Ramana Ashtottaram

76. ओ सौम्याय नमः:
Om Soumyāya namah.
Prostration to the embodiment of auspiciousness, of benevolence.

Peaceful, sweet and gentle, he is capable only of spreading goodness. Cool like the moon, ambrosial like the soma juice. All who were given the opportunity of being in the presence of Bhagavan enjoyed the miraculous silence that effortlessly stilled their minds. Their hearts were filled with divine love and minds cleansed.

77. ओ आत्मवते नमः:
Om Atmavatē namah.
Prostration to the one who is ever composed and Self-possessed.

Bhagavan is all atman. Not being any one single body, he is all bodies as the atman or awareness equally present in them all. He is the one indivisible Being-Awareness dwelling as Bliss in all creatures. Awareness is Bhagavan's whole being and nature and sole possession. He knows the Self, enjoys the Self, is the Self.
EDITORIAL

Fidelity

Faith, which is the cause of Self-realization, is the outcome of firm conviction of the truth of Vedantic scriptures and of the words of the Guru.¹

Take the case of the honey bee which has remained unchanged over thousands of years. The honeybee is highly prized for its honey and wax but more importantly it is crucial to the natural world and humankind because of its ability to cross-pollinate flowers. It may not be the only insect which can pollinate but it is the most important. The principal reason the bee is considered such an exceptional pollinating insect is its singular devotion to one species of flower when it seeks pollen. It demonstrates flower fidelity. Since pollen can fertilise only an embryo of the same species this loyalty is important to the proliferation of any species. Most other insects that visit flowers tend to collect pollen at random and can visit six to eight different flowers in their search for pollen but as a result the flowers in general remain unfertilised. Without this trait of allegiance of the bee we could not produce many of the fruits and vegetables on which we thrive. The world as we know it would be much the poorer without the bee.

We see in the life of Bhagavan a prodigious manifestation of faithfulness. One is immediately struck by his one-pointed devotion to Arunachala. We see today the fruits of that commitment in the

progeny he created: a generation of followers who, having tasted the honey of his love, then with fidelity adhere to his path. Fidelity is the active expression of faith, for we all have some form of belief be it in a convention, fetish, person or principle and what we say and do reveals our convictions. There is a saying that it is better, once having chosen a proper site, to dig a well on that one spot and not dig shallow wells all over the place. Discernment is faith; the inability to discriminate, when one considers it, is infidelity.

In respect to Bhagavan and Arunachala this is not to say there is only one genuine place to seek that divine spring which can quench our thirst; on the contrary there are many authentic traditions, which, if followed correctly, will transform and release us from the bonds of ignorance. It would be foolishness and indeed, arrogance to deny the truth of other traditions. There are as many paths as there are souls in search of higher truths. We have been attracted to Arunachala-Ramana for whatever reasons of destiny. It is because we resonate to the call of that mysterious form we call Arunachala that our prarabdha is such. What we seek to emulate in Bhagavan is this unwavering fidelity to one path, eka-bhakti.

The first step is to see what is appropriate for us, what feels right and then choose. Once we decide according to our level of discrimination, we should remain firm in our faith. Yes, we may be mistaken and place our trust in an inappropriate source but we will learn through painful disillusionment and begin again wiser for the fact.

History abounds with countless examples of misguided faith. We all have endured disenchantment on many levels, be it in our family, friends, teachers, society. An instructive instance is the accepted chronicle pertaining to the inhabitants of Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean. For whatever reason, they had decided that the construction of a series of giant figures lined up and facing the ocean was of paramount importance for their tiny community. They invested their time and energy into the quarrying, shifting and raising of these curious, powerful and intimidating basalt idols. The task depleted the small island of its timber which meant they could no longer maintain or build boats to fish or maintain their houses. The top soil was degraded by wind and their capacity to harvest vegetables and fruit shrunk to the point of
unsustainability. The island was either abandoned or the people died of starvation. To varying degrees we have all invested our time, energy and belief in a figment of our imagination that at the time seemed real and enduring. These false gods devour us with their demands.

We see the value of Bhagavan’s path in that the way has been clearly shown and marked; the journey has been verified in Bhagavan’s own life and it has been shown to be direct and efficacious. It is not then a question of blind faith but of application to the quest. The question is how do we enter the stream that carries us to our destination. It calls for certainty. We could even legitimately ask the old conundrum: which came first the chicken or the egg? It requires faith, so then how do we get faith? Do we need faith to have faith? How can we create something out of nothing? We can’t and that is the crux. It is not ours to command. It spontaneously happens when we are ready.

D. The Upanishads say, I am told, that he alone knows the Atman whom the Atman chooses. Why should the Atman choose at all? If it chooses, why some particular person?

M. When the sun rises, some buds alone blossom, not all. Do you blame the sun for that? Nor can the bud blossom of itself, it requires the sunlight to do it.

D. May we not say that the help of the Atman is needed because it is the Atman that drew over itself the veil of maya?

M. You may say so.

D. If the Atman has drawn the veil over itself, should not itself remove the veil?

M. It will do so. See for whom is the veil.

D. Why should I? Let the Atman itself remove the veil!

M. If the Atman talks about the veil, then the Atman itself will remove it.²

Bhagavan makes a very subtle distinction here. This illustrates the genius of Bhagavan for always, always he refers to first principles.

² Maharshi’s Gospel, Book 2, Ch II, ‘Sadhana and Grace’.
He says that which created the veil in the first place will remove it. He does not give credence to the veiling nor to its effects. Instead of speaking about the branches of manifestation, he directs us to the root and by inference, denies *maya* any power to delude us. He not so much contradicts the power of veiling as declines to even recognise it as an independent, determinant feature.

Faith as we generally understand it is a conviction in something we cannot grasp with our rational mind. Bhagavan consistently says that our so-called ‘Self’, or innermost core of reality is self-evident. None of us can deny our conscious existence. It does not matter what name we give it because all names fall short, but if we exercise fidelity, this slender thread will surely guide us home. Faith is much like love and who does not have faith in their own being and who does not harbour love for themselves? Love and faith grow from the same tree.\(^3\) Even rejection of our own worth and denial of a higher imperative is a perverse response to the same principle.

Like all necessary journeys the first steps can be arduous but are satisfying if we faithfully adhere to the instructions of our guiding light. To extend the metaphor of the bee, we all know the expression ‘busy as a bee’. We also know that bees live in highly organised hive governments if they are to have any chance to gather pollen for honey and survive the rigours of inevitable barren periods. Though the path seems a lonely one, that is not true for once we are bound by the sweet knot of Bhagavan’s love, it does not matter whether we are in physical proximity to other lovers or not; we are nonetheless joined by an invisible strand to him and his extended spiritual family.

Loyalty is much disparaged these days. Loyalty is measured more in terms of how much money can buy one’s allegiance. Everyone has a price and everything apparently is for sale. There is a level of cynicism in the world today that can be critical of anyone who proves an exception to the rule. Motives are examined in the light of possible personal gain. It has been termed ‘the reign of quantity’.

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\(^3\) Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 22.7.46.
In our own lives it is not so much the triumphs as rather the defeats which reveal our mettle. We can be dignified in defeat or savage in response. We can transcend the predicament or be further enmeshed in the quagmire. How often we have seen individuals squabble much like dogs quarrelling over a bone. Unless a vital principle is under contention, for the most part it is not worth it.

Paradoxically it is when we lose everything we had blindly clung to, that Bhagavan can fill us with the Grace he so generously wishes to share. It is the experience of loss which can create the greatest opportunity. Do we have the courage and constancy to accept it and grow out of our obtuse limitations?

What is our criterion of loyalty or faith in a higher ideal, guru or way of life? Do we feel obliged to justify it to ourselves and others to reinforce its validity? Or do we remain imperturbable in our faith? The inevitable shocks which ravage us over time, the family tragedies, the disappointments, do they shake our faith? And if so, why? It is easy to be loyal in times of bounty but when the cold storm of adversity strikes we experience the true depth of our devotion. No one is immune to doubt, it is what we do with it once we confront the reality of our feeble foundations that is the real test. It can make us stronger or cause us to die the thousand deaths of the coward who refuses to face the truth. When we realise vacillation is the mother of confusion and ultimately madness, we should be firm in our resolve and take the smooth with the rough.

The course of our life is determined in part by the assumptions we have of ourselves. If we have faith it can move mountains; if we are fearful and lack trust in a higher power and our own innate goodness, we are doomed by the unavoidable aggregation of evidence which seems to conspire against us, little realising we have contributed to it by our attitudes and beliefs.

May we cultivate that faith and devotion which can raise us above the selfish and unconscious attachment to ignorance.
Facets of Self-enquiry

Part Two: The Practice of the I-feeling

N. A. Mohan Rao

The essence of Self-enquiry consists in turning the mind inward and holding on to the sense of ‘I’ that we feel within.¹ This is what we call ‘I-abidance’. As we practise it, some of the vasanas are eliminated. We transcend the rest of the vasanas, and attain Self-abidance.² During Self-abidance, these remaining vasanas too are obliterated. Self-abidance is then rendered permanent, and that is Liberation.

¹ “It is enough that a person becomes antarmukhi (inward-bent).” Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §513, p.498, (1994).
² “It [Self-abidance] will dawn on you suddenly, when the obstacles are removed to some extent.” Sri Nisargadatta in I am That, (Tr.) Maurice Frydman, Ch.97, p.502, The Acorn Press, (1999).

N. A. Mohan Rao lives in Hyderabad, where he has settled after retiring as a professor of chemical engineering.
Our practice thus proceeds at two levels, namely, ‘I-abidance’ (‘I-feeling’) and Self-abidance. We shall study them broadly in Parts Two and Three respectively. For the sake of generality, we shall assume that the seeker is one who follows the method of direct intuition for obtaining the ‘I-feeling’.

Practice of I-feeling: the Sitting-mode Enquiry

A seeker would normally start his practice of Self-enquiry in a sitting posture, preferably an asana. We may call it ‘sitting-mode enquiry’ to distinguish it from another kind that mixes with activity, seen later. For practising it, the seeker would select a congenial location with the least possible disturbance and reputedly strong spiritual vibrations. If the second condition cannot be met, he would carry on in the belief that the available location will itself start manifesting spiritual vibrations when it is used long enough.

At first, the sadhaka’s major preoccupation will be the control of thoughts, without which ‘I-abidance’ will not be possible. An ongoing practice of daily puja or prayer, and a prior practice of japa or meditation help bolster the sadhaka’s ability to control thoughts. He can then turn to the ‘I-thought’, and seek its source to obtain ‘I-abidance’. It is usually desirable to start each session of sadhana with a brief japa of the Guru. Besides fulfilling the ‘mandatory’ requirement of doing pranam to the Guru at the start of sadhana, the japa serves to soften up the ego and so brighten the prospects of ‘I-abidance’.

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3 ‘I-feeling’ stands for experience of I-abidance, and so is sometimes used to indirectly refer to I-abidance.
4 For details of this method, see Part One of the article in Mountain Path, July, 2011.
5 For the desirability of an asana, vide ‘The practice of Self-enquiry’, Mountain Path, pp.9-19, April, 2008, wherein the sitting-mode enquiry was referred to as ‘meditational enquiry’.
6 “It is impossible to fix the mind on the Heart to start with.” Talks, §40, p.45. See also §213, p.179.
7 “Dhyana, bhakti, japa, etc., are aids to keep out the multiplicity of thoughts.” Talks, §485, p.464. “If (upasana or japa) is pursued in all sincerity … it will automatically lead to the investigation of the Self.” §374, p.341. On the imperative of japa in sadhana, see The Technique of Maha Yoga, N.R. Narayana Aiyer, Ch.I.7, pp.20 & 21, (1996).
Early Hurdles in I-feeling Practice: A sadhaka is at first prone to over-exert while attempting to control his thoughts. It can lead to minor problems like pain in different parts of the body, disturbances in breathing rhythm, strain in and around the eyes, weakness, palpitation of the heart, etc.\(^8\) The problems are thought to be due to reaction from the \textit{prana} and mind, which resist his efforts at controlling them. Some of these may extend even beyond the \textit{sadhana} session. If the symptoms happen to be severe, the \textit{sadhaka} may be obliged to suspend his \textit{sadhana} for a few days for return of normality. Generally, though, he will have to put up with such discomforts,\(^9\) till he learns the art of managing his effort, be it days, weeks, months or more.

Even when the \textit{sadhaka} is at the stage of grappling with his thoughts, it can so happen that the \textit{pranic} forces are excited, and create peculiar, pleasant sensations in the body. He is usually tempted to think that they have something to do with the spiritual states he is after, and take keen interest in them. It is a mistake to be avoided. From about the same time, the seeker starts receiving encouragement in his \textit{sadhana} in many subtle ways\(^{10}\) — such as by occasional prognoses, pleasant co-incidences etc.

Since the \textit{sadhaka} is presumed to use \textit{direct} intuition, he must already know what is ‘I-feeling’. Yet, it can at first be inexplicably difficult for him to intuit his ‘I’ \textit{during practice}. It is as though the new context requires him to experiment afresh to find his way through the dark causal domain to the ‘I’ at its rear. He repeatedly finds himself up against a wall, and may have to alternate his attempts with \textit{japa} for the sake of respite. Even so, it can be difficult for him to sit in

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\(^9\) Bhagavan assures, “All these would go, if you would but continue your meditation … on … Self.” And again, “All diseases will be effectively annihilated by continuous Self-enquiry.” \textit{Crumbs from His Table}, R. Swarnagiri, Ch.10, pp.33-4, (2006).

practice for even 10 or 15 minutes. It is unnecessary and unavailing to try to prolong the session at this juncture.\footnote{In fact, at no stage of sadhana is it desired to force the pace. Steadiness of effort, backed by strong faith, is what is needed. Vide The Technique of Maha Yoga, op. cit., Ch.I.22, p.51.}

With steady practice, the sadhaka succeeds in obtaining I-abidance. The experience, being of the explicit kind, will be so novel that he becomes all too curious to observe it, and so disrupts it. The ‘I-feeling’ therefore lasts only momentarily. The curiosity can be all the greater with intellectuals, who tend to follow academically every new development. It usually takes a long time to cross this hurdle. When the I-abidance occurs recurrently, even if infrequently, the duration of the session can be increased to 20-25 minutes.

Bhagavan considers sleep as the first obstacle to sadhana.\footnote{Day by Day with Bhagavan, Entry of 25-4-1946, p.182, (1989).In classical Vedanta, the obstacles to sadhana are said to be laya, vikshepa, kashaya and rasasvada (or ananda). They stand respectively for sleep- or trance-like states yielding a subtle kind of enjoyment, tossing of the mind among sense-objects, reminiscing on past enjoyments, and savouring of the bliss of anandamaya kosa.} Sleep is particularly relevant in the early stages when distractions are longer and more frequent, and so the possibility of dozing off, often momentarily, is greater. Sleep, like vasanas, belongs to the causal zone, which we attempt to cross to reach our ‘I’. So, if we fail midway, we can be caught by either by sleep or vasanas (which project thoughts). In the former case, there is the possibility of a bodily fall and injury, unless we have adopted an asana for the practice, or taken other precautions.\footnote{If the ‘I’ is … let go, … meditation will end in sleep.” Talks, §139, p.122.}

Like sleep, visions and other miscellaneous experiences,\footnote{For a detailed account of experiences in sadhana, see Concentration and Meditation, op. cit., Ch. IX.} too, are possible only when we let go of our hold on ‘I’.\footnote{‘Spiritual Instruction’ (Upadesa Manjari), Ch. II, §16, Collected Works, p.61, (2002).} They may include sakshatkaras (visions of gods). Such experiences are caused by our own
mental make-up, and have no spiritual significance. We are not to pay any attention to them, and instead remain focussed on our quest.

Ups and downs are very common in early phases of sadhana. We may have a good abidance one day, and then have a poor run for several days on end. The alternating rich and lean phases are due to the play of the gunas. We are to make the best use of our sadhana when the sattva-guna is in the ascendant, and be patient when tamas or rajas is predominant. The important point is not to let the aspiration sag, but persist with the practice without regard to the quality of outcome on a given day.

Breaks in sadhana, even up to several weeks, can occur due to miscellaneous causes. Resumption would then appear exceedingly difficult. A positive mind-set is important to make at least a tentative re-start. It may appear like a slow climb, but a pleasant surprise awaits us when we not only catch up with the former level but even exceed it.

In the early stages of practice, when we are in deep contemplation trying to attain ‘I-abidance’ or holding it, certain kinds of noises can cause us great bodily shock. A telephone ring, a buzzer, or a car horn in the neighbourhood, etc. can sound unbearably shrill and be received on the heart with a shudder. In certain states, even a pin-drop noise can cause a severe shock. Paul Brunton reports of a case when he was admonished by a yogi for having disturbed the latter in his meditation by shooting with a camera. The yogi tells him such intrusions can prove dangerous to the meditator.

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16 “Visions, etc., are no signs of progress.” Talks, §103, p.99.
17 Talks, §52, p.55; §73, p.78.
18 “Mere performance of tapas is its progress also.” Talks, §103, p.99.
19 “There is the steady impulse of your determination that sets you on your feet again after every downfall and breakdown. Gradually the obstacles are all overcome and your current becomes stronger. Everything comes right in the end. Steady determination is what is required.” Talks, §29, p.34.
20 The Technique of Maha Yoga, Ch. II, p.58; Ch. I.18, p.40.
21 A Search in Secret India, op. cit., Ch. 7, p.112.
**Progress of the I-feeling:** In due course, we will be able to attain the I-feeling more frequently and in longer spells. The clarity of the experience too grows. We become so intimately familiar with our ‘I’ that we feel no disappointment when we lose sight of it for a while. We feel certain that it is always there within, and is ours ‘for the asking’. Our inner calm is thus preserved, whether or not with the I-abidance. We can then extend the duration of sadhana to 1-2 hours, spread over two or three sessions a day.

Our effort in the practice of ‘I-feeling’ is at first expended in two ways: for the onset of the ‘I-feeling’, and for retaining it. When our practice steadies a bit, we find, to our pleasant surprise, that the ‘I-feeling’ now and then pops up on its own. With further practice, we find it coming in non-stop, wave after wave. There is then no more need for effort for purposes of the onset. Even for retaining the ‘I-feeling’, very little effort is found to suffice. Our sadhana may be said to have taken a most fortunate turn at this juncture.

About this time, none of the outside noises or other disturbances including our thoughts seem to affect our abidance. We find ourselves singularly capable to adapt any situation as a means to attain I-abidance. If we get a thought, our awareness that ‘this thought is occurring to me’ instantly lands us at our ‘I’. If we hear a sound, our awareness that ‘this sound is being heard by me’ does the same. It marks the time when we can carry our sadhana into the buzz of everyday life, as we shall see shortly.

With continued practice, we reach a stage when the moment we sit for sadhana, the experience of ‘I’ arises within us by itself, and stays on and on, with but a little of our effort. Any number of thoughts can now come and go, and they don’t disturb our state of quiet. In due course, the thoughts themselves recede, and I-abidance becomes correspondingly more intense.

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22 *Talks*, §91, p.87; §73, p.78.  
23 *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., Ch. IX, p.156.  
24 In other words, all thoughts now become non-intrusive.
Concurrent Enquiry

Our practice of ‘I-feeling’ is meant to reduce our *vasanas* to such an extent as to allow our transcendence to Self-abidance. It is a high goal, not attained by anything but a total commitment of our personality to it. If we pursue ‘I-abidance’ for just a couple of hours a day, and indulge in worldliness the rest of the time, it does not speak for total commitment. What is needed is to maintain the ‘I-abidance’ literally every moment of our waking time. This may look humanly impossible, but Bhagavan counsels thus:

“The life of action need not be renounced. If you will meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed by your activities.”

And again, “The current induced during meditation can be kept up by habit, by practising to do so. Then one can perform his work and activities in that very current itself; there will be no break.”

In the first quote, what Bhagavan means to say is that if we pursue Self-enquiry — which in our present context means I-abidance — for about one to two hours daily in the sitting mode, the awareness of ‘I’ (i.e., ‘I-abidance’) so generated will continue in the rest of the day when we attend to other activities. The second quote, however, qualifies it by saying that although the current carries into the rest of the day, it does so only sparsely and sporadically. So, we have at first to put in some effort, or practise, to make that current last in our activities. The maintenance of I-awareness then becomes a habit with us, and remains unbroken through our waking life.


26 *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., p.156.


28 “The mind ... train it to look inward; make this a habit.” *Talks*, §26, pp.25-6.
The practice referred to above has been termed ‘concurrent enquiry’ since it involves the holding of ‘I-abidance’ concurrently with other activity. It can be started fruitfully only after we reach a certain stage in sitting-mode enquiry, as stated in the previous section. At first, we may practise concurrent enquiry with relatively passive activities like waiting, walking, bathing, taking food, cooking, travelling (without own driving), going to sleep, etc. Slowly, we can try to extend it to other, less passive activities like watching TV, reading, speaking, writing etc. When the ‘I-abidance’ eventually covers our entire waking period, it might seem like a changeless screen, over which is projected the entire changing panorama of the world.

It is held in science that our mind cannot attend to two things at a time. This would seem to controvert the feasibility of concurrent enquiry, wherein our mind is said to attend to both ‘I-feeling’ and outer activity simultaneously. The anomaly is explained thus: our mind actually attends to only one of these things at a time, but alternates between the two so rapidly that we feel the two experiences to be simultaneous.

Preliminary Outcomes of I-feeling Practice
When we practise ‘I-feeling’ for a few years, we begin noticing three kinds of outcomes. Firstly, whenever our mind strays from ‘I-abidance’ during the day, we become conscious of it. An urge keeps developing in us that we ought to arrest such straying, and it prepares us to take up concurrent enquiry in due course. We also become alert to any rise of negative feelings like anger, desire, malice, conceit, etc. in our

30 “Hold the Self even during mental activities.” Talks, §407, p.382.
31 It is like being a witness to whatever happens around us. Vide The Garland of Guru’s Sayings, v.674.
33 In everyday life we come across numerous instances of our mind attending to two or more things seemingly at the same time. They are all explained by the same logic, called ‘multi-tasking’. Modern high-speed computers use this principle when they serve a number of terminals ‘simultaneously.’
mind, and thus get an opportunity to check them and shelve them, before they overcome us completely.

Secondly, we notice a profound increase in our capacity to understand spiritual teachings, whether from the scriptures or given by latter-day sages. The precise context and meaning of the statements strike our mind at once, irrespective of the phraseology and nomenclature used. Teachings, which had earlier seemed mutually contradictory, now stand resolved to their respective levels. The logical inter-connections among different sadhanas become apparent to the mind with little effort. Occasionally, a casual talk on spiritual matters with someone grows, to our surprise, into a long, impromptu, learned discourse, with the words streaming out as if from a fount.

Some of the clarifications to our spiritual knowledge may be received in the form of thoughts during or outside the ‘I-feeling’ practice. Some of these may be so exquisitely phrased, that we will be led to suspect that they are from a ‘higher source’ (later identified with our Guru). We would do well to jot them down immediately, as else we may later rue for not being able to recollect them. Thus, not all thoughts that come at the time of our practice can be castigated as obstacles.

The third outcome of our ‘I-feeling’ practice is that we get constant guidance in all matters of our sadhana from the inner Guru, in the form of our ‘I’, directly or indirectly. Bhagavan had often stated that

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34 *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch.I Conclusion, p.53; Ch. I.15, p.33.
35 “Sometimes the knowledge contained therein has already been experienced by the seeker, and serves only to verify his experience.” Ibid, Ch.I.15, p.33.
36 While doubts relevant to the seeker’s needs are readily cleared (*The Ultimate Medicine*, Ch. 3, p.24), it cannot be expected that all doubts whatsoever will be cleared (*Talks*, §618, p.583).
37 Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has said that he feels as though someone unseen continuously feeds him all that is spoken by him when he addresses his devotees. Cf. *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch. I.22, p.46.
38 Ibid, Ch. I.19, p.41.
39 “The beingness (“I am”) itself is the guru.” Sri Nisargadatta in *The Ultimate Medicine*, Ch.4. p.54.
the Self is our real guru. But since the Self, being absolute, cannot be expected to enter into relations, that must be taken to mean ‘I’, which is the first manifestation of the Self. The practice of ‘I-feeling’ thus opens up a channel of communication with the Guru. We are never left in doubt as to what our next step should be. We feel convinced that the Guru is constantly with us, and will see us through our sadhana, without our having to turn to any external help.

The guidance and clarifications may sometimes come to us in unexpected ways. For instance, we may be inspired to refer to a particular book or passage that precisely answers our requirement. Else, the answer may strike our mind at some odd moment during the day. Sometimes what appears like a chance meeting with someone or reading may happen to provide the answer needed. A feeling takes root in us that, even in matters mundane, we are guided imperceptibly by the inner Guru.

**Tanumanasi**: Thinning of the Mind

According to Yoga-vasishta, jnana-yoga proceeds in seven stages, of which tanumanasi is the third stage. The next four stages are states of jnana. Since ‘I-feeling’ too is a state preceding jnana, it follows that tanumanasi corresponds to the practice of ‘I-feeling’. Tanumanasi is usually interpreted as ‘thinning (or attenuation) of the mind’. It stands for a steady loss of the capacity of the mind to project thoughts

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41 Sri Nisargadatta in I am That, Ch. 98, p.510. See also The Technique of Maha Yoga, Ch. I.22, p.51.
42 “When you abide sufficiently long in this [knowledge ‘I am’] … everything will become clear. No external [source of] knowledge will be necessary.” Sri Nisargadatta, The Ultimate Medicine, Ch. 3, p.24. See also Ch.8, p.138.
43 The Technique of Maha Yoga, Ch.I, Conclusion, p.53. This small book contains many practical details on sadhana, and a practising sadhaka can find much that interests him/her in it.
45 ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. IV, §3, Collected Works, p.70; Talks, §256, p.214; §95, p.91.
46 The Technique of Maha Yoga, Ch.I.2, pp.13-14.
due to partial elimination of the *vasanas* during the ‘I-feeling’ practice. At first there will be elimination of the onrush of minor passing thoughts. Later on, the gap between thoughts lengthens. Towards the end, thoughts become altogether rare. As Bhagavan says, it is this degree of absence of thoughts that is the *real* measure of our progress in *sadhana*.

**Use of Pranayama in Self-enquiry**

Self-enquiry is ordinarily to be followed after gaining some mental strength, which means one-pointedness of mind, through preliminary disciplines like devotion, meditation etc. A *sadhaka*, if he is mature, can then attain instant *kumbhaka* while attempting to dive into the heart, and attain the Self. Others may follow the slower route of the ‘I-feeling’. In either case, there is no *deliberate* application of *pranayama*.

If Self-enquiry is taken up without at first undergoing the aforesaid disciplines, then *pranayama* is needed as an aid to control of mind. It may be carried out by way of regulation of the inhalation-exhalation cycles, or by merely watching the breath. In either case, it should be discontinued once the control of breath (and so of thoughts) is achieved, and Self-enquiry taken up.

**Option between ‘Life’ and ‘Death’**

In Self-enquiry, we seem faced with a choice between ‘I-thought’ and ‘I-feeling’. If we choose the former, we are condemned to a life of predestination — becoming a cog in the wheel of creation with its cycles of birth and death. If we choose the ‘I-feeling’, we are given

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47 Ibid, Ch. I-16, p.34. “One has to experience this to believe it.”
48 *Talks*, §618, p.582.
49 This is how Sadhu Om interprets Bhagavan’s reference to *pranayama* in verse 28 of ‘Reality in Forty Verses’. Cf. *The Path of Sri Ramana*, Part One, Ch. 8, pp.148, 149, (2005). In this, he differs with N.R. Narayana Aiyer, who takes the verse literally, and calls for a deliberate use of *pranayama* while diving. Cf. *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Preface, p.vi; Ch. I.15, p.31; Ch. II, pp.56-58.
51 *Talks*, §54, pp.59-60.
a passing respite from the shackles of *karma,*\(^5\) and in time gain the ‘life eternal’. Other than this single freedom, we have really no other freedom,\(^5\) the so-called free-will that we seem to employ in our daily life being a mere myth. In Self-enquiry practice, we are privileged to exercise this precious freedom of ours recurrently.

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\(^5\)“Prarabdha concerns only the out-turned, not the in-turned mind.” Cf. ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. II, §21, *Collected Works*, p.62.

\(^5\) *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 1-6-1946, pp.211-2.

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The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Rahoyaga Krama radhyaa*, we worship you with night’s ritual: the secret devotion of limbs aflame, entwined in the dark.

*Rahastarpana-Tarpitaa*, who delight in the wild offering; who transmute the body’s flames into the fire of the stars.

You bring the taintless bliss, untouched by dark sorrow, who bring salvation; *Nirvana sukha dayini*, you bear the chalice of life.

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 Four

The Golden Years in Beirut and the Juki Heritage

DOUGLAS HALEBI

Just beyond Beirut, a cluster of umbrella pines was planted long ago, to prevent the land from linking into the sea. Over time, it grew to become a small forest as well as a kind of temporary sanctuary for nomadic visitors in the land and, sometimes, a haven for groups of refugees little esteemed in official circles. Such was the hashi nura or ‘Gypsy Camp’, where the wine of intoxicating ideas once alternated with the wine of the grape. (Though the reputed ‘drinking bouts’ held there were in reality ritual toasts and libations consumed slowly, deliberately, in honour of great poets and cherished ancestors. And it was rare for anyone who partook of these rituals to drink in excess.

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.
Indeed, to become intoxicated is to lose control and therefore dignity; and dignity is the most important virtue among the Juki.) To live there was to partake of a distinct and different rhythm of human existence, a flow of events permeated in impression from the ‘guests’ who lingered in the shade of the trees. And life was experienced in a certain unmistakable, unforgettable way.

While we drank thick, hot, unsweetened Arabic coffee, our old teacher told us that the land and the trees had lessons to impart to us. That here we would soon be deprived of the illusion that utopian schemes and distant goals are an adequate substitute for the fullness and plenitude of the life we experience all around us, here and now. That a day lost never returns to us. And that the most worthy way to serve the future is to give everything we have to the present.

There, it seemed, the deepest pleasures were often the briefest, the swiftest to ripen and then to fade away. Life was lived in an eternally instantaneous, ever-recurring present, so that the prosaic gestures of ordinary existence, each one in its turn, came to be invested with an intrinsic value. Man, in the midst of those flowering pines, was well aware of the fact that every instant of time has its own possible perfection. And that every object, no less than every soul, is somehow unique and irreplaceable.

Simple pleasures became time-honoured rituals. Customs of distant origin were constantly refined, old gestures polished, so that instead of bringing forth endless novelties, man rested content in the wealth of time-honoured ways. Man was self-sufficient, as far as life in this habitat was concerned. The poverty there was never extreme, reflecting the opulence and freedom of Lebanon in those years.

Land was more expensive in downtown Beirut than in much of London. Oil money from the Gulf States flowed into the country at an ever accelerating pace. Tourism was a major industry. There were more foreign embassies in Beirut than in most European capitals. Even Gypsies roamed the streets of Ras Beirut (a section of Beirut, literally ‘tip of Beirut’), calling it a feast for the eyes. It was like a separate town, with staggering wealth accumulation, endlessly varied amusements and diversions, an amazing cultural plurality. Life was
good. And the ‘mere guests’ in the pine forest were nourished well by that environment. They took pleasure in the rising and the setting sun, the cycles of the moon. And the astoundingly brilliant light that rose from the ground in waves and dripped from the branches of trees.

And if I had to summarize all the lessons to be learned there, I would say only this: life is a delicate flower that fades away all too quickly and so must be honoured and celebrated every day. And those who serenade life and extol its beauty will be recompensed far more than those who only despair of its infirmities. Even granting that these infirmities are real and that to live in this world is to taste bitterness, sorrow and deprivation all too often.

The last days and nights we spent with Uncle Noah were never intended as a permanent farewell. It so happened, however, that we left the hashi nura in which he dwelled while we were still young, overflowing with curiosity and in love with life. And in fever to travel to the ends of the earth, which never happened, and then back to our mother’s relatives in the West. We considered our departure no more than a necessary prelude to our next meeting with Uncle, anticipating that only a brief interlude would pass before we could be back in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, enjoying his company.

But many years later, we still encountered obstacles in the path of this seemingly modest ambition. The last night, then, Aunt Rihani prepared a farewell meal for us, complete with a Juki delicacy called nashuuf, a rich, thick stew and a mouth-watering treat known in Arabic as bint sahn, ‘girl on a plate’. This was a thin, crepe like bread drenched in honey and covered with almonds. The feast, however, included many other courses. And this was in keeping with the renowned hospitality rituals of the Middle East. When all the dishes had been consumed, and all the coffee and brandy slowly downed, Noah rose and began to speak. He addressed us in an almost ritualistic, archaic-sounding manner, his sing-song voice turning bittersweet.

“The heritage of our fathers,” he began, still tilting his glass in the air, “expresses in its own way the deepest desire of man, to know more and be more. And to experience deeper, richer, purer, higher states of being (awwal), until we are drunk with mercy and stupefied by
compassion. Know, then, that man was put on the earth to embark
on a mission, a quest for meaning and a destiny that causes him to
surpass his seeming limits. He is possessed of a thirst for perfection
that can never be slaked, since any perfection attained is not an end
in itself but only a prelude to still vaster and higher strivings.

“Wherever we enter this world, and wherever we may leave it, this
life passes like a spring rain-cloud that waters the land for an hour
and then is gone. When we come into this world, we are already
hastening out of it. We depart even as we came, in the twinkling of
an eye. Learn, then, that there’s never enough time to serenade beauty,
absorb wisdom, take pleasure in generosity and seek out a creative
abundance. Know that before we even begin to ripen inwardly, or to
perfect our understanding of this life, we’re already gone.

“So if you want to do good, don’t wait too long. The time is now,
the place is here. The sun that only begins to rise will soon set. And if
you want to do something worthy, then love life and burn it up with
never a tear. And place no faith in remote causes and distant promises.
Every cause intends itself to be good in principle, or it would attract
no followers. But a Cause isn’t like a tree that’s already flowered and
now waits for us at the end on the road. Causes have only the fruit
and flower we, ourselves, cultivate along the way.

“Those who spill innocent blood today don’t become merciful and
compassionate tomorrow. One who poisons the rivers of knowledge
and thrives by hatred and treachery will never become wise and
benevolent. A wealthy society is not one that hoards up its material
riches, but one that spends freely to nourish culture, honour wisdom,
give water to the thirsty and bread to the hungry. And know that
whether we live at the North Pole or linger in the gardens of Cordoba,
we are where we were meant to be...”

Long ago, I cultivated an all consuming desire to travel to the ends
of the earth. To see the sun rising and setting over a thousand orchards,
a thousand villages. And like my brothers, I began to wonder why
anyone would remain forever in an Anatolian forest or a Syrian hamlet.
We even raised that difficult question with our Uncle Noah. And he
answered back, saying that in his richest and ripest years, it was no
longer necessary for man to reinvigorate himself with vast journeys and endless quests. That the Juki could learn to gaze on the sun that rose and set over a single city and see it in a thousand different ways. Extensive travels, he assured us, belong to the spring-season of life. Whereas he and his whole generation had entered into an autumn calm. And now they had learned to gaze on the grass and the trees as if they had never seen such things before and might never see them again. And to experience a deep and abiding sorrow at having to leave behind, sooner or later, all the verdant meadows of this world. At the very same time to drink in the beauty of the earth as if it were nectar and honey being poured into them.

“One man, especially if he is young, may ride his piebald steed from the Oaks of Besan to the waterwheels of al-Andalus (i.e., Spain). And he may be well nourished by the spectacle of the world spread out before him. And another man may linger in a single rose-garden, increasing his awareness of its beauty until it inebriates and recompenses him like nothing he has ever seen.”

Now I, too, want to cultivate my garden and deepen my experience of life with my family and friends.

The legendary bard, Nuratin, said that the deepest thirst of man may lie sleeping within us, waiting to be coaxed into flower. And that man was made in such a way that when we hear this thirst given proper expression in words, it comes to life and rises to exercise its compelling power. And the richer our expression of such a need, the more it is quickened into life and begins to be manifested openly.

It has been speculated that someone who lives in a remote, isolated wilderness and has never seen the outside world would have difficulty even conceiving of the reality of a megalopolis, such as Mexico City or Sao Paulo. That perhaps such a person would think of a modern, cosmopolitan city as something like a collection of small villages put together to form a larger habitat. And that he would have no way of understanding what such an immense, complex dwelling-place is really like.

But may it not also be the case that those who are forever encased in the hypermodern, prolifically developing, futuristic cities of today would have no context in which to situate or explain the repeated
flowerings of archaic worlds of man, such as those typified by the reindeer cultures of the Arctic Region and Siberia, the Shamanistic peoples of the Amazon jungle, Bedouins from the Sahara desert or ‘Gypsies’ in such settings as the pine forests and the icy summits of eastern Anatolia? Man, when he is conditioned to understand everything in existence with respect to material dominance, accepting the dictum that only what is amenable to scientific verification is real or meaningful, would indeed be at a loss to discern what has timeless and universal significance in the hashi nura, the ‘Gypsy Camp’ in an Anatolian forest or a valley of the Syrian highlands.

But I think that whoever lives there, lingering from year to year, will be changed by it as much as the kings of all the Moorish dynasties were changed by living in medieval Spain. There are certain sites on earth that transform those who encounter them in an intimate, active manner. A great city, like a great teacher, saturates us in impression in ways that we don’t begin to suspect until long after. And man, despite what he believes to the contrary, is not like a stone that the water of life can flow over, without ever penetrating to its interior. On the contrary, even the most conservative, narrow minded people are more like a sponge that absorbs this water of impression almost without effort. Man is constantly fermenting, growing, declining in some respects and advancing in others.

According to Uncle Noah, however, the ‘primitive’ habitat of the Juki is like a sacred arcanum where the terrestrial, the celestial and the supra-celestial worlds are interwoven in a single pattern of meaning. A realm in which man becomes hypersensitized to the affinity of the stars that turn in the summer sky, the contours of mountains, water gushing from the desert stones and trees rising toward the sun. And the goal of man should be to love life, become drunk on its beauty and never lose the thirst for more. And to render service to ancient ancestors and serenade the souls of the living.

For man was made in such a way that he was meant to engage in high strivings, embark on sacred quests and, through the raptures of a mystical ascension, commune with ancient forefathers, ride on a celestial steed and drink brandy, wine and fermented mares’ milk with venerated
masters and guides. These are “The Shades who left this earth long ago, drinking water of life and eating bread of life by the banks of the crimson river, beyond the emerald cities and the ruby-coloured mountain, in a land where spring is unceasing.” His visitations to such a place, the setting of various theophanies, cannot be proven even to the traveller on this path, except through the experiment of his own ripening. And those who make the journey consider it a proof unto itself, comparable to the reality of sunshine or falling rain.

In this archaic milieu, hailstones and lightning, birds that cross all boundaries in freedom, mountains wrapped in ever-present storm clouds and nightingale singing in the ruins of the world are all *ayat*, portents, signs and similitude of a supernal reality, beyond our power to define, demarcate and so to limit. And man is himself a coarse, material covering, “like a blanket thrown over a horse to warm it,” beneath which he is composed of *nur* or uncreated, divine light. And when a man dies, the light within him goes on to the Land of the Shades or, according to some, ascends into the firmament, becoming one of the billions of stars in the thick, churning river of the Milky Way.

Others maintain that this immortal destiny can only be claimed by the soul when it is perfected and purified of dross. That man may, indeed, return to this world many times, live many lives and be enriched and instructed by each one of them. That man first descends to this earth like an empty wine-goblet and that with every new life the goblet becomes fuller, more intoxicating. When at last this goblet is filled and the intoxication is complete, the human soul begins to journey on the new road, beyond this terrestrial world of sorrow and loss.

Many, however, consider this allegorical, a way of speaking about a spiritual destiny we are unable to fathom, such as we are now. Man could also be seen as a living portal which leads into rarer, purer, finer, more sublime and more beautiful worlds. Man is a multi-dimensional being, a seed-bed of endless possibilities, as well as an actor in a cosmic dramaturgy which is played out against a backdrop of constantly changing material forces. Yet the drama always reprises the same underlying spiritual themes. Various spiritual romances of the Juki speak of souls that pine and thirst to return to their
‘homeland’ in the ‘celestial forest’ or village of the ancient shades. Or, in a different analogy, such a soul is said to return to the Garden of Eden, consummating the human quest for ‘the water of life’. And man, at such a lofty level, has also been compared to the sweetest singing bird, forever perched on the tree whose roots descend from paradise.

As for the Creator of the world, He is likened to the splendour of the rising sun, *shams tali’ya*, or rather the sun itself is the similitude of ‘the sun of the sun’, Divine Reality.¹ One can repeat a thousand such motifs, and still they would not exhaust the oral commentaries, or the narrative poetry which seeks to depict a Reality beyond the limits of conceptual thinking. And those who speak of this ‘primitive domain’ from afar are no more informed about it than the man in an arctic wilderness is informed about the life of a modern metropolis.

¹ None of this, however, is deemed to be contrary to the essence of Judeo-Christian or Islamic tradition. And it is often the case that a clan of Juki will become attached to one of these religious communities in the outside world.

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**Karthigai Deepam 2011 Calendar Correction**

Karthigai Deepam this year takes place on Thursday, the 8th of December. The *Mountain Path* calendar (Jayanthi issue) erroneously gave the 9th as the date according to earlier estimates. As fixing festival dates often involves subtle astrological calculations, discrepancies can occur. The final decisions were made by the Arunachalaeswara temple authorities who have now scheduled Deepam a day earlier.

According to the *muhurtha* criteria for Deepam, the Sun must be in *vrischhika*, the eighth sign of the zodiac (Scorpio), and for Bharani Deepam, (starting 3 am Deepam morning), the moon should be in *bharani nakshatra*. Maha Deepam follows on the succeeding evening for which the moon should be placed in *krittika nakshatra* at or around the time of sunset. As this alignment involves the moon and is thus not calculated according to the solar calendar, Deepam Day is not a fixed date year to year but fluctuates within the 30-day period between mid-November and mid-December (*Karthigai*), generally falling a day or two prior to, or in some cases coinciding with, *poornima*.

Please note that the flag-raising ceremony and the festival commencement will not be the 30th as announced in the January issue, but rather the 29th November.
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi was a Knower of Brahman and thus verily Brahman himself. Contact with him blessed countless creatures, human beings, animals and birds, to realize their inherent nature of Brahmanhood and obtain release from the cycle of births and deaths. Many such instances have come to light and have been documented. One such is that of Sri Vallur Nattu Srinivasa Rao (VNSR). He came in contact with Bhagavan in 1948 under strange circumstances but got the opportunity to spend a whole day intimately

Sundararajan Mohan and his late wife Nirmala Mohan were introduced to Bhagavan and his teachings by her father, Sri V.N. Srinivasa Rao. They have been researching the unity of world philosophical thought and practice and share their findings in the blog [http://advaitananda-mohan.blogspot.com/](http://advaitananda-mohan.blogspot.com/)
in Bhagavan’s company at Sri Ramana Ashramam. That occasion made a remarkable impression on him and he was blessed to realize the Truth of Brahman in his life as recorded by him.

VNSR was my father-in-law and unlike many formal relationships between son-in-law and father-in-law, I was blessed with his friendship and love. I met him for the first time in 1962 when I had just arrived for a brief visit to India after completing my training in England. His father, Dewan Bahadur Sri V. N. Viswanatha Rao, was a close friend and classmate of my maternal grandfather, Rajamantrapravina Sri A. V. Ramanathan. They both desired a marriage alliance between their families but could not proceed because they both belonged to the same Gotra. The fulfilment of their dream materialized in our marriage. It was in the sacred presence of my grandfather who was himself an enlightened soul and disciple of Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati of Sringeri that I met VNSR. Over the years I got to know him closely. My career kept me in various parts of North India, and he was a practising barrister in Chennai, but every opportunity to meet was a pleasant experience and full of laughter and bonhomie.

**VNSR: A True Renaissance Student, Lawyer and Man**

He was passionately devoted to Oxford where his two years of postgraduate studies from 1935 to 1937 at Wadham College were an important turning point in his life. The experiences he had then were a foundation for his life and taught him self-reliance and introspection. After the fairly traditional and conservative life in a joint family in India and the typically regimented education in school and college, Oxford seemed a breath of fresh air.

He delighted in the freedom of the Oxford system of education which imposed a lot of responsibility on the student and made him work in his own way to understanding the subjects. At Oxford a student was free to attend lectures anywhere in the University and work in the library. But the direct guidance and tutelage came from the Tutor who gave him the important guidelines for study. VNSR’s tutor at Wadham College was Prof F. W. D. Deakin, himself a
young man but, who gave VNSR several challenging objectives. This drove VNSR to study the original writings of many historians and understand their ideas in the original form. This mode of study became a life long habit.

Oxford also helped VNSR overcome his shyness and launched him into debating and oratory. He became Secretary of the Oxford Union’s debating forum, the Oxford Majlis, and he always felt that this exposure gave him a lot of self-confidence and courage.

Post Oxford, VNSR decided to take up a legal career rather than attempt the Indian Civil Service exam. He was deep into his study of law in 1939 when the Second World War broke out and he was persuaded to return to India. He subsequently qualified for his Barrister exam at the Inner Temple from India.

He was not an iconoclast, but he was a rational intellectual, full of curiosity and intense interest. He liked to look at things from an independent, objective, logical viewpoint. During our occasional encounters he would regale me with incidents from history, and poke fun at current events in the light of history. Highly learned in legal matters, he was also keenly interested in psychology.

His way of relaxing was to dip into Plato, or the Oxford Dictionary. Out of sensitivity to my spiritual leanings, he would occasionally talk about some of his own encounters with religion and philosophy. He was anything but orthodox, although, like so many of his generation, he was proficient in Sanskrit. Whenever he came to stay with us, he would dip into my collection of texts and make detailed and careful notes.

Professionally, one can imagine that tall, stately figure in Court, expressing views based on meticulous research. Needless to say, he was a lawyer of considerable eminence. It is probable that his independence of outlook limited his popularity with colleagues, but he was not one to compromise. Yet he rose to be the President of the (then) Madras Bar Association, surely the pinnacle of his professional career.
On one occasion when he was visiting us at Delhi, we took him to the Ramana Kendra there. It was on that occasion that he related to us in his usual under-stated way about his own visit to Sri Ramana Ashramam in 1948, as a young lawyer. The under-current of how this visit must have changed his life can only be inferred from the stunning detail in his narrative (from a memory that was already 30 years old at the time of its telling).

In 1948, VNSR, a freshly minted barrister, was actively looking for briefs. One late evening a lady walked into his office at his residence seeking legal help to file a suit against Sri Ramana Ashramam at Tiruvannamalai. Her argument was that she was a lifelong devotee of Bhagavan and the Ashram authorities had unfairly refused entry to her on the grounds that she was ‘mad’.

VNSR expressed complete ignorance about Bhagavan and of the Sri Ramana Ashramam. He insisted that he could take up her request only after he had the opportunity to visit the Ashramam and after he had sought a clarification from Bhagavan. Somehow she seems to have taken him seriously and arranged for his travel to Tiruvannamalai. The plan was that she would also arrange to be there and wait for instructions at the gate.

The subsequent events are best stated as he related it to us:

So I ultimately reached the Ashram. I paid off the cart driver and approached a building. Someone showed the way and I reached a large room.

I took off my shoes and entered. There was no one there, I think, except the Maharishi. He sat near a brazier and was warming his hands. He looked up and smiled pleasantly.

I was about to speak when he called someone and gave him some instructions. The person beckoned me and took me to a dining hall. He then placed a leaf-plate in front of me and I was served iddlies and sambhar. I can never forget the taste of those delicious iddlies and sambhar.

When the breakfast was over, I was taken to a room. I washed and changed into more comfortable clothes.
When I returned to the hall again I found many people seated there. The Maharishi was seated on the couch. He again saw me enter and beckoned me to sit at a place near the couch. I sat down.

Someone then got up and addressed me.

“I gather you are a lawyer, sir, and you have come to represent Mrs. Ranganayaki Ammal,” he said.

I then also stood up and, with much dignity, said, “Yes, sir, my name is V.N.Srinivasa Rao, Barrister. May I know your name?”

He replied, “I am Dr. ___ . We gather that you are planning to take legal action on behalf of Mrs. Ranganayaki Ammal.”

I said, “Yes, sir, that is correct.”

He said, with some impatience, “She is mad!”

I looked at him severely. “You said you are a Doctor, sir. Are you prepared to give me a certificate in writing that she is mad?”

He looked seriously at me. Then he just shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

I turned back to see the Maharishi beckoning me.

When I approached him, he asked me details about myself. I spoke to him of my credentials and stated that I had come on behalf of Mrs. Ranganayaki Ammal.

He smiled and pointed to a particular place near the wall.

“Is she the one who used to sit there?” he asked.

I was confused. I just remained silent.

He then asked me, “Where is she?”

I said, “She should be at the gate of the Ashram.”

“Are you sure?” he queried.

“I am quite sure. That was our agreement.” I replied.

He then pointed to the door. “Bring her,” he said.

I went out to the gate. Sure enough, she was standing there, complete with her spectacles and umbrella.

I told her, “The Maharishi has asked me to bring you in ... no melodramatics please. Promise me you will behave yourself.”

She nodded her head in assent.

“Follow me,” I said, and turned and came to the hall. She followed meekly.
Just as we stepped into the hall, she threw down the umbrella and crying “Bhagavan! Bhagavan!” ran up to him and fell at his feet.

It was then that I realized the significance of the Maharishi’s earlier query. I went up to her and said, “Madam, you promised me you would control yourself. Please come and be seated.” I pointed to her old place. She went quickly and sat down.

I turned to the Maharishi. He gave me a brilliant smile. He pointed to a place quite close to the couch. I sat there the whole morning. He made someone bring a photo album and made me go through it, pointing out various people and mentioning names. At this length of time, I only remember the photo of a cow. He said, “That is Lakshmi.”

He later arranged for me to be shown all over the Ashram. He particularly asked my guide to show me Paul Brunton’s cottage.

The rest of the day passed like a dream. We had lunch and he again made me sit near his couch.

Later that evening I realized I had to catch a train back to Madras. I thought it would be appropriate to take leave of the Maharishi after all the kindness he had bestowed on me. I went up to him to inform him.

He looked surprised and said, “But you have to eat dinner. You can leave after dinner.”

I went and packed all my belongings and made my way to the dining hall. Orthodox Brahmins were seated in a long row. I slowly went somewhere to the end of the row and sat opposite a leaf-plate.

Someone suddenly came to me.

“Please get up and come!” he said.

I thought that I might have sat down at a wrong place.

“This is perfectly OK,” I said, getting up awkwardly.

“Bhagavan is calling you,” he said. “Please follow me.”

We went right up and there was the Maharishi seated in front of a leaf. Another leaf was laid near his.

“For whom do you think this has been laid?” he asked affectionately.

I was taken aback and slowly sat down. We began to eat.

As I was an irrepressible young man then, I looked up at him and asked, “Is it permitted to speak?”

“Of course,” he replied, “Ask anything you want.”
We actually had quite a long conversation between mouthfuls. I asked him many questions and he answered all of them. I remember vividly one particular question I asked and the answer he gave me. “Please tell me,” I asked him, “Is Ranganayaki Ammal really mad?”

He smiled and replied: “Some people come here a quarter mad, and they go back half mad! Some people come here half mad, and they go back fully mad! Some people come here fully mad, and I don’t know what happens to them! Is it not all so wonderful?”

After dinner was over, I washed and went and prostrated to him. I then left for the station. The same horse cart was there.

“So did you see the Maharshi?” asked the cart driver.

“Yes-s-s,” I replied pensively.

When the train came, I got into my compartment. Someone opened the door and came in.

It was the Station Master. His eyes were bright with excitement.

“We heard all about it! You are a very fortunate young man!” he said and shook my hands eagerly.

Many years later, VNSR was attending a marriage, when an old man who was seated on a chair there beckoned him.

“You are the lucky person who spent a whole day with Bhagavan, aren’t you?” he asked. VNSR admitted it was so.

It was the Station Master.

Realization that I am in the presence of someone exceptional

Many years passed both from the incident and its telling. It was in 1983, on a chance visit by me to Chennai, that we found ourselves alone for a whole afternoon. After the usual rambling discussion about mundane matters, he suddenly confided in me that he had succeeded in ‘stilling the mind’. His eyes sparkled with unusual gaiety and laughter as he explained how all thought had vanished. He went on to explain his subsequent experience of the physical world around us. I cannot say that I completely understood him. But I was moved when he used the words “This must be self-realization!” I had to leave
soon after to catch a flight, but, perhaps for the first time, I voluntarily prostrated. For a person who rarely cared for formality, he accepted the obeisance and blessed us all profusely.

After that, his health seemed to give way, a bit, and he suffered a mild stroke in 1984. I was deep in my own career and apart from spending a few weeks with him at the nursing home, till his discharge, I cannot say I followed up on our earlier conversation.

Fast forward to 1990, and I got another chance to spend some time in his company. His life style had changed considerably after the stroke and he could not chat and laugh the way he did earlier. He still joked about the medical regime but he was slower and less active. However, he was kind enough to let me see his diary and copy his notes from it. I reproduce some extracts below:

**Excerpts from his Diary**

**26-02-85** The result is that the person is no longer what he was prior to this experience. The world, which was subjective becomes objective. Desires vanish. Fear of Death goes. Pain and pleasure, Failure and success, Fame, Achievement, — all become equal in the mind.

Curiously enough, the power of enjoyment of Life Force does not vanish; on the other hand Life becomes more intensively interesting. Nature around looks more beautiful. Earth and the Life which is seen on it is heavenly to watch. Only purity in everything becomes obvious to the mind. Vanity vanishes. Titles and what not given by human beings to human beings don’t have a meaning. Above all, an Unknown Bliss descends on the Mind. And at such moments the awareness of the world around disappears. It feels as if one loses oneself in Eternity.

I wonder whether this is Self Realization. I record this as I had this experience about twenty days back.

**30-03-85** … even men of great mental power struggle for the acquisition of shanti – peace.

This Shanti is necessary to acquire if the other non-physical force – spiritual force – which is imbedded in each one of us has to be realized. This other force is not earthly and is not concerned with the physical.
body. It is connected with the Eternal Power of the Universe, but it is imprisoned in the body because the universe is not merely spiritual. It also is capable of creating physical objects in part(s) of the universe.

To enable the imprisoned spiritual force in the body to merge now and then with the Great Universal Force even during one’s life, is the challenge of life. Ninety-nine persons out of hundred are so obsessed with the Mind …… and estimate the success of their existence on the basis of their Mind …… and they do not waste a minute or even (a) single thought on the very existence of a spark of the other mighty force — the Universal Force — that lies dormant in the human body……

……to those who do not want to fear death, and who desire serenity, the other spirit or force counts.

This does not mean that the Mind force and the other non-body force work at cross purposes. It is not necessary to shun one to gain the other.

As a matter of fact, one who achieves self-realization (i.e. is able to make his inner spirit unite as often as possible with the Universal Spirit) is able to enjoy his physical life better. Physical life and the existence on earth become more enjoyable after self-realization. It is a mistake to imagine that self-realization is renunciation. Far from it.

A certain objectivity gets established after self-realization. This objectivity which helps detachment makes one enjoy worldly things better.

Remember that an actor never enjoys as much as a spectator does in a theatre.

12-04-85 … In truth, the Un-created Brahman can be realized as existing in the man only by allowing that part of the Universal Force present inside the man to feel its identity with the Uncreated Brahman. This, when done is Self-Realization.

But the doing can hardly be by Meditation through the Mind.

Everything in the body, including the mind, must be suppressed into silence before the Inner Universal Force present in man can get stirred and reach out its identity with Brahman.

Self Realization is effortless. Meditation is the result of effort.
08-07-85  …. Now, recently, a sudden idea flashed across me. It suggested that it is an enormous waste of energy to make the soul run to have union with the Universal Soul, when the Universal Soul itself is eternally running through every human body. The Universal Soul does not stay put at the centre of the universe. It pervades the Universe……

…..A few self experiments convinced me the logic behind my new idea was valid. Why not awake one’s Atman to have an automatic and continuous communion with the constantly passing Universal Soul in the body. Once I succeeded in making this communion I found it so effortless that I was surprised.

Thus I found that any moment and at any place it is possible for one to have one’s soul have and enjoy communion with the Universal Soul. The beatitude that results is the same I experienced with all such efforts several months ago. Self Realization is the simplest thing to achieve.

VNSR’s legacy: Study, Contemplate, Realize.

VNSR had a second stroke in 1991. He had to be given emergency help but he came through it all cheerfully. He blessed all who came in contact with him and shed the body peacefully in Jan 1993.

VNSR was not only a learned lawyer but also a wonderfully compassionate and understanding human being. It was VNSR who really introduced me to Freud. He always felt that a study of Freud during his Oxford days had helped him a lot. Thus, many of his clients used to find him not just a quintessential lawyer but also a counselor and many were the cases where his advice helped to resolve issues and settle them out of court.

He was a champion of difficult causes. I recollect that he was instrumental in restoring the authority of a family to perform their hereditary duties on the occasion of the Aradhana of the great composer Sri Thyagaraja at Tiruvaiyaru. He also helped a Muslim family regain access to an important Dargah in Chennai. Needless to say there were countless cases where he never charged fees.

He was a rationalist and as a lawyer he tended to be more comfortable with factual evidence and the use of reason rather than
anything even vaguely mystic. I am a slightly emotional chap and when I exuberantly went through a phase of Bhakti yoga he was entirely kind and allowed me my incessant talk of miracles and faith. Even with regards to Sri Ramana’s own teachings, I was more attached to the Aksharamanamalai than his Upadesam. However, VNSR put up with my idiosyncrasies with a kindness that is hard to forget. Oddly enough my own understanding of ‘rationalism’ (jnana yoga) started soon after he passed away. Later as I wandered through these new fields of thought and logic, I missed him terribly. Nowadays I keep thinking that I could have enjoyed his company so much.

His kindness took the form of sharing his most intimate experiences with me, allowing me access to his jottings which I have reproduced above. He never flaunted his spirituality, yet he blessed me with an account of his experience of ‘Self-realization’. I was deeply moved on that occasion as it dawned on me that I was in the company of a realized soul. Surely, it must have been a blessing of that one intimate day (or many ages perhaps?) in the company of Bhagavan. May that bliss and beatitude that VNSR experienced be the experience of all!

Acknowledgements


The excerpts from VNSR’s diaries are being published for the first time.
Jagrat and Sushupti

The Waking State vis a vis The Dreaming State

JOHN GRIMES

The common understanding of the ‘waking state’ and the ‘dream state’ involves a misunderstanding according to Sri Ramana. Truly there is only dreaming. True waking and true dreaming only the Sage knows. Individuals dream they are awake and they dream that they sleep. The three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep are only varieties of the dream state. Sri Ramana said, “Real waking lies beyond the three states of waking, dream, and sleep.”¹

The realm of maya is comprised of everyday experiences as well as dreams and illusions; any and every realm involving multiplicity. According to Advaita, anything that a person perceives or experiences


John Grimes is a recognised academic authority of Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras. He recently released Ramana Maharshi: The Crown Jewel of Advaita which is published by Indica Books, Varanasi.
is attributed some sort of existence, reality. The question is, ‘what sort of reality?’ What is to be understood is that the reality that a person generally attributes to objects of perception is not the reality that is Brahman. That which is apparently real has a reality that is very much limited. Such ‘existents’ or ‘appearances’ are seemingly real to an individual at the time they are experienced, but once a cognition suffers sublation, it ceases to be ‘real’. Their reality is subject to a given individual at a given time. A useful example to demonstrate that perceptions are possible of objects that do not necessarily exist in empirical reality is the case of dreams. Dreams are inscrutable phenomena and Sri Ramana made frequent use of dreams to illustrate the nature of reality:

“All that we see is dream, whether we see it in the dream state or waking state. On account of some arbitrary standards about the duration of the experience and so on, we call one experience a dream and another waking experience. With reference to reality both the experiences are unreal.”

In a dream we observe that every dream-object, including oneself, all enjoy the exact same ontological status. The reality of the most expensive diamond is exactly the same as a speck of dirt. This aspect of dreams helps to convey some understanding of the state of a Sage. Sri Ramana remarked: “Does a man who sees many individuals in his dream persist in believing them to be real and enquire after them when he wakes up?” “When a man dreams, he creates himself (the ego) and the surroundings, all of them are later withdrawn into himself. The one becomes many, along with the seer.”

In addition to this, dreams are a helpful aid in a spiritual seeker’s spiritual practices according to Sri Ramana. A seeker is advised to look upon everything in the world as possessing the same value, since nothing in the world actually possesses any real value. If the world

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is viewed as a dream containing dream objects, an individual is less likely to foster worldly desires and strive to fulfill them.

“A dreamer dreams a dream. He sees the dream world with pleasures, pains, etc. But he wakes up and then loses all interest in the dream world. So it is with the waking world also. Just as the dream-world, being only a part of yourself and not different from you, ceases to interest you, so also the present world would cease to interest you if you awake from this waking dream (samsara) and realize that it is a part of yourself and not an objective reality. Because you think that you are apart from the objects around you, you desire a thing. But, if you understand that the thing was only a thought-form you would no longer desire it.”

The dream world is very useful but all that we can know from the dream world is that the Reality is ‘not-this’, ‘not-this.’ If the world is but an extended dream, this tells us that it is not real, but it can’t tell us what is Real. Even if we learn that this world is a dream, all that an extended dream informs us of we can realise is that all this is not real. It doesn’t tell us what is real.

The dream analogy has many facets to it and explicates much of what may remain puzzling vis a vis non-dualistic teachings. The dream analogy clarifies the rather incredible claim that one is not, as is generally believed, in the universe, but rather the universe is in oneself. Dreams and everything contained within them are within the dreamer. Sri Ramana said: “You dream of finding yourself in another town. Can another town enter your room? Could you have left and gone there?” In dreams, the dreamer is the light of that realm, the dreamer creates the entire dream universe, experiences various things therein, and then withdraws them.

Dreams, according to Sri Ramana, suggest that the dream state and the waking state partake of the same reality. Dreams have the ability to put into doubt the reality of waking experiences which one

5 Ibid., §625, p.588.
take for granted as real. What are the reasons why one would make such a bold claim? Even if it is true that objects come and go in both states, there seem to exist many differences between them.

Sri Ramana said: “In the waking state, the ego identifies itself with the physical body; in the dream state it identifies with the subtle mind. The ego and the mind are one and the same.” Just because Sri Ramana declares that whatever is seen by the mind is unreal, does not seem to prove the point. Even if one were to grant this, how does this show that objects are not real in either case? This seems to fly in the face of everyone’s everyday experience. Dream objects differ from waking objects in a number of aspects. Objects found in the waking state are practically efficient. One can actually drink water in the way one can’t drink dream water. Dream objects are often bizarre, abnormal, and incredible. In the waking state one is aware that one is awake but in the dream state one is not usually aware that one is dreaming. Dreams take place within the mind/body while the waking state involves the external world. Dream objects are often imprecise and ethereal while waking objects are definite and solid. Dream objects last only so long as the dream lasts while waking objects are perceived before and after a dream.

Sri Ramana clarifies: “There is no difference between dream and the waking state except that the dream is short and the waking long. Both are the result of the mind. Because the waking state is long, we imagine that it is our real state. But, as a matter of fact, our real state is *turiya* or the fourth state which is always as it is and knows nothing of the three states of waking, dream, or sleep.”

Further, consider the fact that waking objects outlast the duration of dream objects only from the vantage point of the waking state. What status do waking state objects have from within the dream state is unknown. Why privilege one vantage point over another? In an attempt to determine what is real, one cannot presuppose that the criterion of the waking state is valid when that is the very thing one

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8 Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 29-10-1945, Afternoon.
is attempting to prove. Isn’t it obvious that dream objects last as long as the dream lasts and waking objects last as long as the waking state lasts. No advantage to either side.

Sri Ramana remarked: “Because you find the dream creations transitory in relation to the waking state there is said to be a difference. The difference is only apparent and not real.”

Again, on this aspect he said, confronted with a person who was objecting that a dream is fleeting and unreal, besides being contradicted by the waking state:

“The waking experiences are similar. You go to sleep and dream a dream in which the experiences of fifty years are condensed within the short duration of the dream, say five minutes. There is continuity in the dream. Which is real now? Is the period covering fifty years of your waking state real or the short duration of five minutes of your dream? The standards of time differ in the two states. That is all. There is no other difference between the experiences.”

The objection that dream objects are not similar to waking objects cannot be supported on the contention that, while objects experienced in the waking state are practically efficient, those seen in a dream are not. When confronted with this objection,

Sri Ramana replied: “You are not right. There are thirst and hunger in dream also. You might have had your fill and kept over the remaining food for the next day. Nevertheless you feel hungry in dream. This food does not help you. One’s dream-hunger can be satisfied only by eating dream-food. Dream-wants are satisfied by dream-creations only.”

Objects of the waking state only have efficiency in the waking state. Dream objects are useful in their own way in the dream state. Dream water cannot quench a waking thirst, but it does quench a dream thirst; and it is equally true that waking water cannot quench a dream thirst even though it does quench a waking thirst.

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9 op. cit., Tālks, §399, p.371.
10 Ibid, §487, p.469.
11 Ibid, §400, p.375.
Again, listen to Sri Ramana:

“A phenomenon cannot be a reality simply because it serves a purpose or purposes. Take a dream for example. The dream creations are purposeful; they serve the dream-purpose. The dream water quenches dream thirst. The dream creation is however contradicted in the waking state. The waking creation is contradicted in the other two states. What is not continuous cannot be real. If real, the thing must ever be real — and not real for a short time and unreal at other times. So it is with magical creations. They appear real and are yet illusory. Similarly the universe cannot be real of itself — that is to say, apart from the underlying Reality.”

“It is like a man satisfying his dream wants by dream creations. There are objects, there are wants and there is satisfaction. The dream creation is as purposeful as the waking world and yet it is not considered real. Thus we see that each of these illustrations serves a distinct purpose in establishing the stages of unreality. The realized Sage finally declares that in the regenerate state the waking world also is found to be as unreal as the dream world is found to be in the waking state. Each illustration should be understood in its proper context; it should not be studied as an isolated statement. It is a link in a chain. The purpose of all these is to direct the seeker’s mind towards the one Reality underlying them all.”

Thus it cannot be said that waking objects alone are useful, fruitful, or practically efficient. Dream objects work in dreams just as waking objects work in the waking state. Thus, the issue is still out on whether the waking state can be proven to be different from the dream state. Another argument is advanced stating that dreams are strange and contain bizarre objects, while the waking state is normal. Adi Sankara addressed this issue in his commentaries on the Brahmasutras and the Gaudapada-karikas:

“It may be argued that, since the contents of dream are quite different from the objects of waking, they cannot constitute the illustration for proving the illusoriness of the waking world. The

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12 Ibid, §315, p.278.
dream-contents are strange and abnormal, and are not the replica of what are experienced in waking. It has been said that the things seen in dreams are strange and abnormal. But when and to whom do they appear abnormal? To him who has returned to waking after a dream. In the dream-state itself the contents are not realized to be strange. It is from the side of waking that the dream-contents seem abnormal, but in themselves they are quite normal.”

Just as a traveller who is well-instructed travels to a place and sees there strange things which are but natural to that place, so also the dreamer transported as he is to the dream-world, experiences strange things. Each state or circumstance has its own peculiarity. But that cannot prevent comparison of the waking-world with the contents of dream.

There do exist strange and unusual events and objects in the waking state, even if they may be rarer than the ordinary and commonplace. Sometimes, quite often in fact, dream contents are ordinary, too. The Brahmasutras say: “The dream is only an illusion, for its nature is not completely manifest (compared to waking).” However, dreams are sometimes quite vivid and lucid while perceptions in the waking state are sometimes fuzzy and unclear. But this is not the crucial issue here. In dreams, the senses function unaided by the external sense organs while the sense organs function in the waking state. Yet, is it the case that what the external sense organs perceive is Reality? What is important to note is that the logic of one state need not conform to another in order for both to be dream-states. Dreams can take many forms and merely because of variations one need not conclude that something is not a dream.

As Sri Ramana remarked: “Again, consider it from another point of view: You create a dream-body for yourself in the dream and act with that dream-body. The same is falsified in the waking state. At present you think that you are this body and not the dream-body. In your dream this body is falsified by the dream-body. So that, you

16 Brahmasutra III.2.3.
see, neither of these bodies is real because each of them is true for a
time and false at other times. That which is real must be real forever.
But you say ’I’. This ‘I’-consciousness is present all through the three
states. There is no change in it. That is alone real. The three states
are false. They are only for the mind. It is the mind that obstructs
your vision of your true nature. Your true nature is that of infinite
spirit. That was the case in your sleep. You note the limitations in the
other two states. What is the difference due to? There was no mind
in sleep, but it exists in the dream and the waking states. The feeling
of limitation is the work of the mind. What is mind? Find it. If you
search for it, it will vanish by itself. For it has no real existence. It is
comprised of thoughts. It disappears with the cessation of thoughts.”

Another aspect of dreams Sri Ramana remarked about was the
charge that a person makes no conscious effort to get rid of a dream
and awaken. Dreams come to an end spontaneously without any
effort on one’s part. If the waking state is a dream, then why doesn’t
it come to an end without any effort on our part? Why should an
individual attempt to realize the Self?

“Your thinking that you have to make an effort to get rid of this
dream of the waking state and your making efforts to attain or realize
awakening are all parts of the dream. When you attain jnana you will
see there was neither the dream during sleep, nor the waking state,
but only yourself and your real state.”

“In a dream, you have no inkling that it is a dream and so you don’t
have the duty of trying to get out of it by your effort. But in this life you
have some intuition, by your sleep experience, by reading and hearing that
this life is something like a dream, and hence the duty is cast on you to
make an effort and get out of it. However, who wants you to realize the
Self, if you don’t want it? If you prefer to be in the dream, stay as you are.”

It has been said that the waking world can be distinguished from the
dream world because in the waking state one is aware that one is awake, but
one is not aware that one is dreaming in the dream state (except perhaps

17 op. cit., Talks, §328, p.294-5.
18 op.cit., Day by Day, 8-9-1945, Morning.
19 Ibid., 3-1-1946, Afternoon.
in what are called lucid dreams). The reason given for this claim is that objects are external to oneself when one wakes while, upon waking, one believes the dream objects were internal. Sri Ramana pointed out that it is only upon awakening that one realizes that the dream objects which had appeared as external to the dreamer in the dream, were actually internal. In a similar manner, upon Self-realization, true awakening, one realizes that the objects of the world that were perceived as external are really internal. Even as the waking state reverses the experience of the dream state, so does Self-realization reverse the experience of the waking state. In this way, the waking and dreaming states are not less but more compatible.

How does one know that there are external physical objects in the waking state and merely internal mental objects in a dream? When dreaming, objects are perceived as real and as external to the perceiver. It is only upon waking that one renounces these perceptions as being mere mental creations, internal, and illusory. Judged from the perspective of within a dream, there is no way to tell that such perceptions are internal. Then the question may arise if a truly awakened person, a jivanmukta, has dreams, because it is said that jivanmuktas do not sleep like ordinary individuals. Sri Ramana said:

“If the jnani can have a waking state, what is the difficulty about his having a dream state? But of course, as his waking state is different from the ordinary man’s waking state, so his dream state also will be different from the ordinary man’s dream state. Whether in waking or in dream, he will not slip from his real state, which is sometimes called the fourth or turiya state.”

“Of course, the jivanmuktas are having brahmakara vrtti always, even during sleep. The real answer to the question, and the whole set of questions, is that the jnani has neither the waking, dreaming, or sleeping states, but only the turiya state. It is the jnani that sleeps. But he sleeps without sleeping or is awake while sleeping.”

Thus, we see that Sri Ramana often used the dream analogy to elucidate how maya operates as well as to reveal the unreality of the

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20 Ibid., 19-3-1945 Afternoon.
21 Ibid, 28-11-1946.
MOUNTAIN PATH

world. In fact, it seemed to be his favourite analogy. He did this not
to formulate an intellectual theory, but to direct the seeker’s mind
towards the one Reality underlying both the waking and dreaming
states. The heart of the issue rests in his contention that the entire
universe, with all its infinite multiplicity, is built upon a single mental
thought, the ‘I’-thought. A person mistakes the ‘I’ for a ‘me’.

There remains the problem that if the waking state is similar to
the dream state, then why doesn’t the waking world disappear when
one wakes up, that is, becomes enlightened? Yet, as we just saw in Sri
Ramana’s own words, the jnani continues to perceive the world even
after Self-realization has occurred – though the jnani perceives the
world as Brahman rather than apart as separate and distinct objects.
To this objection Sri Ramana replied:

“There are different methods of approach to prove the unreality of
the universe. The example of the dream is one among many. Waking,
dreaming, and deep sleep are all treated elaborately in the scriptures
in order that the Reality underlying them might be revealed. It is not
meant to accentuate differences among the three states. The purpose
must be kept clearly in view.

“How can the world be false when, after being repeatedly declared
to be false, one cannot resist satisfying one’s desires from the world? It
is like a man satisfying his dream wants by dream creations. There are
objects, there are wants, and there is satisfaction. The dream creation
is as purposeful as the waking world and yet it is not considered real.

“Thus, we see that each of these illustrations serves a distinct purpose
in establishing the stages of unreality. The realized Sage finally declares
that in the regenerate state the waking world also is found to be as
unreal as the dream world is found to be in the jagrat (waking) state.

“Each illustration should be understood in its proper context; it
should not be studied as an isolated statement. It is a link in a chain.
The purpose of all these is to direct the seeker’s mind towards the one
Reality underlying them all.”

22 op.cit., Talks, §399, p.372.

Errata: The Advent Keyword should have been titled Srsti Vaadah and
not Drsti Vaadah as stated.
The summit of the Vedas (the Upanishads) proclaim ‘Thou Art That’. Instead of becoming aware of the truth of his own Self as Brahman, through the enquiry ‘Who am I?’, if the sadhaka merely meditates in the mind ‘I am that’, that is, I am not the body-mind complex, it will be of no avail. The aspirant does this due to lack of strength and steadfastness.

Commentary
The Upanishadic mahavakya ‘Thou art That’ is usually interpreted as encouraging meditation on the teachings as a means of obtaining that experience. But Bhagavan takes this interpretation to a higher plane. He says that the mahavakyas are a prescription for vichara marga or...
Self-enquiry, and that if and when a *sadhaka* turns his mind inward and engages in the quest of ‘Who am I?’, the mind merges in the Heart. The ego and all its associated *vasanas* come to naught and the Self alone shines as the *Brahman*. Hence Bhagavan indicates that the *Upanishadic* text does not say ‘Meditate on *Brahman*’, but ‘Be *Brahman*’. Bhagavan gives the same directive in the famous eighth verse of the Supplement. “Brahman itself is shining as the Self in the cave of the Heart. Enter the Heart Cave, Abide in the Heart, either by fixing it on the Self or by controlling the breath; thereby thou will become firmly established in the Self.”

According to Bhagavan, all the *mahavakyas* indicate that state of right awareness of the Self; it is not meant to describe any method of meditation. Thus Bhagavan brings out the true import of the *mahavakyas*. When the Truth of this is firmly established in the mind of the aspirant, he crosses the impediments of his own weaknesses and plunges within. The aspirant can then catch hold of the stream of *vichara* ‘Who am I?’ by banishing all distractions and with one-pointed enquiry, dives within. The kernel of the Truth contained in the *mahavakyas* is then experienced as a subjective feeling of Awareness. The ‘feel of Being’, not the rational approach, is the *sine-qua-non* since the truth is beyond the scope of mind or reasoning faculty.

The statement ‘Thou Art That’ comes from the instructions of Uddalaka Aruni to his son Svetaketu in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Uddalaka posits the Truth as *sat* or existence, which Bhagavan has beautifully transcreated in Tamil as *ulladu*. Uddalaka states that the Self or *atma* is the subtle essence of all things manifest and unmanifest. The Self is not in a distant place, unknown and unrealized. The teacher admonishes the disciple not to search for it elsewhere. Bhagavan emphatically says that the Self is here and now, immediate to you. There is nothing to be realized; just give up the notion that you are not realized the truth will then spontaneously shine, ‘Thou Art That’.

Bhagavan here hints in the last line of the verse at the need to exercise an indomitable will and matchless courage to take up Self-enquiry. The four indispensable requisites for this task (*sadhana catushtayan*) are: i. *nitya-anitya vastu vivekam* (discrimination);
Bhagavan says that the one who suffers from lack of courage and a weak mind can start with the bhavana meditation on ‘I am Brahman’. Those with courage, once they see the Truth of the mahavakyas, will immediately plunge within and remain firmly established in the Self.

Is it necessary to point out at the vast gulf of difference between the jnani and the ignorant man? The state of jivanmukta is indicated here by the description that, in his case, the Brahman is ever shining as the Self. In a later verse, Bhagavan shows how absurd it is to say that a jnani meditates, on ‘I am that’. Bhagavan says that it is as ridiculous as a man meditating ‘I am a man’.

There is a beautiful verse in Ozhivil Odukkam on the person (aspirant) who lacks courage.

Fire cannot burn and reduce to cinder
The green banana stem;
The touch stone of alchemy
Converts not an earthen pot
For unripe cowards, atma vidya is fruitless!

Mahavakyas seek to remove our pramada (forgetfulness) of the fact that that we are indeed Brahman. When we grasp the meaning of the statement and abide in that, the super-imposed non-self disappears. On the other hand, any amount of mental reflection on ‘I am Brahman’, as a thought-form will only add to the ceaseless flow of thoughts. A sign-post pointing out to Tiruvannamalai will not take you there. You will have to take that road. Likewise, the spiritual aspirant, with undaunted courage, should take the journey within. Then he will reach his destination which is Here and Now.
John Maynard

Samadhi of Tattuvaraya
Tattuvaraya was a Tamil saint and poet whom scholars believe flourished in the late 15th century. He was a prolific author who wrote thousands of verses on a wide variety of spiritual topics. Bhagavan noted in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §648, that he was ‘the first to pour forth *advaita* philosophy in Tamil’. Prior to his arrival on the Tamil literary scene, *advaita* texts in Tamil seem to have been translations of, or expositions on, texts composed in Sanskrit.

One of Tattuvaraya’s compositions was mentioned several times by Bhagavan. This is how he narrated the story in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21st November 1945:

Tattuvaraya composed a *bharani* [a kind of poetical composition in Tamil that features military heroes who win great battles] in honour of his Guru Sorupananda and convened an assembly of learned pandits to hear the work and assess its value. The pandits
raised the objection that a *bharani* was only composed in honour of great heroes capable of killing a thousand elephants, and that it was not in order to compose such a work in honour of an ascetic. Thereupon the author said, ‘Let us all go to my Guru and we shall have this matter settled there’. They went to the Guru and, after all had taken their seats, the author told his Guru the purpose of their coming there. The Guru sat silent and all the others also remained in *mauna*. The whole day passed, night came, and some more days and nights, and yet all sat there silently, no thought at all occurring to any of them and nobody thinking or asking why they had come there. After three or four days like this, the Guru moved his mind a bit and thereupon the assembly regained their thought activity. They then declared, ‘Conquering a thousand elephants is nothing beside this Guru’s power to conquer the rutting elephants of all our egos put together. So certainly he deserves the *bharani* in his honour!’

Sorupananda, his Guru, was also his maternal uncle. Early on in their life they had made an arrangement whereby they would both seek Gurus in different places. Tattuvaraya travelled to the north of India from Virai, their home town, Sorupananda to the south. The agreement further stipulated that whichever of the two attained the grace of the Guru first would become the Guru of the other.¹ Sorupananda became the disciple of Sivaprakasa Swami and realised the Self with him. Then, to fulfil the agreement with his nephew, he became his Guru.

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¹ A fuller account of Sorupananda’s and Tattuvaraya’s lives can be found in *The Mountain Path*, 2004, pp. 75-103. A slightly longer account also appears at [http://www.davidgodman.org/tamilt/sorupasaram.shtml](http://www.davidgodman.org/tamilt/sorupasaram.shtml). Both locations contain a complete translation of *Sorupa Saram*, Sorupananda’s only known work. Sorupananda’s name is spelled ‘Swarupananda’ in Ramanasramam publications, while Tattuvaraya’s name appears in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* as ‘Tavaroyar’ and ‘Tatva Rayar’. There is a very similar retelling of the *bharani* incident in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §262. In *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (letter dated 8th April 1948) Bhagavan gives a brief summary of how Sorupananda became Tattuvaraya’s Guru.
Though Tattuvaraya was a prolific author, only one work has ever been attributed to Sorupananda: *Sorupa Saram*, a 102-verse poem about the nature of the experience of the Self. This work was so highly valued by Bhagavan, he included it on a list of six titles that he recommended to Annamalai Swami. Since the other five were *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, *Ribhu Gita*, *Ashtavakra Gita*, *Ellam Ondre*, and *Yoga Vasishta*, *Sorupa Saram* is in distinguished company.

Tattuvaraya realised the Self quickly and effortlessly in the presence of Sorupananda. The opening lines of *Paduturai*, one of his major works, reveal just how speedily the event took place:

> The feet [of Sorupananda], they are the ones that, through grace, and assuming a divine form, arose and came into this fertile world to enlighten me in the time it takes for a black gram seed to roll over.\(^2\)

Black gram is the *dhal* that is one of the two principal ingredients of iddlies and dosa. It is 2-3 mm across and slightly asymmetrical, rather than spherical. This property led Tattuvaraya to write, in another verse, that Sorupananda granted him liberation in the time it took for ‘a [black] gram seed to wobble and turn over onto its side’.\(^3\)

Tattuvaraya attributed this near-instantaneous enlightenment wholly to the power and grace of his Guru, rather than to any intrinsic merit, maturity or worthiness:

> It is possible to stop the wind. It is possible to flex stone. But what can be done with our furious mind? How marvellous is our Guru, he who granted that this mind should be totally transformed into the Self! My tongue, repeat this without ever forgetting.

> When my Lord, who took me over by bestowing his lotus feet, glances with his look of grace, the darkness in the heart vanishes. All the things become completely clear and transform into *Sivam*. All the *sastras* are seen to point towards reality.

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\(^2\) *Tiruvadi Malai*, lines 1-3.

\(^3\) *Nanmanimalai*, verse 10.
Most glorious Lord, if you hadn’t looked upon me with your eye of divine grace, how could I, your devotee, and the mind that enquired, experience the light that shines as the flourishing world, as many, as jnana, and as one?

To destroy me, you gave me one look in which there was no looking. You uprooted the ignorance of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. You brought to an end all the future births of this cruel one. O Lord, am I fit for the grace that you bestowed on me?

Sorupananda’s mind-silencing ability is quite evident both from the story of the bharani that Bhagavan told on several occasions and from the verses in which Tattuvaraya spoke of this transmission from his own direct experience. Tattuvaraya even stated in some places, somewhat hyperbolically, that Sorupananda, unlike the gods, bestowed instant liberation on everyone who came into his presence:

[In order to convince the devas] Brahma, lacking the power to make them experience directly the state of being, held the red-hot iron in his hand and declared, ‘This is the ultimate reality declared by the Vedas. There is nothing else other than this. I swear to it.’ Siva as Dakshinamurti declared, ‘In all the worlds, only the four are fit; they alone are mature for tattva jnana.’ Lord [Krishna], holding the discus, had to repeat eighteen times to ignorant Arjuna, who was seated on the wheeled chariot. But here in this world [my Guru] Sorupananda bestows jnana on all as palpably as the gem on one’s palm.

The Brahma Gita is the source of the story mentioned at the beginning of the verse. This text was translated from Sanskrit into Tamil by Tattuvaraya himself. His version of the relevant verses, taken from chapter five, is as follows:

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4 Venba Antadi, vv. 12, 14, 60, 69.
5 Tiruvadi Malai, lines 117-126. ‘Eighteen times’ refers to the chapters of the Bhagavad Gita.
Statue of Tattuvaraya at his samadhi
The four-faced One [Brahma], he who creates all the worlds and is their Lord, said, ‘You [gods] who love me well, listen! Since it is I who declare to you that this is the meaning of the arcane Vedas, this is the reality beyond compare. If you are in any doubt, I will have the iron heated till it is red hot and hold it in my golden hands to prove myself free of any falsehood.’

He who sits upon the lotus blossom [Brahma] said, ‘[Gods, you who are] loving devotees [of Lord Siva], listen! The meaning of the Vedas, as I have explained it, is just so. There is nothing further. In order that you should be convinced of this in your minds, I have sworn a threefold oath, holding onto the feet of Lord [Siva].

Holding a red-hot iron in one’s hand was ancient trial-by-ordeal way of affirming the truth. If the flesh of the hand did not burn, then the statement uttered was deemed to be true.

Tattuvaraya made the claim in the Tiruvadi Malai lines that his Guru was more powerful and more capable of granting enlightenment than the trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu in the form of Krishna, and Siva. Elaborating on this theme, Tattuvaraya stated that Siva, appearing as Dakshinamurti, only managed to enlighten the four sages (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata); Brahma had to resort to holding a red-hot iron and taking an oath to persuade his deva followers that his teachings were true; whereas Krishna, despite giving out the extensive teachings that are recorded in the Bhagavad Gita, wasn’t able to enlighten even Arjuna. Though this is a somewhat harsh assessment, the inability of Krishna to enlighten Arjuna through his Gita teachings was mentioned by Bhagavan himself:

Likewise, Arjuna, though he told Sri Krishna in the Gita ‘Delusion is destroyed and knowledge is imbibed,’ confesses later that he has forgotten the Lord’s teaching and requests Him to repeat it. Sri Krishna’s reiteration in reply is the Uttara Gita.6

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6 Sri Ramana Reminiscences, p. 52.
While all this might sound slightly blasphemous, it is a long and well-established position in Saivism that, when it comes to enlightening devotees, the human Guru is more effective and has more power than the gods themselves.

Though Tattuvaraya knew that it was the immense power of his Guru that had granted him liberation, he was at a loss to understand why that power had ultimately singled him out as a worthy recipient of its liberating grace. In one of his long verses he ruminated on the mysterious nature of prarabdha – why events had unfolded the way they did in various narratives of the gods – before chronicling the circumstances of his own liberation in a stirring peroration:

When [even] the gods despair; when those who investigate the paths of every religion become confused and grow weary; when even they fail to reach the goal, they who perform great and arduous tapas, immersing themselves in water in winter, standing in the midst of fire in summer, and foregoing food, so that they experience the height of suffering, I do not know what it was [that bestowed jnana upon me]. Was it through the very greatness of the noble-minded one [Sorupananda]? Or through the nature of his compassion? Or was it the effect of his own [absolute] freedom [to choose me]? I was the lowest of the low, knowing nothing other than the objects of sense. I was lost, limited to this foul body of eight hands span, filled with putrid flesh. But he bade me ‘Come, come,’ granting me his grace by looking upon me with his lotus eyes. When he spoke that single word, placing his noble hands upon my head and crowning it with his immaculate noble feet, my eye of jnana opened. [Prior to this] I was without the eye [of jnana], suffering through births and deaths for countless ages. [But] when he commanded me ‘See!’, then, for me, there was no fate; there was no karma; there was no fiery-eyed death. All the world of differentiated forms became simply a manifestation of Sorupananda.7

7 Nanmanimalai, v. 37, lines 28-50.
The lines that immediately precede this extract discuss destiny, karma and death, and mention a claim that it is impossible to destroy them. Tattuvaraya then disagrees, citing his Guru Sorupananda’s statement: ‘We have routed good and evil deeds in this world; we have destroyed the power of destiny; we have escaped the jaws of Yama [death].’

In the portion of the verse cited here Tattuvaraya emphatically backs up this claim by saying that when his own eye of jnana was opened through the look and touch of his Guru, ‘for me, there was no fate; there was no karma; there was no fiery-eyed death. All the world of differentiated forms became simply a manifestation of Sorupananda.’

There are other verses which reaffirm Tattuvaraya’s statement that after he had been liberated by Sorupananda he knew nothing other than the swarupa which had taken the form of Sorupananda to enlighten him:

All that appears is only the swarupa of Sorupan[anda]. Where are the firm earth, water and fire? Where is air? Where is the ether? Where is the mind, which is delusion? Where indeed is the great maya? Where is ‘I’?

[In greatness] there is no one equal to Sorupan. Of this there is no doubt. Similarly, there is no one equal to me [in smallness]. I did not know the difference between the two of us when, in the past, I took the form of the fleshy body nor later when he had transformed me into himself by placing his honey-like lotus feet [on my head]. Now I am incapable of knowing anything.

Let some say that the Supreme is Siva. Let some say that the Supreme is Brahma or Vishnu. Let some say that Sakti and Sivam are Supreme. Let some say that it is with form. Let some say that it is formless. But we have come to know that all forms are only our Guru.
Tattuvaraya wrote of the consequences of his realisation in a poem entitled *Pangikku Uraittal* (Paduturai, v. 64), which can be translated as ‘The Lady Telling her Maid’. The second of the five verses, which speaks of the simple, ascetic life he subsequently led, was mentioned with approval by Bhagavan in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, § 648:

- Our reward was that every word we heard or said was *nada* [divine sound].
- Our reward was to have ‘remaining still’ [*summa iruttal*] as our profession.
- Our reward was to enter the company of virtuous devotees.
- My dear companion, this is the life bestowed by our Guru. 1
- Our reward was to have the bare ground as our bed.
- Our reward was to accept alms in the palms of our hands.
- Our reward was to wear a loincloth as our clothing.
- My dear companion, for us there is nothing lacking. 2

Bhagavan’s comment on this verse was:

I had no cloth spread on the floor in earlier days. I used to sit on the floor and lie on the ground. That is freedom. The sofa is a bondage. It is a gaol for me. I am not allowed to sit where and how I please. Is it not bondage? One must be free to do as one pleases, and should not be served by others.

‘No want’ is the greatest bliss. It can be realised only by experience. Even an emperor is no match for a man with no want. The emperor has got vassals under him. But the other man is not aware of anyone beside the Self. Which is better?

The poem continues:

- Our reward was to be reviled by all.
- Our reward was that fear of this world, and of the next, died away.
- Our reward was to be crowned by the lotus feet of the Virtuous One [the Guru].
- My dear companion, this is the life bestowed by our Guru. 3
Our reward was the pre-eminent wealth that is freedom from desire.
Our reward was that the disease called ‘desire’ was torn out by the roots.
Our reward was the love in which we melted, crying, ‘Lord!’
Ah, my dear companion, tell me, what tapas did I perform for this?

There is an indirect reference in the first line to Tirukkural 363: ‘There is no pre-eminent wealth in this world like freedom from desire. Even in the next, there is nothing to compare to it.’
The final verse says:
Our reward was to wear the garment that never wears out.
Our reward was to possess as ‘I’ the one who is present everywhere.
Our reward was to have [our] false devotion become the true.
My dear companion, this is the life bestowed by our benevolent Guru.

‘The garment that never wears out’ is chidakasa, the space of consciousness.

After his realisation Tattuvaraya subsequently spent much of his time absorbed in the Self. Sorupananda knew that his disciple had a great talent for composing Tamil verses and wanted him to utilise it. However, to accomplish this, he knew he had to coax him out of his near-perpetual samadhi state. This is how the story unfolds in the traditional version of Tattuvaraya’s life:

Sorupananda thought, ‘This Tattuvaraya is highly accomplished in composing verses in Tamil. Through him, we should get some sastras composed for the benefit of the world.’

He indicated his will through hints for a long time, but as Tattuvaraya was in nishta [Self-absorption] all the time, he could not act on the suggestions.

11The indented biographical details that follow are all taken from an introduction to a 1953 edition of Tattuvaraya’s Paduturai, published by Chidambaram Ko. Chita. Madalayam. They appear on pages 8-16.
Sorupananda eventually decided to accomplish his objective by following a different course of action. Pretending that he wanted to have an oil bath on a new-moon day, he turned to his attendant and asked, ‘Bring oil’.

Tattuvaraya, who was standing nearby, knew that it was amavasya [new-moon day]. He began to speak by saying ‘Am…’ and then stopped.

It is prohibited to have an oil bath on amavasya. This breach with custom was sufficient to bring Tattuvaraya out of his Self-absorption. He spontaneously uttered ‘Am…’, presumably as a prelude to saying that it was amavasya, but then he stopped because he realised that it would be improper of him to criticise any action his Guru chose to perform. This gave Sorupananda the opportunity he was looking for:

As soon as he heard Tattuvaraya speak, Sorupananda pretended to be angry with him.

He said, ‘Can there be any prohibitions for me, I who am abiding beyond time, having transcended all the sankalpas that take the form of dos and don’ts? Do not stand before me! Leave my presence!’

Tattuvaraya thought to himself, ‘Because of my misdeed of prescribing a prohibition for my Guru, who shines as the undivided fullness of being-consciousness-bliss, it is no longer proper for me to remain in this body. There can be no atonement other than drowning myself in the sea.’

With these thoughts in his mind, he walked backwards while still facing his Guru, shedding torrents of tears at the thought of having to leave his presence.

Other versions of this story make it clear that Tattuvaraya walked backwards away from his Guru’s presence because he felt that it was improper to turn his back on his Guru. Though it is not clear in this particular retelling, he apparently walked backwards until he reached the shore of the sea where he intended to drown himself. The narrative continues:
Through the compassion he felt for other beings and through the power of the Self-experience that possessed him, he began to compose verses as he was walking [backwards towards the ocean]. These were the eighteen works he composed in praise of both his Guru and his Paramaguru [Sivaprakasa Swami]. These were noted down by some of Sorupananda’s other disciples.

As he continued to sing these eighteen works, the disciples who were following him took down what he said, [conveyed the verses to] Sorupananda, and read them in his presence.

Sorupananda pretended not to be interested: ‘Just as a woman with hair combs and ties it, this one with a mouth is composing and sending these verses.’

Another version of Tattuvaraya’s life states that Sorupananda had sent disciples to write down the verses that Tattuvaraya was composing, so his lack of interest should not be taken to be genuine. It was all part of a ruse to get his disciple to begin his literary career.

Meanwhile, Tattuvaraya was pining and lamenting: ‘Alas, I have become unfit to have the darshan of my Guru. Henceforth, in which birth will I have his darshan?’

Like a child prevented from seeing its mother, he was weeping so much, his whole face became swollen. At this point he was singing Tiruvadi Malai from Paduturai. He was close to the edge of the sea and was about to die.

When the disciples went to Sorupananda and updated him about these events, he [relented and] said, ‘Ask the “Guruvukku Veengi”[the one whose obsessive desire for his Guru is making him ill] to come here’.

When Tattuvaraya heard about this, he was completely freed from his bodily suffering, and he also regained the power to walk [forwards].

The Pulavar Puranam, an anthology of the biographies of Tamil poet-saints, reports in verse thirteen of the Tattuvaraya chapter that he was already neck-deep in the sea when Sorupananda summoned him to return. The story continues:
He [Tattuvaraya] told the disciples [who had arrived with the message], ‘Sorupananda, the repository of grace and compassion, has ordered even me, a great offender, to return.’

Experiencing supreme bliss, he sang some more portions of Paduturai, and then returned to the presence of the Guru. He stood there, shedding tears, in ecstasy, singing the praises of his Guru.

Sorupananda merely said, ‘Iru’.

*Iru* is the imperative of a verb that means both ‘Be’ and ‘Stay’. In choosing this word Sorupananda was ordering him both to remain physically with him and also to continue to abide in the state of being.

Tattuvaraya lived happily there, serving his Guru.

Sorupananda went through the works that Tattuvaraya had composed and was delighted with their depth of meaning and the grandeur of their vocabulary. However, he made no sign of the joy he felt.

Then he thought to himself, ‘These *sastras* will be useful only for the learned and not for others’.

He told Tattuvaraya, ‘Son, you have sung all these *sastras* for your own benefit, but not for the benefit of the people of the world’.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the cooks who informed Sorupananda, ‘Swami, you should come to have your food’.

When Sorupananda went for his meal, Tattuvaraya, who was left alone, pondered over the words of his Guru. Concurring with his remarks, he composed *Sasivanna Bodham* before Sorupananda had returned from eating his meal. He placed it at the feet of his Guru [when Sorupananda reappeared] and prostrated. Sorupananda was delighted at the simplicity of its style and the speed with which Tattuvaraya composed poetry.

The next incident is the story of the *bharani* that Bhagavan narrated and referred to. There are several sources of Tattuvaraya’s life, and
the details vary from text to text. The version that appears in this narrative is slightly different from the one Bhagavan told, and it also has a few extra details:

Tattuvaraya composed some Vedanta *sastras*, but was mostly in *samadhi*. Around that time some Virasaivas, who were on a pilgrimage, along with some pandits, came before Tattuvaraya, who was sitting in the presence of Sorupananda.

[They read the *bharani* and complained:] ‘A *bharani* is [only] sung about great heroes who have killed a thousand male elephants on the battlefield. How is it that you have composed this [kind of poem] on your Guru who has not heard of or known heroic valour even in his dreams?’

To this Tattuvaraya replied, ‘As our Guru kills the ego-elephants of disciples, I sang in this way’.

They responded, ‘The ego-elephant that you mention is not visible to the eye, so it is not proper [to compose in this way]. However, even to kill one ego-elephant would take many, many days. How did he manage to kill the egos of 1,000 disciples simultaneously?’

Tattuvaraya, thinking that they should be shown through a demonstration, resumed his *samadhi* state, without replying to them.

Under the power and influence of Sorupananda all the pandits who came remained in *paripurnam* [had the full experience of the Self] for three days, without knowing either night or day. On the fourth day Tattuvaraya opened his eyes. All the pandits arose and prostrated to both Tattuvaraya and Sorupananda.

They said, ‘It was because of our ignorance that we objected. The power of your [Sorupananda’s] presence is such that even if 10,000 disciples happen to come, it [the presence] has the ability to bring them all to maturity simultaneously.’

Then they composed their own verses in praise of the *bharani* and departed.
TATTUVARAYA

It is not unreasonable or fanciful to compare the relationship of Tattuvaraya and Sorupananda with the one that existed between Muruganar and Bhagavan. Tattuvaraya and Muruganar came to their Gurus (who both liked to teach through silence) and realised the Self soon afterwards. They both subsequently composed thousands of verses that either praised their respective Gurus, or recorded some aspect of their teachings. Tattuvaraya’s poems in praise of his Guru (and Sivaprakasa Swami, his Guru’s Guru) include Venba Antadi (100 verses), Kalitturai Antadi (100 verses), Irattaimanimalai (20 verses), Nanmanimalai (40 verses), Jnana Vinodan Kalambagam (101 verses), Kali Madal (232 verses), Ula (393 verses), and many, many more. Then there was the bharani that Bhagavan mentioned: a 493-verse poem (Ajnavatai Bharani) on the annihilation of ignorance by the ‘hero’ Sorupananda. Mokavatai Bharani was another 850-verse bharani on the killing of delusion that includes in its text 110 songs in which a goddess instructs her followers in Vedanta. These 110 songs are often published independently as a Tamil primer on Vedanta under the title Sasivanna Bodham. This is the work that Tattuvaraya composed while Sorupananda was having his meal. Selected translations of one of Tattuvaraya’s works on Vedanta (Amrita Saram) will appear in the next issue of the Mountain Path.

There are, in addition, two long anthologies of Tamil poetry that contain more of Tattuvaraya’s verses: Peruntirattu (The Great Anthology), and Kuruntirattu (The Short Anthology). Though these anthologies mostly contain works by other authors, Tattuvaraya contributed some verses to both collections, and he is also acknowledged as the compiler of both books.

Muruganar, at Bhagavan’s behest, composed Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, modelling it on Manikkavachagar’s Tiruvachakam. In another interesting parallel Tattuvaraya composed Paduturai, a 1,140-verse collection of verses that are derived from contemporary folk songs. This work is also loosely based on Tiruvachakam. The ‘Lady Telling her Maid’ poem that appeared earlier in this article comes from this collection of verses. A selection of verses from Paduturai will appear in one of next year’s issues of the Mountain Path.
Though Tattuvaraya clearly played a Muruganar-like role in the life of Sorupananda, it is interesting and a little intriguing to note that Satyamangalam Venkataramayyar, the author of *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, addresses Bhagavan himself as ‘Tattuvaraya’ in the second line of verse nine of *Kalaippattu*. This poem is chanted every Saturday evening in Bhagavan’s *samadhi* hall.

In addition to the original Tamil compositions and the anthologies he compiled, Tattuvaraya also translated *Brahma Gita* and *Iswara Gita* from Sanskrit into Tamil.

Despite this prolific literary output, it is fair to assume that Tattuvaraya regarded as his greatest accomplishment the state that was bestowed on him by his Guru Sorupananda:

> What if the world praises me henceforth or reviles me? What if Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, remains close to me or separate from me? What if the body assuredly exists without ever decaying or perishes? Will there be any gain or loss to me on account of them, I who have worn perfectly on my head the twin feet of immaculate Sorupananda?¹²

The passing of both Sorupananda and Tattuvaraya is described in the traditional story of their lives:

Sorupananda started to wander aimlessly, leaving Tattuvaraya behind. Tattuvaraya followed him. When Sorupananda reached the sea shore, the waters separated to let him enter. However, when Tattuvaraya tried to do the same [and follow him], the sea did not part.

Tattuvaraya stood on the shore, crying loudly, like a calf separated from its mother. He searched for his Guru in all directions. Finally, Sorupananda appeared to give him [a final] *darshan* before shining as *akanda paripurna satchitananda* [the undivided transcendent fullness, being-consciousness-bliss].

In the context of what follows, this is the author’s way of saying that Sorupananda took *mahasamadhi*.

¹² *Jnana Vinodan Kalambagam*, v. 99.
After performing his Guru’s *samadhi* rites, Tattuvaraya was constantly thinking of Sorupananda. Either through the supreme love he felt for him, or through his inability to bear the separation, or because of the understanding that there was nothing for him to do apart from his Guru, he immediately attained *mahasamadhi*.

Tattuvaraya’s *samadhi* shrine is located at Irumbudur, which lies between Vriddhachalam and Chidambaram.

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### Beside the River Ganga

Nandhini

As my mala is being washed of all dirt  
In the sacred waters of Mother Ganga  
May I also become purified —  
A shining jewel to illuminate all worlds.  
Sitting by You, Mother  
I regard You as the external flow of my interior.  
Water regards water – Elemental  
O Shiva!  
You who radiate from my crown in all ten directions  
Purifying, cleansing, clarifying,  
Emptying, quickening my Heart —  
The seat of my mind loving all beings.  
What would I be without Your constant care?  
I am nothing but what You make me  
A servant of others —  
O Gurudeva — You are my Lord Shiva  
In head and heart I bow  
May my first thought be a loving one  
And make me a pure vessel  
Through which the Divine Mother may enter.
As a child, the religious traditions of my family did not work for me. I was looking for a direct, honest, and practical way to deal with my life, especially with persistent feelings of very piercing loneliness and emotional abandonment. These feelings were with me despite having caring parents and no physical hardships to endure. Without knowing it, as a young adult I started meditating on my own, without any instruction, finding temporary stillness in contemplating moving clouds or the flow of water.

A great turning point occurred in my life in 1990 when my son Nathan was six years old. I was taking a vegetarian cooking class when, on a nearby table of books, I saw one by Eknath Easwaran entitled *Conquest of Mind*. Those words were electrifying and dramatically made me aware of an intense inner longing — that I could end the...
tyranny of my negative thoughts. After that class, I read all of his books, became a vegetarian, and started to meditate daily. I went to Easwaran’s ashram, the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, in Tomales, California for several years, bringing my family with me. A marvellous and very gifted teacher, he was extremely kind to me and encouraged my budding interest in Eastern approaches to spirituality. He gave mangoes and special attention to my son, who enjoyed having free reign at the ashram grounds. At times he included me in his inner circle. I remember sitting next to him once, feeling quite overwhelmed by ashram politics that were stirred up around a major building project. Easwaran turned to me and, with great sweetness, said not to worry about all of that but to focus on why I was there. That immediately reassured me and helped me put things in perspective.

One day I was home alone in my room. After meditating on inspiring poetry I had memorized, the thought “What is behind the words?” came upon me with great force. It was a thought that had been brewing for a long time because it felt very familiar. Only its expression was new. It grabbed me and dug into my very being.

Not long after that, in 1993, I attended a lecture on Hinduism at Easwaran’s ashram in California. When jnana was described, I felt a sudden jolt, and the hair on my back stood on end. Afterwards I asked the speaker who was the greatest guru of that path, and he told me Sri Ramana Maharshi. So, I looked for books to read and found the famous Welling bust. It was like a magnet, and looking into those eyes, I felt, at last, the peace I had been looking for all my life.

At this point, Joan Greenblatt came into my life, supplying me with books and encouragement. She and Matthew (her husband) thought I should visit Ramanasramam and offered to write me a letter of introduction to Balarama Reddy, one of the great devotees in Bhagavan’s inner circle, which I accepted. So I took leave of my family, and, solo, boarded a plane for India. That was in 1995.

I will never forget the sense of wonder I felt on the ride from the airport to Tiruvannamalai. It was pitch dark and the air was crisp. I could barely see human and animal forms silently moving in the distance. Through the darkness, the whole scene was foreign to me, but in an
exciting way, making me feel as if I were in a dream. And above me were stars, bright and penetrating, like witnesses to the dream.

Balarama Reddy welcomed me immediately and treated me both like an old friend, as if we knew each other already, kindly taking me under his wing. He asked me questions and invited me to come to his room every afternoon for mediation, which I did until my departure. He arranged for me to go around the Hill for the first time with a young girl who was a close friend or relative. He directed me to always merge the mind into the Heart and reassured me that, with perseverance, I would succeed.

I kept to myself and remained silent most of the time, which was a surprising healing experience. One day, as I was entering the dining hall, I looked up and saw Ramana’s face staring down at me in a very direct and personal way, with eyes full of kindness and compassion. I immediately felt the words, “So, you have come.” It melted me completely and inundated me with indescribable peace.

Before my departure, I managed to meet Kitty Osborne at her home near the Ashram. She kindly served me tea, and we talked. My purpose in seeking her out was to express my gratitude for her father’s words and example. Arthur Osborne was especially inspiring to me, since he made it clear that one could be a devotee without being a Hindu or a lover of ritual. He put Bhagavan in perspective like no one else I had read at the time and consistently touched me with the depth and clarity of his thinking.

When I returned home, I continued to practise on my own by reading Ramana literature and meditating daily on the Welling bust (photo). In addition to being a wife and mother of an only child, I was working in a highly competitive environment as a manager in the central administration of the Smithsonian Institution. At the time, the attraction of the cultural world was my belief that art, music, and literature had the potential of transcending the material world. The challenge to myself was to see if I could survive, that is, stand somewhat steady throughout the constant storms around me. Looking back on that period of my life, some days were good and others not so good. Nonetheless, I could not have managed without Bhagavan,
who was my supreme and unfailing refuge on a daily basis, helping me through challenges I thought I could not overcome.

In 2000 a great personal disaster stuck: my husband abandoned our marriage of 24 years for reasons he obviously sincerely believed in. The anger and mental anguish I experienced was truly life-threatening. I did not have relatives living nearby who could comfort me, but by Bhagavan’s grace, a neighbour I barely knew befriended me the very day my husband left. Her support through the years was a great gift. Another gift was connecting three years later with other devotees through the satsang in Washington, D.C. Being in the company of people with whom I did not have to feel defensive about having a guru was an amazing relief.

When I retired in 2005, I had an overwhelming desire to return to Tiruvannamalai with my son, Nathan, who at the time was a religious studies major at Brown University and a newly-converted Catholic. It was important for me to show him the context for my own practice, to which he had been a witness, without much choice, throughout the years. Once there, I realized there was another equally important purpose for the long journey: I was coming home to Bhagavan for His grace and for His comfort. Although I always felt His presence at home, it was an especially intense experience at the Ashram. One afternoon, lying on the bed alone in my room, His compassion flooded my being until my longings for comfort were satisfied. I also felt He was telling me to stop grieving and to go to the plane that is beyond pain.

On the same trip, I was able to visit, with my son, Bhagavan’s birthplace and His uncle’s home in Madurai, where the great event of His realization took place. On my own, I visited the Temple at Tanjore, which had a great hold on me. I was passionate about the Chola bronzes in that city, having already been exposed to them in the art world. My taxi driver took me to a family foundry, where one of the family members greeted me warmly. It turned out he exhibited his bronzes at the Smithsonian’s annual summer Folklife Festival and knew one of my colleagues who directs the Festival. I told him I wanted a small Parvati and chose one his uncle had made. He was
satisfied with my choice and told me she was waiting for me on the shelf for many years. I believed it and still do. On the trip back, as Nate and I were having coffee at the airport in Frankfurt, suddenly I saw sitting next to us my colleague whom the sculptor had met. He was amazed by the story of the encounter and the purchase I had made.

In 2009 I again returned to Ramanasramam, this time for a more extended visit that involved a project I had volunteered to undertake. While working on the project, I spent time meditating both in the Old Hall and at Skandashram. One day, returning from the cave with a purified mind and heart, the moment felt strangely familiar, and I was convinced that I had come down that path many times before, after having spent time in His bodily presence, that His presence had made me understand and experience a higher state of mind, free of the ego, and that I had vowed then to do anything that would keep me there. During that visit in 2009, I was only retracing those steps and revisiting that vow.

Before leaving the Ashram, I had made an appointment with V. S. Ramanan, the President, so that I could discuss with him my progress on the project I had undertaken. Since the project presented many difficulties, I was full of anxiety. As soon as our conversation began, however, a great peace came over me. The President did not ask me a word about the project but smiled glowingly and wrapped me in his love. He looked into my eyes and said not to worry, that I was in the jaws of the tiger, from which one does not have the liberty to retreat. There was nothing else that needed to be said.

Looking back on my life and practice, my quest has always been an unrelenting search for inner stillness and an end to various forms of mental suffering, for which Bhagavan alone has provided steady and unfailing guidance and relief. For me, He has always been the sole source of peace, and He has become, without a doubt, the centre of my existence.

Throughout the years I have had some unforgettable experiences that have proven to me His constant presence. For instance, once I found myself in a very dangerous situation, and as I feared for my life, Bhagavan’s sweet, shining face suddenly appeared. It gave me the
presence of mind to escape danger and filled me with the certitude that, as my sole refuge, He would always be there for me.

On many other occasions, I have been in difficult positions when someone mysteriously appears, eliminates the problem, and then disappears. For instance, once I was leading a group of sophisticated and demanding professionals in the art world on a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright’s great iconic masterpiece in Pennsylvania, Fallingwater. On the way, the bus driver got lost. Everyone was getting increasingly restless, and it seemed possible that we would miss our appointed time for the tour. Everyone was hungry but, if we stopped, we would lose even more time. I started to panic inside. Just at that time, the driver found his way and led us directly to a fast food restaurant. I was afraid we would not have time to get through inevitable lines. To my great surprise, however, as we drove up to the door, a lovely and gracious woman was there to greet us. She immediately arranged for our orders to be taken so that we were back in the bus in record time. When I went to thank her profusely, she was nowhere to be found. The incident could have just been chance, but in my heart I truly felt Bhagavan’s intervention. Stories like this are replete in Ramana literature.

As my faith evolves, I have more fully realized the reality of predestination and learned to accept that, gradually letting go of an illusory sense of control. Depending always on Bhagavan has become a liberating habit of mind I am increasingly grateful for. Three pillars of inspiration for me have been Dakshinamurti, Adi Shankaracarya, and Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Working in the museum world, when stress seemed unbearable, I would go to the Freer and Sackler Galleries and stand in front of a beautiful stone sculpture of Dakshinamurti. Waves of peace would wash over me, and the angst would be resolved in silence. Silence has always been the greatest ally of my soul.

My brother Richard now lives with me in the house I have occupied for 25 years. His presence and his example of a simple and truthful life has been a great blessing. He is a scientist and an atheist and has in countless ways been a great teacher. My son is a very gifted journalist and writer on religious topics in New York. It is impossible to measure
how much he has meant to me and how much his life has been in inspiration to me and to others.

I spend my time walking in the woods, listening to the Vedas morning and evening, reading Ramana literature, gardening, cooking and learning Sanskrit. My current sadhana is to learn to read spiritual texts without depending on translations. To do this, I have taken classes from the American Sanskrit Institute and, more recently, from an Indian professor I encountered last summer. I mostly work on my own, referring to a collection of dictionaries and grammar books, although I have had the deep pleasure of reading Sanskrit with Santha Ramachandran, one of Professor Swaminathan’s daughters. All of these experiences have been immensely fulfilling.

I am now learning Ganapati Muni’s Sri Ramana Chatvarimshat in devanagari, after having thoroughly worked through Na Karmana so that I have an intimate relationship with every word. The Chatvarimshat tells us over and over again of the sweet and powerful eyes that are shining from the other shore and of the presence that removes all sorrow. As devotees all know, Ganapati Muni came to Bhagavan for true knowledge after having spent his life studying the Vedas and all holy texts. It was His eyes and His presence that brought him to the tiny, sinless spot in the lotus heart, the spot that must be meditated upon.
Where Does This I Arise?

What Does Current Science Say?

GARY WEBER

17. When an enquiry is made into what exactly is this mind, it will be found that there is no mind at all. This is the direct path for realization of the Self. 18. Thoughts alone constitute the mind, and they are all dependent on the ‘I-thought’. Hence know that the ‘I-thought’ itself constitutes the mind. 19. On enquiring from where this ‘I-thought’ takes its birth, lo! that very I-thought collapses. This is Self-enquiry. 20. With the individual-I thus annihilated (through such enquiry), there shines forth the Self by itself as ‘I-I’. It is the supreme infinite Being.

Upadesa Saram

Verses 17, 18, 19 and 20, are often spoken of in advaita workshops and courses as the most important verses in *Upadesa Saram* and perhaps in Sri Ramana’s teachings. Many advaita Vedanta lineages use *Upadesa Saram* as a major text so its importance, and the importance of these verses, is well established.
MOUNTAIN PATH

In Sri Ramana Maharshi’s teaching, the powerful and famous verse 19, “Inquire where this ‘I’ arises and the ‘I’ will fall away”, is one of the clearest and strongest pointers to what is defined therein as “self inquiry”. For those doing self-inquiry on “Where does this I arise?”, “Where am I?”, “Who am I?” etc., is there anything we can gain from the current cognitive neuroscience investigations with the latest tools and technology?

One of the most highly-regarded current neuroscientists is Anthony Damasio. One of his categorizations of the ‘self’ is as three different functional parts, ‘proto self’, ‘core self’, and ‘autobiographical self’.1

The ‘proto self’ is identified as those parts of the brain that take care of physical functions such as metabolism, body temperature and daily/circadian rhythms. Those functions are found to be performed in the brain stem and hypothalamus.

The ‘core self’ is identified as those parts of the brain that are responsible for functions such as visceral activities, processing emotions, plans for actions and issuing commands. Those functions are found to be performed in the amygdala, interbrain, medial and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex regions.

The ‘autobiographical self’ is identified as those parts of the brain that are responsible for functions such as speech, linguistics and memory. Those functions are performed in the hippocampus, Broca’s area, parts of the prefrontal cortex, ventral medial prefrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, premotor cortex, insular cortex, and somatosensory cortex.2 Others include the parietotemporal cortex, the precuneus, and the temporal lobes.3

To make this a little more understandable for those who aren’t familiar with neuroanatomy, the schematic on the opposite page

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above shows roughly where some of those areas are. Keep in mind that some of these areas are in the interior of the brain.

**Where Is The “I”?**

The point of all of this is to show that science has not been able to find any ‘single and permanent place’ for anything like a central controller, or ‘I’. The ‘self’ or ‘I’ is found only as several different places where different functions occur. When those functions aren’t being actively performed, there isn’t anything ‘active’ really there – just currently inactive portions of the brain.

This perception of regions being activated only for functional usage was recently confirmed, even for those regions previously suspected of being the most likely site of an ‘I’, the ‘E network’ composed of the medial prefrontal cortex, precuneus, temporoparietal junction and temporal lobes mentioned above.\(^4\)

The ‘I’ has also clearly been identified as associated, perhaps even ‘created’ by memory. Where does memory reside in the brain? Perhaps that is where the ‘I’ is.

Again, contemporary cognitive neuroscience has some useful insights. The hippocampus is normally considered to be where short-term memory is organized, managed and retrieved. If one looks at short-term memory retrieval in progress, a schematic of what it typically looks like if an fMRI is imposed on the brain is shown

below with the hippocampus highlighted. The memory storage sites are shown as circles when in actuality they are less regularly shaped.

If the ‘I’ is located where memories are stored, and memory is broadly distributed all over the brain, there is no single memory site, or location, where the ‘I’ resides. So if one inquires into the question ‘Where am I?’, one would have to answer that ‘I am all over the place in different places at different times depending on what memories are involved and what functions are being performed.’

If the inquiry into the nature of the ‘I’ goes further, most folk certainly believe that the conscious ‘I’ is at least responsible for solutions being generated to all sorts of problems, simple and complex and where action is subsequently initiated.

Looking first at where solutions are generated to relatively complex problems, contemporary cognitive neuroscience has done some extensive investigation. Two recent papers looked in detail at solving such problems. A problem was framed which required


non-linear logic, i.e. \( A > B > C > 3 > 4 > D \), for its solution. With two of the most powerful current tools in cognitive neuroscience, electroencephalography (EEG) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), they looked at brains during the process of solving this problem.

They discovered that in every case they could identify by activity in the right frontal cortex that the problem had been solved up to 8 seconds before the ‘I’ was made aware that it had been solved and would subsequently announce, proudly, that it was successful, even though it had been completely ‘out of the loop’ for the process.

The normal ‘I’/working memory/ego which believes that it solves problems is increasingly looked as comprising something called the secondary or symbolic consciousness. This working memory/symbolic consciousness has the capability of handling no more than 7 +/- 2 items at the same time, whether they are symbols, colours, unassociated numbers, letters, etc. This is found to be true across virtually all languages, cultures and countries. This secondary/symbolic consciousness is relatively recent, evolutionarily speaking, probably only 30,000 to 100,000 years old, in its development and would be roughly equivalent to the random access memory (RAM) in a personal computer. It is responsible for largely serial (one thing being done at a time) processing, has relatively low processing capability/bandwidth, takes credit for everything that is done, and is the ‘voice in your head’. As it is the most obvious consciousness, it is often assumed to be the only consciousness. It is probably found in its fullest manifestation only in humans.

On the other hand, there is ‘beneath’ this secondary or symbolic consciousness, something called the ‘primary consciousness’, which is nominally unconscious/non-conscious and is generally not directly accessible except through the secondary/symbolic consciousness. This primary consciousness, which has been under development for millions of years, is comprised of roughly 100,000,000,000 neurons and trillions of connections. It is arranged as something akin to massive parallel (many things being done at a time) processors with great bandwidth/capacity and enormous hard drive storage capacity.
This primary consciousness is the problem solver, the creative engine and the long term memory region. It is likely found in all primates and many other animals. It is the consciousness that does most of the work. As it is difficult to report the content of this consciousness without the symbolic or secondary consciousness, it is often “overlooked”. It is responsible for art, music, and intuitive, spatial and concrete results.\(^7\)

The relative sizes and comparison of functionalities is shown below:

**Schematic of Functional Capacities of the Brain**

7 +/- 2 items in working memory - RAM

Symbolic

Consciousness

100,000,000,000 neurons and 1,000,000,000,000 + connections
- massive hard drive
- many high speed parallel processors

Primary

Consciousness

The obvious question is why did this configuration develop with such a great mismatch between the user interface/ego/I/symbolic consciousness and the main processor and storage capability/primary consciousness? Wouldn’t it have been better if we were able to run 15 programs at the same time?

Yes, until we realize that this development is relatively recent, evolutionarily. What would happen if we were running 15 programs at the same time and a tiger or a runaway elephant appeared? We might be eaten or crushed before we even realized that there was a problem as the focus of our attention was elsewhere. Running the

main critical programs ‘off line’ would be a superior survival strategy as it would allow us to be aware of our immediate situation, whether it was a bus, or a tiger or elephant bearing down on us.

The apparent ‘I’ construct then, located in the symbolic or secondary consciousness, is capable of only simple calculations and reasoning, taking credit for activities and functions being carried out of which it is blithely unaware and constantly being the voice in the head talking about it to itself. It is also located not in one place, but is located ‘all over the place’ as different functions and memory sites for recall are carried out in some part of the brain which uses the functional region for a short time and then moves on to other activities and locales as situations change.

Who am I?

Ana Callan

Dip your heart
in the Golden Question
and the ocean of knowing
will yield its nectar.

What has always been you
will disrobe, will unveil
itself so you may marry
your beauty, your singular
truth, so you may become
that one Love that has waited
lifetimes, that has never,
ever abandoned you.

Fall into me, lay down the past,
let your mind be freed of its shackles
so you may shine as that light
- O Illumined One -
your very birthright
for eternity.
The Quest

Chapter Nine

Spiritual Life

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

Before a child can walk it is supported on both sides and held up. As it gains strength and confidence the support diminishes and finally ceases so that it can learn to walk alone not without falls and stumbles, till walking becomes natural. Similarly with sadhana; when I first came to Bhagavan and started to meditate according to His teaching the Grace and support were tremendous, a time of discovery and sheer wonder. Such undeserved Grace may also be vouchsafed to those who need more encouragement than others to make them know what the real aim is.

Normally we are submerged in the innumerable shifts and changes of life and so we are caught up in the world with its troubles and confusions. To be deluded and to suffer belongs to the state of all human beings interspersed with a little unsteady happiness. We live

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of The Mountain Path. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.
in a belt of illusory time with birth, old age and death. It is in this state, which is said to be superior to the state of angels that we can work out our destiny and awaken to our primordial divine state in timelessness where there is no birth or death. It is a return to the All-source relatively speaking because the departure was an illusion, a dream from which one has to wake up. If a man is well he takes it for granted. When he returns to well-being after severe illness or suffering how great and precious is his well-being. How much more so, how sublime the return to the All-source after the suffering of embodied existence which is said to be the greatest suffering.

Meditation that leads to Self-realization is neither idle reverie nor vacant inaction but an intense inner struggle to master the mind and then use it like any other instrument, like a silent missile to penetrate the barrier of the five senses and the discursive intellect.

It is the greatest, the most worthwhile effort a human being is capable of. It demands determination, steadfastness and courage, particularly so when after a period of Grace one feels abandoned, desperate at being left alone to struggle like a deer that is trapped. That is the time when one can rise much higher than when one is made to feel good and successful by self-styled gurus with some *siddhis* (supernatural powers) like thought-reading and hypnotic or magnetic powers. It is the ego which feels good and ‘special’.

“God, Guru and the Self are the same” Bhagavan affirmed. “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....”

Questions about renunciation were also asked frequently and the explanation that Bhagavan gave usually was that true renunciation is in the mind and is neither achieved by physical renunciation nor impeded by the lack of it. The life of action need not be renounced. If one meditates for an hour or two every day then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of work. It is possible to perform all the activities of life with detachment and regard only the Self as real. Actions tend to express and follow the line taken in meditation.
People sometimes assume ochre robes and play the part of renunciates when they have comfortable assured incomes or are looked after by someone who has to work to enable the renunciate not to work. With others it may be escapism from performing their duties in life.

Bhagavan never encouraged young people to leave home and give up their duties in life. When a man is ready for a life of pure contemplation everything falls into place of its own accord for him to do so. “Sannyasa means renouncing one’s individuality, not shaving one’s head and putting on ochre robes,” Bhagavan affirmed. “A man may be a householder but if he does not think he is one, he is a sannyasin. On the other hand he may be wearing ochre robes and wander about but so long as he thinks he is a sannyasin, he is not one. To think about one’s renunciation defeats the purpose of renouncing. Why should your occupation or duties in life interfere with your spiritual effort? It is wrong to suppose that if one is fixed in the Self one’s duties in life will not be properly performed.”

Nowadays one comes across so-called communes, usually in the countryside, where a group of people lead a spiritual life and practise sadhana. If combined with work which it usually is, it has more chance of success.

In the selfless performance of plain duty man mounts higher spiritually. Huang Po cautions not to permit the events of our daily life to bind us but never to withdraw from them. Only by thus acting can one become liberated.

Reading books on spiritual matters and the sayings of wise men explained my questioning attitude in childhood and many things became clear. In the Genjokoan Shobogenzo writes: ‘In the feeling of inadequacy of body and mind the dharma is fulfilled. But one should know also that in the feeling that the dharma has been fulfilled by body and mind something is still lacking.’ I also read that Plotinus was ashamed of having a body.

In Plato’s Dialogues Lady Diotima confirmed my conviction that whatever life has to offer will not quench the thirst in our soul for true fulfilment. “Wise men know that so great is the human heart that nothing less than God, the return to the Source, their divine Self will
satisfy it.” Seeking happiness, true happiness, means seeking one’s true state. But it is one thing to try to get happiness for oneself and quite another thing to try to establish the Kingdom of Heaven in the heart....

Even if all so-called good things in life are at one’s disposal for enjoyment it does not satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart and more often than not ends up in boredom. In the depth of the heart remains an unfulfilled longing which only the Unconditioned can fill. Modern man flies to the planets and seeks to conquer space due to the unconscious urge to transcend his earthly finitude. This he does in a physical manner which is the only one the majority believe to be possible. There is no joy or pleasure so great in this life that it can quench the thirst in our soul. The efforts to conquer mountains, speed and to fly into space prove that man does not live by bread alone. There is the urge to escape from the tyranny of finitude; the urge for the Infinite, for the Sublime, to seek the Holy Grail.

To illustrate: at the height of her career the greatest Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, said, “There is a desert in my heart.”

Happiness derived from relationships, worldly success, acquisition, circumstances in general usually has an element of restlessness combined with insecurity.

“Happiness”, said Aristotle, “is the object of the good, but peace is the object of happiness.” “Where is happiness without peace?,” asks the Gita.

(To be continued)
For a long time now the discourses on enlightenment have been trapped in predominantly psychological terms. It has been so mainly because of the discourses against the Body in opposition to the Mind or Spirit or Soul. Hence, it is hard to conceive of Nirvana or moksha or enlightenment in physical or biological terms.

‘This body is born and it has death,’ declares Maitreya Upanishad. ‘It has originated from the impure secretions of the mother and father; it is the abode of joy and sorrow and it is impure… It is built up of primary fluids, subject to grievous maladies, abode of sinful actions, transitory and diffused with agitated feelings… It always naturally exudes at the appropriate time impure secretions through the nine apertures (eyes, ears, etc., and smells foul...’

In contrast with many Hindu traditions, Buddhism may not regard the body and the mind as being two entirely separate entities; there is

Mukunda Rao is the author of several books on UG Krishnamurti and recently edited The Biology of Enlightenment, conversations with UG.
no division between the body and mind; rather, the body and mind combine and interact in a complex way to constitute an individual. In one’s spiritual journey only when the body is kept fit and healthy it could be an aide in the development of insight and wisdom.

In Thervadism Buddhism there is an anti-body philosophy. The body is seen as a source of troublesome desire and it is depicted as unwholesome and potentially an object of disgust. Meditating on the loathsomeness of the body is considered to be a particularly powerful method for countering attachment to sensual pleasures. And the canonical text make the Buddha warn: ‘A boil, monks, is another word for this body composed of the four properties,... It has nine openings, nine unlanced heads. Whatever would ooze out from it would be an uncleanliness oozing out, a stench oozing out, a disgust oozing out... For that reason, you should become disenchanted with this body.’

The above quotes sum up a prevalent view against the physical body. Even later, despite Kundalini Yoga and Tantra which offered a radically different understanding of the body as a field of energy (which was unfortunately termed as esoteric and therefore of no importance and value to ordinary religious seekers and laymen), the dominant trend has been to see the body as a sort of ‘enemy’, a dangerous customer, who needs to be controlled and disciplined in one’s spiritual enterprise.

Thanks to the biological sciences today, we have a better and holistic understanding of the body-mind. And thanks to the Mother (of Pondicherry) and U.G. Krishnamurti who have thrown some light on this most enigmatic subject and given us some clue to understanding enlightenment or Nirvana in physical, physiological terms.

The case of the Mother (of Pondicherry)

Sometime during 1962, after the Mother fell ‘ill’, she began to notice strange changes taking place in her body. It was actually not an illness

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2 Anguttara Nikaya 9.15; Ganda Sutta, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
or symptom of illness, but signs of the body undergoing biological mutation: ‘...a sort of decentralization...as if the cells were being scattered by centrifugal force...’ She would feel terribly weak at times, faint now and then, yet, something, untouched, was fully conscious of what was happening... ‘witnessing everything... like matter looking at itself in a whole new way.’

Taste, smell, vision, touch, sound — the sensory perceptions began to undergo complete change. Now and then she experienced a tremendous burst of energy that caused pain. At times she would feel that she was dying, that she was going to explode. It was not what the religious people assume to be joy or bliss, she asserted, but a sense of alarm, fear, anxiety, pain. ‘...It’s really and truly terrifying...it’s truly a journey into nothing...You are blindfolded, you know nothing.’

The mind was not involved in the process, it was the body; it was a struggle within the cells between the old habit and something new that was trying to emerge. In other words, it was the struggle of the body to cleanse itself of the habit developed over thousands of years of ‘separate existence on account of ego.’ Now it had to learn to continue, without the ego, ‘according to another, unknown law, a law still incomprehensible for the body. It is not a will, it’s... I don’t know...something; a way of being...’ and she felt that the body was everywhere. ‘I am talking here about the cells of the body, but the same applies to external events, even world events. It’s even remarkable in the case of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc. it would seem that the entire earth is like the body.’

Everything is interconnected. Everything is one. The sense of separation is complete falsehood. The mind divides everything up. But here, in the body, everything is one. ‘The speck of dust you wipe off the table,’ she pointed out, ‘or ecstatic contemplation, it’s all the same... It’s not a product of thought, or imagination... dreaming, meditating, soaring into higher consciousness is all very well, but that seems so poor in comparison, so poor, so limited!... In mental world, you think before doing the thing; here it’s not that way... No more memory, no more habits...it’s all spontaneous... it comes, it comes in facts, in actions, in movements.’
It was the body taking over and doing what had to be done. Hence, ‘Salvation is physical,’ she declared. And she wondered: why did they (the spiritual teachers of the past) all seek liberation by abandoning their body? Why did they talk of Nirvana as something outside the body? ‘The body is a very, very simple thing, very childlike,’ said the Mother. ‘It does not need to “seek” anything: it’s THERE. And it wonders why men never knew of this from the start: why, but why did they go after all sorts of things — religions, gods, and all those… sorts of things? While it is so simple! So simple! It’s so obvious for the body!’

The case of U.G. Krishnamurti and the Natural State

In a manner of speaking, if Sri Aurobindo did not live long enough to finish his spiritual experiments and the task of finishing it was passed on to the Mother, the Mother died before the ‘cellular changes’ could come to full fruition and find their expression and the burden of completing the process was passed on to UG.

The admirers and followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would certainly find such a reading strange and even problematic. It was certainly not something like passing on the baton in a relay race! But we do not know the ways of Nature; rather, we know it is all interconnected but not how things work.

The period between 1953 and 1964 was a period of great changes and the beginning of the metamorphosis UG would undergo in 1967. In 1953, he had undergone the ‘near death experience’ that set him up on a long journey that eventually ended with his entry into the natural state in 1967. On 13 August 1967, on the completion of his forty-ninth year, the biological changes began to manifest. For the next seven days, seven bewildering changes took place and catapulted him into what he called the ‘Natural State’.

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4 This quote and all the other quotes of the Mother in this chapter are from The Mind of the Cells — or willed mutation of our species, edited by Satprem, Institute For Evolutionary Research, New York, 1982. Also refer Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, by Kireet Joshi, The Mother’s Institute of Research, Delhi, in association with Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1996.
In seven days, the whole chemistry of his body, including the five senses, was transformed. His eyes stopped blinking; his skin turned soft; and when he rubbed any part of his body with his palm, it produced a sort of ash. He developed a female breast on his left-hand side. His senses started functioning independently and at their peak of sensitivity. And the hitherto dormant ductless glands, such as the thymus, the pituitary, the pineal, which Kundalini Yoga calls the chakras or energy centres, were reactivated. And on the eighth day, he ‘died’.

It was a ‘clinical death’—‘death experience’. He felt a tremendous burst of energy and all these energies seemed to draw themselves to a focal point from different parts of his body. It was terrific and terrifying. The terrific movement of the life force continued and it seemed to be converging at some point in his body. It was the sign of approaching death. He stretched himself on his bed and got ready to embrace death, as it were. Then a point arrived where the whole thing looked as if the aperture of a camera was trying to close itself, but something was there trying to keep it open, perhaps the ‘I’, the residue of ‘thought’ (the fear of death, dramatized as Mara by Buddhist literature), refusing to die. Then, after a while, there was no ‘will’ to do anything, not even to prevent the aperture closing itself. And, it closed.

His hands and feet turned cold, the body became stiff, the heartbeat slowed down, the breathing slowed down, and he started gasping for breath. UG cannot remember what exactly happened at that time. He was finished. All the thoughts of man from time immemorial, all experiences, whether good or bad, blissful or miserable, terrific or terrible, mystical or commonplace, experienced by humanity from primordial times (the whole ‘collective consciousness’) were flushed out of his system, and on the eighth day, he ‘died’ but only to be reborn in the state of ‘undivided consciousness’.

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great leap into the state of ‘primordial awareness without primitivism’, or the ‘undivided state of consciousness’ untouched by thought.

It was a cellular revolution, a full-scale biological mutation. It was the birth of the individual in the natural state.

Preferring the term natural state over against enlightenment, UG insisted that whatever transformation he had gone through was within the structure of the human body and not in the mind at all. And, avoiding religious terms, he described the natural state as a pure and simple physical and physiological state of being. It is the state of ‘primordial awareness without primitivism’, or the ‘undivided state of consciousness’, where all desires and fear, and the search for happiness and pleasure, God and truth, have come to an end. And he never tired of pointing out that ‘this is the way you, stripped of the machinations of thought, are also functioning.’

After UG underwent the physical changes, he was to ascertain that the swellings that appeared on his body now and then were due to the reactivation of the ductless glands, namely, thymus, pituitary and pineal.

These glands are what the Hindus call chakras. These ductless glands are located in exactly the same spots where the Hindus speculated the chakras are. There is one gland here (slightly to the right of the mid point of the chest) which is called the ‘thymus gland’. That is very active when you are a child, and so children have feelings, extraordinary feelings. But when you reach the age of puberty it becomes dormant. When again it is activated, when you are reborn again, that gland is automatically activated, so all the feelings are there. Feelings are not thoughts, not emotions; you feel for somebody. If somebody hurts himself there, that hurt is felt here — not as a pain, but there is a feeling. All feelings, not emotions like love and hate, anger or kindness, are felt in the region where the thymus is located. That is where the physical, not emotional, oneness is felt or experienced.\(^6\)

\(^6\) op. cit., *The Mystique of Enlightenment.*

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October - December
It is said in the epic Ramayana, that when Bharatha, a younger brother of Sri Ramachandran, failed in his request that Sri Rama stay at the kingdom of Ayodhya and be crowned as the king, instead of going to the forest, he wanted an assurance from Sri Rama, that he would one day return to govern the kingdom.

Bharatha knew that Rama always kept his word, but he still insisted on a security which should be as valuable as Sri Rama himself. Being an astute and devout person, Bharatha chose Rama’s *paduka* (wooden footwear) as the symbolic authority by which he ruled the kingdom until his brother returned from exile.

The reason why he chose the *paduka* is said to be because, though Sri Rama who is the ultimate reality in life and beyond, carries the whole world on his shoulders, it is the *paduka* that carries Sri Rama. Is it not the wonder of wonders?

Padma Subramanian is an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. She feels that coming to Sri Ramanasramam is akin to coming home.
Even in commercial practice, it is customary to insist on some valuable security which should be more valuable than the personal security of the person from whom the performance of the promise, namely repayment of loan or any other commitment is expected.

As is well known, the *paduka* ruled the kingdom till Sri Rama returned and it is said that all-round prosperity was present during the reign of the *paduka*.

Whenever I go to Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, I perform *pradakshina* of the *Sri Mathrubuteswsarar* shrine (Mother’s shrine) three or four times and then go round Bhagavan’s *samadhi* as many times as possible.

Recently, when I was walking the Mother’s shrine a thought occurred to me that Bhagavan’s mother was indeed fortunate in having carried Bhagavan in her womb for nine months before she gave to the world the blessed child. The thought led to another thought about Bhagavan’s head, which was said in later years to constantly shake. It is said that when asked, he remarked that it is akin to a wild elephant entering a bamboo cage as a consequence of which, the cage would shake.

Bhagavan implied thereby that he is Arunachala in a human form, residing in this small length and breadth of the human shell. This thought led me to wonder more about Alagammal, mother of Sri Bhagavan who carried this wonderful phenomenon in her womb for nine months.

I then recalled the incident about *paduka* of Sri Ramachandran and how it was considered as equal to Sri Rama himself. It occurred to me that the mother’s shrine is as sacred (if not more) as Bhagavan’s *samadhi*. Did she not carry in her womb this great being who is none but Arunachala Ramana? From then on, I divide my *pradakshina* schedule equally between Mother’s shrine and Bhagavan’s *samadhi*.

It is also recorded in an article written by a devotee of Bhagavan that when the mother’s shrine was under construction, Bhagavan was seen in the night when people were not around, to lovingly touch every part of the construction, and it appears that he imparted his power and grace to the temple of his noble mother and all that it houses.

He is said to have remarked later, that soon after his mother’s *mahasamadhi*, when he came down from Skandasramam to the Pali
Theertham area, for the traditional offerings of the milk at the Mother’s samadhi (which was then not having any construction), something held him back and he did not go back to Skandasramam. He stayed put near his mother’s Samadhi and thus Sri Ramanasramam was born.

Mother’s shrine and Bhagavan’s samadhi act in unison to fulfil all the legitimate prayers of the sincere devotees of Bhagavan. Just as it is said, that one should first worship Padmavathi Thayar at Alumelumangapuram at the base of the Tirumala hills and then go climb to the peak for the darshan of the Venkateswara Swami and just as Lord Ramachandran is pleased when people worship his servant Anjaneya, Bhagavan is pleased when his devotees first worship at the mother’s shrine and mentally place all their prayers first at mother’s shrine for fulfillment. Bhagavan once humorously said that he thought he had escaped from his home in Madurai but later acquired a very large family in Tiruvannamalai as all his devotees are related to him and his physical mother is hence the mother of all his devotees as well.

Mother’s heart melts when devotees place their prayers at her feet and Bhagavan feels happy to fulfill the legitimate prayers of his devotees. It should be also remembered that one should have strong faith and belief in the guru.

Yogi RamSuratkumar said that full and absolute faith in one’s guru means, that whatever be the way the prayer is answered, the devotee should have the mental makeup to accept it wholeheartedly as his guru’s prasad, even if it is the opposite of what he originally prayed for.

A Tamil poet sang about Lord Siva thus, venda thakkathu arivoy nee, vendai muzhuvathum koduppoi nee. (You alone know what is proper to be asked for and once that is asked, you grant it in full.)

I also recall what a devotee of Lord Narayana sang, “Prostrations to you, Lord Narayana and also prostrations to your discus which went before you to destroy the crocodile which had caught the feet of your devotee, the elephant Gajendra and who pitifully cried out, ‘Adhimoolamey, save me from this crocodile’.”

In the same vein I sing, “Prostrations and pranams to the Mother Alagammal and prostrations and pranams to Guru Ramana Bhagavan.”
Vithoba, father of Jnaneshwar, receiving jnanopadesa from his guru.

Vithoba receiving darshan of the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva).
exalted souls, who have attained the eternal beatitude by the awakening of Kundalini! Please bestow one-pointed attention and listen to the blessed story of Jnaneshwar.

Looking at his father, the embodiment of supreme dispassion, austerity, immersed in exalted bliss and seated motionless like Dakshinamurthy, Jnaneshwar sat on his lap with an inclination to engage him in a discussion. At the very touch of the body of Jnaneshwar, Vithoba was engulfed in waves of ecstasy which brought him out of Samadhi. His eyes fell on Jnaneshwar sitting on his lap. He embraced the child with great affection and held the other children also in loving embrace.

He asked the children, “O unparalleled children, O precious children who are worthy of being worshipped and revered by me, you have come to this primitive abode out of love, leaving behind the comforts of a home life. Why should you suffer inconveniences
here? You have delighted my heart with your sweet face. Relinquish your attachment to parents, return home and enjoy your life under royal patronage.”

The deceitful One, Jnaneshwar replied, “O father, please bless us with your company and accompany us home. While you live in the forest amidst all hardships, how can we have the heart to enjoy the comforts at home? Can we be uncaring of our father?”

Other children also came closer to their father in a gesture of supporting Jnaneshwar’s plea. Vithoba said in gentle tones, “Will anyone eat one’s own vomit even if it is delicious pudding? Can a man of good character go back on his words? Is it proper to return to one’s home after renouncing worldly life? Can a wise man live amidst ignorant people and fall in love with their worldly ways? Why should a renunciate crave the favours of a king? I am a forest-dweller. You all must leave for home without further delay.”

Then Jnaneshwar asked why his father preferred to live in the seclusion of the forest.

Vithoba explained, “There is nothing for me to attain by living in the world. On the contrary, worldly life will be an obstacle, not an aid to my spiritual life. By being away from the association of worldly people, I will be absorbed in the tranquil state without any distraction.”

The following discussion continued between them:

Jnaneshwar : Just as a sparrow tries to hold back the thunder with its tiny feet; just as a man tries to accumulate merits through self-interested acts; just as a pitiless man desires to get the vision of God; just as a person attempts to attain the state of Samadhi without erasing the sense of ‘I’; similarly, you are trying to attain the transcendental state while holding on to the sense of difference between mingling in society and seclusion in the forest. How can you reach the undifferentiated state while your mind dwells on such distinctions?

Vithoba : As long as the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ remains, the individuality or egoism cannot be rooted out and the duality of you and I, this and that will persist. It is only in Nirvikalpa Samadhi that one is free of dualism. Seclusion and detachment from the world are conducive for absolute Silence, hence I prefer to be in the forest.
Jnaneshwar: To realize one’s true nature and remain fixed in that state is true Samadhi, not remaining in isolation in a remote forest.

Vithoba: Even if one experiences one’s original nature in the presence of the Guru, one needs to be in a lonely spot to become established in that experience.

Jnaneshwar: Being in a still state in a forest does not destroy one’s ignorance nor does it erase one’s pride or egoism and sense of doership. While realized souls remain effortlessly in this state without being assailed by divisions such as ‘this is society’ and ‘that is seclusion’ or ‘this is Sannyas’ and ‘that is householder’s life’, why have you left home, looking upon Samsara with contempt to hang about in this desolate place?

Vithoba: If one has realized his true and all pervading nature and still continues his association with Samsara, he will certainly meet with a downfall and lose his exalted state of Self-abidance. Therefore, such a person will not be inclined to associate with the world even in his dream.

Jnaneshwar: To remain in the unbiased, neutral state without the movement of thought which discriminates, ‘this is conducive’, ‘that is not conducive’, is indeed abidance in one’s natural state or Sahaja Samadhi. Can longing for one set of conditions and repelling another set of conditions in life lead to this effortless Samadhi?

Vithoba: If one remains without desire and distinction, how can he transact the worldly business? What is the use of such a person living in the society? Therefore, making a Sadhu live in the society is like performing marriage to a dead body! Just for the sake of this transient body’s care, one should not live in the society which leads to a host of afflictions.

Jnaneshwar: If a seeker’s mind is rooted in duality, then it is not much different from worldly transaction. Then, he can as well carry on with Samsaric transactions in the dual plane, without rejecting one and accepting the other.

Vithoba: Duality practised in spiritual sphere puts an end ultimately to all other modifications of the mind, whereas transaction with the world gives rise to countless miseries.
Jnaneshwar: When your very self is That, the Satchidananda Swaroopa, what is the fun in seeking it through external means and conditions?

Vithoba: Great souls aver that attaining Samadhi in the wakeful state is the supreme way. Is it possible to get this experience of eternal bliss without seeking solitude?

Jnaneshwar: Scriptures avow that to be the Pure Witness of the play of senses on the sense-objects in waking state, of the imaginative mind in the dream state and of the supreme void in the deep sleep state is bliss. To remain detached as witness to the world drama while abiding in the Delight is eternal bliss. While it is so, you are holding on to the notion that to remain in the void and remain unconscious of the world is bliss.

Vithoba: The states of waking and dream drown a man in worldly existence, feed him to the wild animals of sensory cravings and finally cast him into the purgatory of agony. Therefore, unaware of the phenomenal world, losing oneself in the void or Nirvikalpa Samadhi, a sleep-like state is the supreme attainment.

Jnaneshwar: Just as a thief takes his lessons from a rogue, one should cut off the delusion of the world while interacting in the world like King Janaka, with the sword of Jnana and remain unaffected by the polarities of joy and sorrow. To remain in the solitude of Samadhi in the midst of worldly existence is true Samadhi and not getting oneself lost in the void.

Vithoba: It is Suka’s total dispassion which tamed the monkey of the mind, wildly driven by age-old vasanas whereas Janaka who lived in the state of Brahmajnana.

Jnaneshwar: It is the supreme Knowledge of Janaka that effaced the mind totally, whereas in the case of Suka, mind was kept dissociated from the external world for the duration of his absorption.

Vithoba: Only from the state of a seer or the subject, can the objects seen be obliterated. How can one perform the feat of transcending the mind while remaining within the three states in which mind is not extinct? Can the sensory perceptions bring the sense experiences to a halt? Can poison be an antidote to poison?
Jnaneshwar: Just as the poison converted into medicine becomes the antidote for poison, it is by steady and pure wisdom, that wild senses are subdued. There is always an undercurrent of fear of the wild animals of sense objects in the mind of one who seeks absorption. His mind’s preoccupation with the senses and the battle for subduing them strengthens his fear and arrests his march towards his goal.

Vithoba: If the power of senses can trounce the efforts of a Sannyasi and make him unsteady, then what can be said of his fate when he is engulfed by the flames of worldly transactions? Can his mind remain steady without oscillation? He will be carried away by the high tide of Samsara like a dry leaf washed away by the torrents of flood.

Jnaneshwar: However long one abides in Nirvikalpa Samadhi without attaining pure wisdom, his mind not having been dead, the power of senses will externalize his attention, draw him out and bring him hardship. One who remains steadfast without being affected by the mighty sensory pulls and worldly afflictions like a big stone lying unmoving in the midst of strong current alone can enjoy the bliss of Brahman. One whose mind is not fixed thus can never be free from ignorance.

Vithoba: Whatever the level of attainment, unless one takes to the practice of experiencing the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi frequently in seclusion, he will undoubtedly drown in the deep well of delusion.

Jnaneshwar: Only if there is a Maya apart from the all-pervading Brahman, one can slip from Self-experience. Can you conceive of the shadow fighting with its owner? Likewise, you have imagined a non-existent individual sense of I which is the play of Maya and you want to battle with these pseudo entities and subdue them, yet you want to experience the non-dual Samadhi always. Just as wrestling with one’s shadow results only in fatigue, struggling to conquer the non-existent Maya causes despair. Clinging to the notion of rejecting the world brings about more harassment. Please give up this futile endeavour and abide in effortless inner Silence.

Vithoba: How to attain the state of Sahaja Samadhi without practising self-restraint, one-pointedness or witness consciousness?
Jnaneshwar: As you go on rejecting the world and suppressing the mind, more and more sensory demands will surge from within like a Pandora’s box. The more you push your mind to be one-pointed, the greater will be its rebellion. The practice of witnessing the never-ending chain of thoughts gradually deludes one into an identity with those very thoughts. Therefore, indifferent to non-existent Maya, the phantom of ‘I’ sense, and sustaining the certitude, “I am Brahman”, dive deep within and plumb the depths of the source. Such a deep enquiry alone will reveal the source.

Vithoba: You mean that without any spiritual practices, just by remaining convinced that “I am Brahman”, can the turmoil wrought by the play of the senses can be conquered? Can one ever get closer to the experience of the Atman in this way?

Jnaneshwar: When even a live cow cannot kill the tiger, how can a dead cow threaten it? Likewise what can the sensory world do to the transcendental and effulgent Atman? Just as even a fat cow is killed by a tiger, the mind loses its foothold in the presence of the magnificent Atman. If it ever surfaces, it will forthwith meet with the same fate as the cow on encountering a tiger.

Vithoba: Just as a chaste woman is soiled by the company of a prostitute, even so an ascetic loses his self-control in the company of the Samsari and plunges into the pit of destruction.

Jnaneshwar: A truly chaste woman will not swerve from the path of moral conduct even if she has to associate with prostitutes; whereas, one whose mind is wavering will come to ruin even if he lives alone. A true ascetic will not depart from his chosen goal. Just as a Brahmin who acts the role of a scavenger does not actually become one, but remains a Brahmin, a Brahmajnani even if he lives amidst Samsaris acting in different roles, will not deviate from steadfast wisdom.

Vithoba: However steadfast a person may be, unless he takes a dip now and then in the holy waters of Self-experience, he cannot retain that state for long.

Jnaneshwar: Is it necessary for the Brahmin acting as a scavenger to keep asserting to himself, ‘I am a Brahmin’, ‘I am a Brahmin’? If he doesn’t affirm this often, will he really become a scavenger? Is it
necessary for a well-known Brahmin to sport his sacred thread to proclaim his caste? Is it necessary for one who has uprooted the pride of egoism to meditate daily on the Maha Vakya, ‘I am Brahman, I am Brahman’. Such an exalted soul, even if he does not adhere to any prescribed practice will be worshipped by all.

Vithoba: How is it possible to remain steadfast without regularly imbibing any practice? The sense of doership is very difficult to eradicate, it is not that easily wiped out.

Jnaneshwar: Holding a lamp in your hand, can you request the darkness to stay back for a little while? Holding a cat in your hand, can you ask the parrot to entertain you with its prattle? Similarly, knowing fully well that the body, world, deities etc. are unreal, can you experience the Maya? When a disciple realizes without a trace of doubt that all existences are mere appearances without substance, can he continue with his practices? Be it Samsara or Sannyasa, birth or death, bondage or liberation, it has no meaning to him. Can such a person be infatuated by the Grand Illusion? Can he ever be affected by ignorance? Just as the eyes of a dead goat, though wide-open, does not have the power to see, even so an enlightened person whose mind is dead is not affected when he interacts in the world like any other person. Please contemplate on what I have said.

Nivritti: O dear father! It is very strange that you still keep arguing obstinately on this subject. One should contemplate on That which instantly burns away one’s entire stock of sins, makes him fully perfect, bestowing the exalted universal vision in which individuality is irrevocably lost. It is That which illumines everything, stands alone, generates undiminishing love in the heart and gives eternal delight. It is the greatest wonder, nearest to one both outside and inside, and has the brilliance of more than billions of suns. It is the goal of Mahavakyas, ever-new and ineffable. It is from that Absolute the entire creation springs and has its being, which supports the functions of creation, sustenance and destruction, remains changeless, undivided and absolute through the past, present and future, without any modification into names and forms. It is That which is also the body, mind and senses. That essence is Brahman. It is That which has
become the five elements, Tanmatras, Mahat, Ahankar, the Trigunas of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas, Trimurtis, minutest atoms and inheres in all its perfection.

How to worship, extol or contemplate on such a Thing which defies description? How futile it is to try to grasp with our senses that which is the nameless, formless Supreme Void? Even the Srutis and Smritis, having attempted to sing the praises of That, which transcends all indicators and defies all descriptions, have fallen silent. Then, how can the puny intellect comprehend such an enigmatic state? Therefore, contemplating on That which alone remains after eliminating the superimposition of name, form and other signs from all objects and beholding That alone which permeates everything and pervades everywhere, establish yourself in that equal vision which is the highest meditation, the supreme Nishta. Rising above the pairs of opposites and releasing the knot of ‘I’ is the superlative meditation. While it is so, of what avail is your attachment to forest life or your sitting still in an isolated place?

Unable to contradict the words of Nivritti and Jnaneshwar anymore and conceding to his children Vithoba said, “Beloved children! You are born with great insight and strong inclination towards Truth. How can I disagree with your penetrating wisdom? It is my great good fortune to have begotten exalted souls like you for my children.” Overwhelmed with joy and shedding tears of ecstasy, he embraced both with great affection.

When he opened his eyes, both children gave him Darshan as Siva and Hari. His hair stood on end, his entire being shook with waves of bliss. Going into raptures, Vithoba sang Their praises, “O Hari! O Hara! When You Yourselves have incarnated as my children, is there any need for me to engage in ascetic practices? Is there anyone more blessed than me on this earth? What kind of ignorance had possessed me so long that I could forsake Your company and service and flee to the forest? Why didn’t You enchain me to Your feet even at Your birth by revealing Your forms to me? Why did You keep me in the dark all these years?”

Then Vithoba pleaded to Sopandev to reveal His divine form upon which He revealed His form of Brahmadeva to him and said,
“O noble ascetic! He whose inner vision is clear and who always remains in the ever-perfect state, will birth and death threaten him? Such a realized soul is free from the notion of heaven or hell and bondage or liberation. For him, everything is Brahman. He is indeed the liberated soul who realizes that Brahman is bigger than the biggest and smaller than the smallest atom. While being fixed in this state, he who makes his dwelling place in the society and discharges his duties as a householder is supreme among men. Viswamitra, Sukadeva and Durvasa sat at the feet of householders like Vasishta, King Janaka and Sri Krishna. A householder saint is far superior to a Sannyasi; one who transacts in the world abiding in Sahaja Nishta is far superior to a Sannyasi lost in Nirvikalpa Samadhi in a secluded place.”

Vithoba addressing Rukmabai said, “Beloved woman, our Guru’s words have come true. We have been redeemed in this birth by the descent of Trimurtis and Adishakti in our household.” Overcome by this incredible good fortune Rukmabai said, “It is indeed a wonder that the Trimurtis who incarnated as the children of Anasuya, the supreme jewel among women, and Adishakti chose to be born to an ordinary woman like me who is bereft of noble virtues.”

Beholding the beautiful countenance of Muktabai, she continued, “O Divine Mother, will You not reveal Your captivating form to us and purify us?”

Muktabai blessed them with the vision of Her form. The couple engulfed by joy adored the Mother. Muktabai said, “O holy ones, We have incarnated to reduce the burden of the earth by destroying evil doers, to establish the paths of Saguna-Nirguna i.e. Devotion and Knowledge, and purify the creation. To start our mission we have to commence our work in the society. You both must agree to come and live in the society which will be conducive to our work. He who wants to attain the unbiased state of Advaita should not be caught in the notion of dualism such as society and seclusion.”

“The most exalted state attained by one who sees not a distinction between filth and sandal paste, consumes poison and nectar with the same attitude, has equal vision towards a friend and a foe, can never be reached by an ascetic who is stuck up in the dualities of
this and that, good and bad etc. The supreme Being, self-effulgent, self-revealed, self-fulfilled, self-existing Bliss Itself cannot be confined even to a description of ‘One without a second’, as the notion of one gives rise to many as well.”

“The state is such that no one exists there to bear witness to Its existence. Lord Siva indicates That by Chinmudra and abides in silence; Lord Vishnu indicates It in his Buddha Avatar through silence. As language utterly fails to express this baffling state, Lord Brahma has lapsed into a dumb state. Just as the pain of a slaughtered animal can be felt only by that which is slaughtered, or craving for water can be understood only by a thirsty person, or sweetness of sugar can be understood only by one who has tasted sugar; similarly the nature of transcendental Reality can be known only to him who has become That.”

“When Guru and the disciple revel in the bliss of same experience, who is left behind there and to serve whom? When the Guru imparts the supreme truth to the disciple, ‘You are I; I am you’, then can the disciple retain a separate existence of his own? The experience of Self-knowledge is like the blazing forest fire which consumes everything without distinction. Likewise, a Brahmajnani abides in equal vision, seeing the same Brahman everywhere. Then, what makes you abhor society and adore seclusion?”

Vithoba falling in total accord with them, got ready to enter the town whole-heartedly. The Trinities resuming their forms as children requested Vithoba not to disclose the secret of their birth. When Vithoba reached the house of Sidhopant with Rukmabai and children, all bathed in the ocean of joy.
167. Surrounded by the Twelve [Adityas]¹, the Eleven [Rudras]², the Seven [rishis] and the Eight [Guardians of the Directions], the serpents of the naga world, the kinnaras and kimpurusas, the siddhas and the yakshas³,

¹ The Adityas are solar deities. In puranic times they are numbered as twelve, and include Mitra, Varuna, Savitr, Surya, and Visnu in his Vamana incarnation. They are descended from Aditi and Kasyapa. See v. 86.
² The eleven Rudras are also gods and children of Aditi, according to some accounts. Their origin and identities are given differently in different Puranas.
³ The Yaksas are a class of demi-gods. Their origins are variously described in the Puranas.
the gods and rishis, eternal Brahma and holy Mal, Lakshmi and Saraswati, rejoicing one and all, Dakshan, scorning the First One, instigated a great sacrifice, which was not (destined to be) finished.

168. The Goddess spoke to her Lord, saying, “Pray, give me leave to attend my father’s sacrifice,” to which He replied, “Your father unwisely chose to revile me.” “Surely you will forgive him, for my sake?” she said, bowing down to him. “Well then, go swiftly and return,” he said with a smile. Thereupon she whose locks are intertwined with fragrant flowers departed for that densely crowded place where her father’s sacrifice was about to begin.

169. Seeing her mother, she fell at her feet, but her mother did not embrace her in return. Her wicked father, too, she worshipped but he scorned her also. Affronted by this disdainful treatment, she let out a curse, saying, “May your magnificent sacrifice fare badly, like a burning ground haunted by evil spirits,” then disappeared. He who shares her very form came to know of these happenings.

170. Could anyone escape the inner flame that she sent coursing through him? Dwelling within that crown which the cool moon adorns, she unleashed a deluge of fire, whereupon the Lord burned with such anger that, as heaven and earth trembled, Virabhadra was born from his third eye.

171. His body blacker than a dark cloud, it was as if Mount Meru itself roamed the land wearing a crown set with gems of peacock blue. Poison dripping from his lips, his fiery mouth roaring like thunder, his third eye blazing, our Lord Virabhadra appeared, his hands joined above his head in a gesture of worship.

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4 In an earlier incarnation Parvati was Sati, a daughter of prajapati Daksa, (Tamil Tākkan) who married Lord Siva. Daksa however disapproved of the match on account of Siva’s seemingly outlandish behaviour and appearance, and therefore distanced himself from his daughter and son-in-law.
172. For a cloak he wore the skin of a vanquished lion⁵, whilst the flayed skin of a tiger served him as a belt⁶. In the twinkling of an eye, his body blotted out the vast expanse of the heavens, as Virabhadra appeared asking, “For what reason am I summoned? For what reason?”

173. The Three-eyed Lord spoke, “Like a cloud which rains down fire instead of rain, you must raze and shatter Dakshan’s sacrifice, then return.” In that very instant, Virabhadra, filled with joy, bowed to the Lord’s holy feet and departed, surrounded by the cohorts of goblins and demons who stood at this side.

174. The eight naga,⁷ their fangs dripping venom, he wore as a garland, whilst the elephants of the eight directions served him as earrings. Ten bhuta⁸ waved fans of purple, whilst another four, clad in pure white smocks, waved immaculate yak-tail fans.

175. There were twice ten thousand demons, who wring the moisture from the clouds to assuage the fire in their bellies, each one grasping a trumpet, whilst a thousand goblins, with curving fangs in their jaws, like the crescent moon split in half, shaded him with pearl encrusted parasols.

176. Conch shells, which once many tens of millions of former Vishnus held, sounded out; trumpets, made from the horns of the beasts which bear the Gods of Fire and Wind,⁹ and cornets fashioned from the horns of countless buffaloes — once vehicles of the Lord

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⁵ Saiva scriptures relate that Lord Siva incarnated as the half-lion, half-bird Sarabha to vanquish and flay Visnu in his Narasimha incarnation.
⁶ The Tamil paraphrase says this is the skin of the tiger the rishis in the Daruka forest called forth from the sacrificial fire.
⁷ These are eight serpents of the nether world who support the earth in the eight directions, the most well-known of which is Vasuki, whom the devas used to churn the ocean of milk.
⁸ The bhutas are demons and goblins in the entourage of Lord Siva. They are described as dwarfish with huge pot bellies and short legs.
⁹ Agni rides the ram, and Vayu, the antelope.
of Death but now long dead — rang out, as he mounted his chariot, harnessed to a thousand bull elephants.

177. Some of the goblin hordes transformed themselves into elephants; others into chariots; others into galloping steeds; others into warring Gods and men. Demons without number disguised themselves in forms beyond measure.

178. The demon hordes marched on to the fore, eager for battle. Drinking the seven oceans dry, they returned with thirst unsated. Eating everything in the seven wide worlds, still they groaned, their hunger unappeased. Hurling their sharp spears, they plundered even the kingdom of the Lord of Death.

179. The Seven Clouds\textsuperscript{10} they braided into their red matted hair. Many universes of Brahma they consumed in turn with smoke and fire. In all the eight directions they quested, searching for that sacrificial hall. On they came, unleashing whirlwinds as they struck their palms together.

180. Fights broke out as some of the demons became drunk on liquor enough to fill a flooding ocean. Others circled the entire earth in leaps and bounds. Others asked, “Who are they that spurn our Lord?” and stood grinning, ready for the kill. Some took to their beds, whilst others arose spontaneously to sing loving praises to the Lord.

181. To the din of reed pipes, rattles, war-drums, conches and \textit{virudapambai} drums, the pealing of bells of marvellous invention, and the rattle of the \textit{tavandai} drum and the corded \textit{mridanga}, the whole retinue of demons, espying the sacrificial hall at the end of their long journey, scooped up the children of \textit{Aditi}\textsuperscript{11} and robbed them of their life breath.

\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{seven clouds} in Hindu mythology, shedding gems, water, gold, flowers, dust, stones and fire.

\textsuperscript{11} The \textit{devas} - \textit{gods} are children of \textit{Kasyapa} and \textit{Aditi}. 
182. The Guardians of the Eight Directions, [Indra] upon a cloud, [Agni] upon a ram, [Yama] upon a buffalo, [Nirutti] upon a demon, [Varuna] upon a beautiful alligator, [Vayu] upon an antelope, the Lord of Alaka’s city [Kubera] on his flying chariot,\(^{12}\) and [Isanya] upon the noble bull, each mounting his own vehicle, rode to the attack intent on the slaughter of the opposing army.

183. Hurling a rain of arrows, tridents, spears, iron bludgeons,\(^{13}\) \textit{vajras},\(^ {14}\) battle-axes and swords, they cut down the captains of Lord Virabhadra’s army. Thereupon eight of the demon army attacked that ferocious group of Eight, and grasping vehicle and rider both, tossed them in the air as if they were playing a game of \textit{ammanai}.\(^ {15}\)

184. But finally those twice four demons fell, as the Eight put the warlike fiends to flight. Seeing their discomfiture, the Guardians of the Directions draped themselves with the garland of the conqueror. Virabhadra, witnessing the discomfiture of his army, discharged twice four arrows, which penetrated the bodies of those Guardians of the World, and ricocheted about, feeding on the nectar within.

185. Indra dismounted and flew off in the form of a \textit{kuyil}.\(^ {16}\) Isana, the Lord of Alaka, Nirutti, Vayu and Varuna shrank away, whilst [Yama], he who rides the buffalo, slept the sleep of death. As for the Lord of Fire, Virabhadra severed his seven great arms,\(^ {17}\) as easily as our Lord severs the ties of birth for his devotees.

\(^{12}\) \textit{paril eri}, literally \textit{he who rides upon the par}. \textit{par} can mean \textit{the central platform of a chariot}, hence chariot, by metonymy, \textit{akupeyar}, in Tamil. Kubera’s chariot is called \textit{Puspaka}.

\(^{13}\) \textit{ulakkai} -- \textit{weapon of iron, shaped like a pestle} (Tam. Lex.).

\(^{14}\) \textit{vacciram}, Sanskrit \textit{vajra} is an iron weapon, pointed at both ends and held in the middle.

\(^{15}\) There is a description of this girls’ game in G. U. Pope’s introduction to his translation of Manikkavacakar’s hymn \textit{Tiru ammanai}: ‘The women, generally six in number, sit in a circle and toss a number of little balls from one to another with great dexterity and very swiftly. It is a pretty sight.’

\(^{16}\) The \textit{kuyil} is the Indian cuckoo.

\(^{17}\) In Hindu art, Agni is depicted with two or seven hands, two heads and three legs.
186. Taking the learned priest of the sacrifice\(^{18}\) whose terror was without bounds, he plundered his life’s breath and flayed his body, casting away the remnants. As for Dakshan’s wife, the mother of [Parvati] who resembles a fresh green creeper, he hacked off both her ears with his vajra before going to confront the Lord’s father by marriage.

187. Turning that great ambrosial banquet into a feast of heroism, he plucked out one of the columns which had been set up for the sacrifice and attacked Dakshan, striking his head clean off, and sending it tumbling like a great mountain. Immediately one (of the goblins) leapt forward and swallowed it down in an instant.

188. Plying his trident again and again with a scornful laugh, Virabhadra consumed the embodied souls of the Rudras, whose vehicle is the bull. The souls of the Vasus and divine Asvins he also consumed, along with the lives of the rishis who had scurried of into hiding like monkeys.

189. The Sun’s teeth and one of his eyes he tore out by the root. Sarasvati’s fair nose and Lakshmi’s fair tongue, both, he sliced in two. The many-phased moon, who had been feasting upon ambrosia, he squashed with his anklet-clad foot so that the conflagration [in the sacrificial hall] was extinguished, just as you daub butter on a [burned] foot.

190. When the gods who had left their bodies upon the earth returned again, assuming the dark forms of demons, to appear in the sacrificial hall and resume the battle, that holy army pursued them and killed them in the fight. Demons as they were, still they were not exempt from suffering.

\(^{18}\) Bhrigu, one of the prajapatis, was one of the officiating priests at the sacrifice, and was killed by Virabhadara.
191. Although the sacrifice as ordained by law was destroyed, a demon came along, shovelling into his mouth fresh boiled rice and puffed rice with sesame and swilling down pots of ghee, so that as he did so his belly became the sacrificial pit, with the fire of his hunger rising from it.

192. So as not leave those bodies to rot, the demons consumed them all as they lay dead, the Guardians of the Eight Directions, the Vasus, the rishis and the tormented gods, thirty three crores in number, so that their very bellies resembled the sacrificial hall as it was at the beginning.

193. As those demons, who know not death even at the kalpas end, trampled their bodies, the blood that gushed forth from the vile corpses of the Immortals resembled ghee poured upon the sacrificial fire. And as the bellies of that vast number of yakshas and siddhas split asunder, the sacrifice instituted by Daksa that day became like a serpent sacrifice,\(^\text{19}\) draped in their intestines.

194. As the glorious Guardians of the Eight Direction along with all the other gods, the siddhas and all the rest met their deaths over and over again, Brahma recreated them in an instant and they returned reborn to join the battle. In order to ensure that those who died were no more reborn, Virabhadra launched an assault on lotus-borne Brahma himself.

195. He smote the lotus-borne One, lopping off those hands which caused the slaughtered gods to live again. And taking up a three-pronged trident, he severed the heads of the ten sons created from Brahma’s thoughts,\(^\text{20}\) scattering them over the earth.

196. Vishnu, the First One, he who swallowed up the universal shell and spewed it forth again, joined the battle, appearing like Mount

\(^{19}\) carppayakam, a sacrificial rite for the destruction of serpents.

\(^{20}\) The prajapatis.
Meru itself, riding upon the glorious Garuda, and discharged a great shower of arrows towards Virabhadra’s breast. All of these Virabhadra reduced to tiny pieces with an arrow shot by his own hand.

197. Vishnu, he who consumed the earth, grew angry and brandishing his sword, hurled it a Virabhadra, who shattered it with one arrow, and with another, took the life of that Eater of Serpents, Garuda. Vishnu’s body grew black with fury and he hurled his discus, which, however, fell meekly in obeisance at the feet of the Lord.21

198. When the discus given as a gift by our Father fell at the feet of Virabhadra, Vishnu changed his form and carried on the battle in the form of a boar and then of a lion. Virabhadra slew these with sword and spear, whereupon Vishnu changed his form again, and went to hide under the ocean in the form of a fish.

199. Tall Mal, the consumer of the earth, tasted defeat once more, as in ancient times, and went away. Brahma endured the suffering of having his four heads severed. The Gods were bludgeoned with clubs and destroyed. The shrouded sacrifice became a huge food platter for the flesh-eating demons, and the rishis who had joyfully consumed the sacrificial offering all lost their lives.

200. Having finished them all off in this way, Virabhadra went to the Lord, made obeisance, and told him all that had happened. Siva’s anger was appeased, and, filled with compassion, he restored to life those who had perished at the sacrifice and returned to them the deathless attributes they had held before, whereupon they bowed before him and departed. And what was the fate of Parvati’s erstwhile father? His head was replaced with the head of a goat.

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21 The reference is to the same story as that mentioned in v.126. The story goes that Visnu was preparing to make an offering of 1000 flowers to Siva, when he noticed that he was a flower short, Siva having hidden one to test his devotion. Accordingly Visnu tore out one of his eyes to replace the missing one. As a reward for his devotion, Siva gave him the discus, which, on being thrown at Virabhadra, recognised his Lord’s servant and went to pay homage to him.
201. In order to dispel the suffering of being known to the world as the daughter of one who showed disrespect to our Lord, Parvati abandoned her body using her yogic powers, and took birth as the daughter of Himavan and Menai, on account of Himavan’s own tapas, and that of Menai, who had formerly given birth to Mainakan. Thereupon, the Gods, all, poured down a rain of karpaka blossoms.

202. As the One, indivisible from the true Reality, as the Two, the duality of Sakti and Sivam, as the Three, the triad of knowledge, volition and action, as the thick branch (which supports) both nada and bindu, which are generated by pure maya, as the pearl, and as the fundamental seed from which Rudra, Mal, Brahma and the rest are engendered within Sivam, she [Parvati] is all-pervading. Is it possible to describe the tapas accomplished by those who gave birth to such a one?

203. Like the waxing moon, or like the sugarcane that Kama grows as a weapon against Lord Siva, Parvati grew up mastering the arts and sciences, playing ball games, swinging on the swing, and playing other games like kazhangu. Happily, during this time, Narada, who was fully versed in the four Vedas, came to the court of the Mountain King. Realising the divine qualities of Her in whose divine belly all the worlds are contained, he spoke these words:

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22 Considered to be the son of Himavati and Menai, Mainaka is a rock in the sea between the southern point of the Indian peninsula and Ceylon.

23 sittantatu onru — [she is] one with siddhanta. Ultimately Parvati is one with Siva, the absolute truth.

24 nana, iccai, ceyalin munru — the Three: knowledge, will and action. These are the three active, female energies of Siva by which he evolves and creates the universe, jnana sakti, iccha sakti and kriya sakti, to give them there Sanskrit names.

25 natam and vindu are two of Siva’s nine forms. vindu is a male energy, and nada is female. They evolve from sakti and are responsible for the creation of the universal constituents, tattvas.

26 The word used here, kutilai, is a name for pure maya. There are three mayas: pure, pure-impure and impure. Siva does not become involved with any but the first.

27 It is not clear what this might refer to.
204. “[In the course of time] the following will occur: on one side of her forehead half an eye will appear; one of her hands will hold a long trident; one of her breasts will disappear; half her body will lose its green hue and become coral red; half her fragrant, braided hair will become the matted locks of an ascetic, and the bangles will fall from one of her wrists.” At this, the Mountain King’s heart melted, and he was filled with joy.

205. One day, on those snowy slopes which send the waters of the river Ganges rushing down upon the earth, the father of Her who engenders all the worlds, having heard that He who bears the holy waters in His locks had come there to perform tapas, went and made obeisance to Him. Saying, “Sire, pray accept my daughter to serve your tapas,” he left her with Him and departed.

206. Whilst He who, on account of their unbroken austerities, grants enduring boons to exalted Vishnu, Brahma and the rest of the gods, was performing tapas with some purpose in mind, the maiden Parvati, bringing fruits, flowers, darbha grass and holy water, and surrounded by her handmaidens, performed many a service for Him.

207. Meanwhile, all the gods, with their king, Indra, went to lotus-dwelling Brahma and paid homage to him. He, in turn, bade them be seated, noting the despondency in the countenance of each of them, and the sorry state of their arms and shoulders, bereft of the kumkum paste that was wont to adorn them.
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The stories in the MB are the lifeblood of not only Hindus of India but also the people of Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia. It commands great religious and cultural significance. Many people carry the names of the heroes and heroines from the MB. Despite its mammoth size and intricacy, the MB predominantly explores one theme: the observance of one’s sacred duty, dharma. All the major dramas in the saga relate to the question of dharma and whether it is obeyed or ignored. The trials and tribulations of each character and their clan is the story of how they remain true to their dharma or deviate from it. The characters who obey the dictates of dharma are rewarded, while those who deliberately refuse to obey their dharma are finally punished.

There are many short versions of this great text but to my knowledge there is but one complete 18 volume edition of the entire MB. It was done by Kisori Mohan Ganguli, and published between 1883-1896. Ganguli tried to give a literal translation. Though lively the translation is dated with its archaisms, for example it is full of ‘Thou’ and ‘Thee’.

Ramesh Menon published a few years ago a condensed version of the MB in two large volumes but felt compelled to render the entire MB in modern English without compromising the spirit of the text. He has with his team of collaborators made a word for word translation based not on the original Sanskrit but Ganguli’s version.

The first volume The Adi Parva has now been released. The language is chaste, faithful to the intent of story and a joy to read. It is not a book to be read like a thriller charging to the book’s end but one to be savoured. I am sure that those who wish their children to learn about their Hindu heritage can do no better than read to them this long, enchanting tale. Though we all know the basic story, yet to read it as the ancients did is to be enchanted by its unique rasa.

This has been a labour of love for Ramesh Menon and we wish him and his team the best in their long journey. The complete project will, I think, become the new ready reference for all matters pertaining to the MB in English.

— Christopher Quilkey

Pannalal Dasgupta was a revolutionary freedom fighter and a leading figure in the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI). In his younger days, though he respected Gandhiji, he was intent on the armed struggle against British colonial rule. He became a friend of Prof. Nirmal Bose who was close to Gandhiji and learnt in depth about the true intentions and methods of the Satyagraha movement. He wrote the book under review in 1954-55 while serving a life sentence in the notorious Dumdum Basirhat case where he was held morally responsible for the murder by his associates of a factory manager. He was later pardoned and with the help of Jayaprakash Narayan started ‘The Tagore Society for Rural Development’. He devoted the rest of his life in unceasing effort to uplift villages in West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.

Panna Babu was well aware of rampant consumerism and the dangers of science and technology’s abilities unencumbered by ethical restraints and guidelines. He was guided by Gandhiji’s vision of society in which the rhythm and harmony of our existence would be enriched from within as well as channelled by concern and consideration for the needs of others both material and spiritual.

Thanks to an excellent translation from the Bengali we are introduced to the main themes on which Gandhiji lived and based his life and political creed: Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Hindu-Muslim unity, harijans, village economics and the charkha.

This is a rich, sober book informed by the insights of man with a formidable intellect and a driving passion. One can catch the ‘voice’ of the author whose integrity shines through. He has a style free of verbiage and pleasing to the mind with its cogent observations and arguments. He does not raise Gandhiji to an inaccessible platform but shares with us his sober appraisal of Gandhiji’s character and the tribulations and doubts he faced square-on. He sees in Gandhiji one who never flinched from unpleasant truths nor in changing direction, if convinced he was wrong. The explanation of Gandhiji’s evolving philosophy of abhimsa is fascinating, for Gandhiji saw it not as a coward’s path of resignation but one that required the greatest courage in refusing to accept anything less than the truth, whatever the cost.— Christopher Quilkey
Old Dispensary Renovation

Health services started in the Ashram in 1929 led by Dr. Krishnamurthi Iyer. But for more than ten years medical procedures were conducted in makeshift facilities, until the early 1940s, when construction began on a proper Ashram dispensary. Inaugurated in 1942, the old Ashram Dispensary is one of the Ashram’s earliest buildings. Built in the Madras terrace style with lime-mortar finish and segmental-arched windows, it harks back to a simpler time. However, it is not only its period architecture that merits its designation as a heritage site but also its historical value: this is where Bhagavan was treated in the last years and where he underwent surgery in March 1949 by an eminent medical team from Chennai.

In 2010 investigation revealed that the building required immediate repairs. Due to the ravages of time, numerous wooden rafters were badly damaged as were portions of the lime-plaster exterior and window frames. With the help of Ashram devotee, Dr. Perumal, architectural conservationists working in the Tanjavur area were contacted to carry out the work. Shakti Murugan, the project-in-charge, is an architect by training and has dedicated his career to renovating historical buildings. Among his priorities is taking measures to extend and protect the life of vintage buildings far into the future. Concerning the Ashram Dispensary, since the building’s underlying structure seems to be intact, renovation will focus on replicating damaged portions of the lime-plaster façade, securing the overall exterior against the elements, replacing damaged woodwork and, with the help of archival photos, restoring the building to its original condition. The project is being carried out by six temple masons and three carpenters. Projected time frame: 4-6 months.

Nochur Venkataraman Discourses

Sri Nochur Venkataraman, the much loved and admired young speaker on Bhagavatam, Adi Sankara and Sri Bhagavan gave an 8-day discourse at the Ashram on Bhagavan’s Ulladu Narpadu in continuation of last year’s talks. Starting 26th June (up to 2nd July), the afternoon lectures were given in Tamil. But for the benefit of non-Tamilians, an additional lecture in English was scheduled for
Sunday, the 3rd of July. The discourses were available ‘live’ on the web for devotees residing outside Tiruvannamalai.

Beginning with UN v. 14, Nochur talked on tanmai (which is the Tamil first-person for ‘I’ but also means ‘nature’) and explained how the ending of tanmai (the ‘I’) is finding our true nature. He talked equally at length on time, space and causation, and the body, world and the Self and pointed out, as per the teachings of Sri Bhagavan, that the absence of the Self-Knowledge is the only misery.

Nochur’s talks are backed by a meditative study of existing commentaries and years of sustained application of the teaching in his daily life.

Khanna Samadhi Day
On the 23rd of July, around 10am, devotees, including family members, gathered at the decorated samadhi of Sri H.C. Khanna. Aksharamanamalai was chanted, followed by arati and the distribution of prasad.

Ganapati Muni Samadhi Day
Two days later on the 25th, the Anniversary Day of Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was observed in the New Hall. Devotees chanted verses written by the Muni such as Sat Darshanam, Sri Ramana Gita and Soundaryamba Shatakam, which celebrates the consecration of the Mother’s shrine by Bhagavan’s own hands.

Kunjuswami Day
Kunjuswami’s Samadhi day was observed on 7th August 2011. Upadesa Saram, Gita Saram and Saddarshanam in Malayalam were chanted by devotees and guests from Palakkad, followed by Aksharamanamalai, after which puja was offered to the lingam at Swamiji’s Samadhi.

Bhuminatha Temple Repairs
In recent months it came to the attention of Ramanasramam that the mantapam at the main entrance of Bhuminatha Temple in Bhagavan’s birth place, Tiruchuli, was in disrepair. The manatapam was subject to severe leaking during the rainy season due to damaged roofing tiles. A team of 20 masons and workers under the direction of Sri Anjaneyalu and including local labourers convened at the site to carry out the task of re-tiling the 22,000 sq. ft. mantapam roof. With Ashram logistical
support and the requisite funding from Ashram devotees, the project is on target for completion by the middle of September.

**Muruganar Samadhi Day**

The Samadhi Day of Bhagavan’s great devotee, the Tamil poet Muruganar, was observed on Sunday, the 28th August, 2011. Chanting began at 6am with Muruganar’s *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* led by Sri Ramanan and devotees from Ramana Sacchidananda Sabha (Choolaimedu), Chennai. Complete chanting of the 1,852 verses of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* continued from the aradhana day celebration up till the 30th August in the New Hall with wide participation. Thanks to the late T. R. Kanakammal who formed a trust and arranged funding, these elaborate celebrations on Muruganar’s Samadhi Days are sure to be an annual event.

**Obituaries**

**Saroja Krishnan**, who knew Bhagavan since early infancy and spent her life in close association with the Ashram, attained the feet of Bhagavan on the 30th June 2011 at the age of 90. Granddaughter of Dr. Narayana Iyer, the long-time devotee who spent time with Bhagavan in Virupaksha days, Sarojamma had a treasure trove of stories to tell about her experiences over the decades with Bhagavan. **Uma Khanna**, wife of Sri Ranvir Harichand Khanna, and daughter-in-law of H.C. Khanna, reached Bhagavan’s abode on 3rd June 2011. She first came to Ramanastamam in 1958 and regularly visited till her illness a few years ago. She was a member of the Managing Committee of Mumbai Ramana Maharashi committee and held regular *satsangs* in her house. **Trudel Elsaesser**, long-time subscriber to the *Mountain Path* and benefactress of the Ashram, passed away in July at her residence in Germany. She was in her 102nd year. In her last days, her thoughts were often with the Holy Mountain. Those who met her were impressed by her quiet strong integrity. **Karin Stegemann** had been editing the journal of the Buddhist Society of Hamburg when, in 1959, she discovered Bhagavan through a German edition of *Talks*. She became a devotee when her regular visits to the Ashram started in 1976. She passed away in Hamburg in May at the age of 92.