one should go and experience it for himself, how an asram, with no funds or endowments and no organization could manage such celebrations in so huge and gigantic scale, the poor feeding especially, to such a commendable success, all with the voluntary help and selfless service of the devotees themselves.

Once more, I can simply state that the serene calm and absolute quiescence, the spiritual and magnetic influence of Sri Bhagavan,
surcharging the whole atmosphere with them, in the midst of grandeur and colossal buzzle of arrangements, cannot be described in words, and one ought only to realize for himself by being present there on such occasions.

Sri Bhagavan stands supremely detached from the secular affairs and management, but everything goes on smoothly only through his Grace. It is said, in all philosophical books of the East, that the Ultimate Principle Brahman stands beyond space, time and causation, unruffled, calm and quiescent, completely detached from the activities of Maya, the radiation of ‘Its’ own power; Maya, the superimposition on this principle like waves in a mirage, plays her ceaseless sport in the creation of diversities and the illusion of separateness and enjoyments. This principle is practically illustrated in a concrete form in Sri Ramanasram.

Bhagavan stands as the ultimate one principle behind the diversities of the Asram, completely detached, abiding in his own truth and unity, without any sankalpa or the creative play of mind, though, on account of him alone, the Asram exists and continues its activities in diverse channels. He does not partake in any of these activities, and stands a passive spectator; though from him alone radiate the powers that manifest in these activities. Bhagavan is the basic centre and Asram is the outward Maya Sakti.

The jivatma [guiding spirit] of this manifestation as Asram is only his younger brother, Swami Niranjanananda, the head and mind of this corporate existence. He identifies entirely with his Asram and thus had annihilated his narrow ego into that selfless service towards Asram and its bhaktas.

He renounced his material life, donned the ochre robe some 17 or 18 years ago, and surrendered himself completely under the lotus feet of his elder brother. He commenced to take the management in his own hands only three years ago [1931].

Hitherto, the management was under the hands of strangers and devotees, not residents of the Asram. As Bhagavan never would take any interest, as bhaktas are scattered far and wide, the management became irresponsible to anybody. Consequently, mismanagement,
SRI RAMANASRAM

petty misunderstanding cropped up and, under such circumstances, Niranjanananda Swamy assumed the management.

As he is a recluse, he has no personal axe to grind; as he is a permanent resident of the Ashram, he has got all the time at his disposal; as he is an educated gentleman, having tasted the sweets and sours of official clerical life before he renounced and came here, he is a very scrupulous accountant. He is carrying [executing] the business of [accurate] accountancy to a fault. He is so very meticulously careful in the management, that he is oftentimes accused by bhaktas themselves as rather narrow minded, but all the same, he is selfless, loving and devout bhakta. In a world of diverse temperaments, inequalities, petty selfishness, prejudices and prepossessions, one cannot please all and command the admiration of all, and, as a consequence of this universal fact, our Chinnaswamy, as Niranjanananda is called, is not liked by some and he is not responsible for it. The Asram must go on, and it does go on smoothly and satisfactorily, under the able management of our Chinnaswamy, and he is the Sarvadhikari (the possessor of all authority and power) of the Asram.

The right hand of the Asram is Ramakrishnaswamy. He belongs to Malabar, and his language is Malayalam, though he knows Tamil well and comes of a respectable family. Though not educated in the modern sense of the term, he has got shrewd common sense and high culture. He became attached to Bhagavan from yet a boy in his teens, some 16 years ago, and was for some years a personal attendant on Bhagavan. He is more or less a General Supervisor of the Asram. It is he that goes into town every day and looks to the Asram’s needs, in the matter of provisions, engagement of labour if needed, and in fact, he attends to all the minute details and wants of the Asram. About seven years ago, when there was a robbery in the Asram, when Bhagavan himself was beaten, he had also his due share in the blows at the hands of these robbers, along with his companion Kunju Swamy. Kunju Swamy, another resident Bhakta, is also a Malayali, a highly cultured selfless devotee. He was also an attendant of Bhagavan’s person for some time. These two came to the Asram at about the same time and are still in the Asram, having completely renounced their all. They are
bachelors and are bound to be so all through, since they had already realized the spiritual growth on account of it. They are, as it were, the twins of the Asram. Bhagavan’s knowledge of Malayalam is due partly to the contact of these Bhaktas, and partly to other Malayali devotees who had preceded them in that service.

Then comes Madhavaswamy, another Malayali youth who is now doing the service of Bhagavan’s person, and is enjoying that unique bliss of service. His contact with Bhagavan also is nearly a decade. He is the fairest of all Asram’s inmates and a bachelor sadhu. Some bhaktas do often envy him for his lot of having been gifted with the good fortune of the privilege to attend on a jivanmukta; along with him, there is also another youth, as dark as Madhavan is fair, Rengasami, a Tamil, non-Brahmin youth of a somewhat respectable family in South Arcot District, who has also the unique good fortune of sharing his lot with Madhavan. He was for some time in the flower-garlanding department.

The Temple services are being attended to by a Brahmin bachelor Ramanatha Dikshitar, past middle age, a good spinner, and a Vedic scholar dedicated his life to the Asram, and a willing obliger to all bhaktas. He is also in charge of Asram pet deer, a calf still, named ‘Valli,’ after the consort of God Subramania. Looking after her needs has devolved on Ramanatha Dikshitar. There is also another old Sadhu, Ramanandaswamy, who is also in charge of [the] Temple. [The] Flower department is under the charge of Annamalai Swamy and Hanumantha Reddy.

The most important service is that in the kitchen, for on this depends the physical sustenance of bhaktas. One Ranga Rao, an educated, respectable Brahmin belonging to Madhwa caste, who was for some time in war service also, [and] after having become a widower turned to spiritual pursuits, became attached to Bhagavan; and one of the bhaktas of Vasistha Goutamany, also took to this kitchen service of the Asram and had laid many under his obligation. His father also is alive and a pensioner, a very old gentleman who had also for some time taken to this service. Though Ranga Rao never knew cooking before he came to Ashram, he is now a past master in the art. A very indefatigable worker. With complete self-surrender, he
was attending to the most difficult part of Asram’s service, for some years, and now he is in another taluk town, Polur, in an independent Asram, rendering his service of healing to whole humanity by taking to medicine. On all important occasions, he will fly down to Asram and contribute his mite in the shape of his selfless service. Now that important and difficult duty is being attended to by two women bhaktas, Andhra Brahmin widows, one from Ramnad district in the south and another from Nellore in the north; one past middle-age, another passing through middle age: Santhamma and Subbalakshmi by names. Both of them are educated in Tamil and Telugu, come out of very respectable families possessing some means for their livelihood; but have settled themselves in the Asram, dedicated to Asram service, giving away to the Asram what little they get for their maintenance. It is an unwritten convention in the Asram that ladies are not permitted to sleep in the Asram precincts during night. That is strictly observed in the Asram, and so these two ladies, that toil all day in the kitchen, return very late to town, and come again at 6 a.m. everyday to attend to the breakfast service, and remain ’til 9 p.m.

The Asram has got a book depot attached to it called Sri Ramasramam Book Depot in which all Asramam publications alone are available, along with the photos of Bhagavan. This branch is under the management of one Somasundara Swamy, another Bhakta.

In this connection, I cannot ease my conscience without saying something of the Nellore family, who have come from Nellore and settled themselves here in a rented house in the town, solely for the purpose of rendering some service to Bhagavan and his Asram and obtaining his Grace. The family consists of 5 brothers, one of whom is Sri Sambasiva Rao, a Ba.Bl. and an Advocate in Nellore. Two of his younger brothers are with him in Nellore itself, having been employed in the educational line there. Another of his younger brothers is one Satyanarayana Rao, a trained teacher employed in Mahant High School, Vellore. The youngest, Narasinga Rao, a BA.BL. a young man of over 27 years of age, has not set up his practice anywhere but is living here with his mother, wife, and the only sister Lakshmi Ammal. All the members of the family are highly devoted towards Bhagavan and the Asram, and it is this family
that daily brings some tiffin every day at 2:30 p.m., distributes them among all those that are present there in the Asram, remain in the Asram ‘till nightfall, and then depart home. This Narasinga Rao renders his little bit of assistance to Niranjanananda Swami in his correspondence, accounts, and other similar office duties of the Asram. The ladies that go to the Asram, along with the permanent inmates above referred to, will be accommodated by them in their house for the night. The devotion of that young lady Lakshmiammal to Bhagavan is boundless. It will be really ennobling for any to see this selfless band of workers, willingly and lovingly sacrificing themselves and toiling all the day in the service of the Asram and its bhaktas, without the least desire for the fruits of their doings. This is the real *nishkamya karma*. It is only Bhagavan’s Grace that is giving them all the strength and endurance, which the nature of their service demands, without which none of them will be able even to lift his [their] or her little finger. All the worldly happiness is there without the pains, sorrows, worries, cares and anxieties of the world. Peace and happiness reign everywhere. O, what potentialities are there in detached spiritual life of service and surrender!

The Asram has no funds of its own, or any trust endowments as similar institutions have; not even an appeal for funds is permitted. The Asram is being maintained, partly, by monthly voluntary subscriptions from some bhaktas who can afford to contribute, without the least feeling of any discomfort, as such amounts after all do not amount to more than Anas 100 a month; but the main income is derived by bikshas and donations from casual visitors and bhaktas that go there every day. *Biksha* is the offering of food to Bhagavan, and Bhagavan will not touch anything which is not shared by all his devotees there present in the Asram, including animal relations, and further, Bhagavan will not stir out of the Asram. He is almost as immobile as his Lord Arunachala, and, so one should try to bear the expenses of the feeding in the Asram for that day, if he wants to play the host to Bhagavan. Even here, there is no particular rate fixed. Whatever one can afford to contribute, from Anas 5 onwards, will be gladly accepted for biksha. Any amount, however insignificant, will be accepted as donation. The bhaktas also contribute a little. In
this manner, there may be at least 10 bikshas in a month. Sometimes a few rupees may be saved out of Jayanti donations and sometimes not. The Book Depot also contributes a little. Without any thought of providing for the morrow, the Asram is eking its magnificent existence from day to day, never at any moment feeling any want. The average number of persons fed will be about 40 to 50 every meal, including the permanent inmates.

Turning to the hall where Bhagavan lives, as soon as one enters there and prostrates before him, Bhagavan will gaze for a few seconds on the visitor, with his eyes gleaming in spiritual splendour, and then [one] will be asked to seat oneself there. If he happens to have brought any fruits or edibles, Bhagavan will take only a little of it, just a pinch, and the rest will be distributed among all of those that are within the precincts of the Asram. One will completely enjoy that peace of mind, the eternal bliss so long as he is there.

Many had expressed to me that, before they entered the hall, they wanted to worry Bhagavan with a number of questions, but, the moment they saw him and sat before him, the questions vanished and their minds attained a calm and peace, which they could not express. Such is the silent Anugraha [grace] of Bhagavan; and if one were to pursue the quickening awakened in the minds by the silent awakening with an earnest search of Truth, investigating into who that ‘I’ that arises in him is and whence that had arisen, this momentary peace, which one realizes in his presence, will convert itself into eternal Peace and Bliss leading one to salvation from the cycles of births and deaths. Some have said to me that even material desires are sometimes fulfilled, dangers and difficulties are averted by his Grace, and that was their experience. I do not know anything about it, but I can assure, from my experience, spiritual awakening and a turn to inward quest can be got by his Grace. Even with regard to material desires, this much can be said from my experience, that whatever you desire for, within the precincts of the Asram, for the benefit of the Asram and yourself, that is somehow fulfilled by its supply. All this is mystery, and one ought to experience for oneself about all these, as experiences may vary with individuals, and so I shall stop here.
Mystery of the Milk

Nawazuddin

This is the third instalment of the series of Khadre Alam’s poetry which depicts the multiplicity of manifest Being and its Unity in essence.

Introduction

The core of Islamic Sufism lies in the fundamental belief that the Supreme Being is ONE. This Supreme Being in its Pure Essence is endowed with all the attributes and qualities that are hidden as pure potentialities. These potentialities are Life, Knowledge, Will, Power, Hearing, Seeing and Speech.

Let us summarize the manifestation of Being with the example of a word. A word before being spoken is one with the Being, remaining hidden in its Essence as knowledge. When the Supreme Being intends that the word be spoken out, He uses His Power to express it.

Nawazuddin belongs to a traditional Sufi family of Qadriya Tariqa. He is an employee of the State Bank of India, Tiruvannamalai Branch. He spends his leisure time in the study of comparative religion. His particular passion is the translation of Sufi literature from Urdu into English.
When the word is spoken, it is clothed in a subtle body, lives for a short span, and then is reabsorbed into the Essence. When the same word is written on paper, it is now clothed in a gross body, visible to everyone; it lives for a particular period in time and then is annihilated.

In both the subtle and gross forms the word is the manifestation of the Being, and the meaning of the word is the Pure Essence. The Sufi marvels at both the subtle and gross manifestations that are the multiple states of Being. The true Sufi abides in the everlasting meaning of the word.

A milkmaid sitting by the side of a street was selling milk. Four thirsty travellers passed by. On seeing the milk pot, they approached the milkmaid cheerfully and asked her for something to quench their thirst.

One of them asked for cream; the second, curd; the third one, buttermilk; and the fourth, butter. To all of them the maid gave one answer: these four things were certainly not with her. The travellers insisted that she undoubtedly had all four items. They spoke among themselves that if she did not give them what they wanted, they would seek justice from the judge. The maid thought how unfair it was for these four people to quarrel with her.

Finally all of them went to the judge with their dispute. The judge was a man of conventional wisdom and said to the travellers that they were stupid and that intelligence seemed to be non-existent in all of them. “You are demanding things that are unavailable as the maid is only selling milk.” He advised them to desist from their demands and forget about the milkmaid. The travellers, however, said, “We will definitely not give up and leave the maid alone, because we are sure that all the four things that we demand are available from her.”

Among the crowd there was one wise man who witnessed the proceedings against the milkmaid. He intervened and said that he would give each one what he asked for. He poured a little curdled milk into the milkmaid’s pot. After separating the milk into cream, curd, buttermilk and butter, he gave each traveller what he wanted. Satisfied, they made ready to continue their journey.
Someone, a fifth person, stopped them and collected from each of them a sample of what they had, namely cream, curd, buttermilk and butter. He asked them how they got those four things. They narrated the whole episode. He asked, “Tell me, these four things, are they derived from the milk, or is it the curdled milk which gave them form? Is it the gross quality of the animal nature or the subtle nature of the intellect? How did they attain these forms?”

The travellers remained silent because the query was too subtle for them. He then asked to be taken to the person who revealed the mystery of the milk. They all went to the wise man, and the fifth person gave him the four things: cream, curd, buttermilk and butter. He demanded that the wise man convert them into milk again as they all came from milk in the first place. He said, “Make them milk again so that they regain their original form.”

The wise man said, “O dear one, listen. You do not understand the hidden truth. In the beginning milk existed and these things were non-existent in it. In the end, milk also became non-existent and brought them into being out of itself and was itself in them. From now on these will never become milk again, though they are not separate from milk. “Ponder over this carefully, O man of wisdom. Outwardly man does not become God, though in reality, he is not separate from God. When outward forms vanish from the eyes and are annihilated in knowledge [jnana] then, and only then, you will gain discrimination and discern the radiance [quality] of milk. Otherwise where are we, where is the milk and where is that mystery which is that light of knowledge? It is far beyond the range of our understanding.

“The essence of milk is hidden in all the four forms. Without the essence there is no existence of forms. Men of vision say that everything is He. He was. He is. He will ever be.

“Now, friends, listen to the interpretation of the mystery of milk. Consider the cow as the hidden treasure.¹ Milk is the Absolute Essence

¹There is a sacred traditional saying of the Prophet (hadis qudsi) which says: “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, therefore I created Adam, in order that I might be known.”
endowed with names and attributes. It is a Being with attributes which always remain hidden in the Essence. Milk again is the station of negation (fana). In order for milk to manifest outwardly, the bodies of all the four things – cream, curd, buttermilk and butter – remain hidden in it as pure potential. The milkmaid symbolises the divine solitude which the mature soul enters upon in its inner spiritual journey (wahadat).²

“The four travellers symbolise the four Archangels in their subtle form; in their gross form they are the four elements.

“The all-pervasive, complete Divine Nature (uluhiyat)³ is the principle on which the expression of Unicity (waqhidiyat)⁴ in form is revealed. The wise man [the higher intellect or buddhi] is the first discernible manifestation of the immutable Divine Nature. From it there stems the divine archetypes (ayan ath-thabitah⁵), the unchanging essences, which are the foundation of manifestation.

“The metaphor of milk signifies the undifferentiated spiritual world. The silent, wise man is he who can apply the curdle [discrimination] in the milk. The curdling activity reveals the all-pervasive nature of knowledge. When the milk, which contains the four hidden forms, becomes the object of undivided attention, the quintessence of Reality is revealed.

“In natural milk the four substances, – cream, curd, buttermilk and butter – cannot survive as distinct from milk. These four qualities constitute the four elements.⁶ When they manifest outwardly, the

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² The Divine Solitude is situated ontologically between the Supreme Unity and the distinctive Unicity.
³ Word derived from ilah, ‘Divinity’, and signifying the ‘Quality of Divinity’ not in the sense of a particular Divine Quality, but as total Divine Nature.
⁴ The Divine Unicity is that aspect in which the Essence appears as unifying the difference of attributes. Here the All is both One and Many. Marvel at the plurality of what essentially is One.
⁵ The principal possibilities of a being or of a thing.
⁶ The four Archangels are Jibraail, Izraail, Mikaail and Israafil in their subtle forms; they represented in their gross forms as the four elements, namely Earth, Fire, Water and Air respectively.
body’s form takes shape. These four elements are indispensable for the constitution of the body.

“As every substance that emerges from the body of milk has a unique virtue, so also every individual element has a unique virtue and quality. When the elements become mixed and clothed as a single body, they lose their individual distinction.

“The soul is reflected in the external manifestation of the bodies thus formed, just as the essence of milk is inherent in each separate manifestation of it as cream, curd, buttermilk and butter.

“This is a summary of the all-comprehensive knowledge of the Almighty. Whoever comprehends it is the Complete Man. Pondering over this is the preoccupation of those who exist solely to perceive the manifestation of the Essence in the forms.”

O Khadre Alam, value and respect intimate knowledge in every instant. Let the seeing, the seer and the object seen be all one.

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It

Billy Doyle

it’s before you see
it’s before you hear
it’s before you think
how can you doubt it
it’s nearer than the nearest

it needs no eyes to see it
it needs no ears to hear it
it needs no mind to think it

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
The Quest

Chapter Seven

Silence

Lucia Osborne

The silent teaching of Bhagavan is a direct spiritual influence on the mind and the heart. The impact can be overwhelming since Bhagavan is not limited to the body. One has to be attentive and listen with the inner hearing and be silent and passive to His Presence or, if you would have it, to the ever-present God or Christ in you, your own Self, the core of your being. “God, Guru and the Self are the same,” Bhagavan affirmed. “His Silence is more vast and more emphatic than all the sastras put together. Grace is always there. We are never out of its operation. It is only the clouded mind which does not feel it. Yet through effort it can experience Grace.”

The physical guru leads one back to the inner guru, to Grace, a living Presence always abiding with us even if we are unaware of it. We do not exist apart from it.

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of The Mountain Path. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.
“You bear God about with you, poor wretch and know it not. You bear Him about within you and are unaware that you are defiling Him with unclean thoughts and actions. When God Himself is present within you and sees and hears all the things you do, are you not ashamed of thinking and acting thus?” – Epictetus.

Plotinus realized that when intellectual denudation is achieved the One, who is not a being, but the source of being appears to the soul and they are no longer two but one and the soul is no longer identified with the body or mind, but knows……

Plotinus wrote to Flaccus in 260 A.D. “You ask, how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite, therefore, cannot be reached among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite by a faculty superior to reason, by entering a state in which you are your finite self no longer.”

Ramana Maharshi was always ready to clear the doubts of sincere seekers whilst avoiding unnecessary discussions. He never gave talks as such nor did he set out to teach. In his teens he was already followed by devotees when he came to the small temple on one of the eastern spurs of Arunachala. Devotees had doubts and asked questions. The replies were noted down and constitute the teaching. His words carried power but as mentioned the most powerful impact of his teaching is in Silence. By Silence eloquence is understood, he used to say. It is a direct transmission of the knowledge depending on the disciple’s receptivity. The first European visitor, Frank Humphreys, has thus described it:

“On reaching the cave we sat before Him at his feet and said nothing. We sat thus for a long time and I felt lifted out of myself...I could feel only that this body was not the man, it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless figure from which God was radiating terrifically. My own feelings were indescribable.”

Another visitor, Paul Brunton, who arrived more a sceptic than a believer, has given the following account of the first impact that the silence of Ramana Maharshi made upon him: “I cannot turn away my gaze from Him. My initial bewilderment, my perplexity...
at being totally ignored, slowly fade away as this strange fascination begins to grip me more firmly. But it is not till the second hour of this uncommon scene that I become aware of a silent resistless change which is taking place within my mind. One by one the questions which I prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy drop away. For it does not seem to matter whether they are asked or not and it does not matter whether the problems which have hitherto troubled me are solved or not. I only know that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me, that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest.”

And another description:

“I know no other man whose mere presence has thus enabled me to make the personality drop down into the abyss of nothingness where it belongs. I have found no other human being who so emanates his grace that it can plunge one into the ecstasy of timeless omnipresent Being.”

Many more such instances could be quoted. Some of them are recorded in the chapter on *Glimpses of Reality*; among them: Swami Ramdas, Swami Chinmayananda, the doctors who treated Him, sceptics and non-believers to start with, who became devotees without a word spoken. Bereaved and distressed people found solace again without a word spoken. Simple people who could not understand or follow Bhagavan’s teaching, children, and animals loved to be in His presence. They felt at peace, happy.

A genuine Guru expresses his divinity with his mere presence, his silence which can be awe-inspiring, with every action. He the Self in our hearts has taken shape in order to lead us back to Himself, the Source, which is I-AM-ness.
The Inner Kora of Mount Kailash

Savithri Krishnan

Akin to the Giripradakshina of Arunachala by the Inner Path, the Inner Kora (circumambulation) of Mount Kailash enables one to touch the Holy Mount Kailash, in contrast to the Outer Kora, where one only gets to see the mountain from a distance. A vast majority of people visiting Kailash perform only the Outer Kora and do not undertake the Inner Kora for varied reasons. For one, it is physically demanding and robust health is a must, as it involves gruelling treks on snowy, rugged tracks. Given the steep and tough nature of the terrain, horses are of little use, and hence one has to do it entirely on foot. Man’s best companion on this inhospitable terrain is Man.

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.
himself in the form of the generally affable Sherpa/Tibetan porters whose contribution is significant for a successful yatra (pilgrimage). Secondly, not many private tour operators are equipped enough to conduct the Inner Kora, and the Indian government-operated tour doesn’t even offer it. Even the handful of private operators who conduct the Inner Kora make just one trip a year, generally sometime between July and September, unlike the Outer Kora, where dozens of trips are conducted between May and September. For Buddhists, scripture stipulates undertaking the Inner Kora only after completing thirteen Outer Koras on foot, the sole exception occurring in the Year of the Horse (2014 happens to be the next one), which sanctions one to undertake the Inner Kora without any precondition.

I was blessed with the golden opportunity of visiting Mount Kailash for a second consecutive year. Unlike the Buddhist view, the Hindu scriptures apparently don’t impose any condition on undertaking the Inner Kora, and so I set out for it, this time well-prepared by way of adequate physical training and pranayama. The Mountain is pyramid-shaped with four faces (Eshana, the fifth face looking skyward, is believed to be invisible), namely North, East, South and West, which go by the names Vamadeva, Tatpurusha, Aghora and Sadyojata respectively. It typically takes five days to complete the Inner Kora, covering three of the four faces. Visiting the West Face is generally avoided for reasons stated later in the article.

North Face – Vamadeva

As with the Outer Kora, we start from the base camp, Darchen, which is South of Kailash, and proceed via Yama Dwaar to Dirapuk in the North for the night’s halt. *En route* we behold the magnificent and imposing face of West Kailash. This region is the habitat of the famed *kasturi mrig* (musk deer), and it was a delight to behold herds of them, albeit from a distance. Early next morning, we take the Inner Path and proceed towards the North Face. Manjushree and Avalokateeshwara, considered co-deities of Lord Buddha, are two hillocks on either side of this face, as if guarding Kailash. Along the entire uphill path flows a narrow stream appearing to have its
origin in the slopes of Kailash. The ascent is not very steep, and after a few hours climb, we reach a small pyramid-shaped rock known as the *charan sparsh* (literally, touching the feet) spot, which is also believed to be an Atma Linga. As we reverentially touch the base, I am reminded of Manickavachagar’s refrain in Shivapuranam,¹ *Avan arulaale avan thaazh vanangi* (touching His feet through His grace). Though this is considered to be the base of Kailash, there is still a gap of about half a kilometre between this point and the actual visible base of the mountain. This stretch probably is typically covered with snow, thereby allowing access only to the *charan sparsh* spot. In the absence of snow here during our visit, a daring few among us cross this point though the path is quite slippery and steep, and proceed to the visible base portion of Kailash, which is completely covered with snow. The landscape here is truly awe-inspiring. We are spellbound by the Mount’s aura and proximity, and the mind effortlessly gets into a thoughtless calm state here. No wonder that this region is considered highly conducive for meditation. In fact, there are people who come all the way here year after year to do meditation and return without even bothering to complete the Kora! After savouring a few tranquil moments here, we trace our way back and reach the camp early evening. The duration of the entire trek is approximately seven hours, with the distance to and fro being nearly nine kilometres.

**East Face – Tatpurusha**

The trek to the East Face is arduous compared to that of the North. We start at the wee hour of 3 a.m. and initially tread on the Outer Path before taking a deviation towards the right, soon after passing the Manjushree Mountain, onto an unmarked trail. We then have to negotiate the tough and steep Kandasangla Glacier. The slope gets steeper towards the peak and with the help of rope-climbing harnesses skilfully anchored to the boulders by the Sherpas, we tread the last hundred-meter stretch before reaching the Eastern zone of Kailash. The atmosphere here is so astoundingly serene that a fellow

¹Shivapuranam is the first chapter of Manickavachagar’s masterpiece *Tiruvaachagam*
yatri from Delhi, considering it a sacrilege to ingress into an area befitting use by only the celestials and other highly exalted beings, vowed never again to set his foot in this region. I am reminded of the great Nayanmar, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, who literally did not let her feet touch the sacred precincts of Kailash and walked upside down balancing herself on her head! After walking for about a mile, we come across a small and serene lake called Kuber Kund. Kuber, the Lord of Wealth, is believed to have taken shelter in the vicinity of Kailash after losing his earlier abode, Sri Lanka, to his half-brother, the legendary Ravana. We pray on the banks of this lake, and collect some water to take back home as prasadam.

In order to have the East Face darshan, one has to further proceed and cross three hillocks. Not many in our group have the stamina for this, and most of the porters refuse to accompany us to the East Face. Added to this, the already tough weather conditions start to turn even more unfavourable. Only six of us venture on, of whom only two of yatris finally taste success. The other four of us tread nearly eighty percent of the distance and are blessed to have a partial darshan of Nandi the bull, who is Lord Siva’s mount and also His foremost gana (attendant). Four Nandis are said to be in Kailash, facing each of the four faces.

We then descend and trek for nearly six kilometres to reach Zhutulphuk for the night’s halt. Weather towards the evening gets quite inclement. With incessant downpour and intermittent snowing, getting drenched every now and then becomes almost a daily norm, rendering raincoats practically of no use, an indication perhaps of what physical and mental resilience is demanded to meet the Lord in His abode. The next morning, we resume the Outer Kora path along the banks of River Brahmaputra, reach Darchen for the night’s halt, and prepare ourselves to visit the South Face the next morning, on the last lap of the yatra.

One sight we witness in this last Outer Kora stretch comes packed with subtle messages. Not only does it dwarf our efforts, it also decimates our perceived triumph over the travails en route. It opens our eyes to what high altitude bhakti literally means and inspires us to be further resilient. Considering the state we are in, physically
and mentally, we are flummoxed to see a couple of devout Tibetans doing *sashtaanga* (full body prostration) parikrama, different from the one done at our South Indian temples. The way it is done is to first kneel down and make a full body prostration, then make a mark on the ground where the tip of the head touches, rise up and pray with folded hands, then crawl to the point where the mark was made, make a full body prostration again, and repeat the process. This kind of parikrama requires at least two or three weeks to complete and demands a Himalayan physical and mental endurance!

**South Face – Aghora**

The trek to the South Face is the most strenuous one compared to its Northern and Eastern counterparts. We start at an unearthly hour of 12:30 a.m. and drive to Astapad, which is in the vicinity of the South Face of Kailash, and start the trek with a miner’s torch crowning each of our heads to light our way. Astapad, where the first Jain Tirtankar, Rishabadev, attained enlightenment, is towards our left and Nandi Parvat is to the right, sitting right in front of Kailash, facing it. Here again we have to negotiate the steep glaciers with the help of rope-climbing harnesses. It’s interesting to observe the changing perspectives of Kailash as we approach it nearer and nearer. And finally, from very close quarters, the pyramid shape of Kailash is no longer seen, its appearance being just like a wall. Nearby this spot is the Ganesh Ling, which basically is formed by fragments of ice continuously sliding from Kailash. At times, the surface of Kailash gets scraped and these rock pieces slide down along with the snow. Pilgrims collect the same and treasure it as Atma Linga, considered to be extremely sacred and potent. The stretch of the ascent close to Saptarshi Cave is infamous for the frequent stone-falls from the Summit of Kailash. Yatris are not allowed to rest here for long and the caring Sherpas ensure that all are transported to the cave soonest. Leading from the front and proceeding ahead to ensure our safety, our captain yells often, “*Patthar gir raha hai* (Stones are falling).” Head-gear is provided for safety. A fellow yatri is hit by quite a big stone, which breaks her headgear instantly. She luckily escapes unhurt. I too
am hit at the back by a falling stone of considerable weight, while taking a short break from the continuous climb. I choose to consider it as *sparsha-diksha*\(^2\) by Lord Siva Himself, as the falling stones from Kailash have Siva *amsa* (quality) in them.

The specialty of the South Face is that we not only get to do *charan sparsh* but also enter into Kailash! Saptarshi Cave is inside Kailash and is about two hundred feet from its base. It’s a long narrow passage with the dimension being approximately one hundred feet by five feet. Once we reach the cave, we are actually inside the sacred mountain. Though Kailash is the abode of Siva, some consider it to be Siva Swaroopa, and hence resting here in this cave gives one a proud feeling of sitting on Siva’s lap! It’s verily on these walls that Lord Siva is supposed to have written *Soundarya Lahari*, a collection of one hundred verses extolling his consort Parvathi. Adi Sankara during his visit to Kailash is said to have copied these verses to share the same with the rest of mankind, but Nandi took objection to this as these are highly esoteric and snatched the manuscript from Sankara. However, with his elephantine memory, Sankara was able to reproduce the first forty-one verses known as *Ananda Lahari*, and composed the remaining fifty-nine verses in praise of Parvathi’s beauty and naming methods of worshipping her. Chanting *Soundarya Lahari* at the very holy spot where it was composed gives us a blessed feeling.

Buddhists refer to Saptarshi Cave as *Serdung Chuksum*. *Serdung* means gold, *dung* means stupa/chanten and *chuksum* is thirteen. They have the utmost reverence for this place and consider these thirteen chortens ‘the treasures of Kailash.’ There might have been thirteen golden stupas at some point in time, but presently there are only a few man-made sand and cement stupas built along the edge of the hundred foot-long cave, each measuring about five feet in height with a width of about two feet. After spending the most blessed moments of our lives here, we proceed back to the camp. Instead of tracing our way

\(^2\)Traditionally there are three ways of initiation by the Guru. *Hasta* or *Sparsha diksha* is initiation by touch; *Nayana diksha* is initiation by look; and *Manasa diksha* is initiation by thought/mind.
back along the same route from where we started, we ascend about half a kilometre further along a narrow path less than two feet wide with steep slopes below to reach a point between Kailash and Nandi called the Serdung Chuksum Pass, which is at a height of 19,400 feet, the highest in our yatra. We then descend down towards the right on the slopes of Nandi so as to complete Nandi Parikrama as well. Descending the first five hundred-metre stretch is indeed a challenge, as it is quite steep and completely covered with snow, the depth of which is not known until we place our feet on it. At some places it is almost knee deep, thus leaving our socks wet and feet numb. To ease our effort climbing down, a rope is tied to the summit with the other end let loose. We descend holding this rope as a prop. Despite this, it is hard to climb down without tumbling and faltering at every other step. I find sliding down the snow more sensible than risking a possible ankle or knee sprain due to frequent tumbling. The rest of the seven-kilometre trail thankfully is on dry land, and we reach the camp by evening.

West Face – Sadyojata

*Charan sparsh* is possible in all the cardinal directions except West, though a bit difficult on the Eastern side. Not many venture the West Face. Reasons are aplenty, the one probably topping the list is the belief that the West Face is the main entrance to Kailash exclusively reserved for the celestials, and that human beings may not return alive if they trespass this entrance. The rock formation here has the appearance of sages waiting in a queue to gain entry to Kailash, and the Tibetans attest that the formation changes every twelve years implying the entry of the present batch, with a new batch awaiting their turn. Secondly, a secret entranceway to the Inner Kora from this side is in fact visible from the Outer Kora path, and the Tibetans strictly believe that one can tread through this particular entrance only after completing thirteen Outer Koras. Many lamas have shared their experience of hearing the rings of bells, beats of Siva’s *damaru* (drum), and other heavenly vibrations here. Or the reason could even be as simple as the West Face being the least explored region. As
THE INNER KORA OF MOUNT KAILASH

mentioned earlier, not many tour operators are familiar with the Inner Kora terrain, and hence they conduct only the Outer Kora. However, the agency with whom I travelled is one of the pioneers in conducting the Inner Kora and is constantly exploring the region. It, with a group of devout and regular yatris, succeeded in tracing the path to the East Face only recently. It has been trying the same with the West Face as well, but without any tangible success thus far. An adventurous few from our team, which included the veterans of previous yatras, set out exploring the route and were fairly successful in nearing the face, but were unable to touch the base as it was quite steep.

Parts of the Kailash range of mountains, though not part of the Inner Kora, are the Milarepa caves and Tirthapuri. Bhagavan Ramana spoke highly of Milarepa, a Tibetan tantric yogi, and even recommended the reading of Milarepa’s biography to devotees like Balaram Reddy.

Incidentally, W.Y. Evans-Wentz, an English research scholar of Oxford University, who has contributed in editing and translating Milarepa’s biography from the Tibetan language to English, met Bhagavan. In one of his conversations with Bhagavan, he asked if there is any psychic effect in visiting sacred places like Mount Kailash and Benares, to which Bhagavan replied in the affirmative.³

There are a few caves in the vicinity of Kailash where Milarepa meditated before attaining his final emancipation. We visited those at Zhutulpuk and also at Nyalam, a Tibetan settlement at a height of 12,000 feet where people spend a day for acclimatization before proceeding on the yatra. In the surrounding areas, one can find a lot of boulders and stones inscribed with the well-known Tibetan incantation Om Mani Padme Om. There are some interesting facts about the cave in Zhutulpuk. The idol here is said to have been made by Milarepa himself using a precious metal called li, and he empowered it with special powers to bless and protect the devotees. He is also said to have raised the low ceiling of this cave with his bare hand, leaving behind his hand impression on the ceiling, visible to this day.

Tirthapuri is the place where the famed Mohini-Bhasmasura incident is said to have taken place. This is at a distance of seventy kilometres from Darchen. Legend has it that an Asura named Bhasmasura had received a boon from Siva of reducing anyone to ashes by merely placing his hand on their head. He wanted to test its efficacy first on Lord Siva himself! Bewildered at this, Siva took to his heels, and Vishnu in the form of Mohini came to rescue Siva. Enchanted by Mohini’s grace and beauty, Bhasmasura proposed to make her his consort. She accepted on the condition that he surpassed her in a dance contest. She successfully got him to imitate her dance gestures and eventually made him place his hand on his head, thus reducing himself to ashes. Even to this day, there is one hillock here which is full of ashes while the adjacent ones are of sand and rock. Yatris usually collect these ashes as they are believed to ward off the evil forces. We too did likewise.

According to legend, which Bhagavan spoke about, Siva is said to have accompanied 2,999 priests called Dikshitars from Kailash to Chidambaram, the descendants of whom carry out the temple tasks even to this day. The striking resemblance of the temple roof at Tirthapuri to that in Chidambaram-Nataraja temple bears a strong testimony to this.

The Inner Kora symbolizes that it is the ‘Aagna of the Kartu’ (command of the Lord) that reigns, as Bhagavan says in his first verse of Upadesha Saram. The yatri is a mere tool or doer of preordained activity. It is one of those rare yatras where the yatri cannot call the shots singly by any means. A committed and skilled tour operator, a loyal Sherpa/Tibetan porter, the weather, and above all, the grace of Lord Siva – all define and determine the outcome of the yatra more than the yatri per se, annihilating any sense of ego in the accomplishment of the holy yatra.

Note: The distances mentioned for Inner Kora are my approximations, as official figures are not available.

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4 The 2,999 priests along with Siva totalling 3,000 were called the Thillai Moovayaram. Thillai refers to Chidambaram and Moovayaram is 3000 in Tamil.
Ozhivil Odukkam

Revisiting a Rare Vedantic Treatise

K.Sriram

Introduction
Adi Sankara has said, “It is rare to get a human birth.” To reap the full benefit of such a rare gift, God keeps sending His emissaries in a continuous stream. Such God-conscious men and women not only guide their fellow human beings on the path of Self but also leave behind their Self-experiences in the form of wonderful expositions in prose or poetry for the benefit of posterity. These divine outpourings transcend space and time and shine forth as the ever-bright Pole Star in the firmament of spirituality.

The Origin
One such rare work is the Vedantic text Ozhivil Odukkam composed by Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar, who was born in Seerkazhi, Tamil Nadu,

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His celebrated work *Maharaja Thuravu* was serialised in four instalments recently in *Mountain Path*. When he was a child, his parents and relatives would frequently take him to the famous Shiva temple in Seerkazhi. One scene in the temple that made a lasting impression on this child was the worship performed twice daily at the Sannidhi of Tirugnanasambandhar, who also was born in Seerkazhi. Devotees would light camphor and offer it at Tirugnanasambandhar’s shrine first while entering the temple. They would once again light the camphor left with them at the same shrine finally leaving the temple. Seeing this repeatedly, the child thought that Tirugnanasambandhar was the greatest among all the gods in the temple. It was thus that this great saint-singer found a special niche as *atma-guru* in the heart of Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar and led him towards God-realisation later in life.

Tirugnanasambandhar is held in greatest respect in Saivism as the ‘son of God,’ a reincarnation of Lord Subrahmanya, and to obtain His Grace is no mean achievement. When, by Divine Will, Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar decided to distil his Self-experience into words, the result was one of the most admired Vedantic texts in Tamil, namely *Ozhivil Odukkam*.

Some three hundred years later, in the seventeenth century, Tiruporur Chidambaram Swami wrote a commentary on *Ozhivil Odukkam*. His guru was Sri Kumara Deva Swami1 of Viruddhachalam, Tamil Nadu, whose guru, in turn, was Sri Santhalinga Swami of Peraiyur. Sri Santhalinga Swami entrusted Thiruporur Chidambaram Swami with the task of writing a commentary on *Ozhivil Odukkam* in the presence of Sri Kumara Deva Swami, which the disciple carried out faithfully. Both the original and the commentary are set in an archaic style of chaste Tamil and are very difficult to understand.

In 1851, a further one hundred and fifty years after the composition of *Ozhivil Odukkam*, Vadaloor Sri Ramalinga Vallalar Swami realized

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1 His celebrated work *Maharaja Thuravu* was serialised in four instalments recently in the *Mountain Path*. 

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its inestimable Vedantic value and brought out the printed edition, comprising both the original and the prose commentary that were hitherto confined to palm leaves. The contents of this edition, without even a single alteration, were again brought out as a fresh edition in 2002 and again in 2004, by the Thiruvarutprakasa Vallalar Deiva Nilayam of Vadaloor, founded by Sri Ramalinga Vallalar Swami.

Thus this ancient Vedantic treasure had been preserved by a few stalwart saints and passed on to posterity over a long period of about 700 years. Further, this has the unique distinction of three Self-Realized people being connected with it: its author Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar; the commentator Thiruporur Chidambaram Swami; and the publisher, Vadaloor Sri Ramalinga Vallalar. All the three Swamijis have become immortals in the history of Tamil Vedantic literature.

Getting to know about Ozhivil Odukkam

During one of our conversations, Smt. T.R. Kanakamma, the respected Ramana bhakta and scholar, told the author of this article that Sri Bhagavan who used to quote sometimes from Ozhivil Odukkam to Sri Muruganar, told him that the only available commentary rendered by Thiruporur Chidambaram Swami was Saiva-Siddhanta-oriented and it would be appropriate if a Vedanta commentary were written. Smt. Kanakamma said that Sri Muruganar never even attempted such a commentary and such a work was yet to be accomplished. Sri Muruganar was so deeply immersed in Ramana Consciousness that all his great poems focused exclusively on Sri Bhagavan alone. However, at her request, Sri Muruganar taught Smt. Kanakamma in great detail over several months the entire Ozhivil Odukkam, verse by verse. It was through her that this author came to know about the existence of Ozhivil Odukkam. She also added that both the original and the commentary by Thiruporur Chidambaram Swami were in knotty and high class literary language that only scholars can appreciate and that a commentary in a simple style that can be understood by even the lay public was needed. After a couple of years, it so happened that Swami Tanmayananda Saraswati of Tiruvannamalai visited Vadaloor during one of his pilgrimages and found a copy of Ozhivil Odukkam.
at Thiruvarutprakasa Vallalar Deiva Nilayam. Remembering this author’s interest in the text, he sent him a copy.

Going through this marvellous Vedantic treasure, this author was thrilled by the sublime poetic constructions in consonance with Tamil grammar and prosody, and the telling examples used to elucidate the subtle implications of Vedantic ideas. The deep spiritual Self-experience that Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar must have gone through was writ-large in every verse, which effortlessly cascaded forth.

Having accomplished all this, he states quite a few times in the text that the entire credit for this work belongs to his Sadguru, Tirugnanasambandhar, out of whose Grace this Vedantic treatise was born.

About the Text

This great Vedantic work, as the title suggests, elucidates the techniques that help one to attain permanent abidance in the Self (Atman). Ozhivil (Ozhivu [end] + il [without]) means “endless, i.e., incessant or without interruption.” Odukkam means “abidance, i.e., to delve in Self, erasing the individual identity.” Hence the title means ‘Incessant Abidance in Self’ or ‘Ceaseless Self-abidance.’ It can be further extrapolated to mean that Self-abidance is possible by renouncing certain things in life. The whole text deals with the things that are to be avoided for one to attain Selfhood: Ozhivil can also mean “by rejecting/removing/avoiding” as Ozhivu means “to reject/renounce/avoid.” Some of the major pitfalls that need to be avoided by those who are fit to receive Self-knowledge are surrendering to a pseudo-guru, the trap of a frivolous attitude towards cultivating detachment (vairagya), and desisting from worldly pursuits.

This quintessential Vedantic masterpiece is made up of ten chapters containing 253 verses in all, wherein the activities that are to be eschewed on the spiritual path are not only listed one by one but also are dealt with extensively in each chapter.

The first chapter deals with the teachings in general and offers important hints for distinguishing the real Sadguru from a pseudo-guru. The second chapter explains different methods of teachings
to suit the four categories of disciples who are in different stages of spiritual evolution. In the third chapter, the fact that action (karma) and its consequences can only bring sorrow and never Liberation (mukti) is stressed. In the fourth chapter, the highest truth that mukti is possible only through Vedantic enquiry by diving deep within oneself and not by performing years of prayers (puja), mantra japa, idol worship, miracles (siddhis), and philanthropic activities is forcefully dwelt upon. In the fifth chapter, it is expounded that the only way to mukti is to give up the ‘ego’ and not mortify the body unintelligently or tax it too mindlessly. In the sixth chapter, the importance of ‘inner renunciation’ is emphasized. The seventh chapter explains that reducing external material comforts also carries legitimate significance in the path towards attainment of mukti. The eighth chapter explains the qualities of those who have attained Self-realisation. The ninth chapter states that grihastas, i.e., householders who are immersed in worldly activities, are not disqualified from attaining mukti and that Self has no such distinctions. The tenth chapter deals extensively with the state of Self-hood.

Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar excels in the art of lucidly explaining tough, intricate Vedantic truths with unconventional and often mind-blowing examples.

In Verse 47, he says that even though akasha (the sky) is fully saturated with vayu (wind), it is only when the wind stands still that the presence of akasha is recognized; when the wind blows, akasha is forgotten. Likewise, when all the activities of the jivatma (individual soul) subside, Paramatma (Self) manifests in full effulgence and is recognized. Hence, all abhyasa (practice) is to still the mind and make it thought-free, so that Self-consciousness becomes palpable. By this example, the author also indicates that Self is not sunya (void) but full of Consciousness, even as the akasha is not empty but is filled with vayu in the terrestrial atmosphere.

In Verse 87, the author says that the jnani, once realized, is never perturbed by ignorance again. To illustrate this, he counter-questions, in his example, as to whether the vast sky will get frightened and seek shelter in the kitchen if attacked by a typhoon, however powerful it may be.
In Verse 124, the author repeats that only through Vedantic enquiry can one attain mukti and never by any other means like puja, mantra japa, or dana (philanthropic activities) in spite of any number of years indulged in them. He adds that such activities are like assuming that Agni, the God of Fire who devours and consumes everything, has developed indigestion and so a ginger decoction has to be administered to him; or that Agni has developed bouts of severe cold and so must be covered with a hay stack to keep him warm; and having done these things, one starts weeping inconsolably for not having done these things more promptly! The author says that this is like purifying water by using water itself as one does not have anything else to purify it with, and he exhorts the seeker that, having let his ignorance reach its limit, it is better to give up all monotonous, lifeless, routine rituals and start Vedantic enquiry about oneself immediately without wasting any further time.

The author says in Verse 29 that names and forms will automatically drop away if one attains Self-knowledge; this is because the sense of ‘me’ (first person), ‘you’ (second person) and ‘God’ (third person) is totally absent in the jnani. When this is the reality, he questions, how is it possible to narrow down the Self to the third person in the form of Lord Siva or Isvara?

This one verse in the entire text is sufficient to explicitly bring out the Suvaanubhava (experiential knowledge of Self) of Sri Kannudaiya Vallalar. For, in spite of having attained mukti through his chosen deity, Lord Siva, by the grace of his Sadguru, Tirugnanasambandhar, he is bold enough to declare that ‘Self’ alone remains in Self-hood (kaivalya sthiti) and nothing else, even if it comes to his chosen, personal God.2

Conclusion

It may not be out of place to state that both Vedanta and Saiva-Siddhanta point out the one and only non-dual Consciousness as the final goal of human life. However, the difference lies in their

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2 The penultimate verse of the celebrated text Advaita Makaranda of Lakshmidhara Kavi echoes this idea: upashanta jagat-jiva sishyacharya Isvara bhramam,/ anadyantam svatasiddham paripurnam aham mahah.
approaches. The Saiva-Siddhanta way of instruction is to order and command like that of a king’s ruling. But Vedanta’s approach is like a friend, to persuade, cajole, suggest and to shape the very thinking process in the right direction. Such differences can be clearly discerned in the verses of Ozhivil Odukkam. Thirupurur Chidambaram Swami’s commentary is an indispensable boon to sincere seekers, for without it, it would have been well nigh impossible to understand this intricate Vedantic text.

It is said that the jnani’s words have tremendous power. They call it vaaksakti, as the words of jnani never go waste like that of the ordinary mortals. In the present case, it is the power of Sri Bhagavan’s words that have worked all through these eighty-odd years with ever increasing intensity, for it is most likely that Sri Bhagavan would have originally made his comments to Sri Muruganar in the years between 1926 to 1930.

His prophetic words were the motivating factor for the author of this article to undertake a popular commentary in simple Tamil based on Sri Bhagavan’s teachings. Due to His Grace, the Tamil manuscript was ready by November 2009 and Smt. T.R. Kanakamma went through the entire commentary before she attained the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan on 1 January 2010. She was delighted that such a good commentary was to come out.

Sri Vidwan H. Vaidyanathan, under whose tutelage the present author learnt Sri Muruganar’s works and who was the direct student of Tamizh Thaathaa Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, the legendary savant, went through the commentary with meticulous care and suggested many useful improvements that were implemented.3

Thus was unearthed and brought to light one of the ancient Vedantic texts, said to be some 700 years old, by Sri Bhagavan’s powerful words and Grace.

Aum Sri Ramanarpanamasthu

3 The book was formally released on Sri Bhagavan’s 60th Aradhana day on April 18th 2010, in Chennai by Sri La Sri Nachiappa Gnana Desika Swamigal, pontiff of Koviloor Adheenam. Copies are available in Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot for Rs150/-. 
The Grace of Arunachala Siva

Anna Du Chesne

It has been said that the work of healing is often the work of narration. With this thought in mind I have written my story, my memories of a major accident, treatment and my return to Tiruvannamalai. These events were borne from devotion and love. The manifestation of the Self through love is what has given me strength. This love has been selflessly given by those who knew me either little or not at all. It is this simplicity of giving, of time, thoughts, prayers and even blood that has helped me become stronger and kept my hopes light and full. I have been shown that the heart of a true sadhaka shines forth in coming to the aid of another through the gift of selfless service.

A few minutes past 5 am, on a Tuesday in February 2010, I left my room with the intention of meeting my friends for pradakshina of the holy mountain Arunachala. A few days previously I had

Anna first came to Arunachala eleven years ago. She is interested in the role of spirituality on health and wellbeing. She lives in Australia.
organized this walk as I wanted to share some time with two very dear friends, Purnima and Ryan. I had set the time, the date and the meeting place, something I had never done before. It is only now in retrospect that it seems as if the drama was being written then. A few days before I had moved into the ashram, celebrated my 40th birthday and mahasivaratri by walking around the mountain barefoot chanting the Mrtyunjaya mantra! I had begun to make plans to settle and make a home at the foot of my beloved mountain. And yet I still felt something empty inside me. There was a persistent sadness and a longing for union, connection and love. I felt distant, separate and alone. The night before the accident my thoughts were heavy and I walked around Bhagavan's samadhi feeling impelled to walk one more time as if asking for a blessing to keep me safe, just in case.

Leaving my room took a few moments longer than usual, still half asleep after a restless night, I forgot my key and then had to go back again for water. I made my way out of the library compound, towards the ashram gates, thinking of the coming walk and feeling the coolness of the morning. As I walked past the Dakshinamurti shrine I did pranaam, requesting a blessing.

The following moments are a blur. My head still cloudy with sleep, I heard a loud sound behind me. This is not unusual in India as often the roadsides are full of screaming horns and rattling lorries. I turned slowly to see what the commotion was, impelled by some sense on the street, from others who were also walking. I turned to face the centre of the road.

In the next moment I found myself on the ground and everything that followed happened slowly and simultaneously...

**Me on the ground**

Fireworks! The electrical power board is hit and it is as if it is diwali! The visual impact of the flashing lights, the aural impact of the screaming sizzling wires initially superseded the physical.

Sitting in the dirt on the side of the road, slowly coming to realise what was happening, it was as if this was God/ Shiva/ Swami's way of announcing this super real moment in my life.
My instant reaction was to get up, to stand on my own two feet and move on. I placed my hands on the ground to lift myself up, to stand up. It was only then that I realised the intensity of the situation. I looked down at my leg and I knew. I knew that my life would never be the same again. I knew that I would lose my leg. This strong inner knowing broke through the chaos and confusion. It was then that I looked at my sweet hill of grace, Oh Arunachala! I think I may even have smiled. It was as if I knew I was caught. I knew I had been bitten. I saw the mountain shining down on me. I may have laughed and said to myself – “Well, you wanted something? You were looking for love? You want to grow? Well WAKE UP!....BOOM!!! What are you teaching me dearest mountain?” I remembered the previous evening’s parayana, in which I had joined with others singing of my love for the mountain and bemoaning my fate as a prisoner bound by this love. This silent roar from the mountain would keep me connected and open to what was to come.

Me on the ground

“Help!” The lessons began now. Never wanting to ask people for anything, never wanting to cause bother and priding myself on my independence, my first impulse was to simply move on, on my own. It was only after the few seconds of shock, and silent communication with the mountain, that reality took her firm grasp on me and I cried out “Help!”. I think I began to scream. The pain started to get very real and I became scared, realizing I was helpless. That such a strong impulse (to look after myself) had been torn from me was what struck me the deepest. I need other people! I had to call for help. Due to my great love and respect for the people who work in the ashram, my heart turned to them. I called out “Ramana Ashram! Get the ashram people!” or some such thing as I was afraid I would be left. I did not know who was already there and already looking after me...

From here I believe the love started to flow. Again it was the mountain speaking to me, “You wanted love? Well here it comes!”. I felt that through tearing off my leg, love was able to flow. I am not sure from where it came but it came. People started to appear.
A man who owns the fruit stand opposite the ashram gates came and cradled me, letting me place my weight on him as he supported my back. It was so dark that the faces who appeared were a blur. A few I recognized in the small crowd at the ashram gates: the young boys from the *veda patashala*, Divakar who runs the supermarket across the road, Sri Sundaram, the ashram president, others whom I did not know well enough to name. A devotee whom I had recently met, came and sat beside me. She took my hand and repeated gently, “You are going to be ok! You are going to live!” My friend Ryan appeared and it was such relief to see him. Finally my friend Purnima appeared, with her presence I felt I could relax a little, as I knew she would do everything that was needed to keep me safe.

*Me on the ground*

Pain! In the moment there was pain that is difficult to describe, pain that took my breath away, pain that took me out of my body so that the only way I could comprehend it was to float above myself watching, dissecting and dissociating myself from the physical body. In these moments there was a great awareness of the nature of the body as a vessel or a shell, nothing more. And then BOOM! the pain would wrack though my body and my mind would again be overcome. I would swing back to observing. I was thinking, “Well, this is it! Here is my chance to really observe, to examine the pain of the body and see where it comes from.” I repeated to myself, “I am not this pain, this pain is not me. There is just pain...” And then Bang! I would be back deep in the mind of the pain.

In the moments my mind detached itself from the body, my thoughts became enormous. I was only able to understand or relate at a deep universal level. I felt such overwhelming compassion for all those who must experience this pain. I was struck by the injustice of it. I felt nothing of myself. I could only use my experience to feel and understand the horror that is senselessly inflicted on others. It was as if I had a deep insight into the minds, emotions and hearts of so many, as if I were linked into their suffering. Why must others,
victims of war or land mines experience this? How is it possible that this kind of pain is experienced by so many soldiers, innocent civilians, animals...

Finally the ambulance came and the commotion continued. There was no stretcher initially and as they were attempting to lift me I had to instruct them to bring something to lift my leg. I was fearful as they seemed ready to just throw me onto the stretcher without a thought for the lower leg that was barely connected to the rest of me. I was reminded of a teacher of mine who once told a story of a woman in a terrible situation. She maintained her peace of mind by directing the attackers, telling them how the event was to be handled. I remained conscious throughout this event as I too wanted to ensure that this horror would be my responsibility.

I think the worst part of the whole morning was lying in Tiruvannamalai hospital. I can clearly remember the pain, coming in crashing waves. The shock and nausea was made worse by not trusting that I was in the right place and then not quite believing what was happening. I was also feeling annoyed and agitated by the overly curious people in the waiting room where I was left. I have a strong image of lying on the stretcher in what seemed like a waiting room. The walls were green and it was dark. I could not move for the pain and had been left, pushed to the side of the room, near a corridor. The people in the waiting room began to come and peer at me. I remember moaning and just wishing they would all go away and leave me alone. All I wanted was to retreat, to disappear, to go into hiding. I remember biting Purnima’s hand in an effort to quell the pain. I remember the dissociation I was experiencing in my mind and my body. And yet, in spite of this tremendous fear and pain, I felt the presence of the mountain. I remember knowing God was with me and realizing that God never leaves. Those moments of silent communication had calmed the core of my mind. I had no concept of what was to come yet I knew God was with me. In the worst moments I found myself chanting “OM nama shivaya!”, over and over in an effort to further calm my mind and to call on his grace to help me through this torment.
When I arrived at the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore I was even telling the nurses not to throw away my clothes, that I would not need a ventilator and making sure my mother was called. In the first few days at the hospital, I did not really care or understand what was happening. It may have been the morphine or it may have been the shock of the intensity of the situation. The fuse box fireworks for me seemed to be the visual equal of my emotional impact. I was lost somewhere in another world. My visitors were so concerned for my wellbeing that I was delighted to see them. I never felt much sadness at my situation and was often more concerned for the plight of others. At the same time as my amputation was to take place a woman was brought into the HDC. There had been a terrible road accident and her husband and child had died. As I lay waiting for my operation I could hear her inconsolable wailing! My heart went out to her...I had just lost part of my leg and yet she had lost her whole family.

Finally the time came for the amputation and I was again blessed to have my eldest sister with me. Her love for me, coupled with her training as a clinical psychologist, provided me with the firmest foundation of emotional support imaginable. In preparation for this major operation we sat for a few minutes praising and honouring my beautiful left leg. We spoke about the joy I felt feeling sand between my toes, diving off rocks into the ocean, the freedom my foot had given me and the great distances this foot had taken me – the sights I had seen!

The operation was very long and traumatic. I woke up in ICU in terror as I had had hallucinogenic nightmares of running, climbing and moving about with two legs. These dreams were so real that upon waking at 2am I became quite hysterical and started to go into shock. My sister was called and I fell into her arms crying, “I don’t know what is real anymore! I don’t know what is real anymore!”

The final operation was the worst. The heat was unbearable and as with all the previous operations I was not allowed to drink water or take any food for hours beforehand. My sister came with me and I was lead through the maze that is CMC. We arrived at the theatre and had to wait in the corridor. I still had the memory of the previous three
operations in my mind and was scared that there would be more pain. I closed my eyes and meditated. As I calmed my mind, I imagined angels holding me, sweet doves with the eyes of love of Ramana. I went to God, and felt God holding me, soothing me in the heat...

The doctors and nurses who cared for me were incredible. I feel very fortunate to have had such a professional and experienced team of doctors looking after me. One of the senior doctors admired my pictures of Ramana that had been put up in my room. He told me of his recent visit to Tiruvannamalai and his day spent in the ashram. Again, I realized here was God looking after me. As the CMC is a Christian hospital the nurses would sing hymns of Christ in the morning. Before every operation they would stand around me and pray for a ‘safe’ result.

People were so generous with their time and energy. A relay of people gladly came from Tiruvannamalai to give blood.

In the days after the operation and my return to Australia I found the intensity of the love continued to flow. Below are some entries from my diary and from letters received and sent.

In a letter from Purnima I received this:

‘This is from Chandra Shekhar (Dr Murthi’s friend)...’

“Never the less the events that happened to Ms Anna is not mysterious at least to me because in the Bhagavad Gita Krishna has said that he would indeed go to any extent, including ruining the life of someone who is dear to Him. In so many saint’s lives He has come to accept them by similar means of diverting them to Him by giving them troubles. If some such thing should happen to a devotee who was planning to go for a pradakshina that too early in the morning certainly it is only a blessing though it may look different in the eyes of others....”

More from Letters and Diary

4th March to Rose:

“I believe that this event is a blessing, a kiss from Siva, waking me up to my true nature and bringing me closer and closer into the
Heart. I would love to speak with you and hear any wisdom you may be willing to share with me.

“I am learning that nothing is certain and I have no idea of what is to come – so I can only focus on what is happening right now... liberating really!”

12th March to Ryan:
“Some of these images that kept me going...
“I will write again with a list of things I want you to do, like listen to a peacock for me, gaze at the monkeys being naughty and smile as the ghee is poured on your rice at lunch...the glance upwards at the hill...magnificent green against the soft blue.”

14th March:
“... in these moments no predictions or reflections of past or future make much impact...nothing can be as great or as real as what is happening in my life right now! Every day is uncertain and fresh, the pains come and go, sleep comes and goes...being so still I must sit and observe my friends and family as they rush in and out of my view from the couch…”

”Emotionally I am pretty numb, I have not yet cried or felt much sadness over the loss and the chaos of the accident. There is such a feeling of perfection about all this – as if it COULD NOT BE ANY OTHER WAY – that sadness seems impossible. I feel held, loved and cared for...which allows stillness and surrender to unfold sweetly. I have never been at a place in my life where I have known less about what is to come – before I always had an (often fear filled) image of possible future events – and now? I really don’t know...and as a result there is no fear! I project and plan for difficulty – learning to walk again, falling over, possible pain of the prosthesis? but really I don’t know...YEAH! it is good not to know.”

23rd March to Thomas:
“...I feel like cutting off the lower leg (it’s really just a 1/4! – about 10cm below my knee) was like cutting open a reservoir or spring of LOVE – people from all over the world have sent me love, blood,
flowers, friendship...and I am learning to receive, to be gracious and invite this in...

“I will slowly begin to learn how to walk again, find my balance...I feel as though all the years of yoga, meditation, self-enquiry and observation are my strength now – now I must use them as I begin to swim...many of the old mind games and crazy insecurities that kept me small have completely been blown up, destroyed – this is the joy of this madness! Now I see what is really important...”

5th April to Clive and Miranda:
“I have been overwhelmed by the grace of a very very dear group of friends – so much support! so much kindness! This whole event really has brought me to my knees...in truth I am humbled and find myself at the beginning of a frustrating yet beautifully essential opening and LETTING GO!!!!

“It is incredible how many beliefs and concepts are falling away – those that keep me fearful and doubting are losing their grip! How can this not be grace. So there is joy in this madness...even living in Sydney!”

23rd April to Ryan:
“When I read your letters I am instantly with Arunachala, thank you. I am crying – it is obviously Arunachala tapping my heart open....”

17th May:
“This step on the spiritual path is all about stillness...this stillness being reflected in an acceptance of what IS!!!!!!! How wonderful: No grasping, comparing, wishing or hoping for difference – rather a peace filled stillness in the present...

“So challenging!!!!”

30th May to Purnima:
“When I really think about (returning to TVM) I get a little scared and am aware that I still ‘jump’ whenever I hear a truck bang past me – if I am inside or on the street...so there is still work to be done on releasing some of the trauma that I am holding onto...A thought just occurred to me – I am living my life like a person practising a
Mountain Path

Walking meditation – awareness, awareness, awareness...step by step...the destination is no longer my focus...

7th June to David:
“I am doing very well, walking around on my new leg – still a little clumsy and using crutches. The doctors are all amazed at my determination and fast recovery. I tell them that it is because I have so much love in my life, so many wonderful people who have shown me friendship....thank you!”

19th June to Bobbie:
“Ahhhh...a day does not go by in which my heart flies to Tiru....And you are there!!! I think of walking around the mountain with you...resting (because I am learning to slow down!) on the rocks...sitting under the mountain.”

5th August to Gita:
“I am walking with such ease that I am often surprised and laugh at the simplicity of my mind – that forgets the trauma, the frustration and the difficulty it once faced. I have found enduring love and support from all my friends, family and colleagues. A day does not go by in which I am not greeted by friends and acquaintances delighted to see me and thrilled at my recovery! How lucky am I!!!!”

Mountain Path

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

31/03/2011

April - June
I first heard of Sri Bhagavan in 1957 when during a Hatha Yoga practice I was enveloped by a strong voice that came out of nowhere, strongly calling ‘Who Am I?’. I was startled and bewildered, not knowing what to make of such a strange occurrence. Shortly afterwards a train of events speedily led me to the Gurdjieff Society in London, where I remained until 1968. Then, feeling a need for a living Master, I followed until 1979 J. Krishnamurti, who was at the time teaching in various places around the world. The ‘Who Am I?’ experience happened twice subsequently, and I had discovered by this time that this phrase was the core teaching of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. One day when I looked at his compassionate photograph, the portrait seemed to say, “At last you are ready for me!”. I had now been cooked by the Master. From 1979 I threw myself whole-heartedly into Sri Bhagavan’s teachings, for which I shall be eternally grateful. It seemed

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to me to be a miracle and one for which I have no explanation except that it was the greatest grace that can ever happen to a human being.

Recently I was approached by the Indian publisher Gautam Sachdeva of Yogi Impressions, whom I knew personally, to write a brief biography of Sri Bhagavan Ramana for a series he was preparing of Great Spiritual Masters. After obtaining our President’s permission to proceed, I gratefully accepted his request.

The challenge that was clearly facing me was how to write a brief biography that came from a different stance than the many biographies of Sri Bhagavan already in print. I decided beyond any doubt that Sri Bhagavan was a ‘Supreme Guru’ for this age.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is now universally regarded as a great world teacher and is admired and regarded and quoted as the ultimate authority when it comes to questions of Advaita Vedanta.

“Tradition proclaims that every thousand or more years, a Supreme Guru, of the highest calibre, appears on this planet to set a new agenda for the coming millennium. This is Divine Grace, to assist all those perplexed men and women trapped in samsara – the endless cycle of suffering births and rebirths – and wishing to wake up and free themselves from this bondage.

“The revered Adi Shankara was the last to fulfil this historic mission in the years between the 7th and 8th centuries AD. He clarified the eternal principles residing in highest teaching of Advaita Vedanta which, when applied, leads to Self-Realisation. In his commentaries on Vyasa’s Brahma Sutras, he lucidly codified the ancient Non-dual Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge into a systematic form, easy for assimilation by the men and women of his day, and in the days to come. Now Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has appeared, upholding the teaching of Shankara, but bringing certain important innovations for this current millennium and the generations to come.

“Primarily, the Maharshi has made the great secret of Self-Enquiry or Atma Vichara easier and brought it into the open, making it readily available for all, and not kept as a secret to be revealed only to the initiated brahmin pupils of traditional gurus. Sri Bhagavan let his teaching encompass the Western world, as well as Asia, which it naturally did, leading to his being recognised as a true Jagadguru, the World Teacher.
“The Maharshi was able to transmit his Jnana of Non-dual, Self-knowledge through Silence – a rare spiritual power, following the precedent set by the divine primeval Guru, Lord Dakshinamurti, who is deemed a manifestation of Lord Shiva. He could readily converse with birds and animals, a unique gift possessed by only a few saints.

“He also lived an impeccable life without any trace of blemish on his noble character, and was a veritable ocean of love, devotion, wisdom and compassion to all who came into his orbit.

“By his ineffable presence and Teaching, he created a global renaissance of interest in the high doctrines of Advaita Vedanta. He started a wild forest fire that is remorselessly burning down much of the dense forest of samsara that is trapping mankind”.1

I was very pleased when the President approved the content of the book. It is my firm belief that a mere sixty years since Sri Bhagavan’s Mahasamadhi, we are seeing only the beginning of the wide global interest and application of his teachings.

I also decided to include the famed ‘Who Am I?’ series of questions as recorded by Sivaprakasam Pillai, as I believed this dialogue was at the very centre of his teaching and should be studied by all who read the book. I included as a novel feature some of my own poetry, giving the main teachings of Sri Bhagavan in a Corona of Sonnets along with a versification of Ganapati Muni’s Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Bhagavan. I felt this was justified since Bhagavan was a natural poet, loved poetry and wrote his main teachings in poetic form. I also felt that any gift that I may have as a poet was due to his Grace.

The strongest impression I received by writing about Sri Bhagavan was a reinforcement of his undoubted greatness as one of the most important spiritual masters ever to appear on this planet since Adi Shankara, and the overpowering grace of his magnificent teaching of Devotional Surrender to Bhagavan, as Sat-Guru in one’s spiritual heart, along with his unique AtmaVichara, which when both are applied with persistence and determination, gracefully lead one to Liberation.

Ma’s statement that at Her birth “with gaze upward I saw the Void.”

In the Taittiriya Upanishad we read: *atmanah akashah sambhutah* (2.1) – From Atman emerged space – the Void. Here the Upanishad does not speak of creation, but of revelation and perception. The Atman did not *create* the space, but *revealed* and *perceived* it. And exactly this happened in the case of Mother. Before Her was revealed and perceived the Void – the empty space.

There is another significance of this first perception. The space here does not stand for the physical element, viz. ‘ether’, but for the vast screen of empty consciousness upon which the future drama was
to be enacted; for the mirror in which the Divine was to see His face in manifold ways; for the playground where the Infinite was to play the role of so many finites. “Within the Infinite lies the finite and in the finite – infinity. He Himself, the One Who is the Self, stages a play with Himself,” says Sri Anandamayi Ma.¹ This vision of Ma gives a meta-cosmic insight and meaning to the theories of creation.

In succession was seen “the tree with its leaves and branches”. The vision of Sri Ma mysteriously refers to “the tree and leaves whose roots are above and branches below, and whose leaves are the Vedas.”² Thus they were the Vedas which were revealed to Ma with Her very birth, a fact which makes the descent divine. Janma karma ca me divyam – “Divine are my birth and action,” says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.³ The Vedas are regarded as the source and fountain of all knowledge. Thus one may conclude that Sri Anandamayi Ma seeing “a tree with its leaves and branches” at the moment of Her birth really means that She possessed all knowledge since the moment of Her birth; that there was no need of learning from outside. This fact we find exemplified in Her later life when we see Her answering most spontaneously the most difficult questions related to philosophy and other branches of knowledge without any outward learning.

“She was throughout Her life,” rightly observes Richard Lannoy, a scholar from the West, “the acme of effortless perfection.”⁴

Now when one reflects upon these two primal events of Ma’s birth and taking them together, one becomes wonderstruck to discover that through such a simple, though uncommon statement She was in fact revealing the secret of Vedic wisdom as expressed in the Vedas themselves:

“In the Supreme Void (Parama Vyoma) resides all the Vedas and the Gods. The one who does not know this Void, of what avail are the mantras to him? Only they who know it are established in That.”⁵

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¹ Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma, p. 125.
² Bhagavad Gita, 15.1.
³ Ibid., 4.9.
⁴ As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance, Forward, p.VII.
⁵ Rig Veda 1.164. 49, Atharva Veda 9.15.18.
In this context we find a very striking conversation between Ma and a devotee recorded by Sri A.K. Dutta.6

Devotee: Mother, I want to know all the secrets of Creation. How can it be possible?

Mother: To know all the mysteries of Creation you have to enter into and become one with the Supreme Void.

From the above descriptions of Her life we reach two important conclusions that are helpful in forming Her philosophy. First, that it is possible for Void to exist in the Supreme. Thus Reality in its very nature proves to be a paradox of Being and Non-Being both. Second, the vision of a tree with its leaves is also suggestive of a philosophical truth that the Supreme Reality is ‘One and Infinite’. When we look at a tree, it seems to be one, yet the same one is seen in multiplicity when we take notice of the branches and the leaves. Thus substantially ‘one and many’ represent one and the same Truth.

The problem of ‘one’ and ‘many’; of ‘unity’ and ‘diversity’ is as old as philosophy itself and we shall deal with it in a later chapter. Here in this chapter our main task is to illustrate those revelations of Ma’s early life that can make our understanding of philosophical truths more real as they are not truths based upon conceptual reasoning but are direct realizations and perceptions. Perception is always of greater significance than conception. “What I conceive does not carry the same weight of validity as what I perceive”, say the wise.

The Void of which the Vedas and Upanishads7 speak and which was revealed to Sri Anandamayi Ma stands for a state of consciousness in which lie all things in potential form, yet to manifest. Ma’s experience of Void thus refers to the experience of this ‘Primordial Consciousness’.8

This Primordial Consciousness is the source of all knowledge-omniscience, the source of all power-omnipotence, and the source of all-pervasiveness-omnipresence.

6 In Association with Sri Ma Anandamayi.
7 See Svetasvatara Upanishad, 4.8.
8 The reference to this potential and primary consciousness we find in the Brahma Sutra, 1.1.2.) and also Pratyabhijna-Sutram (Sutra 1 and 2).
Here it is necessary, however, to note that there is a difference in the consciousness with which man is born, and the consciousness with which the Divine descends on earth. The main difference lies in the fact that the consciousness with which man is born is always conditioned by ‘avidya, kama and karma’ – i.e. ignorance, desire and actions; and this being the case, man’s consciousness is always restricted and limited to man’s own selfish being. The Divine, on the other hand, descends with a consciousness which is wholly unconditioned, eternally free from all restrictions and limitations, and as such infinite, pure, all-pervading and all-inclusive. It is the egoless and no-mind state of Pure Being. The life of Sri Anandamayi Ma from the very moment of Her birth until the end of the play, revealed such an egolessness that it was clear right from an onlooker’s first impression. There were many to witness this uncommon purity reflected in Her being. To quote a few:

“Here I was suddenly confronted with a human being of whom I felt that She had no ‘I’ anymore.”

“It is impossible to describe Her with a subjective mind. To each one She means something different according to how our limited ego minds allow us to glimpse the whole that is such an egoless Being.”

“She does not exhibit what is normally considered ego-consciousness. No personal likes or dislikes, cravings or aversion are apparent. She is totally devoid of fear and anger…entirely free from any conditioning.”

The state of consciousness which is free from ego or the sense of individuality has moral, theological and metaphysical value. A person possessing this consciousness cannot do harm to others as he realises his oneness with everything. Again, such a person becomes the abode of God and his actions are no more directed by his little selfish ego, but by God Himself. For God to act, the person must be totally empty. It, the mind, must have nothing, it must be nothing.

“…if God wants to act in the soul, He Himself must be the place in which He acts…” says Meister Ekhart, the great medieval Master.

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9 *Mother As Seen By Her Devotees*, – Melita Meschmann, p. 73.
10 Ibid., – Ethel Merston, p. 57.
11 Ibid., – Alexander Lipski. p. 33.
of Europe. It is the secret of the mystical life that when the self or the mind gives up its own egoistic life, it enters into the larger life of the spirit. As Jesus Christ put it, “He who loses his life shall find it.”

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Sri Anandamayi Ma attaches great importance to truthfulness and purity in mind, speech and action. According to Her, “God is Truth and as such He cannot be found by false means.” Truth and falsity cannot go together. For Her, purity in its highest sense is also the Truth – that which IS. On the relative plane whatever aids towards the realization of Truth or God is called pure, and whatever retards this progress is termed impure. Till the vision of Oneness of Truth dawns, every ethical injunction has a relative and preparatory value. On the other hand, Ma also said, “Fundamentally purity and impurity are of the mind. There is only one Atman. Filth and sandal paste are both manifestations of the One; there is neither purity nor impurity.”

The entire emphasis of Sri Ma’s teaching is upon the realization of Truth which is one. She repeatedly tells us, “We must reach the state where we know the One alone, and everything as His form. There is only one Brahman without a second, (ekam brahma dvitiyam nasti).”

A multitude of times the question was put to Her, “How can we lead a purposeful life?” And every time Her response was the same, “By contemplating the Self, one will find out how to make one’s life purposeful. It is man’s sovereign duty to aspire to Self-Realization.”

To conclude Her instructions to seekers of Truth:

“At every single moment, try to be aware of Him, for have you not chosen this path to dedicate your lives to Him? Therefore, when speaking, speak of Him; when thinking, think of Him; when listening, listen to His words or to what is said about Him. Further, try each one of you, to keep a diary, so as to check your mind from turning outward. This may also make you watchful and help you in your striving. Those who are pilgrims on the path must develop great inner strength, energy, mobility and swiftness, so that their lives may become beautiful; to fill their lives with a new current. It will not do to sit and ride in a rickety, jolting bullock cart! At all times,
the mind must be intensely vigorous, energetic and alert – then only can you forge ahead with great speed. Remember that every person has to mould his or her own life. Accept cheerfully whatever He may bestow on you or take away from you.

“By constant practice one finally achieves. At what moment He will grace us with His touch, lies with Him; our duty is to continue to invoke Him without interruption. Enough time has been spent in wandering hither and thither aimlessly, leaving the Path in order to enjoy the sights of the world. Now all one’s time should, as far as possible, be spent in the attempt to find one’s Self. Vain and idle talk is of no benefit and only prevents one from advancing towards Him – it is but an obstacle to one’s efforts. Ages and ages have been wasted in this way. Now friend, return to your real home! By lingering on the way you only prolong the agony of troubles and difficulties that have to be endured on the pilgrimage. Ever remember that one who is eager to advance towards Him and practises His Name and His Presence progresses no matter what his condition may be. To say, ‘I do not feel His response’ and thereby to take pleasure in mundane things can never be for one’s good; always bear this in mind.

“Do not pay attention to the shortcomings of others, but try to discover their positive qualities, remembering that it is your way of looking at things (namely finding fault with people) that causes you pain.

“All these difficulties are due to your own karma. In God’s creation the results of one’s actions have to be enjoyed and suffered to the minutest detail. Everything is His dispensation. You will have to find Truth! Always bear in mind that you have to exhaust all kinds of karma and that He is thereby cleansing you to make you fit to be united with Him.

“Everyone has his own way. When one’s problems are made more acute, one feels disturbed and thereby one’s search will be intensified. Before thread can be spun and woven into cloth the pod in which the cotton was enclosed has first to be broken and entirely destroyed. To prepare oneself really means to uproot completely the sense of ‘I’.”
Nabaji called out, “O sages, whose minds are always absorbed in the contemplation of the lotus feet of the Lord! Are you listening to this wonderful tale?”

“Vithoba, who had attained the rare Knowledge of the Self which is not within the reach of siddhas and devotees, engrossed in bliss, losing consciousness of the external world and always inclined towards austerities, was soon bewitched by the beauty and play of the children and was tied by the cord of attachment. It is indeed difficult even for Jnanis to cross the ocean of delusion! Rukmabai travelled back and forth between the town and forest to collect the wherewithal from her father for the household to feed her beloved family.

Six years passed in this way. Rukmabai came to know that her father’s wealth had been exhausted; he had fallen on hard times and taken to the begging bowl. She told Vithoba, “Swami, my father has been reduced to the state of penury and become a mendicant on my
account. Hereafter, we will not be able to support our children living in the forest. Let us return to the town to earn our livelihood.”

Vithoba, suddenly realizing that his attachment had taken him away from his chosen path of spiritual life, seized upon the opportunity just as making hay while sun shines and suggested to Rukmabai tactfully, “O noble woman, you should certainly shift to the town and live in comfort with the children. I will stay back in the forest.”

Taken aback by this reply, Rukmabai said, “Has anyone ever heard of a married woman living away from her husband? What has made you say this? Is it your love for a meditative life or something else? This problem of separation has now sprung up because of the children. Let me leave them in the care of my parents and return to you.”

Now it was Vithoba’s turn to become wordless. However, intending to run into the jungle for solitude soon after Rukmabai turned her back, he said to her, “Beloved woman, make haste and come back soon.”

Pleased with her husband’s reply, Rukmabai left for her parents’ place. Rejoicing on her departure, Vithoba thought to himself, “Let me get out of this samsara which has blindfolded me to the Reality. It is the most opportune time when she is away just as the deity of the temple comes to give darshan when one is setting out to visit the temple.”

Not wanting to lose this precious opportunity, he left the hut which they had set up on the outskirts. Lo, suddenly he was overpowered by affection for the children and retraced his steps. Once again, dispassion took hold of him. Now, he went forward resolutely. Alas, soon he was back at the hut thinking of his family. Torn between attachment for the children on the one hand and the pull of renunciation on the other, he walked back and forth between the hut and the mountaintop several times. He was in turmoil for a long time. Ultimately his deluded mind attained clarity and became dead to worldly desires. With a firm resolve and detached mind, he reached the hill top and sat down for meditation, singing adoration to the Guru. Restraining the senses, withdrawing the mind into the subtle intellect, obliterating the egoism, gaining the thought-free state, setting fire to the heaps of Agamiya, wiping out the Sanchita, transcending the Maya, Vithoba
became absorbed in the eternal Brahman like motionless picture and unflickering lamp.

Meanwhile, Rukmabai reached her house and leaving the children with her father, she said, “O dear parents, I am leaving these children under your custody. It is growing difficult to protect the children from the dangers in the forest.”

However, Sidhopant commented, “O crownjewel among chaste women! How can you and Vithoba bear the separation of these auspicious children who are born with the blessings of the Guru and power of your austerities? Can the children remain without their mother even for a moment? Why don’t you both come to live in the country? Will the children stay here peacefully without their parents?”

Rukmabai said, “My husband’s inclination towards meditation had become weakened as most of the time he was occupied with fending for the children, bringing fruits and roots, searching for water springs, protecting them from wild animals, etc. Growing weary of these activities and becoming detached from the bond of children, he has now asked me to leave them here. I should act according to my husband’s wish. Moreover, during my visit to the town, if he is lost in meditation in the forest, the lives of children may be threatened by wild animals. Let me make haste now.”

When she departed from the house, the children started running after her, weeping all the way and clinging to her desperately. It was a heart-rending scene. Rukmabai’s dilemma was equally pathetic. Though she walked a few steps, unable to control her maternal love, she came running back to the children and hugged them closely. This act of going back and forth went on for some time. The onlookers ridiculed Rukmabai, saying her passion for her husband outweighed her motherly love. Her parents were also unhappy at the plight of the children. Citing the example of Damayanti, who followed her husband to the forest, leaving her children with her parents without fearing the slander of the world, Rukmabai made up her mind finally and left for the forest with tear-filled eyes and a heavy heart. Her agony can be compared only to the torment of ants trapped inside the bamboo, between both openings that had caught fire, leaving no route of escape for them.
To her consternation, she didn’t find her husband in the forest abode. Weeping bitterly, she sobbed, “O life of my life, I never even imagined that you would betray me like this! How did you have the heart to subject me to such trials? Why are you so pitiless towards me? Are you hiding yourself somewhere? Will I ever be rescued from misery in my life? Has any woman undergone such sufferings? What kind of sin I must have done to experience this fate?” Inconsolably, she wandered like a woman possessed for the whole night searching for her husband in the dense forest. Stung by poisonous insects, threatened by the howls and roars of wild animals, injured by thorny bushes over which she stumbled in the dark, her feet bruised by sharp stones, she spent the night in a distraught condition. With the first ray of dawn, she resumed her search. Drenched in tears, running around the groves and bushes, she asked the trees, birds, peacocks, and wild cats where they had seen her husband.

In the meantime, the children started growing restless when the mother did not return to them next day as promised. Sidhopant could not comfort them in any way. They refused to eat, drink or play. Hungering for the parents, Nivritti started towards the forest in search of them. The other three children, whose hearts were also aching for the company of their parents, followed Nivritti. Sidhopant and his wife hurried after them and talking consoling words, brought them back. Feeling sad that they were made to witness the play of such a cruel destiny, Sidhopant earnestly supplicated to the Lord, “O Lord, why are You putting these innocent children through such an ordeal? We are in a quandary. We don’t know how to tackle the situation and bring peace to the children. Won’t You bring Vithoba back to the children? How do we pacify them? Where is Your mercy?”

The deep sorrow of the grandparents, the yearning of the children and the pining of Rukmabai together generated the power to disturb the absorption of Vithoba sitting in the deep forest. Who can abide in peace when the Trimurtis and Adishakti are agitated? All of a sudden, the fountain of attachment for children gushed forth from within Vithoba. His abidance in the Undifferentiated State was broken and his mind came down to the plane of duality. Stricken with remorse and shedding copious tears at the thought of his children, he poured
out his grievance, “O Lord, why have You foiled all my attempts to
seek union with You from the beginning? Why have you staged these
dramatic turns in my life? You got me married first against my wish,
shattered my adoption of sannyas, then created the desire to live with
my wife and conferred four children on me when all I wanted was to
renounce this samsara all along?

“By Your will, my family was ostracized by the society. Now, You
have caused waves of attachment in my dispassionate heart. O my
beloved children, Nivritti, Jnaneshwar, Sopan and Muktabai, how
heartless I am to have deserted you, who are embodiments of love
and discrimination. Even at such tender age, you have displayed both
playfulness and ripeness of mind. What endless bliss your delectable
company had showered on me!”

In the midst of such lamentation, he would be overwhelmed by
dispassion and lapse into Samadhi. His state alternated between
attachment, remorse and dispassion. His heart crying for total freedom
on the one hand and seized by Moha on the other made him feel caged
and utterly miserable. After a period of intense struggle, with a clarity
born of deep contemplation ultimately, he realized that all events in
his life had been shaped by the unerring hand of the All-beneficent
Lord. In a spirit of unconditional surrender, he poured out his heart
in adoration of the Lord in 430 verses. At the end, a heavenly voice
was heard saying, “O Vithoba, on this day, all blemishes in your life
have been erased. You will attain the highest bliss. Whoever repeats
these verses of adoration will be blessed with the same good fortune
that I have bestowed on you now!”

Freed from all afflictions, desires and distractions, Vithoba swam in
the ocean of Eternal Delight. At this time, Rukmabai also reached him
after the day-long search and prostrated at his feet. Thereafter, Vithoba
came to reside in the abode at the edge of the forest. Rukmabai kept
shuttling between her husband and the children and spent her days
in great joy, unmindful of her inconvenience. Vithoba remained
steadfast in his wisdom.
April - June
Arunachala Purana

Chapter Two
The Holy Mountain

Saiva Ellappa Navalar
Translated by Robert Butler

Introduction
In the July-September 2007 edition of this magazine, an abridged translation of Chapter One of the Arunachala Purana, ‘The Holy City’, was printed. The introductory notes given there apply here also. As stated in that Introduction, the Arunachala Purana is a sthala Purana portraying the greatness of the holy hill Arunachala. The material is drawn in the main from the Arunachala Mahatmya, a section of Book I of the Sanskrit Skanda Purana, itself one of the eighteen major Puranas. It was written in the sixteenth century when it became popular to praise the greatness of specific sthalas, (holy places of worship and pilgrimage), usually in the vernacular (in this case, Tamil), and drawing on local myth and legend to elaborate the stories.

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has recently published a grammatical commentary on Ulladu Narpadu, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666.
At the end of Chapter I, Nandi, the head of Lord Siva’s army of attendants, has just given to Markandeya and the other rishis an account of the enduring glory of the Arunachala sthala. Markandeya now entreats him to tell the story of the origin of the mountain itself…

79 & 80. My Father! Most gracious Nandi! You who are always accessible to your devotees! My mind is overcome with joy on hearing of Aruna’s glory. Pray tell us now, O You who possess the great wealth which is to serve Kailash’s King, who is clad in the skin of a rutting elephant with its powerful trunk, how in that great city Lord Siva manifested in the form of fire, how later that fire became a mountain, and how Mal and Ayan suffered, seeking in vain, one the foot, the other the head of that mountain of fire, until the Lord afforded them his grace! To which Nandi replied:

81. Were a man to entertain in his mind the thought of going to that holy place to commit the five heinous sins, the thought of that place would prevail and the succour of final liberation would be his. Such is the pronouncement of the holy Vedas. For those who sweetly sing its praises, what reward might be too hard to win?

82. In telling this there is profit, not only for you who listen but for myself also. Now I shall tell as best I may how, for the good of Mal and Ayan, He who uproots sorrow and joy equally became a vast flame, growing upward till it pierced the very heavens, and then, how He took the form of the Bhoga Lingam.

In Verses 83-94 Nandi describes how, at the time of the universe’s dissolution, all creation is reabsorbed into Parashivam, from which in due course a new universe emanates once more. According to conventional Puranic wisdom, Brahma created the universe and the creatures within it, but only after he himself has evolved out of Visnu. Thus are sown the seeds sown of the argument over which of the two has primacy…

95. The Lord of the Vedas, seated upon a lotus blossom, surveyed his work, and became consumed with pride, thinking, ‘All this world
is my own creation.’ Rising in fury, he confronted Hari in his own city, intent on war with the One who wears a fair garland of tulsi leaves about which clouds of bees sweetly hum. Reviling him, he began to speak:

96. ‘It is I who made the seven upper and lower worlds, the seven clouds, seven oceans and seven principal mountains. Then, in order to create all living things according to their species, I brought forth out of my mind sons, the first of which was great Marichi.  

97. The children of these sons of mine are the Gods themselves with their priests, the Moon and Sun, the Sons of Danu, the Gandharvas, Kimpurushas, and Siddhas, the Chiefs of Siva’s Hosts, and with Indra at their head, the Guardians of the Eight Directions.

98. Forget your claim that you are the Supreme Being in whom nothing is lacking, and that I am your ‘Lotus-born’ son. Had I not created the world with my own hands, how might you then have been able to preserve it? How could a picture exist unless there were sound walls to paint it on?

99. If you do not abandon in your heart your arrogant claim to be the guardian of all things, I will call into existence another to take on this work of preservation. Therefore submerge yourself in the chilly ocean, and hide yourself there, before the hordes of my divine progeny come to dispatch you!

100. Through incurring the displeasure of the wise sage Bhrigu, you entered upon a series of ten incarnations. Do you not comprehend? Just look how my hands have been defiled in the creation of those very forms!

101. Do not insult me by saying that I am the One who was born from the lotus blossom in you navel! Formerly, you sprang into being

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1 At the time of the creation of the universe, Brahma first created ten sons, called Prajapatis, to help him with the work of creation, the first of whom was Marichi.
from a pillar. Are we to say that that pillar was your father? Or that it was you mother? Speak! When a bright red flame is kindled, it can consume the branch that gave it life, can you not see?’

102. These words of Brahma entered his ears, burning into him like a well-honed weapon, heated upon the fire. Smoke issued from the mouth of Visnu as he smiled bitterly, paused briefly in thought, then rebutted him in the following manner:

103. ‘You quite forget the manner in which you came to be. You overlook the fact that my navel is your own mother! Perhaps you spoke these words like a small child who believes that his father will be indulgent towards his misdeeds. However, this lack of respect is something I will not tolerate.

104. When they held me in contempt, the raging Madhu and the elephant-like Kaitabha, both I slew, even though they were my own children. After committing such a heinous sin, can a son remain a son? For who would hesitate to cut out the canker in his own body?

105. When the divine Madman, Lord Siva, tore off one of your heads and cast it aside, were you not powerless to restore it and make it your own again? What kind of Supreme Being are you? Is this the kind of power that will enable you to call into being this world which rests upon the hooded serpent, Adisheshan’s head?

106. Incarnating in the form of a fish, I recovered the entire corpus of the Vedas. Those wily Sons of Danu, I defeated and put to death. Even so, I am loath to slay you, just as one who has reared a poisonous tree might be loath to cut it down. However, it would be no great task for me to do so.’

2 Madhu and Kaitabha were two asuras (demons) born from the ear wax of Lord Vishnu, and eventually slain by him on account of their arrogance.
107. So many angry words flew back and forth from one to the other, as they angrily smacked each other’s shoulder with the flat of their hand. Rising up, they leapt down into the world of men, shrinking themselves down, then rising up tall again, shooting dense streams of fire and sparks from their narrowed eyes.

108. Mountains were ground into dust. The cosmic shell exploded into fragments. The hot rays of the Sun, and the Moon’s cold beams, all were blotted out. Even the serpent Adisheshan writhed in pain, unable to bear the weight upon his head. The [unblinking] Gods themselves blinked, thinking that the end of a world age must be at hand.

109. The stars in their constellations and the massed clouds fell from the sky like falling leaves, as the dust rose up and the tormented world fell into total disorder. Bhagirathi and all the lesser rivers ran dry and the Elephants of the Eight Directions bellowed in terror.

110. Now they tossed each other up in the air and fell down again, only to charge at each other once more, bending towards one another to exchange their barbed retorts. Now they traded blows and grabbed at each others’ clothing, whirling hither and thither like a thousand tornadoes. It was like the powerful onset of ruddy evening and black night, both at the same time.3

111. All creatures that crawled, hopped or walked took to the air and flew. Anything that stood was toppled. Trees of all the manifold species were snapped off and destroyed. Thick blackness enveloped everything. Mount Meru itself trembled, as the seven oceans turned to mud.

112. At the height of all this destruction, the Gods went in fear to Indra, but before they could explain what had happened, Indra himself recounted to them all the troubles he had himself endured, after which he asked them the reason for their visit, to which they replied in detail:

3 Brahma’s body colour is red, like the evening, and Vishnu’s black, like night.
113. Aranan and Narayanan together are waging a mighty battle upon the earth. For our salvation we have no other recourse: we must go and pay homage to the First One who is the creator of us all.

114. On receiving the assent of their King, the Hosts of Heaven went to pay homage at the pure lotus-like feet of the Supreme Lord, saying, ‘You who share your form with the Maiden Divine! We beg you to end the evil being wrought by the trickster Mal and Ayan. For who is there to help young children upon this earth, if not their own mother?

115. To escape the darkness of birth and death, which follow one upon the other upon this earth like a rolling cartwheel, we have sought refuge in you, so that we may realise the final truth, and seeking the shelter of your feet, may bathe in the boundless sea of your grace.

116. You who bestow the grace of true knowledge to dispel the defiling ignorance of those unable to bear the burden of their maggot-ridden physical forms! To dispel this base impurity, which could not be removed even were we to bathe each day in an entire ocean of water, we have sought refuge in you.

117. You are our only hope; show us your compassion.’ Even as the Gods told their story to Him who bears a third eye upon his forehead, the Lord already knew what had happened. Indeed, how could He fail to know, He who permeates all life forms as oil permeates a sesame seed?

118. To dispel the fear of all the trembling Gods and rishis, to put an end to the conflict between holy Mal, who has a serpent for a sleeping couch, and Ayan, whose throne is a lotus blossom, to ensure that all the worlds in their established order were preserved, avoiding destruction, He bent his divine will upon compassion, and, taking the form of an invincible mountain of fire, set off to restrain the two of them.
119. In the deepest hell, the serpents who dwell there trailed about it like hanging tendrils, whilst its thick roots plunged down far below. Growing upwards through the earth, it expanded through all the realms of the Gods, bursting through the lofty vault of lotus-borne Brahma’s sphere. Going out beyond the universe’s enclosing shell, it traversed the furthest limit of the vast ethereal region, looking for all the world like a Mount Meru of pure fire.

120. Rushing out beyond all the worlds, far beyond the reach of those twin horses who draw the Sun’s chariot as he spreads the rays of the dawn, dispelling the enveloping sapphire-like darkness, it shone out like a bright beacon set on high, so that all the oceans glowed blood red as if the immeasurable submarine fire at the world’s end had spread abroad, and the seven great mountains resembled nought so much as tiny sparks, which had showered down from its summit.

121. Seeing this fire in the heavens, lotus-borne Brahma and flute-playing Krisna stood back in fear, unable to see its limit. For lest they possess the eye of true knowledge, could it be easy for those having only the flawed and defective physical eye to perceive our Lord?

122. Seeing that bright effulgence, beyond the eye’s power to measure, they were both much troubled. Both agreed that he who could reach the head or foot of this measureless apparition would be the greater of the two. ‘I shall know the foot of this mountain,’ cried the Great One who sleeps upon a serpent’s hood, transforming himself into a boar. ‘And I shall traverse the heavens to find its summit,’ cried Ayan, adopting the form of a swan and flying swiftly heavenward.

123. Swiftly taking flight, Ayan traversed a thousand leagues in a mere fraction of a second whilst in an instant Visnu tunnelled down a thousand leagues into the earth which rests upon the serpent Adisheshan’s spotted hood. To comprehend what occurred, imagine
the long bar of an irrigation machine, made of pure gold and studded with gems, with small pots attached at either end, one set with bright pearls, and the other with dark sapphires.

124. Burrowing down beyond the earth, Hari entered the nether worlds, traversing each in turn. Passing through the city of Bhogavati, watched over by the demon Mahabali, he forged on, paying homage with hand and head to Hatakesvara, whose supreme effulgence the Gods adore. Though he fathomed first the three words, then the seven lower worlds, he could not find it’s foot.

125. Those long pointed horns, like the waxing moon, soon became blunted, like the moon on the wane, and even as his enthusiasm for the task faltered, his hooves and finely-honed tusks grew ever thinner and weaker. After a thousand years of unimaginable suffering he turned to the Lord in praise, and setting aside his fatigue and exhaustion, returned through the seven nether worlds and emerged at last from an ocean of woes.

126. Seeking out that holy place where the First One has risen up in the form of a column of flame to put an end to their struggle, he realised with absolute certainty that lotus-borne Brahma too could never reach its upper limit, and remained there paying homage over

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4 What is being described here is an irrigation machine, consisting of a long beam, pivoting on top of a tall pillar, and known in English as a piccottah. These structures were quite imposing, as one can see from the following description of their use in North Arcot district in the early twentieth century: ‘In the comparative treelessness of the landscape the picottahs stood out conspicuously, with two or three men plodding patiently on the swinging beam that works this primitive pump, alternately towards and away from the wooden pillar, some 15 or 20 feet high, on which it hinges, but always, in either direction, climbing upwards, for the piccottah combines the characteristic features of the see-saw and tread-mill.’

5 Mahabali was the Asura tricked by Vishnu, in his incarnation as Vamana, a Brahmin dwarf, out of his dominion over heaven and earth, and banished to dwell in the nether worlds.

6 Hatakesvara is Siva’s form as Lord of the nether worlds.
and over to Lord Siva, the Distant One, so hard to reach for those who have no faith, about whose neck garlands of fresh flowers are draped, mirroring the beauty of his eyes.

127. Whilst all this was happening, he who had just now flown up in the form of a swan to seek that fiery mountain’s head, traversed full ten thousand leagues in the twinkling of an eye.

128. Piercing even the universe’s outer shell and leaving it far below, he rose on upward, travelling for a thousand years. And though he traversed ten thousand thousand leagues on his search, still there was no end to that column of fire.

129. His feathers fell away and his impetus began to fail. Overwhelmed with suffering his sighs grew long, and as his woes increased and his sense of isolation grew, the Vedas’ Lord began to mull over certain things in his mind:

130. ‘Will great Mal reach the foot, and then return? Or will he give up his quest midway, unable to reach it?’ Thus did his anguished mood swing back and forth, as his thoughts ran away with him, like wax over a flame.

131. ‘I did not realise that this could only be Lord Siva himself,’ he reflected. ‘By confronting Hari I have forfeited his friendship also. Ever since, I have been drowning in this ocean of sorrows. Is this due to my own stupidity? Or perhaps it is the fruit of former misdeeds?’

132. ‘Thus far have I travelled, still unable to discover its upper limit. If I were to lie about it, what proof would there be, other than my word that I had reached it,’ he sobbed sorrowfully. Just then he noticed a screwpine flower falling towards him.

133. He hardly had time to think where it could have come from before it reached him, and he caught it in his hand. ‘Let me go at
once,’ it said with a heartfelt sigh, since it was a faded flower which had fallen from the crown of our Sovereign Lord.

134. ‘Fair screwpine flower,’ said Brahma, ‘whence have you come, and on what errand?’ ‘I have slipped and fallen from the flower wreathed head of the Primal Lord, whose measure neither the Veda’s Lord nor Narayana can know,’ said the flower.

135. ‘Since slipping from that head, which is graced by a bright garland of kondrai flowers, I have been falling for forty thousand years. Agree to my request, and let me go.’ However Brahma, dismissing any hope of seeing our Father, began to speak:

136. ‘Screw-pine flower, dear companion! Be my friend and help me escape the torment of any further wandering. Other than you, there is no one whom I can trust with my life. I am no stranger, nor am I really a swan.

137. ‘My name is Brahma. I and Visnu set our minds on revealing the extent of this wondrous object. Off he went burrowing into the earth, whilst I, for my sins, sought and failed to reach its holy summit.

138. ‘Well, that’s the top and bottom of it, so to speak. Why dwell any further upon the matter? Due to your auspicious arrival, what I was thinking about has come to pass. You must speak to Him who measured the earth in three strides7 and tell him that I, Brahma, adopting the form of a swan, reached Lord Siva’s head with him.’

(To be continued)

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7 See the note to v. 124. Vamana tricked Mahabali by requesting three steps of land on which to live, and, when his request was granted, covering the whole of heaven, earth and the nether regions in the first two steps. Unable to accommodate the third step, Mahabali offered his own head as a stepping place, thus gaining immortality and dominion over the nether regions.

For the spiritual seeker, the essence of this 211-page compilation of U.G. Krishnamurti’s quotations is on page 186 when he says, “Consciousness has to flush itself out. It has to purge itself of every trace of holiness, every trace of unholliness, everything. Even what you consider sacred and holy is a contamination in that consciousness.” U.G. dismisses all religions, paths, gurus and spiritual goals laid out by ‘enlightened’ persons simply because his belief was that no experience can be ‘taught’ to a person. He just simply tells you to have the courage to discard all structures and frameworks to discover your own truth.

Born in 1918 into an upper-middle class, Telugu-speaking Brahmin family, U.G. grew up in a religious atmosphere. By the age of 21, he realized that such a life would not give him the liberation he desired. He came to Tiruvannamalai and met Bhagavan. According to the book, U.G. asked Bhagavan at that time, “Can you give me what you have?” and then came Bhagavan’s reply, “Yes, but can you take it?”.

In April 1967, while U.G. was watching a dance show in Paris, he felt a peculiar movement inside him and could not make out who was dancing on the floor – he or the dancer. There seemed to be no division between the two. That marked the beginning of his incomprehensible mystical experience and his body began to undergo a tremendous change.

Just as you start feeling familiar with what he is saying, U.G. takes a deviation: “The natural state is not a thoughtless state. Where is this ego or self that you talk of? Your non-existent self has heard of spirituality and bliss from someone. To experience this thing called bliss you feel you must control your thoughts. It is impossible; you will burn yourself and die if you attempt it.” He also says that there is nothing more to life than what it already is. “We demand that there must be something permanent. That is what these religious teachers are peddling. They offer you eternal happiness.” U.G.’s way of living is to give up and simply stop searching.
U.G.’s ‘philosophy,’ though he claims he has none, is formlessness. For the spiritual seeker who is searching for answers and a guiding beacon of light, U.G. only takes you to a point where you question everything but succeed in finding no answers. He says that a human life is no more significant than an ant’s and that ideas of god, truth and enlightenment are inventions of a restless mind. He declares that the natural state in which consciousness and truth are lived is devoid of religion and holiness. The impression of an outright denunciation of everything might perhaps be due to the compiler’s efforts in over-highlighting U.G.’s contempt for all spiritual paths and structures instead of emphasizing his encouraging words about finding a unique path to Self-discovery. Bhagavan says that Self-enquiry is only a tool that at a later stage needs to be discarded, as a stick of wood that lights the funeral pyre later is also thrown into the fire, U.G. seems to tell you to light the pyre with no stick and no spark.

– Shriya Mohan


Like the Tao, Nietzsche’s life and thought takes huge twists and turns while operating from the core of things. Allison’s treatment acknowledges Nietzsche’s transcendence but not his mysticism, while attempting to further clear public perception. Kahlil Gibran’s The Prophet was heavily influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche. We now agree with Gibran that Nietzsche is a genius, but what kind we’re still never sure – a holy man even? Allison investigates what Nietzsche was to millions of Nazis – beginning with his sister Elisabeth’s lawsuit against her mother for control of his work to further her part in National Socialism. The irony of ‘Nazi Nietzsche’ is that ‘New Nietzsche’ is almost anti-German, seen to deride “their newspapers and their beer.” No Aryan demagogue here, but indeed, a polemicist, a challenger of big thoughts and needs, if at times overly modest: “It is my fate to have to be the first decent human being,” he recognized with a degree of embarrassment in the autumn of 1888. “I have a terrible fear that I shall one day be pronounced holy.” He set the date somewhere around the dawn of the third millennium: “Let us assume that people will be allowed to read [my work] in about the year 2000.” You cannot escape Nietzsche’s gaze into soul, nor, when you read his last work, The Twilight of the Idols (1888), his mysticism while challenging
our God, “accountable for our happiness and misery,” and offering us the Whole: Nietzsche is on the side of universal non-sectarian Awakening. He is angry: he has to be angry climbing that gruelling rock of a life to the fragrant flowers at the summit of enlightenment which, indeed, I think, he reaches. The death of God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885) and *The Gay Science* (1882) says, basically, that we’ve lost our centre and are entering an age of neurotic pessimism. Propitiation of God is being replaced by science and technology: at first, ‘free’ energy, plagues ‘taken care of’ with pesticides and pills, gave us faith; now, in terms of salvation, old science is increasingly losing status as we apply it to Nature, to bio-mimicry, for example, and where less is more. We now resonate with the Whole that Nietzsche, lover of Nature, speaks of, because we seek a natural and direct connection. Nietzsche seeks to vanquish ‘the shadow of God’ but as he looks into you, you can see what he sees: the bright birthright of being here; the Wholeness. Allison’s Nietzsche takes a well-deserved place in this excellent Motilal series of modern philosophy. The many sides and ironies of Nietzsche that are captured in this treatment yield a treasure trove for newcomers and old hands alike.

– Mark Antrobus


Nyanatiloka Thera was a renowned Buddhist monk who became the leading light in the development of Theravada Buddhism in Europe and the restoration of the tradition in Asia. He was born in Germany in 1878 and died in Colombo in 1957. He was given a state funeral by the Sinhalese people. He became the second Westerner to receive the robes and the first to be declared a Mahathera, that is, a monk continuously for more than twenty years. He was a major figure in introducing Buddhist ideas and practices to the West. A scholar and writer, he did extensive translations from the Pali canon and a dictionary on Buddhism. His classic *The World of the Buddha* is still read today. The bulk of this volume of his autobiography covers the years from his birth until 1926. Originally in German, it has been translated and published in English for the first time.

Nyanatiloka Thera was extraordinarily resolute. He became a Buddhist monk at a time when Western culture was very much in the ascendency. During the First and Second World Wars he was interned, and his adventures
in Burma, Japan and China reveal tenacity and calm resolve in the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges.

Included in this inspiring volume are brief sketches of other pioneering brother monks, notably Nanaponika, who wrote the authoritative The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. For those who follow the Theravada tradition, this is an inspirational book.

– T.V. Ramamurthy


The titles of these essays are inspired by Sri Ramana Maharishi’s talks with devotees. They are followed by apt quotes from renowned Masters, global thinkers and philosophers. The wide-reading mind and clear thinking of the author are impressive. He is an eminent monk who studied Vedanta from Swami Chinmayanandaji and worked for Chinmaya Mission for many years. Residing now in Varanasi, he is the Director of Krishnamurti Foundation India.

The first essay, “What Is Self-Enquiry?” sets our mind into introspecting on the journey of Self-discovery. The author succeeds admirably in elucidating the nature of mind. He explains how the Who Am I? enquiry helps us to pay attention to the basic structure of the ego in us.

In the subsequent essays, the author takes us into deeper enquiry and packs penetrating ideas. “Inquiry or observation are two sides of the same coin,” the author emphasizes time and again. When there is sharp observation without any preconceived notion or identification whatsoever, it is pure enquiry right away. In intense observation, the subtle psychological dimensions within are exposed and then subside. “A thought then arises, only to be engulfed in the pure, bright light of intelligence. The Kathopanisad calls this intelligence ‘a flame without any smoke.’ We are this flame, unwavering and clean.”

There is much food for thought. The author’s mature, clear thinking laced with humour is attractive. The lucid style makes it comfortable for the reader to grasp the essence of Self-enquiry and its relevance to daily life. It is an engrossing and fascinating read. – Dolly Seth
Bhagavan’s 131st Jayanti

On the 131st Jayanthi day December 2010 evening, Smt Sakkubhai Srinivasan accompanied by her group from Bangalore, delighted the devotees at the Ashram with her musical concert for more than one and half hours. She with her sister and brother had the rare fortune of living in the vicinity of Bhagavan during their childhood days. Thus she gained the grace of Bhagavan and her musical offering every year on the Jayanti day at the ashram for the past two decades is an eagerly awaited event by the devotees who are knowledgeable about music.

She selected the songs from various sources on Bhagavan, Sri Ramana Sannidhimurai, and compositions of Smt Mahalakshmi Suryanandan, Salem Sendil Kumar and others.

Bhagavan’s 131st Jayanti in Colombo, Sri Lanka

T.Visvakumar of Colombo sent the following report:

The 131st Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was observed by the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi Peedam, Colombo, Sri Lanka on Thursday 23rd December 2010. The ceremony commenced with Deeparadhana to Arunachaleshwara and to Bhagavan by Swami Sri Madhangi, the Patron of Sri Ramana Maharshi Peedam, Colombo. This Jayanti Vizha was celebrated in Colombo for the first time. Sri Sasangan Sharma compeered the events with brief explanations of Bhagavan’s teachings and reminiscences of his life in Tiruvannamalai. Arunachala Aksharamana Malai and 108 holy names of Arunachala were chanted by the music group of Smt Priyadarshini Thavarajah, Sri and Smt Ganesharatnam and others. The culmination of the ceremony was the discourse by the Chief Guest Brahmachari Darshan Chaitanya of Chinmaya Mission, Colombo. He cited the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatam and described the various Avatars taken by the Parabrahmam at different times. He also went into detail about the genesis of Upadesa Undiyar composed by Bhagavan.

This was followed by a speech of Yoga teacher Mr. Suda who praised the activities of Sri Ramana Maharshi Peedam, Colombo for earnestly disseminating the message of Sri Bhagavan and the sanctity of
Arunachala and Tiruvannamalai. He emphasized that everyone should at least once in their life time, pay homage at Sri Ramanasramam and Tiruvannamalai as it will greatly help their spiritual attainment.

Dr. E. Thavarajah, the leader and organizer of the ceremony spoke about the activities of the Sri Ramana Maharshi Peedam and explained the deep meanings in Bhagavan’s teachings. He further said that not only human beings, even birds and animals attained moksha by Bhagavan’s Grace during his life time and after his Mahanirvana.

The ceremony came to an end with Prayer songs Ramana Sadguru sung by the Music Group.

**Sri Maha Rudram**

Students of Sri Ramanasramam Vedapatasala, Coimbatore Vedapatasala and Manakkal, along with their principals, participated in the chanting of Sri Maha Rudram in the New Hall over two days, the 20th and 21st February for peace and prosperity in the world.

**Sri Ramana Granthalaya**

Work on two major ashram building projects have commenced recently. The new library or, as it is now titled, Sri Ramana Granthalaya, is being constructed between the dining hall and the back wall adjacent to the lower slopes of Arunachala. It will play an important role in enhancing the spiritual learning in the ashram with its multifunctional space. The ashram intends to utilize the space for the propagation of Bhagavan’s teachings, meditation and a concert space for various cultural activities.

The Granthalaya is designed with a large water court that will promote a feeling of calmness. It unfolds into a circular court flanked by a free flowing space and an open-to-sky courtyard that can be used as a multifunctional arena. There is a peripheral ramp surrounding the building suitable for both the young and the elderly that leads to the first floor facilities of the library. At the upper level, there is the large radially organized library space with sky lights that houses some 20,000 volumes of books. The glass dome, an oculus atop the central court brings in ample diffused natural light for reading which conserves energy. The Granthalaya works out to be 8000 sq.ft. in area.
along with an office space. The scheduled date for completion of the Granthalaya is on the 15\textsuperscript{th} December, 2011.

**Morvi Guest House**

The Morvi Guest House project block will radically change what is one of the more important accommodation facilities of the ashram. Many of the present structures require major renovation due in particular, to the poor drainage facilities that have rendered quite a number of the ground floor rooms unusable during the monsoon season. It was decided to do a complete makeover rather than piecemeal restoration.

The historical central building will be preserved. The modules of the guest rooms will surround the heritage central block and create a buffer for free movement and circulation for devotees away from the increasingly noisier main road. The rooms are divided into three categories: there are 20 single occupancy rooms; 20 double occupancy rooms; and 12 family cottages with living room and bedroom concept. With an open communal space it will instil a sense of community. The well will be preserved and there will be other services along with parking facilities. The entire block is set for completion by April 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2012.

**Sri Ramana Eye Clinic**

A free eye clinic is conducted at the Ashram on the last Sunday of each month by Dr. Ravichandran of the Sri Ramana Maharshi Eye Hospital, Tiruvannamalai.

**Obituaries**

Manjuben Dalwala, wife of Ramesh Dalwala, passed away suddenly on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} February at Surat, Gujarat. She was very devoted to Bhagavan. She and her family would come each year to stay at the ashram. In her final days she had a wish to prepare a special Gujarati dish as prasad in the ashram, which was fulfilled before her unexpected passing.

R. Ramaswami left this world on the 14\textsuperscript{th} February. He had lapsed into a coma after being admitted to hospital with acute diabetes. He worked in the ashram library for some twenty years. An unassuming and humble person, he was much liked, and is missed by his friends who appreciated his quiet humour and honesty.