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Ramana Ashtottaram

78. ओं सर्वावनिमतस्थानामाराध्याय नमः

Om Sarvāvani matasthānām āradhyāya namah.

Prostration to the one adored by the followers of all religions in the whole world.

Advaita sums up and transcends all the different creeds. The goal and the core of all religions is the experience of oneness, the direct realisation of the Self. Bhagavan enjoyed and expressed this experience and is therefore adored by Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Hindus of all schools. In him we find the final fulfilment of every creed.

79. ओं सर्वसद्गुणिने नमः

Om Sarvasadgunīne namah.

Prostration to the one who is the possessor of all good qualities.

He did not pursue, practise and acquire one good quality after another. He realized the Self, and all good qualities flocked to him unsought. Bad qualities arise from identification with the body-mind. Identification with awareness dispels all bad qualities and brings in all good qualities. One made up of awareness has all the *daivic* endowments, all divine, auspicious qualities, as his inherent and natural splendour.

EDITORIAL

One Word From Bhagavan

In the annals of those who came to Bhagavan there are many instances of a word, a phrase or sentence that utterly transformed the life of the listener. The instruction could have come direct from Bhagavan or it may have been directed to another person in the assembly; it may have been even a casual remark but nonetheless the force of Bhagavan's speech had the impact of a depth charge that rocked the balance of the everyday mind and set the person on an entirely new track. There are documented cases of this radical summons, as for instance that of a university biochemist who, in 1948 was prostrating to Bhagavan before taking leave, when he heard the command '*Iru*' — 'Be!'. As a rule devotees took leave of Bhagavan out of respect and he did not usually indicate a preference as to whether someone came or went but would either smile or nod in acknowledgement. In this case it was unusual. Sri Tinnai Swami as he was later known, "obeyed both the colloquial [stay] and the literal [be] meaning of the word '*iru*' uttered by Sri Bhagavan. From that moment, he never left Tiruvannamalai, and he also remained fixed firmly in the eternal state of Self-abidance."¹

¹ James, Michael, *Mountain Path*, April 2004, p.78. 'Sri Tinnai Swami'.

Such dramatic instances did happen though not always known. More often than not a word from Bhagavan would irrevocably change a person's direction and attitude. Bhagavan's words are not to be treated lightly; there is a depth in them that can outright transform us if we are receptive.

How then at this distance in time from the historical Bhagavan do we grasp his *upadesa* (instruction)? Certainly we cannot expect that if, after reading about the injunction to Tinnai Swami we hear the command 'Be!' it would happen automatically to us. It depends on our sincerity and willingness to change. It requires fertile ground. Nothing nourishing grows on barren land. More often than not when faced with a heart-felt injunction to revolutionise our lives we are good for high intentions and plans but quickly run out of impetus. We need food to persevere; our suffering is food; our insights into the nature of our own thoughts, is food; our deep, sustained reflection on the word of the guru is food. This food is the fertile ground for the grace of the guru. The guru's word is like a *mantra* that embeds in our consciousness a relentless, sometimes soft, sometimes loud admonition. Bhagavan used the analogy of gunpowder, coal and wet straw to illustrate the level of preparedness in a seeker. The act of setting us alight occurs at a higher level. Yes, we actually are already where we want to be, but it does not help if we are identified with *avidya* (ignorance). The removal of *avidya* is not an act where we go from ignorance to knowledge. It has nothing to do with cause and effect. It is a vertical shift in the moment out of our normal consciousness. It feels as if we are lifted up out of our skin. The previous apparently fixed procession of our life is irrelevant.

This metamorphosis is not ours to command. It is for us to be aware that we are commanded when we have purified our hearts and minds. Not before. We are the template which is acted upon. Learning about Bhagavan's teaching requires patient attention. If we are full of our own preconceptions we may not hear the underlying meaning, for the words then are hollow and will have no lasting impact. Words in themselves do not bring us alive, on the contrary, they may bewilder and we may, through our laziness or ignorance

deliberately misunderstand. It is the authoritative intent behind the words which is paramount. The teachings are meant to shake and awaken us; if we listen aright we catch fire and burn with a new intensity and range of active understanding. The ultimate teaching is not an answer but a silent transformation.

There is a Moroccan Sufi story which illustrates our predicament:

"One day a woodcutter was asleep in the forest, when a long green serpent slithered up to him and slid into his open mouth and down his throat. The woodcutter woke up as the snake was suffocating him. Panicking, he managed to stand up and flap his arms about moaning as loudly as he could.

"As luck would have it, a horseman was riding by at that precise moment. He saw the woodcutter waving his arms in distress. Having come from the neighbouring land where snakes were plentiful, he realised immediately what had happened. Pulling out his whip, he leapt from his steed and began to lash the poor woodcutter's stomach with all his strength.

"The woodcutter tried to protest, but half-suffocated by the serpent and wounded from the horseman's seemingly unprovoked attack he could do nothing except fall to his knees. Displeased at the discomfort of its hiding place, the snake reversed up out of the woodcutter's throat and slithered away. When he saw that the woodcutter was out of danger, the horseman jumped back on his mount and rode off without a word. Hailing from a land where such attacks were frequent, he didn't give the matter a second thought.

"As he caught his breath, the woodcutter began to understand what had happened, that the horseman had attacked him in silence because time was of the essence, before the reptile had injected venom into his bloodstream."²

Ignorance is like that snake. It creates fear and confounds us. Its reality is far more immediate and apparent than our so-called accurate description of events. Our explanations lack the sharp directness of the experience. If we wish to truly understand we should hold fast

² Shah, Tahir, *In Arabian Nights*, Doubleday, London 2008. pp.90-92.

to the experience and not explain it away. Then consider the guru's words and how lightly we can treat them if we are unmindful. In the holy traditions of all religions the sacred books are treated with great reverence. This is not just out of respect but in order to remind us that the contents are not to be treated casually. The implication is pay attention. Like a delectable taste we want to enjoy, we should roll the instructions round in our mind and let them mature.

Language implies there is someone communicating and that there is someone listening who are both on the same wavelength. This has serious implications for there are many conflicting strands of thought competing in us for dominance. Bhagavan likens pure contemplation to a fortress which is attacked by sallies of thoughts. When we say 'I' it is not necessarily the same 'I' since, like monkeys, our mind jumps from one branch of thought to another. Our identification blinds us. How then do we communicate with ourselves and touch truth?

By being still. By not allowing the static of thinking to interfere with the silence of direct understanding. All our efforts in meditation are meant to bring us to this crucial point, the *bindu*.

Bhagavan tells us that all that he has composed can be encapsulated in one letter. It may be a letter written in dead ink on a page but in our heart it shines. He questions whether there is anyone who can write it, that is, identify and know it as separate from oneself.³

How can we be at one in our hearts with the innermost core of Bhagavan's supreme teaching? How can we possibly resonate with that silent hum when our minds are filled with the noise of our rampant thoughts?

We know deep down that if we can stay attuned we will be effortlessly guided and moved in the right direction. Unfortunately we cannot always remain in this state. Our tendencies interfere and cause us to lose our hold. If we cannot remain in contact with its wonderful ascendancy we resort to words to elucidate and explain how we can

³ "All the letters in this book add up to a single, imperishable letter. This as written you have read. The single letter shines forever of its own accord within the heart. Who can ever hope to write it?" 'One Letter', *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

come into union again with its wholeness. For this, grace acts quietly in the back of our minds reassuring us with the notion that there is an answer. There is an unseen power which subtly interweaves with us its persistent and invisible sway. There is a single divine law which makes sense of all the chaos which surrounds us.

Bhagavan related the story of Tattvaraya, the great Tamil *advaitin* whose guru Sorupananda, was to the outside world, an unknown, idle man. Tattvaraya composed a *bharani* praising his guru. Pandits who read the composition protested such a poetic form was normally reserved for those who killed more than a thousand elephants in battle. Tattvaraya requested them to come with him and meet his guru, which they did. They were rapidly impressed with the sanctity surrounding Sorupananda and it is said, "Remained in beatific peace for a few days without the least movement." Recovering their normal state of mind they realised the greatness of Sorupananda, saying that he had "excelled the warriors in that he could subdue the ego, which is a much more formidable task than slaying a thousand elephants."⁴

It is clear from the story told by Bhagavan that though words may assist us, ultimately it is the silence of the guru alone which can purify our mind. The purpose of all our reading and listening is to seek that silence which can slay the thousand rampaging elephants of our mind.

We should understand clearly that silence is not a fixed mental state. It is not an object to be captured and manipulated according to our desire for peace. It does not have any perceptible characteristics. It is elusive and free of limitation. We can no more hold it than grasp the wind that caresses our faces. Bhagavan said that "A person may refrain from speech in order to avoid the obstacles of the outer world, but he should not consider that to be an end in itself. True Silence is really endless speech; there is no such thing as attaining it because it is always present. All you have to do is to remove the worldly cobwebs that enshroud it; there is no question of attaining it."⁵

⁴ *Talks*, §262.

⁵ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 3rd September, 1947, 'The Attitude of Silence'. p.289.

We read the words of the guru and wait and listen for a clue that will transform us. When we hear the sound of birds it is for no other reason than to enjoy their melodious sound. There may be sense in the pitch and trill known to another bird, but for us it is simply pure delight. Similarly, when we hear the words of the guru, they touch a centre in us that resonates in affirmation. Yes, yes, yes. If we hear the message correctly it should not be drowned with explanations but lived in quiet joy. It is a song we discover and slowly replicate until it resounds with irrepressible urgency in the corridors of our mind. It suffuses our dreams and shapes our decisions in daily life. We begin to sing the guru's song.

Who then can hope to write it? We are that song. ▲

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

The final Devi,
you are the source of the sky,
life of all the Gods;
Parameshwari, you are
she from whose eyes time flows.

Unmanifest, yet
all the universes
are your fantasies;
your nakedness, *Avyakta*,
luminous in his starry arms.

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.

Facets of Self-enquiry

Part Three: From Self-Abidance to Fulfilment

N. A. MOHAN RAO

In much of the literature on Self-enquiry, the concept of 'I' as an entity intermediate to the ego and the Self is not taken into consideration.¹ Hence, often, where 'I' ought to be used, the term 'Self' is used instead. I-abidance thus comes to be represented as Self-abidance, and I-feeling as Self-attention. This leads to serious anomalies in the presentation of Self-enquiry, with the Self repeatedly spoken of as accessible to the *mind* and amenable to *effort*, confounding its non-dual nature.²

¹ Bhagavan introduces us to this concept of 'I', as cited in 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part Two, p.15, *Mountain Path*, October, 2010, but otherwise does not weave it into his mainstream teaching of Self-enquiry, apparently to keep the teaching simple in those early days of revival of this mode of *sadhana*.

² Sadhu Om takes the interpretation of Bhagavan's teachings a step forward by introducing the term *feeling 'I'* (I-feeling), and regarding it as different from 'thought' (ego). Cf. *The Path of Sri Ramana*, Part One, Ch. 7, pp.131 & 138 and Appendix One, pp.190 & 194, Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, (2005).

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When we take the concept of 'I' into account, *sadhana* by Self-enquiry presents itself principally in two phases, namely, I-abidance and Self-abidance. Of the two, I-abidance alone involves *mind* and *effort*, and was dealt with in Part Two of this article. The transition from I-abidance to the non-dual state of Self-abidance, and its subsequent culmination in Liberation, is considered hereunder.

Kinds of *Samadhi*; *Savikalpa Samadhi*

The term '*samadhi*' may be taken to mean an intense state of inner absorption by way of I-abidance or Self-abidance depending on the kind of *samadhi*. Three kinds of *samadhi* are relevant in Self-enquiry, namely, *savikalpa*, *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samadhi*, coming in that order. *Savikalpa samadhi* is a state of I-abidance, while the *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samadhis* are states of temporary and permanent Self-abidance respectively.

Savikalpa means '(sa-) with (*vikalpa*) difference'. The term 'difference' refers to that between the experiencer and the experienced. The experiencer is taken to be the intellect (considered as a modification of the ego³). The experienced entity is 'I' (or pure-I).⁴

Savikalpa samadhi has a semblance of non-duality by way of its abidance, but is otherwise to be regarded as dualistic since the abidance is cognized by the *mind*.⁵ Being a state of I-abidance, it involves application of *effort*⁶ to keep away intrusive thoughts. Its high intensity of abidance may be ascribed to the facile control exercised on these thoughts following removal of much of the *vasanas*, and the subsidence of non-intrusive thoughts as well to a large extent. This

would mean a few non-intrusive thoughts (and some external sounds etc.) can yet impinge on the *samadhi*, without disrupting it.⁷

The presence of the mind in *savikalpa samadhi* implies that breath too is present, since mind and breath arise from the same source. However, since the thoughts are largely curtailed, the breath too will be very light, just adequate to sustain life.⁸

It is sometimes held that *savikalpa samadhi* is characterised by experience of bliss (*ananda*). There does not appear any support for this view in Bhagavan's teachings. According to Bhagavan, bliss is actually experienced in *raja yoga*, when the mind is fixed on the *sahasrara-chakra* (crown of the head).⁹ It is the last obstacle to be crossed by the yogi if he were to attain Realization.¹⁰ It has no direct relevance in *savikalpa samadhi*, which is essentially an un-intermittent current of I-awareness (or I-abidance).

Since *savikalpa samadhi* is a state of I-abidance, the *vasanas* continue to be eliminated even during the *samadhi*. So, the *samadhi* gets more and more intense with continuing practice. A stage comes when events will unfold that are beyond our effort.

From *Savikalpa* to *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

As the practice of *savikalpa samadhi* proceeds, our intellect becomes subtler and subtler due to continued removal of the *vasanas*. At some stage, suddenly, it is caused to transcend the remaining *vasanas*. The state of Self-abidance that then results¹¹ is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

The term *nirvikalpa* is derived from *nih-* (without) and *vikalpa* (difference). *Nirvikalpa samadhi* thus represents a non-dual state,

³ Vide Bhagavan's translation of *Vivekachudamani* in *Collected Works*, p.229, (2002). The same mind is spoken of differently as mind, intellect, ego, memory etc., depending on the function it discharges at a given time. Cf. 'Self-enquiry', §6, *Collected Works*, p.8, (2002).

⁴ This is patterned after Bhagavan's interpretation of sleep experience in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, (*Talks*) §314, p.276, (1994); See also Bhagavan's translation of *Vivekachudamani*, op. cit., p.247.

⁵ See under *sphurana* in 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part Two, op. cit., p.19.

⁶ *Talks*, op. cit., §391, p.357; *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Ch. XII, p.90, (2009).

⁷ *Guru Ramana*, Ibid, p.89.

⁸ "... respiration is slowed down ... to the lowest level compatible with life." *Talks*, §28, p.28.

⁹ *Talks*, §616, p.575. There is obviously no scope for elimination of *vasanas* in this state.

¹⁰ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, A. Devaraja Mudaliar, 25-4-1946, p.182, (1989).

¹¹ "The experience ... will dawn on you suddenly, when the obstacles are removed to some extent." *I am That*, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, (Tr. Maurice Frydman), Ch.97, p.502, The Acorn Press, (1999). What is actually transcended is the causal plane. It includes the residual *vasanas* and *ananda* of *anandamaya-kosa*.

which permits no differentiation between the experiencer and the experienced. The intellect that has hitherto been the experiencer, and the 'I' that was being experienced, lie 'merged' in the Self.

The transition from *savikalpa* to *nirvikalpa samadhi* is attended with a sharp discontinuity. Thus far, the intellect had been with us as the 'search party' for finding the Self.¹² When the Self is to appear, the intellect cannot stay around anymore, since the Self is non-dual. So, it makes as if to depart the scene. But the intellect has all along been our sole instrument of cognition, and we depend on it even to infer our own existence. So, its imminent departure would seem like our own extinction. An indescribable fear grips us,¹³ and we involuntarily step back from the perceived self-destruction, in a state of shock, and return to our former dualistic state.

Our further attempts to continue with practice of I-abidance prove no different. After a few such experiences of shock, we become emboldened enough to take that seemingly inevitable, ultimate plunge.¹⁴ We desist from resisting the course of events at the point of crisis, and instantly experience something of an implosion¹⁵ that lands us in the *self-shining*, non-dual state of Self-abidance. The entire non-Self that has been left behind by us in successive stages of renunciation earlier, becomes one with the final Reality that is now experienced.¹⁶

Nature of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

Nirvikalpa samadhi being non-dual, the intellect is no more available as an instrument of dualistic knowledge, and so the *samadhi* is

¹² The intellect is transcended only when the causal body is transcended. Cf. *Maha Yoga*, K. Lakshmana Sarma, Ch. 8, p.105, (1996). "The intellect is co-extensive with individuality." *Talks*, §502, p.484.

¹³ A vivid description of this state of fear may be found in *Life as Yoga*, Vimala Thakar, (Tr. Devendra Singh), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Book II, Discourse 4, pp.214-6, (1982).

¹⁴ *Talks*, §96, p.92; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, op. cit., 24-12-1945 Evening, p.64.

¹⁵ "The mind cannot go beyond itself by itself. It must explode." *I am That*, op. cit., Ch.99, p.52.

¹⁶ *Talks*, §33, p.41.

characterised by total absence of body- and world-consciousness.¹⁷ The *sadhaka* remains still without any interaction with the world.

Since the mind is merged, there can be neither effort¹⁸ nor thoughts in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, unlike in *savikalpa*. The absence of mind also implies the absence of breath as we know it. In its place, a subtle form of breath, known as *maha-prana* ('great *prana*') is said to be operative to sustain life.¹⁹

Nirvikalpa samadhi is experienced as pure *sat-chit-ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss).²⁰ The capitalization of these terms is meant to indicate that they are beyond the pairs of opposites of being and non-being, consciousness and unconsciousness, and happiness and unhappiness.²¹ It is also understood that Being, Consciousness and Bliss are not three separate attributes, but occur together as the one Reality.

The experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi* may at first last about thirty minutes.²² When the *sadhaka* exits from the *samadhi*, it may at first seem to him that he had merely come out of a swoon or trance. After a few such experiences, he will be able to infer the non-dual state correctly.²³ He cannot, however, be considered a true *jnani*, since he is now once again under the influence of the *vasanas*.

The sense of 'I' that continued till the end of *savikalpa samadhi*, disappears with the advent of the non-dual state. Thus there is no 'I'

¹⁷ *Talks*, §391, p.358. Such a *samadhi* is called 'internal *nirvikalpa samadhi*', as will be seen later.

¹⁸ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90. See also *Talks*, § 187, p.154; §391, p.357.

¹⁹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2-2-1946 Morning, p.116.

²⁰ *Who am I?* §3. See, however, footnote 44 under 'Concepts of *Jnani*'. The *ananda* that is associated with the *anandamaya-kosa* is only a reflection of the *ananda* inherent in the Self. Cf. *Vivekachudamani*, v.207, (Tr.) Swami Madhavananda, Kolkata (1989).

²¹ *Talks*, §433, p.403. See also 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. III, §10, *Collected Works*, p.68, (2002).

²² *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, Sadhu Arunachala (A.W. Chadwick), p.50, (2005). When we speak of experience in a non-dual state such as *nirvikalpa samadhi*, we have to understand that it is an experience in which the experiencer is not different from the experience.

²³ *Talks*, §138, p.122.

in *nirvikalpa samadhi*.²⁴ The Self is often interpreted as ‘true-I’. This is not to be taken literally, but only as an indication that the Self is the ultimate source from which our sense of ‘I’ is derived.

Nirvikalpa samadhi is an important milestone in our *sadhana*, because it is here that for the first time we pass from the mire of dualistic existence into the pristine non-dual state. Sri Nisargadatta describes it as “a state infinitely more real, aware and happy than you can possibly think of.”²⁵ It is an *experience*, we ‘will repeatedly try to regain’.²⁶

Nirvikalpa samadhi is not to be confused with *jada-samadhi*, in which the breath is restrained by a yogic technique known as *khechari-mudra*. The latter is a state of hibernation in which the person can survive without food or external consciousness even for decades. Meanwhile, the *vasanas* remain as they are, and so when the person comes out of the *samadhi*, he will be in the same state of ignorance as he was before.²⁷

Transition from *Nirvikalpa* to *Sahaja Samadhi*

The kind of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, wherein the *sadhaka* remains still without external consciousness, is called ‘internal *nirvikalpa samadhi*’. While it is practised, the *vasanas* continue to be eliminated as they come under the ‘glance’ of the Sel,²⁸ and the *samadhi* tends to become more intense and last longer. After a stage, even when the *sadhaka* rises from the *samadhi*, Self-abidance continues to be held for some time. Such a state is called ‘external *nirvikalpa samadhi*’. The *sadhaka*

²⁴Vide Bhagavan’s teaching on the evolution of ‘I’ in ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’, Part Two, *Mountain Path*, Oct. (2010), p.15. “The Self ... has no sense of ‘I.’” ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. I, §12, op. cit., p.52.

²⁵*I am That*, op. cit., Ch.73, p.362.

²⁶*Talks*, §141, p.124.

²⁷<http://www.astrojyoti.com/yblesson10samadhi.htm>; *Crumbs from His Table*, R. Swarnagiri, Ch.8, p.22, (2006).

²⁸*The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, op. cit., v.920, p.175; *Talks*, §219, p.182. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is therefore reckoned as continuation of *sadhana*, and is included in the *jnana-bhoomika* of *tanumanasi*. Cf. *Talks*, §256, p.213.



is seen to partake in external activity, but 'without a reaction from within'. The practice is to be continued till the external *samadhi* covers the rest of the waking period (and dream). All the *vasanas* would by then be eliminated, and the *samadhi* will persist in deep sleep also.²⁹ The internal and external *samadhis* are then realized to be identical, and one is said to be in *sahaja samadhi*.³⁰ Self-abidance never ceases henceforth. The seeker's individuality, along with all his *karmas*, is destroyed never to return. He has become 'liberated' from the cycle of births and deaths. He is reckoned as a *jivan-mukta* and a true *jnani*.

Bhagavan distinguishes between *nirvikalpa samadhi* and *sahaja samadhi* thus: In *nirvikalpa samadhi*, "the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep are only merged, ready to emerge" when the *samadhi* ends. "In *sahaja samadhi*, the activities, vital and mental, and the three states are destroyed, never to reappear. However, others notice the *jnani* active e.g., eating, talking, moving etc. He is not himself aware of these activities ... They pertain to his body and not to his real Self."³¹ They are like the feeding undergone by a sleeping baby, or the travel of a driver sleeping in his cart hauled by bullocks accustomed to the route. Yet, the *jnani* remains internally fully aware, and so his state is said to be one of *jagrat-sushupti* (waking sleep, or 'sleep with awareness').³²

Nirvikalpa samadhi, being impermanent, takes turns with waking, dream and sleep. The state of Self-abidance in it is therefore reckoned as *turiya*, 'the fourth'. The same in *sahaja samadhi*, being beyond such four-fold cyclical change, is then termed *turiyatita* (transcendent to *turiya*). But, since both are states of Self-abidance, the difference

²⁹ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Bhagavan's verse 19 (at v.958), p.184; and Talks, §136, p.121.

³⁰ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90; Talks, §391, p.359. Bhagavan is said to have attained *nirvikalpa samadhi* while he was yet in Madurai, and practised it in his early years at Arunachala to attain *sahaja samadhi*. Cf. *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, Sadhu Natanananda, (Ed. David Godman), §55, footnote 42, p.98, (2005).

³¹ *Talks*, §82, p.84.

³² *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21.11.45 Afternoon, p.36.

between *turiya* and *turiyatita* is only one of context, and not of substance.³³

Like *nirvikalpa samadhi*, *savikalpa samadhi* too can be of two kinds, internal and external.³⁴ The external *savikalpa samadhi* may be looked upon as a culmination of 'concurrent enquiry', just as the internal one is that of 'sitting enquiry'.³⁵

Sahaja Samadhi vis-à-vis Nirvikalpa Samadhi

Sahaja samadhi, being essentially a perpetuation of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, partakes of the *nirvikalpa* (non-difference) nature of the *nirvikalpa samadhi*. It is therefore designated sometimes as *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*. The ordinary *nirvikalpa samadhi* is then referred to as *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* (or *kevala samadhi*).

Nirvikalpa samadhi (internal) is more intense than *sahaja samadhi*³⁶ due to the absence of bodily activity. The breath that was arrested in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, resumes normal operation in *sahaja*, as there is no more any mind to be held in harness.

Numerous analogies are given to differentiate between the two *samadhis*. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is compared to a steady flame in a windless room; *sahaja* to a waveless ocean. *Nirvikalpa* is said to be like a bucket dropped into a well, but with a rope tied to it. It can be fetched out, if required, with the help of the rope. *Sahaja* is like a river discharged into the sea, and so is irreversible.

Concepts of Jnani: Jivan-mukta and Videha-mukta

Vasanas are of two kinds, *bandha-hetuh* (causative of bondage) and *bhoga-hetuh* (causative of enjoyment). To attain *jnana*, it is enough that the binding kind of *vasanas* are eliminated.³⁷ One who attains to *jnana* thus is called a *jivan-mukta* (liberated while yet in the body).

³³ Cf. *Mandukya Upanishad*, v.12; *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Bhagavan's v.18 (at v.939), p.180.

³⁴ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.91; Talks, §391, p.359.

³⁵ See Part Two of this article for the meanings of 'sitting enquiry' and 'concurrent enquiry'.

³⁶ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90.

³⁷ *Talks*, §317, p.280; §515, p.499.

The *bhoga-vasanas* that may have been left in him are to be spent by enjoying the respective pleasures without getting attached to them. The *jnani* is said to have a remnant of a mind, and ego, to enable such enjoyment.³⁸ Since he is without attachment, this ego cannot bind him, just as a burnt rope, though looking like a rope, cannot be of service to bind. The *jnani* is also credited with an intellect of an extremely subtle kind by which he experiences the 'Self-bliss' and knows that he is ever the Self.³⁹

When the enjoyment of the *bhoga-vasanas* is completed, the body of the *jivan-mukta* falls,⁴⁰ and he becomes a *videha-mukta* (liberated having left the body). His subtle mind gets resolved, and the experience of Self-bliss too ceases: he becomes one with the Self-bliss 'without any differentiated existence.'⁴¹

Jivan-muktas may be of four kinds, namely, *brahma-vid*, *brahma-vidvara*, *brahma-vidvarya* and *brahma-vidvarishta*. They correspond to the last four *jnana-bhoomikas* respectively.⁴² They all mean 'knower of Brahman' on an increasing scale of greatness. The differences in greatness arise apparently due to the kinds of *bhoga-vasanas* left in them.⁴³ The *brahma-vidvarishta* is thus the greatest of the four *jivan-muktas* and is alone said to experience Bliss.⁴⁴ Bhagavan's teaching that a *jivan-mukta* ripens from moment to moment,⁴⁵ may therefore perhaps be taken to apply to the three lower levels.

³⁸ *Talks*, §513, p.497.

³⁹ 'Self-enquiry', §11, op. cit., p.12. See also Bhagavan's reference to sleep in *Talks*, §314, p.276.

⁴⁰ *Talks*, §515, p.499.

⁴¹ 'Self-enquiry', §40, op. cit., pp.34-5. This is a little analogous to *krama-mukti*, in which the *sadbaka's* soul travels (after his death) to *Brahma-loka* to enjoy the balance of pleasures to his credit, and then attains *mukti*. Bhagavan does not approve of *krama-mukti*. Vide *Talks*, §513, pp.497-8.

⁴² *Talks*, §256, p.214; 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. IV, §2, op. cit., p.69 footnote.

⁴³ *Talks*, §385, p.352.

⁴⁴ 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. IV, §4-5, op. cit., p.70. It seems therefore possible that in *nirvikalpa samadhi* too, there would be four different kinds of experience, of which only the highest one involves Bliss.

⁴⁵ *Sri Ramana Gita*, Ch. 11, §19, p.65, (1992). A *jivan-mukta* is hence said to be in incessant *tapas*.

If a movie theatre is flooded with light to a certain level, one may not readily notice the picture on the screen. But if he bestows careful attention, he might see it faintly. In the same way, the *jnani* does not ordinarily see the world due to the illumination of *jnana*, but can see it faintly if he makes an effort. Even so, he sees it as not apart from his Self. Bhagavan has said that his awareness of his cancer was similar in nature.⁴⁶

True Nature of a *Jnani*

All the above concepts of *jnani* are meant only for the ignorant, who are unable to reconcile the *jnani's* actions with his non-dual state. As Bhagavan points out, the *ajnani* would normally try to infer the *jnani's* state from the perceived actions of the latter's body, and in doing so, commits a gross mistake.⁴⁷ Says Bhagavan, "The spiritual men are not bodies."⁴⁸

The *jivan-mukta* has neither any enjoyership ego nor doership ego. He has no will, and so the actions of his body are not his. His body is operated by *Isvara*⁴⁹ the same way as the entire universe is operated by Him. The onlookers, out of ignorance, associate these actions of his body with an individual acting under the influence of a mind. Nonetheless, when they regard him as their Guru, they find it possible to draw spiritual inspiration and guidance from him as suited to their capacity. The same situation obtains even after the *jivan-mukta* drops his body,⁵⁰ since there is essentially no difference in his state before and after the death of the body.⁵¹

The simple truth is that the *jnani's* state transcends mind and speech, and hence can never be expressed in terms intelligible to the *ajnani*.⁵² The nearest that can be said of it is that it is a state of pure Awareness, an Awareness that is Being, and Bliss too.

⁴⁶ *Sri Ramanasrama Lekhalu* (Telugu original of *Letters*), Suri Nagamma, Part 5, Letter 41 (undated), p.719, (1995). The relevant paragraph is missing from the English version: vide *Letters*, p.658, (2008).

⁴⁷ *Talks*, §499, p.479-80; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 5-5-1946, p.189.

⁴⁸ *Talks*, §363, p.329.

⁴⁹ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, v.1139, p.217.

⁵⁰ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9-3-1946 Morning, p.145.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 9-1-1946 Afternoon, pp.86 & 88.

⁵² *Talks*, §110, p.105; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-1945 Morning, p.34.

Who is the Tenth Man?

Bhagavan often tells us how incongruous it is that being ourselves the Self, we embark on long investigation and *sadhana* to realize our Self. He narrates the story of the ‘tenth man’ to illustrate this.⁵³ Ten foolish people start on a journey. They come across a river, and swim to the other bank. They check if all ten have arrived, but find only nine, as each person who counts misses to count himself. They start grieving the death of the ‘missing’ tenth man. A passer-by, noticing their folly, gives each person a pat and asks them to count as he pats. When he pats the last man, they count ten, and are satisfied. So also, we search long for our ‘lost’ Self, and finally notice that we ourselves are the Self.

The Self ‘dreams’ (by the *Maya* mode), and in the dream finds itself to be the intellect, shrouded in ignorance. As intellect, this dream-Self infers that it is not its true identity, and embarks on *sadhana* to trace it. It finds its own reflection (‘I’) in the dream causal zone, and thinks it has now a vague identity of itself. When, through *sadhana*, the *vasanas* (reflecting medium) are eliminated, the image ‘I’ too disappears. At this instant, the intellect passes through a shock, and the dream is broken.⁵⁴ The intellect (dream-Self) disappears, and the real Self alone remains. It is thus that the Self, as the dream-Self, lost ‘itself’, and in the end found itself. In reality, it never lost itself, nor found.

The entire *sadhana* (by the intellect) thus takes place in dream or *Maya* mode, and has no reality. Both bondage and liberation are unreal, as the *ajata-vada* proclaims.⁵⁵

The Nature of the Heart

The term ‘Heart’ may be understood as the ‘address’ at which we look for our ‘I’ or the Self. In Self-enquiry, we transcend the physical,

⁵³ *Talks*, §63, pp.70-1.

⁵⁴ Realization is ‘like the ending of a dream’. Bhagavan’s translation of Vivekachudamani, op. cit., p.231. See also Five Verses on the Self (*Ekatma-panchakam*), verse 1.

⁵⁵ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 15-3-1946 Afternoon, pp.149-50.

subtle and the causal planes to reach our ‘I’. Hence, the Heart must belong beyond these three planes.⁵⁶ Any explanation of the Heart lying somewhere in the body may therefore be considered provisional⁵⁷ and an interim help to those who lack the necessary intuition to reach their ‘I’. The Heart is not the *anahata-chakra* (heart-centre) of *raja yoga*, either.⁵⁸

Since ‘I’ is our real Guru, the Guru may be said to reside in our Heart,⁵⁹ and the Heart may be deemed to be the place where we offer our prostrations to the Guru within.

Knowledge of Higher *Sadhana*

Knowledge of *sadhana* at the level of Self-abidance can never be free of uncertainties and contradictions, since the interactions between duality and non-duality can never be logically explained. Any attempt to question a given account would necessitate a more complicated explanation, which only raises the mantle of uncertainty to a yet higher level. Fortunately, *sadhana* at these levels mostly proceeds by itself, and so it suffices for us to accept its basic outline, and treat the finer details as mere embellishments.

Our spiritual transformation really starts from the time the *vasanas* start to be eliminated through practice of I-abidance. Once we are established in this practice, we are verily in the proverbial tiger’s jaws, and there is no chance of our missing the goal.

Life is like a solo ride in a roller coaster, which is designed to end in a fatal crash. Wisdom dictates that we should get out of it when there is still time, and never enter another like it. Self-enquiry offers a very pleasant and efficacious way of effecting this by leading us to an Empyrean that is beyond life and death. ▲

⁵⁶ “In the heart-lotus ... the light of that Self in the form of ‘I’ shines.” ‘Self-enquiry’, §9, op. cit., p.10; “... clinging to the Self within the heart.” *The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, v.1193, p.228.

⁵⁷ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23-5-1946, p.202.

⁵⁸ *Talks*, §398, p.367.

⁵⁹ “You [the Guru] ... shine within my Heart.” *Ramana Puranam*, v.343-50 (by Bhagavan), (Tr. R. Butler et al), p.61, (2008).



Christopher Quilley

The Vision of the Juki

Part Five

The Aspirations of the Human Spirit

DOUGLAS HALEBI

It sometimes happens that opinions and ‘facts’ about Gypsies resembles the old tale of the Men Discussing Fish, Cows and Jackals, which is as follows:

One day a man began to boast of his knowledge of fish, saying that he had journeyed over all the oceans and harvested all manner of fish for many years. But a second man was skeptical, saying that he doubted his friend had any understanding of fish whatsoever. “Yes, yes,” the first man answered back. “I know fish far better than you do.” “Then,” said the other, “What is the sign of a fish?” The reply came swiftly. “The sign of a fish is that it has two horns, like a

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.

jackal.” The second man then concluded by saying, “I was not sure if you knew anything about fish. But now I see that you cannot even distinguish a cow from a jackal.”

Well, whatever else may be said of the Juki, or other such groups of ‘mere Gypsies’ they have one singular merit: they never accept the facile, clever, abstruse explanations of politics, ‘history’ or religion sometimes offered as an excuse for repression and murder. Like Jose Ortega y Gasset, an iconic figure in the culture of 20th century Spain, the philosopher, who arrived at the same position as these ‘primitives’ by a very different, more privileged and more learned means, the Gypsies consider life the answer to life, in no need of being justified by rendering service to a Cause. Ortega y Gasset said that man had at last arrived at a point where he can understand that the Cause, the Party, the Faith, the Movement exist for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of the Cause.

A Cause that does not serve the deepest and most abiding needs of man is no cause at all; it is a distortion of meaning, one of many aberrations that lure man down a false path for the sake of inhuman or anti-human goals. For the Gypsies there is no child that can be sacrificed or a Cause, no living human reality that can be considered a mere means to an end, without an inherent sanctity of its own. Man does not exist for the sake of the state but the state for the sake of man. Man is not here to be manipulated, controlled and so diminished by a political or spiritual hierarchy, used as we might use a cooking utensil or a rug.

And insofar as our exalted institutions are worthy of respect, it can only be to the extent that they enrich our lives, transmit high values, and cause the powerful, the respected, to interject themselves on behalf of the widow, the orphan, the free-thinking sage, the Stranger in the land, the oppressed and the unjustly accused.

Church and State should defend the weak and the undervalued person with all the chivalry and courage of a medieval knight. And this is not an attack on Sacred Tradition, the continuity and succession of a given spiritual heritage, but rather on the abuses and the corruption that all too often accompany it in the life of this world. However, it is

an expression of extreme cynicism, caution and circumspection with respect to the calling of the modern politician.

It is perhaps worth noting that for all authentic groups of Gypsies, East and West, freedom is the pure, primordial condition of man, a divine gift not to be squandered or surrendered for any Cause whatsoever. And that the human soul, the beginning and the end of all culture, needs no tyranny or coercion placed upon it to attain its rightful flowering in society. Life is precious; man is privileged just to be here and his journey through history is only beginning.

“Why, then,” Noah asked us, “do we set before you lofty goals and high aspirations?” Without waiting for us to ponder the question, he added, “Well, because if we relied on trivial matters to sustain us, then we would have disappeared from the face of the earth long ago. Yet we have survived without land, sovereignty, kingship, wealth, fame and glory, or even an army to protect us for at least the last fifteen centuries. We are often called the dregs of humanity, disliked, unwelcome, misperceived and undervalued. And yet we are still here! Remember that man does not live by bread alone. Nor does wealth or celebrity create enduring loyalties. Know, then, that man ripens best when he pursues his highest possibilities. Not only the Juki, but the *kapire* (strangers or outsiders) have a thirst for meaning that cannot be quenched by lesser endeavours.

“Civilizations, nations, societies are like rising suns that can set all too soon. They rise high when they are imbued with great ideals and rich ideas and pursue them well. And when man hears his own deepest needs articulated at the right moment, in a worthy way, he understands that they were always latent in him, sleeping within, waiting to be brought to life. And we are laden with gifts that can be coaxed into flower as surely as we are endowed with vile and low possibilities.

“An army may burn a thousand villages, destroy a hundred enemies. But if it brings no message, if it serves no cause that nourishes man and elevates him, then this great army will fail as the catalyst of profound, ever abiding change. And yet, within man, there are countless seeds that need only to be invoked with words like a nourishing rain. And

then they can blossom. This is why all great poets in ancient Arabia were feared by petty tyrants and corrupt officials. And why the tyrants of the modern nation-state send philosophers into exile, incarcerate the poets, control the press, manipulate television and radio, stifle and suffocate all creativity.

“Let it be said that the Juki, and no doubt all other Gypsies, are against anything that diminishes freedom and so impoverishes man, himself. The bird in a gilded, golden cage is still a prisoner. May all birds one day be released from their cages, so that they may know the pleasure of having the whole sky to fly in. And may we preserve our archaic-appearing ways and be worthy heirs of our fathers. May we be among those who are nourished by high and worthy prospects, noble goals, and boundless quests. May we mount horses and ride with the wind, always seeking out a mission in life, a calling in history, an illumination of life.

“And remember that to go in quest of higher meaning is already to be on the path to finding it. So let the sacred arcanum of the tribe be maintained. It is for us the seed-bed of all great strivings.”

I also came across a passage from the writings of Jose Ortega y Gasset, concerning the dead. It is rich indeed, and I wish to share it with you. It reads, “The dead do not die completely when they die. They remain a long while present. A long while an uncertain something of them hovers amongst the living who loved them. If during this time we breathe deeply and open even the smallest avenues of our feelings, then the dead enter into us, make a dwelling place in us and, thankful as only the dead know how to be, they leave us the heritage of the full quiver of their virtues.”

This is a perfect description of the delicate, subtle, complex but unbreakable bond between the beloved person who has ‘dropped the body’ and the bereaved ones still journeying through this world.

“At first,” Uncle Noah once told us, “the moon is invisible. Then it waxes and it wanes. And soon it is invisible again...” According to Juki custom, and also for several other self-contained, self-renewing minorities in the same habitat, when a child reaches the age of sixteen (or eighteen for some), he is then ritually admitted to the tribal

sodality. And his relationship to his teacher is so close, so inviolable, that the young novice is considered a member of his master’s own family. He is forbidden to marry the teacher’s daughters, because they have become sisters to him.

In somewhat the same way, my ‘adopted’ son is connected to me by a bond that cannot be broken. He is family to me, and so is his mother. So if I have any opportunity to leave anything to them when I ‘drop the body’, I feel compelled to do so. But this by no means negates the considerable value of worthy charities. We have sometimes been told that it is useless to try and effect meaningful change in society by economic means, because the pattern of life is not altered and improved for the total society. Society, however, is only the sum total of the individuals who comprise it.

If you cannot help society, that is taken to mean that you should refrain from helping individual persons, families impoverished or undervalued groups. To give water to the thirsty, we have to let each person come to the well in turn, lower and raise the bucket, and drink the life-bearing liquid. If everyone cannot come at once, or if some never find the well, that is no argument against offering the water to whoever we may.

Socrates was a stone cutter like my father; Spinoza made his living as a humble lens grinder; Joan of Arc was a trembling, vulnerable maiden born in obscurity. Shams i Din of Tabriz came from afar, a wandering mendicant who nevertheless possessed such vast treasures of knowledge that only Jalaluddin Rumi could drink it all in without drowning inside. And those who sit in high places and say the poor multitude is homeless and can never change no doubt had ancestors who had dreams of greatness and never listened to their critics.

The time-honored calling of *bakshy*, singer of tales or oral bard, is no doubt imperiled today more than in any past age. A question arose, in recent memory, about the possible future of this Juki narrative tradition. I can remember distant days and ripe hours of life, deep inside the sparsely populated forests of the Jabal Ansariyyeh, when this was already considered an urgent matter.

How long, indeed, can such a calling, a mission in life, be preserved, guarded and transmitted anew? Will even a part of this heritage survive? He cannot know what looms in the future for such a fragile, delicate, unwritten tapestry of tales. And such a demanding craft, dependent on the *ustoz*, teacher of poets, and on the talent and inclination of the young apprentice.

An old bard named Magrupi expressed well the feeling of his peers one summer night in those mountains. Some were deeply skeptical, expressing doubt that the 'golden tapestry' would survive when the young learn to read, for reading consumes their attention and orients them toward a different conception of the world and everything in it.

Gazing up into the heavens, Magrupi asked, "How long will these stars last?" Without expecting an answer, he assured us that the ancestral romances and epics will survive "as long as green grass grows on the fields of Avshar Plain, as long as the waterwheels of Hama still turn, as long as bees gather pollen and men journey over the wide, ripe earth." And he added that the spoken word is itself a divine gift, one of the glories of man, meant to remain forever "the home and container of rich memories and high strivings."

Uncle Noah then said that "In the dwelling of a wise king, the last blade of grass is watered until there is no more water." And that, "Beauty will be remembered forever, even if it fades away. And man will flower anew, the tall green grass will rise again, the *bakshy* will sing his tales."

They felt profoundly certain that the calling of great poets was an immutable part of the human condition. And that modern man displays all too often a fatal tendency to confuse means with ends, machinery with civilization, and the value of tools and artifacts with the value of man, himself. And that man could not survive forever in a world that makes a golden calf out of technology and fails to understand the incomparability of souls, the uniqueness of living hearts and thirsty minds. That the supreme value of man is unconditional, since it "flows forth from the upper reaches, the utmost summit of the human being, his spiritual nature."

They said that "if we have no water, we die of thirst. If we cannot find bread, then we starve. So, too, if man cannot understand his own nature, he may perish and make way for a better humanity. One that knows well the grandeur of the soul, the worth of capacious hearts and high-flowering minds. It is not we who create these dangers, but those who disdain us, consider us the dregs of humanity and find in our kind nothing of worth." Let us be good to one another, acknowledging that the almost infinite plurality of man expresses the richness, the depth and the immeasurable score of human possibility. ▲

Devotion

Ana Callan

Every day Ramana would sit out on a rock
to clean his teeth,
even when the rains came
and the winds whipped
at his body,
still he sat,
mountain and man fused into One,
and when his devotees tried to stop him,
to lure him towards where it was warm,
he refused.

It was years before they learned
the truth of his mission: an elderly
lady, he had heard, was no longer
able to walk to the ashram

and so she came within view
of His rock day after day.
Ramana, Lord of Lords,
how could he turn from
a true desire for darshan?



The Unique Message of Bhagavan Ramana

SWAMI MUKTANANDA

The following is an edited transcription of a talk given by Swami Muktananda of Anandasbram, Kanhangad, Kerala, in June 2010.

The moment we think of the most revered Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, what comes to our mind is the unique way in which he naturally ascended to the height of spirituality, without the usual struggles experienced by the seekers during their *sadhana*s.

This will be clear from the following answers given by Bhagavan himself.

On 4th October 1946, to a question by one of the devotees, Professor D.S. Sarma, whether there ever was any period of practice or *sadhana* in his life, Bhagavan replied:

“I have never done any *sadhana*. I did not even know what *sadhana* was. Only long afterwards I came to know what *sadhana* was and how many different kinds of it there were. It is only if there was any object or anything different from me that I could think of it. Only if there was a goal to attain, I should have made *sadhana* to attain that goal.

There was nothing which I wanted to obtain. I am now sitting with my eyes open. I was then sitting with my eyes closed. That was all the difference. I was not doing any *sadhana* even then. As I sat with my eyes closed, people said I was in *samadhi*. As I was not talking, they said I was in *mauna*. The fact is, I did nothing. Some Higher Power took hold of me and I was entirely in Its hand.”

He further added, “The books no doubt speak of *sravana*, *manana*, *nididhyasana*, *samadhi* and *sakshatkara*. We are always the *sakshat* (Real) and what is there for one to attain after that? We call this world *sakshat* or *pratyaksha* (directly present). What is changing, what appears and disappears, what is not *sakshat*, we regard as *sakshat*. We always are and nothing can be more directly present, *pratyaksha*, than we, and about that we say we have to attain *sakshatkaram* after all these *sadhanas*. Nothing can be more strange than this. The Self is not attained by doing anything, but remaining still and being as we are.”¹

We now understand from Bhagavan’s statements that he didn’t perform any *pranayamam*, *japa* nor did he have any idea of meditation or contemplation. He was never attracted by them and even in the years after Self-realization in Madurai he refused to pay any attention to them though some may claim he was performing severe *tapas* in the first years after his arrival at Tiruvannamalai.

We should see that *sadhana* as understood by many, implies that there is something to be gained and there is a means of gaining it. Bhagavan asks us to realise there is nothing to be gained that we do not already have. All our practices of meditation, concentration and contemplation, are aimed at stilling the mind, nothing more. When we are still we enter our ever-natural state. We call this state many things: *moksha*, *jnanam*, *sakshatkara*....but ultimately it is pure stillness (*achala*).

Bhagavan also remarks that people mistakenly think that by practising some elaborate *sadhana* something great and glorious will descend on them and they will be ‘realised’. He tells us that the Self is *sakshatkara*, that is, ‘directly known.’ Yes, we now understand there

¹ Mudaliar, D., *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, 4-10-1946.

is no ‘*kara*’, which means making or *kroton*, ‘made out of’. The word ‘*kara*’ implies one who is ‘doing something’. But Bhagavan says that the Self is realised not by an individual performing an act to ‘make’ it but by abstaining from any activity designed to gain that precious state which we falsely believe we do not possess. We can ‘do’ this by remaining still. As Bhagavan would often say, *summa iru*, be still.

It is striking that if someone really applied the teachings of what Ramana said in the above words, they will come to realize that Bhagavan is pointing out that the seeker should never get stuck with a path he or she is pursuing, and always be aware that the end of all spiritual discipline is to still the mind. For this the seeker has to stop seeking and realize the very subject who is propelling to seek.

You see, one day, a serious devotee confessed that, while he would understand Bhagavan’s words intellectually, he was finding it extremely difficult to make it a reality. To this Bhagavan replied, in his own inimitable style, “You don’t stand in the way of what is going on.” Every thought, every word, every deed that is emanating from us, are coming out of the source of all sources which is within. The problem starts only when the ‘me’ and ‘mine’ catch hold of the thought, word or deed, and assumes the role of the doer and enjoyer.

So, spiritual discipline should enable us to gradually reach a state where we rest in the simple, clear, ever present witness, watching every movement of the body, mind and intellect, without choosing or labeling.

This is not to say we should sit back and do nothing like a lazy sack. By the very nature of our reality we tend to act even if it means deciding not to do anything at all! We should not mistake the *tamasic* state of lethargy with the pure *sattvic* state of pure awareness. Effort is required for us to remain in that state of stillness and for that to happen, *sadhana* is definitely necessary, not to gain anything but to remain in that pristine state of stillness. Until we reach that state we have to strive to maintain our focus on what is important, which is the experiential awakening of the Self. In support of this truth Bhagavan has declared in answer to a question of devotee:

“What is that Self in actual experience?”

Sri Bhagavan tells us: “It is the Light which ever shines in the Cave of the Heart as the flame of the Consciousness ‘I’ – the eternal and blissful *Sat-chit-ananda*. This is the answer to the *vichara* and its fulfillment. The ‘I’, which has carried out a *determined* and protracted search into its own nature, has at long last found itself to be not other than the Pure Mind, the immaculate Being, which is eternally wrapped in blissful stillness. This is *Turiya*, the Fourth, or *Samadhi* (the highest stage).”²

At the time of a recent convocation in Brown University which I attended in the United States, someone read out a portion from the book: *The Simple Feeling of Being*, by Ken Wilbur. It is a wonderful piece! I leave you with these observations.

He says: “We begin with the realisation that the Witness is an ever present consciousness even when we doubt its existence.

“You are right now aware of, when we say the words, ‘the room, the window, the people around you, your chair’. You can sit back and simply notice that you are aware of all those objects floating by. Songs float through the air; thoughts float through the mind; and when you notice them, you are effortlessly aware.

“There is a simple, effortless, spontaneous witnessing of whatever happens to be present. When you rest in the simple, clear, ever present Witness you are resting in the great unborn, you are resting in intrinsic spirit, you are resting in primordial emptiness. You cannot be seen, you have no qualities, you are not ‘this’, you are not ‘that’, you are not an object. You are the opening or clearing in which the entire manifestation arises right now. You do not arise in it; it arises in you, in this vast emptiness and freedom that you are.

“Spirit cannot be grasped within our reach, with our thought, word or deed. It is the ever-present Seer. The search for the Seer is to miss the point. The search for ‘ever’ is to miss the point forever. How could you possibly search for that which is right now aware of these words? You are THAT. You cannot go on looking for That, which is the Looker. When you are not an object, you are God.” ▲

² Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, 2006, p.73.

Not So Fast, Awakened Ones

Neo-Advaitin Gurus and their Detractors

PHILLIP C. LUCAS

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Introduction

The profusion of Neo-Advaitin teachers and organizations over the past twenty-five years is an under-noticed and under-researched phenomenon in the larger study of North American religions. These teachers/organizations number over 200 as of December 2010, based on careful tracking of Internet sources and various print publications.¹ The term Neo-Advaita has been used in a pejorative sense by some commentators, but it serves as a useful

¹ One convenient source for these numbers is the Sarlo’s Guru Rating Service, accessed December 13, 2010. <http://www3.telus.net/public/sarlo/RatingsN.htm>

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designation, in that it delineates teachers and organizations that claim a spiritual connection to (at least one of) three Advaitin gurus of the twentieth century, Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), and/or H. W. L. Poonja a.k.a. Papaji (1913-1997). These three spiritual teachers are not the only sources for Neo-Advaitin instruction, but they are the most significant line of transmission for its core teaching of non-dualism. The designation also indicates that the articulation of Advaita spirituality in these teachers/groups departs in significant ways from traditional Advaita Vedanta as practised in India.²

The growing popularity and influence of Neo-Advaita has not come without controversy. A small but influential group of critics (for the most part from the United States, India, and Great Britain) has launched a wide-ranging critique of Neo-Advaitin teaching and teachers over the past fifteen years. The critics align themselves with a more traditional articulation and practice of Advaita Vedanta and often cite as their examples of truly realized sages such revered figures as Adi Sankara, Vasishtha, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Siddharameswar Maharaj and Nisargadatta Maharaj.

This article attempts to identify the main themes and substance of these critiques, which can be plotted along five main thematic trajectories. The first of these themes centers upon Neo-Advaitin teachers' alleged disavowal of *sadhana*, or spiritual effort, in the process of Self-realization. The critics claim that a time-tested method of mental purification/preparation is essential in Advaita and that this purification/preparation is incremental and requires disciplined effort over a sustained period of time. The second theme follows from the first and entails the charge by critics that Neo-Advaitins ignore the necessity for moral development as a prerequisite for authentic spiritual realization. The critics assert that efficacious *sadhana* includes the development of specific virtues and allege that many Neo-Advaitin gurus make insufficient reference to these virtues in their teachings.

² John W. Parker, Interview with Eckhart Tolle, http://www.inner-growth.info/power_of_now_tolle/eckhart_tolle_interview_parker.htm, accessed 13 July 2009.

A third theme critiques Neo-Advaitins for their lack of grounding in Advaitic texts, languages, and traditions. The critics see this grounding as essential for any teacher who is to be an effective agent of Advaitic awakening. Related to this criticism is the charge that too many Neo-Advaitin gurus begin teaching within a short time of their first 'awakening' experiences and thus lack the necessary 'ripeness' for authentic instruction of others. Critics argue that authentic Advaitin gurus must be well established in the state of *sahajasamadhi* and have the necessary skills for effective teaching.

A fourth theme of the critiques focuses on the *satsang* format itself and the shallowness of the seekers who attend these events. Critics see the *satsang* events as limited, ephemeral, and ultimately of little value for attendees. They allege that Neo-Advaitin students eschew ongoing assistance in the arduous task of ego transcendence and rather seek an 'instant enlightenment' that bypasses essential steps in spiritual development. The critics question whether seekers are more concerned with psychological empowerment, self-help, and the experience of spiritual community than true Advaitic liberation.

A fifth and final theme of the critiques is the charge that Neo-Advaitins make no distinction between absolute and relative levels of awareness, and thus tend to devalue a life of engaged spiritual practice and balanced development of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the self. By placing all their emphasis on the most advanced state of spiritual realization, Neo-Advaitin teachers and students are seen by their critics as prone to 'pre-transcendence', the deluded assumption of ultimate spiritual liberation and a resulting premature de-personalization and disengagement from ordinary life.

One could argue that each of these themes resonates with the others and that all five could be reduced to one overarching critique: Neo-Advaitin gurus strip away essential aspects of the Advaitin system, leaving a pseudo-spirituality that is ineffective for the arduous task of achieving *moksha*, ultimate spiritual liberation. Nevertheless, a sequential focus upon each of these sub-themes will help to better disclose the depth and breadth of the critiques of Neo-Advaita by their Advaitin opponents.

Disavowal of *Sadhana*

The first of these themes centers upon Neo-Advaitin teachers' alleged disavowal of *sadhana*, or spiritual effort, in the achievement of spiritual liberation. From the perspective of their critics, Neo-Advaitin teachers wrongly contend that Advaita's essential teaching of non-dual truth has been buried under a layer of myths, practices, and symbols, which are culturally bound and dualistic in their mindset. These Neo-Advaitin teachers, it is claimed, assert that realization of the One Absolute Being can be gained instantly through their version of *satsang*, an intimate, but public discussion between students and their teacher. Because of this, students do not need to learn foreign terms, master abstruse texts, or engage in mental preparation in order to 'get it'. In fact, all the elaborate methodology of traditional Advaitic *sadhana* is seen as inimical to spiritual realization since it fosters the illusion that there is 'someone' to get to some 'future' state of enlightenment. Full enlightenment is here and now, if one simply realizes Advaita's ultimate truth that *atman* (the spiritual self) is none other than Brahman (Absolute Reality).³

Traditional Advaitins strongly disavow these claims and emphasize the necessity of life-long, sustained *sadhana* according to the teachings of Adi Shankara, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and other respected Advaitin sages. An essential aspect of this *sadhana* is mental preparation, which entails the development of habits of discrimination (learning to discern what is Real from what is only appearance), detachment (releasing attachment to the world of forms), calmness of mind, and a profound desire for liberation. Only once this preparation is well underway can the mind of the student fruitfully engage with advanced Advaitic teaching.

Advaitin writer Dennis Waite specifically criticizes Neo-Advaitins Tony Parson and John Wheeler for their claims that efforts, doctrines, and progressive spiritual systems only serve to perpetuate the illusion of separate self-identity. He counters that practice in its traditional Advaitic sense is mental *preparation*, which dissolves the conditioned and inborn tendencies so that authentic Self-knowledge can emerge

³ Waite, Dennis, *Enlightenment: The Path through the Jungle*, Winchester, UK: O Books, 2008. p.3.

naturally. Waite quotes Sri Ramana Maharshi, who observed, "Self-realization itself does not admit of progress, it is ever the same. The Self remains always in realization. The obstacles are thoughts. Progress is measured by the degree of removal of the obstacles to understanding that the Self is always realized."⁴ Put another way, *sadhana* and progress pertain to the degree to which misunderstandings and false perceptions have been removed from the student's mind, not to the Self as it is.

The Advaitin methods for Self-realization, in the view of Neo-Advaitin critics, have been verified through practice over many centuries. Thus there is no need for these methods to change with changing trends and conditions.⁵

Advaitin Timothy Conway alleges that Neo-Advaitins 'call off the search' prematurely, eschewing effort or practice and substituting cognitive knowledge for the authentic realization of the Self. As a consequence, they remain confused concerning the real nature of the Self and deeply mired in karmic habits of attachment and aversion. As he observes, "Just to merely have 'the Understanding' that 'only the Self is Real', or that 'Consciousness is all there is' and think that there is nothing more to spirituality than this conceptual understanding and a corresponding 'blacked-out' zombification is simply not sufficient for authentic awakening. . . . One must be thoroughly liberated into or as this Truth on the affective and motivational-behavioural levels, i.e., fully established in real freedom from binding *samskaras/vasanas* [inherited tendencies]."⁶

The Necessity for Moral Development

The second critical theme charges that Neo-Advaitins ignore the necessity for moral development as a prerequisite for authentic spiritual realization. The Advaitin critics claim that efficacious *sadhana* includes the development of traditional Vedic virtues such as faith,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., pp.53-55 & p.112.

⁶ Conway, Timothy, "Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita and Real Advaita-Nonduality," <http://www.gurusfeet.com/blog/neo-advaita-or-pseudo-advaita-and-real-advaita-nonduality-timothy-conway>, December 13, 2010.

devotion, and perseverance, and allege that many Neo-Advaitin gurus not only lack these virtues, but also fail to emphasize their importance in their teaching discourses. Some critics articulate this development of virtues under the traditional Vedantic practice of *Vaidika Dharma*. These are rules of conduct that govern human behavior according to a system of duties to society, the gods, and one's family. When a person sacrifices personal desires to serve the Divine and others, critics observe, *vasana*-production becomes non-binding and therefore no longer an impediment to realization of the Self.⁷

In response to the Neo-Advaitin mantra there is 'nothing to do', that 'nothing really exists', and that 'everything is simply an illusion', the Advaitin critics cite Vedanta's longstanding teaching concerning the qualifications for authentic self-enquiry. Included in these qualifications is *samadhisatkasampatti*, a set of six virtues that bring about mental purity and qualify the student to hear and understand advanced Upanishadic truths. As articulated by Swami Dayananda of the Arsha Vidya Peetha, they include contentment or self-composure (*sama*), self-discipline and sobriety (*dama*), detachment from the desire to own or possess material things (*uparama*), the capacity to bear small difficulties with patience (*titiksa*), faith in one's teacher and in the words of Vedanta to deliver true knowledge (*sraddha*), and the power of inner concentration so that the mind can become Self-absorbed (*samadhanam*).⁸ Swami Veditatmananda emphasizes the pressing need to foster a pure and orderly mind free of likes and dislikes, lust, anger, and greed. These distractions or 'enemies' cloud the mind, making it unreceptive to transcendent knowledge. They also perpetuate unrighteous and unmeritorious patterns of action that lead to a life out of harmony with cosmic order.⁹ Teaching on the development of

⁷ Swartz, James, "What is Neo-Advaita?" <http://www.shiningworld.com/Satsang%20Pages/HTML%20Satsangs%20by%20Topic/Neo-Advaita/What%20is%20Neo-Advaita.htm>, January 2, 2011.

⁸ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, 'Qualified Student of Vedanta', www.avgsatsang.org, November 20, 2010.

⁹ Swami Veditatmananda, 'The Qualifications necessary for the Study of Vedanta', www.AVGsatsang.org, November 20, 2010.

these virtues is sorely missing from Neo-Advaitin *satsangs*, according to their critics, and this lack of attention to the need for the cultivation of virtues and ethical living bypasses an essential step in the process of self-realization.¹⁰

Progress in the development of these virtues has traditionally been seen as a prerequisite for the maturity required to 'hear' higher Advaitic teaching. Thus a teaching that there are no prerequisites for Self-inquiry, that the practice can be undertaken by anyone, regardless of their lifestyle or qualifications, and that little change of personal behaviour is necessary — though it may appeal to the libertarian, egalitarian and democratic attitudes of North Americans — is self-defeating according to Neo-Advaita's critics. Advaitic writer David Frawley reiterates this theme, asserting that Advaitic tradition is unbending with regard to practices of asceticism and moral purification, unappealing as these practices may sound to Western attendees of weekend enlightenment seminars.¹¹

Lack of Grounding in Vedantic Teachings and Premature Guru Status

A third theme critiques Neo-Advaitin teachers for their lack of grounding in Vedantic language, texts and traditions, and their concomitantly premature assumption of the guru role. The critics see this grounding as essential for any teacher who is to be an effective agent of Advaitic awakening. Without it, they contend, the Advaitic system of Self-realization gets watered down, key Sanskrit terms are misinterpreted, and Neo-Advaitin teaching becomes little more than a psychological massage for stressed-out North Americans.

Dennis Waite insists that Sanskrit training is highly desirable since there are often no suitable words to translate Sanskrit terms. Even in cases where a relatively accurate word can be found in English, it likely will not carry the subtle nuances of a Sanskrit term. The use of

¹⁰ Anonymous, www.mountainrunnerdoc.com/page/page/5060965.htm. August 3, 2009.

¹¹ Frawley, David, 'Misconceptions about Advaita', www.vedanet.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=2.

an ordinary English word, he maintains, also makes it less likely that the concept referred to will be examined thoroughly. It is a tradition in Vedanta that during the first stage of life, (*brahmacarya*), students become proficient in Sanskrit and then engage in a comprehensive study of Vedic texts, including the Upanishads, with their guru.¹²

Some critics question the independent Neo-Advaitin teachers who stand outside the ancient teaching tradition of Advaita. They maintain that a proper understanding of this tradition and how to communicate it in changing contexts has survived in the *sampradayas* of India; moreover, these traditional guru lineages have protected the teachings from innovators who believe it is necessary to “to make them palatable for modern audiences or hide them for want of qualified aspirants.”¹³

For these critics, the genius of the Vedantic tradition is that it reaches humanity where it lives, in the dream of duality, and provides an effective roadmap and tools, including teachings on core issues such as the nature of the mind, the cosmos, and the Self.¹⁴

Shortcomings of the Satsang Format

A fourth theme of the critiques focuses on the shortcomings of the ‘satsang’ format. The usual model of the Neo-Advaitin *satsang* begins with a period of quiet reflection, followed by questions and answers from attendees. The attendees come up to the teacher, who is most often seated on a raised platform or stage. They talk about challenges in their spiritual life, ask questions, and then enter into an intimate dialogue with the teacher. Given the Osho-Poonja connection, it appears likely that this method originated in teaching dialogues that were common in the Osho community. The method is suited to North American seekers conditioned by the public confessional approach found on daytime talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Dr. Phil*

¹² *Enlightenment: The Path through the Jungle*, p.104.

¹³ Swartz, James, “The Horse’s Mouth: An Essay on the Lineage Game,” www.shiningworld.com/Home%20Page%20Links/The%20Horses%20Mouth.html, “If I Cannot Know Myself and There is no Other What is All This.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

and who expect personal attention or ‘therapy’ from their spiritual teachers.¹⁵ As one critic of the Neo-Advaitin teacher Adyashanti put it, “his [*satsang*] dialogue... manifests as a kind of New-Age personal growth modality with a non-dualist philosophical construct laid over it. It is in fact reminiscent of Gestalt.”¹⁶ Some of these critiques also question the core motivations of attendees and allege that many of them are simply seeking self-empowerment, ‘self-help’, and an ephemeral experience of spiritual community, rather than assistance in the arduous task of ego transcendence.

Advaitin writer Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya sees the *satsang* experience as doomed to failure because it bypasses the necessary preparatory stage of purifying the mind. The ‘self-appointed saviours’ of Neo-Advaita, in his view, claim that they can transmit their realization to attendees in their *satsangs*, but in truth are only communicating intellectual insights that do nothing to burn out the ego’s identification with the body and its desires. By disparaging the power of conscious *sadhana* and claiming that nothing must be done, that “enlightenment has to happen on its own,” they lull the ‘gallery’ into a false sense of wellbeing. In the end, attendees walk away with the conviction that their present values, attitudes, and lifestyle are fine as they are and that nothing they can ‘do’ can hasten their awakening. He concludes by warning his readers that the “parodies of ‘modern’ Advaita” rest on a fallacious logic that countenances a life of self-indulgence. The *satsang* events never mention the words devotion, surrender, renunciation, and perseverance. Rather, “they speak of understanding, but never ‘self-realization’, in which false identification with the body form is eradicated. The attendees return to their habitual lives of sensory pleasures and egocentric striving secure in the knowledge that they have ‘gotten it’.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Lucas, Philip, ‘When a Movement is not a Movement’.

¹⁶ Jeffrey S. Brooks, ‘The Emperor Has No Clothes’, www.greatwesternvehicle.org/criticism/neoadvaitanism.htm

¹⁷ Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya, ‘Modern Advaita: Its Lure and Snares’, *Mountain Path* (Advent, 2007), 58-59.

Another critic, Durga, sums up the general Advaitin view of *satsang* attendees. In her experience, many of the seekers were unclear about what to expect from the *satsangs* and were mostly interested in finding new friends, a sense of spiritual community, and a few moments of epiphany, which were interpreted (with help from the overall context) as ‘glimpses of the Self’. Attendees engaged in a pattern of jumping from one Neo-Advaitin teacher to another, comparing notes with other attendees concerning what they had experienced at each of the *satsangs*, and attempting to place all of the teachings and experiences into some coherent framework of spiritual understanding. Durga questions whether attendees are receiving anything of lasting value, given that the common pattern of responses from Neo-Advaitin gurus is off-the-cuff, idiosyncratic, and without prior reflection. She complains that no overview is given of basic Advaitic principles and methods. The books and tapes published by these teachers do not help, since they are usually simply transcripts/recordings of the *satsang* events.¹⁸

Alan Jacobs does acknowledge, unlike many critics, that Neo-Advaita *satsangs* can at least serve to *introduce* attendees to authentic Advaitic teaching. Attendance at *satsangs*, flawed as they may be, does “undermine the ‘phantom ego’ intellectually at least.” At best, he maintains, a partial surrender of the ego can be achieved, but without the full devotional component that leads to “total surrender when the mental occlusion is absorbed in the Heart.” He observes that many attendees, after a period of chasing the latest hot Neo-Advaitin teacher, do begin to earnestly enquire into the full and traditional Advaitic teachings of sages like Ramana Maharshi. He expects the Neo-Advaita movement to continue, as a ‘valid, if imperfect stepping stone’, that draws seekers into the net of authentic Advaitic awakening.¹⁹

¹⁸ Durga, Comment on Guru Ratings Forum, www.globalserve.net/~sarlo/yadvaita.htm, December 11, 2010.

¹⁹ Jacobs, Alan, ‘Advaita & Western Neo-Advaita: A Study,’ *The Mountain Path* (Deepam 2004), p.88.

Pre-transcendence, De-personalization, and Level Confusion

A fifth and final theme of the critics is the charge that Neo-Advaitins make no allowance for the Advaitin distinction between absolute and relative levels of awareness. As a result they allegedly tend to devalue a life of engaged spiritual practice and the balanced development of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the self. By placing all their emphasis on the most advanced state of spiritual realization, Neo-Advaitin teachers and students are seen by their critics as prone to fall prey to ‘pre-transcendence’, the deluded (and premature) assumption of ultimate spiritual liberation that leads to de-personalization and disengagement from ordinary life.

The Neo-Advaitin position, according to critics like Waite, ignores the Advaitin teaching of *absolute* reality and *apparent*, day-to-day reality. Neo-Advaitins, Waite alleges, only recognize *absolute* reality and deal insufficiently with *apparent* reality. Therefore they deny that there is a seeker, seeking, and something to be sought. But from the standpoint of the seeker, Waite maintains, the apparent reality is real enough, just as the dream is real enough for the dreamer. Thus there is identification with the body-mind form, suffering, the search for enlightenment, and a very convincing objective world for most seekers. Pretending this is not the case does not help those whose moment-by-moment experience is deeply conditioned by this identification.

In traditional Advaita the phenomenal world (*vyavahara*) of objects and people has a relative reality. Neo-Advaitins make a grave mistake in the eyes of their critics, therefore, when they deny the existence of this phenomenal level, insisting that only absolute reality exists. The strong delusion of relative existence requires strenuous effort to eradicate, and Advaita provides unarguable logic and various subtle methods to reduce the hold of the limited ego self. When students with unprepared minds are forced to accept the Absolute Truth—for example by asserting that in reality there is no seeker, no doer, and no path, ‘this is it!’—they are left in a state of cognitive dissonance in Waite’s view. For at the same time as they accept that the ego and the world of forms is an illusion, that only Brahman is Real, the conviction persists that they are the body-mind organism and that

they exist as separate, discrete selves. It is of little use to deny the existence of a reality in which most people are trapped, asserting that it is a result of ignorance and that it is 'part of the story'. Far better, Waite maintains, is to provide the means, methods, practices that can dispel that ignorance through knowledge, as happens in traditional Advaita. Otherwise seekers are left in the position of the beginning math student who insists upon learning quantum mechanics before mastering elementary arithmetic.²⁰

Timothy Conway believes that Neo-Advaita's misunderstanding of Advaita's relative and absolute levels leads to inadequate efforts to overcome the *vasanas* and continued rebirth and suffering at the relative level of empirical experience. Moreover, the compulsion to focus solely on the absolute level of reality neglects "the multiple worlds and beings emanated by the God-Self for the sake of Divine *lila* or relationship-play." A resulting tendency to devalue human relationships can lead to a state of de-personalization, "a syndrome marked by a strong, pathological dissociation and detachment, apathy, and loss of empathy. Basic humaneness, warmth, and tender loving care vanish in a preference for a cool, robotic demeanour." This state of pre-transcendence, Conway asserts, dishonours the significance of the Divine's expression as unique and beautiful human persons.²¹

Conway also argues that Neo-Advaita's denial of the relative level of ordinary experience can lead to indifference toward what he terms 'engaged spirituality', the forceful addressing of economic, environmental, gender, racial and political injustice in the world. Because from the Absolute level of reality such injustices are merely *maya* (illusion) or *samsara* (the endless cycle of earthly suffering), Neo-Advaitins can come to view political action in the world as absurd and not worth the trouble. For Conway, authentic spirituality requires detachment from the world and at the same time a paradoxically

²⁰ Dennis Waite, 'Traditional versus Neo-Advaita', www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/trad_neo/neo_advaita.htm, August 3, 2009.

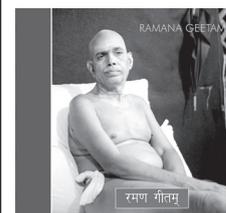
²¹ Conway, Tim, op.cit., "Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita and Real Advaita-Nonduality."

compassionate engagement with the relative world of sentient beings caught in webs of suffering. He cites the example of Ramana Maharshi, who carefully read the newspapers each day and listened to radio broadcasts out of a genuine interest in the welfare of human persons, society, and the animal realm.²²

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be acknowledged that it is not the first time in religious history that new versions of an older tradition has caused consternation and criticism from the upholders of orthodoxy. Gautama Buddha's stripped down version of Brahmanical religion and Saul of Tarsus' law-free version of Late-Temple Judaism roused unrelenting opposition from traditionalists and eventually led to the formation of independent religious systems. In each case, the most virulent critiques came from those who saw their religions as systems of interlocking and mutually reinforcing doctrines, rituals, ethical codes, scriptures, and spiritual methods. Selective choosing of these elements for either rejection or special focus was seen to be a dangerous weakening and debasement of the entire religious system and as an unwarranted attack on time-tested methods of salvation and awakening. Whatever the merits of the critiques described in this paper, they clearly constitute at the very least a predictable defence of a venerable spiritual tradition that is believed to have proven methods for awakening and built-in safeguards against abuse of authority and self-deception. ▲

²² Ibid.



RAMANA GEETAM: An audio CD, 'Ramana Geetam', containing nine devotional songs on Bhagavan in Hindi has been released by the Ashram. The lyrics written by Kamal Nath Tripathi have been soulfully sung by S. Krishnamurthy of Mumbai.



D. Tiyagarajan

KEYWORD

Mantra

JOHN GRIMES

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was firmly established in the state of steady Self-abidance (*sahaja-samadhi*). He was one with everything, perceiving nothing external, nothing internal to the Self, and possessing no desire to receive any impression from anything. It is no surprise that for one who has no place to go and nothing to attain, any talk of a *mantra* would provoke him to say, “*Mantra japa* leads to the elimination of other thoughts and to a concentration on the *mantra*. Finally the *mantra* merges into the Self and shines forth as the Self.”¹

Bhagavan was once asked, “Can *advaita* be realized by *japa* of holy names; say Rama, Krishna, etc.?” He replied, “yes.” The enquirer

¹ Venkataramiah, Munagala (ed), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, § 31, 29-9-35.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority of Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

continued, “Is it not a means of an inferior order?” Bhagavan said, “Have you been told to make *japa* or to discuss its order in the scheme of things?”²

The word *mantra* comes from the Sanskrit ‘*man*’ (to think – *manas* or mind comes from this root) plus the suffix ‘*tra*’ indicating instrument. Thus, a *mantra* is an instrument of thought. A well-known verse says, “The *mantra* is so-called because it is in the nature of thought and deliverance.”³ Sri Ramana said, “When the mind, which is always wandering, is trained to hold onto any name or form of God, it will only cling to that. Because the mind branches out into innumerable thoughts, each thought becomes very weak. As thoughts subside more and more, one-pointedness of mind is gained. A mind that has gained strength in this way will easily succeed in self-enquiry.”⁴

Bhagavan Ramana, when asked which is the best method of spiritual practice, would generally reply that it depends on the temperament of the individual. We are all born with latent tendencies (*samskara*). What is easy for one may be difficult for another. There is no general rule for everyone. The aim of our spiritual practice is to make the mind one-pointed, that is, concentrate it on one continuous thought to the exclusion of all others. As in the analogy of the thorn used to remove another thorn from our foot, this one thought will eventually be discarded when we merge in the source of all thought.⁵

A *mantra* is a chant or formula composed of syllables or words that are thought to reproduce, or embody in sound, the structure of the universe, reality, the divine, the force and power of Consciousness. Generally *mantras* are formula with a fixed or prescribed form to be used according to certain rules thus empowering them with efficacy. Bhagavan Ramana told a story to illustrate this aspect of a *mantra* when asked if anyone can get any benefit by repeating sacred syllables (*mantras*) picked up casually.

² Ibid., §55, p.60.

³ *Mananam sarva veditvam tranam samsara sagarat mananatrana dharmavan mantra ity abhidhiyate*

⁴ Muruganar, *Padamalai: Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2005. p.223.

⁵ Ibid., p.2 & p.258.

“A King visited his Premier in his residence. There he was told that the Premier was engaged in repetition of sacred syllables (*japa*). The king waited for him and, on meeting him, asked what the *japa* was. The Premier said that it was the holiest of all, *Gayatri*. The King desired to be initiated by the Premier. But the Premier confessed his inability to initiate him. Therefore the King learned it from someone else, and meeting the Minister later he repeated the *Gayatri* and wanted to know if it was right. The Minister said that the *mantra* was correct, but it was not proper for him to say it. When pressed for an explanation, the Minister called to a page close by and ordered him to take hold of the King. The order was not obeyed. The order was often repeated, and still not obeyed. The King flew into a rage and ordered the same man to hold the Minister, and it was immediately done. The Minister laughed and said that the incident was the explanation required by the King. ‘How?’, asked the King. The Minister replied, ‘The order was the same and the executor also, but the authority was different. When I ordered, the effect was nil, whereas, when you ordered, there was immediate effect. Similarly with *mantras*.’”⁶

For those using a *mantra* in their *sadhana* or spiritual practice, the texts declare that every *mantra* is said to have six aspects to it. There is the *rishi*, the seer, who originally ‘saw’ or heard the *mantra*. There is the *raga* or melody/vibration. There is the *devata* or presiding deity that provides a focus point on which a personal relationship may be established. There is the *bija* or seed sound that gives it its special power. There is the *shakti* or divine power; the goddess who empowers the *mantra*. Finally, there is the *kilaka* (nail, pin, bolt, pillar) that seals off and protects the chanter.

Mantras fall into different categories: *Mahamantras* which are the most potent and powerful, often called the ‘great liberating *mantras*’, meditation *mantras*, contemplation *mantras*, *siddha mantras* which are used to obtain supernatural powers, *apta* (accomplished) *mantras* which are uniquely associated with the Sage who imparts them and declares how to use them and the only rules for such *mantras* are those the Sage declares, and finally unclassifiable *mantras*.

⁶ *Talks*, §8, 15-5-35.

What are the benefits of chanting a *mantra*? It will increase one's will power. It increases concentration. It produces positive emotions, purifies the mind, and strengthens one's faith. Chanting *mantras* are said to involve the left hemisphere of the brain, and thus they are effective in increasing positive emotions.

What are the most effective places in which to chant a *mantra*? Places where a sage has done spiritual practices (*sadhana*); in the presence of a sage; any place where the chanter has a strong emotional link; in any natural environment; in a solitary place such as a forest, a cave, or in the mountains; in a flower garden or under certain auspicious trees; in a land where there has been no war; on the bank of a river or where two rivers meet; in the presence of a flame.

When chanting a *mantra*, the seat or mat upon which one sits should be made of *kusha* grass, a deer or tiger skin, a woolen rug, a silk sheet, or a wooden plank. All of these are poor conductors of heat and electricity and thus the energy produced in chanting is not lost. As well, they are all good insulators between the chanter and the earth, which has a strong electrical pull. Forbidden seats include those made of cotton, stone, earth, rotten wood, and leaves, as they are good conductors of electricity and thus energy is lost.

It is often said that some instrument or device serves as a link between the *guru* and the disciple. On the one hand, the *guru's sannidhi* (presence) as Bhagavan said, "A *jnani* has no desires (*sankalpa*) but his *sannidhi* is the most powerful force . . . it can do wonders: save souls, give peace of mind, even give liberation to ripe souls. Your prayers are not answered by him but absorbed by his presence."⁷ A *mantra* serves as a link between the *guru* and disciple — like a wire that connects power with the bulb. The disciple should treasure that link and tend it even as one tends a seed.

Mantras can be chanted out loud, whispered, or repeated silently in the mind, which, of the three, the latter is said to be the greatest. Bhagavan Ramana said, "Mental *japa* is very good. That helps meditation. The mind gets identified with the repetition and then you

⁷ Muruganar, op. cit., p.8.

get to know what worship really is — the losing of one's individuality in that which is worshipped."⁸

The classic answer given by Bhagavan on *mantra japa* was to Ganapati Muni. Interestingly, this was the first time that Bhagavan gave a verbal answer to a question. Until this moment, Bhagavan had always remained silent and if he answered a question at all, he wrote it down. Bhagavan replied to Ganapati Muni, "If one watches whence the notion 'I' arises, the mind is absorbed into That; that is *tapas*. When a *mantra* is repeated, if one watches the Source from which the *mantra* sound is produced the mind is absorbed in That; that is *tapas*." ▲

⁸ *Talks*, §31, 4-2-35.

⁹ Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, 1970. p.83.

I Came For Your Sake

Ana Callan

Collarbone broken as he tried
to save a squirrel from a dog,
body frail and waning as he
trailed uphill behind two men
to Skandashram. He came
to admire the stonemason's
quiet work, saying,
when he arrived,
"your prayers dragged
me here." And as I
read of such humble
tender love, the tears
could not be quenched
for He who was God
of Gods and oh such
lover of men.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Thirty Three

S. RAM MOHAN

As the goal of human life is the supreme state, which is known as *Ajnana* (Self-knowledge, pure awareness), it may seem to suggest that the Real Self is an object of knowledge like objects of cognition in the world, that there is a knower and a thing to be known as separate supreme entities. Bhagavan, in Verse 33 explains that the Self is not an 'object of knowledge'.

Verse 33: Both the statements 'I know not myself' and 'I know myself' are causes for laughter. Are there two selves for it to become the object of knowledge? It is the common experience of all that there is only one Self (no other).

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Commentary

For the *jnani*, no one is an *ajnani*, because the *jnani* lives in Selfhood, the Absolute Truth, where nothing exists as separate from the Self or rather all is one. Bhagavan remarked, “The Self is never affected by ignorance, He being Himself a *jnanin* as stated earlier in verse thirteen. Think what is the purpose of the injunction “Know Thyself”!

Bhagavan says that it is laughable for anyone to state that “I do not know myself” or to declare that “I have known myself”. Are there two ‘I’s with us, one to know and the other to be known? For a realized soul or for a person steeped in ignorance, for all of them there is only one Reality in actual experience – the Self alone exists.

This is a very interesting verse. We have seen Bhagavan declaring that in the state of Transcendental Awareness, there is nobody to be seen as ‘*ajnani*’, that is, a deluded person. Then, what does it mean to say ‘Know Thyself’, or ‘attain *jnana*’? The fact is that these are directives to the aspirants to do *sadhana* and realise that they are already and are ever Self-realised. This is a practical advice.

The core of Advaita Vedanta is based on the actual non-dual experience of *jivanmuktas*: ‘I am That’. In practice, however, most of the aspirants have not yet matured enough to grasp this Absolute Truth. Since the aspirant’s mind is steeped in the *vasanas* of duality (*dvaita*), the *upadesa* is also couched in the language of duality whereas in the absolute sense, actual experience is *advaitic* (non-dual). The truth is that the *upadesas* are given to correct the flawed understanding of the aspirant, to make him fit to realize the Absolute Truth of non-duality in experience. “Know Thyself” actually means “Be Thyself”. It is more a reminder than a correction. That is why Bhagavan invariably asked the questioner to find out who asked the question.

Bhagavan says in the second verse of *Arunachala Ashtakam*, “The ‘I’ does not rise to say ‘I have seen’, how can then an ‘I’ rise to say ‘I have not seen’? The state in which the ego does not rise is the state beyond knowing and not knowing.” Bhagavan has also mentioned in the twelfth verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* that the *jivanmukta* is not different from the Self. The ego which differentiates is extinct in him and therefore there is no scope for him to say either ‘I know’ or ‘I do

not know’. In the second verse of *Arunachala Ashtakam*, referred to above, Bhagavan says “Who is the seer? When I thus sought within I saw what remained when the seer (ego) vanished. No thought arose, to say ‘I saw’, how then could the thought ‘I did not see’ arise?” With the ego becoming extinct, there is neither ‘a seer’ nor a person to say ‘I have not seen’.

The intuitive feeling of “Am-ness is the Self” is felt by everyone. The feeling of ‘Am-ness’ is the substratum, in its pristine purity. However, due to the super-imposition of ego, which mutates this pristine feel of ‘I am’-ness, people confuse the body-mind complex to be the Self. They, say ‘I am man’, ‘I am woman’, ‘I am a pauper’ ‘I am a prince’, etc. This limiting adjunct, which makes the person forget his true, ‘I am’-ness is the primordial ignorance. The feeling of pristine pure ‘I am’-ness is in deep-sleep state where there is subsidence in the Self. In the wakeful and dream states, the ego intervenes and confuses the person. This confusion is due to fact that in wakeful and dream states, the attention is on the objective factors present as the second and third persons.

In verse 548 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Bhagavan lucidly elucidates this. “Only so long as one thinks that one knows other things that the delusion ‘Oh, I don’t know myself’ will remain delusory. That thought is removed by constant direct experience of the Self, one’s own nature, the ‘thought of knowing’ vanishes, with it vanishes all talk of ‘ignorance’ too.”

It is because of this idea that one knows the external objects that the confusion arises that he does not know the Self. Only because of the existence of the false ‘I’, the ego, the objects are known. When one understands through enquiry that there is only one thing that exists which is the true ‘I’, the Self, the limiting adjuncts vanish. ▲



Statue of Sage Arunagirinathar
in Sri Arunachaleswara Temple, Tiruvannamalai

Sage Arunagirinathar

The Author of *Thiruppugazh*

V.S. KRISHNAN

When Goddess Parvati was separated from Lord Siva, she went to different temples to pray for union with him. She undertook severe *tapas* as Annapurneswari at Banaras and as Kamakshi at Kanchi. At Kanchi, the Lord ordained that she should proceed to Arunachala and learn the importance of Arunachala from Saint Gautama. Saint Gautama explained the significance of Arunachala to Parvati and said, “He who worships Arunachala and circumambulates the holy hill attains *atma bodha* (Self-realisation).” Hearing this, Parvati performed *tapas* and meditation at Arunachala and was ultimately able to unite with Lord Siva. It symbolised the union of *Sakti* and *Sivam* and the merger of *jiva* with *paramatma*. Ever since, Tiruvannamalai has served as the destination of all spiritual aspirants, with a steady stream of saints and seers flowing towards it. From the time of Sage

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Gautama in the *Puranic* period, many sages over the centuries, like Adi Sankara, Manikkavachakar, Sundaramoorthi Nayanar, Jnana Sambhandar and Appar gravitated towards Tiruvannamalai, the abode of Lord Arunachala, and attained spiritual fulfilment. Among those many, the one who came from Tiruchuzhi, Sri Ramana Maharshi, was considered to be the manifestation of Lord Siva himself. Sri M. Sivaprakasam Pillai, a great devotee of Bhagavan, once said, “The Supreme Lord has assumed a human body as an act of grace and resides at Arunachala under the name of Ramana.”

It was here on this sacred land around the 15th century, in the Tamil month of Ani, that a child of extraordinary brilliance was born. He was named Arunagiri, a name that symbolises the effulgent rays of fire that the mountain represents: the word ‘aruna’ evokes the brilliant rays of the sun and the word ‘giri’ (hill) implies that it is the abode of Siva. According to legend, distressed by the way his body and mind were leading him astray, Arunagiri decided to end his life and threw himself from the temple tower of Arunachala. Surprisingly, he did not fall to the ground. He fell into the strong grip of two hands. Finding himself rescued, he asked his saviour, “Why have you saved me? What is it that I am going to achieve in this life?” His saviour replied, “You are not born to die. You are born to bring life to others. You are not born to fall. You are born to make others rise. You are born to sing. You have been chosen to sing the glory of Lord Muruga.” It is believed that Lord Muruga himself came as that saviour.

Arunagirinathar explains in the opening lines of *Kandar Alankaram* that he has experienced the presence of Muruga on the northern side of Arunachala temple, ‘*Arunaith thiruk gopurathe antha vayilukku vada arukil cenru kandu konden*’. As Arunagiri stood spellbound, Lord Muruga imparted the *sadakshara mantra* to him. The Lord then set out the tasks before him: “Sing songs about me studded with gems of devotion and pearls (*muththu*) of wisdom. *Thiruppugazh*, as your songs will be known, will be the ‘mantra’ to elevate the lives of many people.” Initiating Arunagiri as the exponent of *Thiruppugazh*, the Lord Himself chanted the first few lines and asked his disciple to continue. Within minutes, the student composed his first epoch-

making song starting with *Muththaith Tharu*: “O Lord, who appeared in the lotus that bloomed in *Saravana Poygai*, who resembled the brilliance of dazzling gems, I pray that the seeds of devotion be planted in my heart as the way for my liberation from this world of illusion.”¹

Having gained a new direction and inspiration, Arunagirinathar set out on his holy mission to visit temples and compose songs of divine praise. Deriving inspiration from every temple, he composed *Thiruppugazh* songs highlighting the glory of the Lord and the unique features of each shrine. He visited many holy shrines in South India, distant Kasi in the north, and even beyond the borders of India, Kadirkamam in Sri Lanka. In the epigraphs, inscriptions engraved on stone that relate the significance and background of a given temple, references to Arunagirinathar’s visit and the songs he composed have been inscribed in all the temples he visited, indicating that the saint’s very visit added to their sanctity.

Clearly, Lord Muruga, Lord of Swami Malai, the *jnana panditha*, the fountainhead of all knowledge, had conferred his *arul jnana* (grace-knowledge) upon His devotee. As Arunagirinathar stood in front of the deities within those temples, the devotion in him came out spontaneously. Words started gushing forth as if they were eager to be used by a poet of such eminence and erudition. Apart from songs of *Thiruppugazh*, Arunagirinathar composed *Kandar Alangaram* (108 verses), *Kandar Anubuti* (51), *Kandar Anthadi* (102), *Vel Virutham* (10), *Mayil Virutham* (12), *Seval Virutham* (12) and *Thiru Vaguppu* (25). It is difficult to single out one poem and acclaim it as the best, as every song is unique in its own way and matchless in its appeal. Tamil pandits said, “As Arjuna is known for his talents in archery, Arunagirinathar is known for the power of his vocabulary.” (*Villukku Vijayan, vakkukku Arunagiri*). Apart from

¹ *Muththaith tharu patthih thiru nakai, athikkirai saththi saravana muththikkoru viththuk gurupara enavothum*. Since the Lord had commanded his devotee to sing songs studded with gems of wisdom, Arunagirinathar started his first ever song with the word *muththu* which means gems. The word *muththu* also symbolizes Arunagirinathar’s mother, Muththamma. We may recall that Bhagavan also referred his mother’s name *Azhagu* in *Aksharamanamalai* verse 2.

poetic excellence, *Thiruppugazh* is believed to contain the essence of the Vedas and Upanishads, the doctrine of Vedanta, the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta, and, above all, the seeds of devotion.

All Tamil devotional literature that extols the qualities of the Lord come under the common category of 'glory to God' (*Thiru Pugazh*) but only Arunagirinathar's songs have received the title *Thiruppugazh*. Perhaps this is because no other author has made such an exhaustive description of god. Arunagirinathar has described very elegantly and elaborately the status of Muruga as avatar; the power of his weapon, the *vel* (lance), his vehicle, the *mayil* (peacock), and his ensign, the *seval* (rooster), as well as describing his valour, beauty, knowledge and compassion. He described Muruga's marriage with Valli as '*Valli sanmarga*,' the union of *atman* with eternal reality, the *paramatman*. It is said that the Lord himself named Arunagirinathar's works as *Thiruppugazh* and ordained His devotee to "sing *Thiruppugazh* about me."

Unlike other Tamil works, which are circumscribed by certain boundaries, *Thiruppugazh* encompasses all doctrines. Even if there existed in the early period a division as between Saivism and Vaishnavism, Arunagirinathar did not subscribe to it. It was inconceivable for a poet of lofty vision like him to think in terms of divisions; he believed that the Supreme Being was one without a second and free of all attributes. Rather than addressing Muruga as Siva Kumara, he described him as *Thirumalin Marugone* and as *Mal Maruga*, the son-in-law of *Mal* (Vishnu),² thus finding as much joy in singing the glory of Vishnu or Narayana as in that of Siva or Muruga. He visualized Muruga as *jnanapandita*, as the guiding Guru and as the manifestation of the eternal reality, *Brahman*.

In his song on the brilliance of Arunachala Hill, Arunagirinathar says, "Would I imbibe the nectar of wisdom that emerges from the

² According to legend, Sundara Valli and Amudha Valli were born to Trivikrama, the incarnate of Vishnu from his tears of joy. In their aspiration to marry Lord Muruga, they undertook severe penance. The Lord blessed them and said that their wish would be fulfilled in their next birth. Accordingly, Sundara Valli married Muruga as Valli and Amudha Valli married Muruga as Deivayanai in their subsequent birth.

ocean of Siva's grace flowing from Arunachala? Would I get enlightened by the radiance of the fire that emanates from the hill of Arunachala?" (*Jaya Jaya Aruna Thiri Siva...*) Arunagirinathar, who was basically a devotee, composed *Kandar Anubuti*, a work on *jnana*, while Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, who was basically a *jnani*, composed *Akshara Mana Malai* (The Marital Garland of Letters), a work of devotion. It is a divine coincidence that both Arunagirinathar and Ramana Maharshi stressed the importance of silence and used the same term *summa iru* (be still). Arunagirinathar recalls the saintly advice given by Lord Muruga: '*Summa iru, sol ara enralume, amma porul ondrum arinthilane!* – What a wonder! The moment he said, 'Be still. Do not speak!' there was no longer anything for me to know!³ He says he knows no other means to realise God than the path of silence, solitude and stillness. Centuries later Ramana Maharshi would express the same viewpoint: *Sollathu soli ni sol ara nil enru summa irundhai Arunachala!*⁴ The term *summa iru* does not refer to a state of idleness or inactivity. It does not mean refraining from talk. The state referred to by Arunagirinathar and Ramana Maharshi as silence is a state where the mind and body becomes still and the Self alone shines forth. It is the state where the individual remains free from worldly thoughts and mental activity. Observing silence, looking inward, and practising '*Siva Yoga*' paves the way for Self-realisation in which the *jivatma* realises the eternal truth, *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the eternal reality, the self-guiding awareness, the supreme consciousness, which is neither created nor destroyed and is present in all. He who realises the Self becomes *Brahman*.

The Self alone is real and constitutes the true identity (*Thaan*) but the nescient individual remains under the mistaken notion of 'I am the body.' (*Yaan*). Arunagirinathar says: "O Muruga, source of all knowledge, what grace have I received from you! The ego that characterised my individuality has been thoroughly overpowered. The false notion of 'I' has disappeared completely in the effulgence

³ *Kandar Anubuti*, v.12.

⁴ "O Arunachala, you remained still, wordlessly bidding me to abide in silence, free of speech!" *Aksharamanamalai* v.36.

of Supreme Self. The ego-self having subsided, I am elevated to a supreme state of awareness where my real Self alone remains.” *Aana Amuthe ... yaan akiya ennai vizhungi, verum thanaay nilai ninrathu tharparame.*⁵ In another song, *Thenundu Mukkanigal*, Arunagirinathar says: “Having transcended the false notion of ‘I’ and the world of maya, I became enlightened and conscious of my Self.”

Sri G.V. Subbaramayya, an ardent disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi, used to visit Bhagavan frequently. During one such visit, he informed Bhagavan of his concern about the delay in finding a suitable alliance for his daughter, Lalitha. Maharshi immediately recited a *Thiruppugazh* song (*Neelangol Megaththin*) and advised him that his daughter should render this *Thiruppugazh* to receive the grace of Muruga to bring about a marriage. Exactly as advised by Maharshi, his daughter started rendering the song and soon the *mangala* recital of *nadaswara*, associated with weddings, was heard at his house.⁶ The song conveys the following meaning: “As you arrive, mounted on your blue peacock, with garlands adorning your broad chest, the prospective bride admires your majestic appearance and longs for the advent of the wedding day in her life. O Lord Muruga, the embodiment of the Vedas, you who have shattered the ocean by hurling your *vel* and caused destruction of demons, I prostrate before you.”

Though Arunagirinathar composed more than 16,000 songs of *Thiruppugazh*, they were scattered across different locations, lying untraceable. Thanigai Mani Sri V.S. Chengalvaraya Pillai, has dedicated himself to the task of procuring these manuscripts; he has succeeded in retrieving around 1,500 songs and compiling them properly. It was Sri Sachidananda Swamigal, a great devotee of Bhagavan Ramana, who highlighted the glory of *Thiruppugazh* to the outside world. The songs on Muruga conveyed in the divine verses of *Thiruppugazh* reverberate all over, thanks to ‘Guruji’ Sri A.S. Raghavan, who set them to music and is spearheading a powerful *Thiruppugazh* movement under the banner of *Thiruppugazh Anbargal*. ▲

⁵ *Kandar Anubuti*, v.28.

⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §122.

Amirta Saram

[The Essence of Nectar]

TATTUVARAYA

In the previous issue of Mountain Path we published an article on the life of Tattuvaraya, a 15th century Tamil saint. In this issue we are publishing extracts from Amirta Saram, one of his many works on Vedanta. The verses are taken from a subsection of the work entitled Kalai Kattalai (‘Section on the Teachings’). The translation has been done by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and David Godman.

1 Reverence to the Lord

To those who possess the eye of *jnana*, Sorupan, the reality, is the effulgence of *jnana-ananda*. But to those who possess only the physical eye, he [that reality] is the world. His golden feet which are unattainable even by the gods in heaven are, on this day, easy for me to attain.

In the first verse Tattuvaraya salutes his Guru, Sorupananda, equating him with the bliss of jnana.

5 The greatness of the *jnani*’s words

What does it matter to what caste they [*jnani*s] belong? What does it matter which religion they belong to? What does it matter which type of verses they have sung? Only the words of those who have renounced the mind are pure words. All the rest lead only to rebirth.

6 Name of the work

A whole lifetime will not suffice for anyone to comprehend clearly the truth through studying the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. By studying this work [though], the heart will abide in the ocean of *amirta* [nectar]. It is therefore given the name *Amirta Saram* [*The Essence of Nectar*].

7 Expression of modesty

When formerly the three gods explained the import of the utterances of the *Vedas*, the world could not comprehend. Now, if I claim that I am going to declare this truth for the world to know, I will be like the firefly that says, 'I will dispel and destroy the dense darkness that exists as high as heaven'.

8 Declaring the good [or beneficial] path

Knowing them to be transient, renounce the thought of life here and hereafter. Walk the path of virtue [or rectitude]. Turn back the mind. Seek the Self-realised. Hasten to know the true nature of reality.

9 That which is rare

It is rare indeed to obtain a human birth. Even if one gets it, it is more rare to study the *jnana* scriptures. Rarer still is to become one who possesses renunciation. But rarer than that is to become one possessing knowledge of reality.

10 The characteristic of a *jnani*

The *jnani* knows that consciousness alone exists, and that there is nothing that is not consciousness. He knows consciousness entirely through consciousness. He is the Lord who exists without knowing or not knowing. He is indeed the Supreme Reality declared by the *Vedas*.

11 The *jnani's* actions

For both the *jnani* and the *ajnani* external conduct in activities such as eating look identical. But the mind of *jnani* is quite different. Though the breast of a woman is the same for both her baby and her husband, their mental development [leads to] different [results].

12 The *jnani's* conduct

Will he think 'This is good,' or 'This is bad'? Is not the entire world food for the *jnani*? Could there be any rule whereby a fire raging in

the forest might discriminate between trees, thinking, 'One good and another bad'?

13 Greatness of the *jnani*

Space is extremely vast, but the great *maya* that gave birth to it is mere clay in the hands of Iswara. If one ponders over it, there is no one greater than Siva, but the one who has contained Siva in his mind is greater than Siva Himself.

14 Greatness of service to the *jnani*

Whenever the powerful *jnani* asks God to manifest, God, eager to appear, will be waiting expectantly to serve him wherever he goes. Who indeed is there equal to those who serve the *jnani*?

15 Greatness of *puja* to the *jnani*

When the *jnani* eats, everyone in the universe has eaten. [Even] Brahma, Vishnu and Siva have eaten. He who worships a perfect *jnani*, regarding him as *Sivam*, has indeed feasted his eyes fully on the Supreme Being and worshipped Him.

16 Those who revile the *jnani*

Those who revile the powerful *jnani*, those who listen to it [the abuse], those who do not get angry hearing the abuse, those who permit the *jnani* to be abused, and those who do not leave the company of these four, [not] thinking it best to keep away from them [these four] – these are the five deadly sinners.

17 Improper conduct

Those cruel hypocrites who have not removed the faults in their deluded minds, claiming, without having gained the true *jnana* born of yoga, that they are abiding as the one reality merely for the sake of food, will not attain liberation, and neither will those who hold them in their thoughts [their followers].

'For the sake of food' denotes any kind of material benefit that is gained from pretending to be enlightened.

20 The cause of the world

They will say 'Atoms are the cause'; 'Great *maya* is the cause'; 'A combination of atoms is the cause'; 'The five elements are the cause';

‘The *gunas* are the cause.’ Let them say any cause to be the cause. Not asking ‘What is the cause of this world?’ is the real cause of the world.

21 Cause and effect are not different

Do not say that this impermanent world is apart from the eternal reality. Before becoming an ornament, when it is an ornament, and when the ornament is remelted and made again into a lump of gold, it is only gold.

22 Cause and effect are not different

The Lord is the underlying screen that is His one Self, which is the pure light of *jnana ananda*. On it He, the Self, traced, by means of Himself, the picture of the world of multiplicity, girt by the roaring ocean. He looked upon it and was well pleased.

25 The quality of all-pervasiveness

The Eternal One creates the 84 *lakhs* of different species and abides within them all, just as empty space enters into and occupies all the countless pots that have [ever] been made.

Some Hindu texts posit that there are 8.4 million (84 lakhs) of species in which one can incarnate.

26 Destruction

The body comprising the five elements will be destroyed in the elements. The five elements, beginning with space, will be destroyed in *maya*. Great *maya*, the darkness, in which multiplicity has ended, will be destroyed by the *jnana* that arises here [in this world], saturated with the light of being.

27 The cause of birth

Like the transparent, shining and colourless crystal which takes on the colour of the object that is adjacent to it, the knower [the crystal] becomes [takes on the appearance of] the adjacent objects [body and mind]. Since births come to an end when the knower knows his real nature, the fundamental cause of birth is ignorance of one’s real nature.

35 The base nature of the body

When their *prana* leaves men who are getting attached to land [wealth and women], they are given the name ‘corpse’ and removed for burial. In an instant worms come and infest this body. Is there in

this body any place as tiny as the tip of the sesame seed that remains free from fault?

37 The despicable nature of enjoyment

The asuna bird, the elephant, moth, fish and bee get ruined respectively by a craving for sounds, touch, sight, taste and smell. How disgusting! Won’t humans, possessed by worries, lose their power through their appetite for not one, but all these five cravings, beginning with sound.

41 The base nature of *swarga* [heavenly worlds]

[Lying with celestial damsels is] lying with prostitutes. Drinking ambrosia is nothing but getting drunk on intoxicating liquor. When in one day of Brahma *crores* of *devas* are born and die, what is the glory that those who rule the *deva* world attain?

42 Impermanence

There is not a single thing that remains permanently in this world. This is what all the three gods declared. This is also the doctrine of those other religions that war with each other. Therefore, only impermanence is permanent.

44 Renunciation

Those who want to bring to an end this birth in which one is caught in ignorance should realise that even the body is superfluous, and renounce completely. For those who do not, it is not easy to attain liberation, which is freedom from taking birth and dying.

The verse includes an indirect reference to Tirukkural 345: ‘For those who seek an end to birth, the body itself is a superfluous burden. What then can we say of other forms of attachment?’

80 The argument that *prarabdha* is supreme

If the body is a result of karma, then it would mean that the body existed before to perform the karma. If karma is eternal, then liberation will never be attained. The fundamental cause of *prarabdha* is ignorance.

82 Taking *kaya kalpas*

We have not known anyone who lived for ever in this sea-girt world through *kaya kalpa* medicines. Why are you afflicting yourself,

strengthening the body, which is as unstable as a water bubble, and which causes ruination to one and all?

83 Caste

Freedom from the primal ignorance is the caste of the rare *tapasvins*. Will they make even the slightest mention of differences in caste? Only those who possess *jnana* belong to the noble caste and lineage, and deserve to be worshipped. The rest are low-caste people.

84 Bathing in holy water

Will the defilement of a mind that is not established in dharma be cleansed through water that is external [to itself]? The holy rivers are for the body only. Otherwise they are powerless. For the mind to become cleansed of defilement and to shine, the holy water one bathes in is consciousness.

85 Puja

Those lacking wisdom and thirsting for bliss, while standing in the flood of endless supreme bliss that abides in the heart, will bathe in water, collect water for *abhishekam*, gather flowers, cleanse the precincts with cow-dung, and eventually perform *puja*.

86 Knowing the many paths

You who are a *tapasvin* seeking the truth! Let all the many paths declare 'This alone is the way! This alone is the way!' What is the path through which the consciousness that knows all these paths can be known? That path, which is declared by the *Vedas*, is the way of liberation.

87 Learning *sastras*

Those who have failed to grasp the true import of the holy scriptures they read and have therefore not come to know consciousness as it really is will not go anywhere near the truth, even if they read *crores* and *crores* of scriptures.

88 Attempting to know by measurement

It is through consciousness that all measures have to be known. He who desires to know consciousness through measures, all of which have to be known through consciousness, is like one who wants to burn fire with firewood.

89 Disputation

In the way of disputation, when one wins, pride greatly swells. When one loses, sorrow waxes a lot. [The conclusions of] disputation are not something that remain permanent. The only benefit is tearing one's head off and getting a sore throat.

92 The noble way

If the truth is known clearly, then that path which remains without conflict with any other path will be the path of becoming *sat*. If there is God's grace, it is easy to attain. In the absence of God's grace, it will be difficult for everyone.

95 *Sathya* [truthfulness]

If you ask 'What is the practice of truthfulness?' then they say it is to utter that which does not cause harm to any being. But those who have realised the truth declared at the end of the *Vedas*, which speak a lot about purity, say that truth [*sathya*] is only the Supreme, the Imperishable One.

The first sentence refers to Tirukkural 291: 'If you ask, "What is truth?", it is to utter words that are entirely free of any harmful effect.'

Yamas and niyamas are codes of conduct for dealing with people and the world. In this selection verses 95-100 explain the inner significance of some of the yamas.

96 *Ahimsa* [non-violence]

Ahimsa is not to inflict suffering on any living being. The Self-realised know that realising that the Self is not destroyed by weapons, wind, water, fire, etc. is *ahimsa* to oneself.

97 *Asteya* [non-stealing]

They say that to steal a thing either through force or deceit is theft. But if we are to declare the doctrine of *jnanis*, stealing is to regard the body, which does not belong to one, as 'I' and 'mine'.

98 *Brahmacharya*

Brahmacharya is to avoid the company of women, but those who truly possess *brahmacharya* are the ones who have become one with *Brahman*, which is extremely difficult to attain.

99 *Arjava* [honesty], *dhriti* [steadfastness] and *daya* [compassion]

Arjava [honesty] is to view completely as all one: mother, father, son, daughter, wife, and evil enemies. *Dhriti* [steadfastness] is conviction in the way of the *Vedas*. *Daya* [compassion] is to have love like a mother [towards her children].

100 *Kshama* [patience]

If you want to conquer those who have done evil to you, always bear with them patiently without entertaining hatred. If you have to entertain hatred [towards something], kill that one thing 'anger'. He who can do it will be freed from all dangers.

103 *Tapas*

Tapas is curtailing one's food through vows and tormenting the body. But the *tapas* to end births is enquiring 'Who am I?' 'Through what did I get this birth?' 'What is the nature of liberation in which one becomes *Sivam*?'

Verses 103 and 104 elaborate on two of the ten niyamas.

104 *Santosham* [contentment]

Contentment is to be satisfied by acceptance of whatever one gets. But the *Vedas'* words say that contentment is the happiness of experiencing truly the Supreme in the heart, forsaking all the states that are spoken of, beginning with Brahma Loka.

117 Ridiculing *siddhis*

There will be trouble for those who contemplate the wealth of *siddhis*, beginning with *anima*. Without realising that *ashtanga* yoga is a step towards attaining *jnana*, they are crazy, like those who lift an iron wall, using [flimsy] sugarcane as a lever, and willingly gather bran.

Anima, the first of the eight listed siddhis, is the ability to shrink oneself to a minute form.

Bran is the skin of the rice seed that is removed during milling. The combination of the two images in the final sentences indicates that an immense amount of pointless activity is invested in gaining siddhis that ultimately have little or no use.

127 The six defects

Food and drink are the *prana's*. Happiness and misery are for the mind. The trouble of growing old and dying are for the body. If one [knows the truth, one] knows these are not for the Self.

137 The three attachments

All relationships that arise constitute attachment to offspring. All the *sankalpas* constitute attachment to the world. All the sense objects enjoyed constitute attachment to wealth. These three attachments will leave if one sees the reality.

148 *Tattvas*

If one knows the truth of the indestructible reality, then the rest of the various *tattvas* cease to exist. Then why are these mentioned and discussed? If people with defective vision see the moon as many, does it become many for that reason? Is not the cool moon one only?

159 The *mahavakya*

In the three words 'That you are' 'That' refers to *Brahman*, 'you' refers to *jiva*, the word 'are' refers to the union of *Brahman* and *jiva*, achieved through casting off the limitation, the body.

165 The difference between the *jiva* and the Iswara

In the body there are two, a knower and a witness, known as *jiva* and Iswara. The differences that can be ascribed as base and excellent qualities exist through limitations, but their *swarupa* is identical.

The implication of the original Tamil, which is hard to convey in a literal translation, is that once the jiva comes into existence with a limited outlook, the opposite and complementary entity, Iswara, comes into existence with no limitation on it.

167 Iswara

He is the cause of everything and the Lord of everything. He is the source, sustainer and destroyer of everything. He is none of these many things, but they cannot exist apart from him. He pervades within and without, and knows all.

168 *Jiva* and the Iswara are not different

If the limitations are destroyed, the *jiva* and Iswara are identical. Their limitations of base and excellent are only an appearance. It is like seeing the space within a pot and unlimited space as different. But look, consciousness is one only.

169 Cause of *maya*

If one seeks to know the fundamental cause of *maya*, which is not known [directly], it will be impossible to know it through consciousness. If you can know and tell me the cause of darkness with the help of a lamp, then you can know the cause of ignorance through consciousness.

171 The world

This world, a delusory dream, consisting of infinite differences, is seen as different from oneself, and as if real [in the sleep of *maya*]. When the sleep of *maya* ends, how can this world, which is destroyed in *jnana*, come into existence? Can there be dreaming after one wakes up from sleep?

172 The world

Despite fire existing within wood, it rots on earth, becoming a prey to white ants. This is similar to what happens in the absence of the shining of the Self. Will the miseries arising from the world exist if the Self, which is *jnana*, shines through [the grace of the] *Sadguru*? If fire is generated in wood, can the wood exist?

The fire within the wood denotes the hidden power of the Self within each being. The 'shining of the Self', channelled through the form of the Sadguru, brings out the latent fire within the wood.

173 The primacy of *jnana*

If the three paths *charya*, *kriya* and *yoga* do not become steps towards *jnana*, then they will become inferior states of liberation and be destroyed. To merge with the liberation that destroys identification with the body, there is no way other than the eye of *jnana*.

The practices of charya, kriya and yoga are part of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Kriya is worshipping Siva inwardly and outwardly, charya is

rendering service in a temple and worshipping there, and yoga denotes inward meditation on Siva.

174 The characteristic of *jnana*

Jnana is to know consciousness without the knowing that takes the form of knower, knowing and object of knowledge. This occurs when knowledge of the mind and the senses, which know through the various sense organs, have all subsided.

175 The greatness of *jnana*

The rare *Vedas* position karma, which tosses one about, at the bottom. But they wear *jnana* on their heads without any contradiction and confusion. Only they know the greatness of *jnana*. The rest do not.

176 *Jnana puja*

To bathe in the tears of bliss, to worship strewing beautiful flowers of love, offering oneself as consecrated food, to view all the *chit* and *jada* appearing before one as *Sivam* – this is the *puja* to Siva.

178 The power of *jnana*

Do all the innumerable *punyas* and *papas* that attach to one exist when the fire of *jnana* is kindled? Is there anything that remains unburnt along with ignorance? When a forest is caught in a fire, does any tender tree survive?

179 Slipping from *yoga*

If a *jnana sadhaka* happens to die midway [through his *sadhana*] without merging with the reality through *yoga*, he will not enter the evil worlds but will gain and experience all the fruits attained by those who have performed virtuous sacrifices. Thereafter, he will be born again and attain liberation through *yoga*.

181 The means for liberation

Karma performed without desiring its fruits, listening to [expositions of] *jnana* scriptures, *shanti*, and renunciation are the means to attain a Guru. He is the means to gain the hard-to-attain liberation.

182 The Guru's characteristic

O Lord! I am not any of those things beginning with the body, which is a prison, and ending with mind. The *Vedas* declared 'You are That!' But if you ask, 'What am I?', the Guru will declare, 'You are this. See!'

183 The greatness of the Guru

God remains in the heart concealing himself, but the Guru, dispelling ignorance, reveals God. Tell me, who is the liberal benefactor? Is it He who bears the formless form, or he who took the form of the Guru, so that that formless form might be seen?

184 Incompetent gurus

The office of guru performed by those who do not have knowledge of reality is like the following: achieving pregnancy through intercourse in a dream, trying to make a cloth from the hair of a sea-turtle, trying to light a fire with a firefly, trying to make a bow with the horn of a hare, and obtaining milk from a bull.

185 The mature disciple

He who has realised in his mind the impermanence of the body, he who feels like one caught in a raging fire, or like the frog in the mouth of an angry cobra – his heart is like the prey caught in the tiger's clasp.

186 The immature disciple

They do not have *tapas*, purity, truth and compassion. They do not worship the feet of the Guru. They do not believe in reality. They are eager to make money. Their thoughts are on enjoyments. It is not proper to bestow grace on these.

187 The immature disciple

The teaching which for some leads to clear attainment will for some others lead to perverse understanding. Though pure water is all the same, when the cow consumes it, she yields milk, but when the cobra consumes it, it yields poison. ▲

ASHRAM CALENDAR 2012

Bhagavan's 132nd Jayanthi	Monday	9th January
Pongal	Sunday	15th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Tuesday	7th February
Maha Sivaratri	Monday	20th February
Sundaram Iyer Day	Monday	12th March
Sri Vidya Haven	Friday	16th March
Telugu New Year Day	Friday	23rd March
Sri Rama Navami	Saturday	31st March
Tamil New Year Day	Friday	13th April
Sri Bhagavan's 62nd Aradhana	Wednesday	18th April
Maha Puja	Wednesday	13th June
Cow Lakshmi Day	Saturday	30th June
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Saturday	3rd July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Saturday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Tuesday	16th October
Saraswati Puja	Tuesday	23rd October
Vijayadasami	Wednesday	24th October
Deepavali	Tuesday	13th November
Karthigai Festival Commences	Sunday	18th November
Karthigai Deepam	Tuesday	27th November
Sri Bhagavan's 133rd Jayanti	Saturday	29th December



D. Thyagarajan

Reminiscences of a Parsi Devotee

BERZIN M. LAHEVALA

Professor Laxmi Narain, the editor of Sri Ramana Jyothi, the monthly journal of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, generously passed on the following article which are excerpts from an autobiography A Life of Endless Love-Grace, Marvellous Miracles published in 2003 by Berzin M. Lahevala (1947-2008).

I was born into a highly educated, middle class Parsi family. My father was an eminent solicitor. I was spiritually inclined since my childhood. Even from my school days I was instinctively attracted to the deep, hidden mysteries of life and death, the secret side of the man's psyche. I had many clairvoyant experiences, both in the waking as well as dream states. Books like *Autobiography of a Yogi* and *A Search in Secret India* fired my imagination, thrilled me through and through, and filled my heart with overpowering inspiration. The turning point in my spiritual studies came when I read *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*.

This book awakened me completely and made me realise the truth that life in this world is just a passing show; everything is so transient and fleeting. I began to feel that the real purpose of life is, in the words of the Delphic Oracle, to 'Know Thyself'. I also remembered the words of Jesus Christ, 'Know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free'.

I was seriously handicapped by my Parsi background when I started following the ancient time-honoured path of Hindu mysticism. My father was fully convinced that his only son was going the wrong way, and was throwing away his life and a promising career. He was seriously concerned about my sanity because I behaved in a way completely different from that of any young man of my age. My suffering at his hands was the springboard which made me dive deeper and faster into the ocean of spirituality.

In 1969, the single most important event in my life occurred. In *The Indian Express* I came across an article on Sri Ramana Maharshi. My eyes were just glued to His picture and were quite simply caught by His captivating gaze. I just could not stop looking at His serene, blissful face. And as I kept looking into His deep, fathomless eyes, tears started streaming down my cheeks, wave after wave of ecstasy drowned me, my hair stood on end and I was simply overwhelmed. I had never experienced anything like that in my life. Years later I was to find out that some other persons also had similar experience. After this dramatic, novel and unprecedented experience via the newspaper photo, I was no more the same. Like a salt-doll fallen into the sea, the flood of tears had melted me away into the endless ocean of His Being. I was transformed. Now Bhagavan Ramana was the sole sun in my spiritual sky.

One blessed day, in Chetana Book Store, Bombay, I found *Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana* by Mrs. Taleyarkhan. She was from an aristocratic, high-society Parsi family, who had abandoned her husband, son, family and a posh way of life to become a spiritual seeker. She had met many saints and sages but after visiting Ramanashram and staying with Bhagavan, she realised His greatness and then never left Him. I wrote to her about the wonderfully inspiring effect her book had on me. She was overjoyed to read my letters and insisted

that I should come and stay with her while she was still alive. It was through her that Sri Ramana drew me to His Ashram, where I first reached in October, 1975.

When I stepped into the Ashram, it was a novel experience for me. Having lived all my life in the hustle and bustle of a noisy, overcrowded city, the sudden peace and quiet, the open grounds amidst the tranquil surroundings, the highly charged spiritual atmosphere, all contributed to a breathtaking experience for me. It seemed as if I was in another world altogether. Sadly enough, my one-week stay in this paradise sped by with lightening speed and soon I was back in the miserable atmosphere of my Bombay home.

My father's ceaseless persecution year in and year out, gave me a nervous breakdown. I felt highly depressed, suffocated and helpless. Little did I know that this seeming misfortune was perfectly planned by Sri Ramana and that it was to signal the start of the most important phase of my life. I said to myself, why live in misery at home when there was a paradise waiting for you. In 1980, five years after my first visit, the hour had struck for me to return to where I belonged. As my feet tread the sacred soil of Ramanashram I was delirious with joy and exaltation. I experienced an overwhelming sense of freedom like a captive parrot newly escaped from his cage. Indeed I felt as much at home as a fish in water. I was a love-mad lover intensely in love with my beloved Ramana and I did not want my love to diminish even one bit. I devised a routine in which I would stay at my Beloved's place for three or four weeks and then spend one or two weeks in Bombay. This routine went on for all the seven years that I lived at the Ashram and I must have made a minimum of hundred trips by train and bus between Tiruvannamalai and Bombay. Every time I left the Ashram I strongly felt that I was going away from home and I used to feel sad. And every time I returned I unmistakably felt that I had returned home and my heart was filled with joy to be back home once again.

After becoming an inmate of the Ashram, I found that it was an international spiritual centre. I met people of all ages from countries like USA, UK, France, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Israel, Argentina, Italy, Canada, Australia and many more. I could feel

that the Ashram was supercharged with an invisible and indefinable spiritual power which draws seekers as irresistibly as a candle-flame draws moths. Bhagavan Ramana's bodily absence does not diminish his spiritual presence in the least. His presence is the same as it was when he was in the body. It is all-pervasive; every inch of the Ashram is saturated with it. But it is especially powerful at two places, namely, the Samadhi and the Old Hall. But you need to be sensitive enough to perceive this.

Sri Ramana was famed far and wide for His all-powerful silence. Seekers who came with a long list of questions never had to ask them. Sitting in His silent presence, the answers to their questions would spontaneously occur to them, or else they would simply forget their questions, or find that they were not relevant any more. Those who were drowned in some worldly trouble, grief or sorrow, would find His silence as a soothing balm which stealthily and gently healed and revitalized them. The second source which contributes to the potent spiritual power pervading the Ashram is the close proximity of Arunachala – the Holy Hill. Arunachala and Sri Ramana are inseparable and inextricably linked together. In fact, Sri Ramana is considered as the human embodiment of Arunachala, the walking-talking form of the Holy Hill.

I was really impressed by the seriousness, sincerity and wholehearted dedication of the large number of foreign devotees at that time who flocked the Ashram every winter. Some had made much sacrifice to visit the Ashram. A young couple from Italy told me that they had to sell their flower shop to raise the funds for the trip.

As many foreign visitors to the Ashram told me, Sri Ramana's photo was a fantastic pulling power for them. The most common experience was the one in which they were in a book-shop or library when they were irresistibly captivated by His picture on the cover of a book.

One German girl was drawn to the Ashram after seeing Bhagavan's framed photo in her friend's house. After her first visit she was a regular visitor to the Ashram every winter. She was warm, friendly and extrovert. Once she went for *pradakshina* with me at night. I told her not to go alone at night. One day while talking to me

inside the Ashram she narrated a stunning miracle. She said, "Last night I was fast asleep but was suddenly awakened at 4 a.m. and felt a strong compulsion to go for *pradakshina*. After walking a mile or so when I saw some men ahead of me, I started feeling very afraid. As soon as I felt fear, out of nowhere, a *sadhu* appeared and started walking in front of me. Now all fear left me and I started following in his footsteps. He was with me until the light of dawn appeared, and I felt confident that I could be alone now. Then, right in front of my eyes, the figure of *sadhu* disappeared into the Holy Hill." She added, "You are the only person to whom I have told this. No one else is going to understand or believe me."

A fortunate few even had a vision of Sri Ramana in flesh and blood. An Australian lady at the Ashram told me the following story. She said that she was living in a remote part of the country. One evening while relaxing in an easy-chair in the porch of her house, an old man with a short silvery beard and hair appeared in front of her. He was brown-skinned, clad only in a loin-cloth. He was standing with the support of a staff. After a minute or two the figure abruptly disappeared. She was completely puzzled by the strange incident. The mystery got resolved a few days later when her friend gave her a book to read. As she turned over the title page she was astonished to see a photo which was the same figure which she had seen in flesh and blood a few days ago.

When I put my usual question to an American – 'What made you come here?' he gave me the following amazing account: "I was involved in a severe car crash and was rushed to hospital. After weeks of hospitalization, I got disgusted with life and wanted to die. As I was thinking like this, suddenly I saw a man standing beside my bed. He looked like an Indian and was clad only in a loin-cloth. His face was shining with an unearthly light. He gave me a long compassionate look and softly said, 'No, it's still not the time for you to leave the world, I will show a reason for living.' The next moment he vanished. I could not make head or tail of the extraordinary vision, but my condition improved dramatically after the old man's visit. A week before my discharge, a friend gave me a book to read. As

I unwrapped it my breath simply stopped in shock to find the same smiling, compassionate face of the old man on the cover page. Then I read the book with great interest and anticipation. After that it was but natural that I couldn't keep away and had to come here."

My way of life at the Ashram was quite unusual. My spontaneous spiritual absorption was intense and all-consuming. My food intake diminished and hours of sleep lessened. Many times, for most of the night I was sitting on my bed absorbed in myself. I uttered hardly a few words for the whole day. The austere way of life reduced my body to almost a skeleton. The Ashramites thought I was doing severe *tapas*. But the truth was that I was not doing anything out of my own will and everything was happening spontaneously and automatically.

Postscript

Professor Laxmi Narain:

Many captivating details of Lahevala's seven year's almost continuous stay at the Ashram are contained in his 230-page autobiography. As stated by him, after his father's demise in 1983, his mother was living a lonely and hard life. In 1988, when he suddenly and strongly felt that his stay at the Ashram should end, and felt convinced that by Bhagavan's grace the worldly life would not distract him from his path, he left the Ashram to be with his mother. In Bombay he led a life full of devotion to Bhagavan and of service to others. ▲

Food and Values

SHARADA BHANU

The rate of food inflation in India was almost 20% in June 2010. While we no doubt rejoice that the rate has fallen to around 12% in November 2011, prices, of course, have not. Today a kilo of raw rice in a Chennai shop would cost around Rs.40, a small bunch of spinach Rs.10, a kilo of moong dal, approximately, Rs.75. One notes that Rs.5 was once enough to purchase Bhagavan's devoted attendant Kunjuswami the single meal every day on which he lived for a month. Cost is notoriously easier to determine than value. What was the value of the meal of gathered greens and scanty, begged rice that Keeraipatti served to Bhagavan on the hillside of Arunachala?

So many of the most endearing and memorable anecdotes from Bhagavan's life revolve around food. One remembers the cold soaked rice he received with a piece of pickle, when he first arrived at Tiruvannamalai – the first gift from Arunachala; or the time Bhagavan tried to fast and ended up overfed by loving devotees who would not take 'No.' This writer loves the moment when he read the

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mind of Muruganar's wife – everyone was in deep meditation but her heart was very humanly dwelling on a tumbler of coffee. Bhagavan mischievously laughed at her but also displayed his gentle grace – at the next moment, the coffee arrived.

Bhagavan's compositions also reflect this focus; the 'Marital Garland of Letters,' as is well known, was composed in order that devotees could ask for food. The Appalam song uses allegory to persuade his mother to make those 'appalams' that will put an end to desire. The values that he silently taught were often conveyed through food.

Most accounts of Bhagavan mention his scrupulous sharing of food with all and his indignant refusal of any extra helping or special treatment. It is recorded that he ceased to drink coffee because late comers received a more watery cup and tried to share even his medicines with all, rather than appropriate expensive edibles to his exclusive use. Disciples attest that he frequently preferred simple, even badly cooked food, offered with love to delicacies which others desired. As he ate with intense relish the coarse, cold dosas brought by an old devotee, refusing the sweets others were eating, who doubts that he was tasting the love of his bhakta? How often he compassionately waited for the food from Mudaliar paati or Echammal though their contribution was no longer required and was only a small part of what would be served in the ashram!

Paradoxes abound – the delicate precision of taste which made him an infallible authority when a dish was to be prepared was in contradistinction to the complete indifference with which he mixed all items while actually consuming food. One thinks of the culinary skill and imagination he showed in combining greens into a tasty upuma and his famed refusal to waste any edible substance, as seen in his cooking stone-hard eggplant stalks into a delicious curry. Preferring less to more, he considered rice, sambar and a single vegetable quite adequate, and advised a lady, who once served thirty- two dishes on his leaf, to avoid such an expense of energy and time in preparing what would make those who had nothing, needlessly envious and reflect discredit on those who consumed, for enjoying a life style inappropriate to sadhus.

One remembers that he ceased to cut vegetables after he found out that the peel had been thrown away instead of being fed to the cattle. Some of his rebukes were administered on the issue of food and sometimes must have seemed to the unfortunate sufferers in excess of what they deserved. Muruganar was once told that his uneven chopping of greens was all of a piece with the (disastrous) way he had conducted his family life! Muruganar, poet and renunciate, who had surrendered both career and wife to live at the feet of Bhagavan, brooded over the incident and then pointedly informed his guru that he should have set an example by leading a family life himself. Bhagavan laughed.

As is well known, in India, the elaborate taboos that govern the sharing of food can make the breaking of such taboos, a complex act of intimacy. A family with a sick member, sent a child to collect the water in which Bhagavan washed his hands after taking his meal, believing that consuming this water would cure illness; when Bhagavan found out, he stopped allowing anyone to take this water or eat off his used leaf plate. The erring family was miserable as they had taken away the privilege of any devotee of Ramana to secretly partake of the food the guru had tasted; an act that Ramanuja is said to have yearned to perform towards his non-Brahmin guru. Bhagavan steadily nudged devotees to show their bhakthi in mental acts of surrender or enquiry and tried to discourage their assumption that he was identical with his body, hence perhaps this ban.

Yet he could ignore taboos and give with simple generosity. One thinks of his allowing Annamalai Swami, a non-Brahmin, to cook breakfast early one morning with him, too early for any caste conscious person to notice or object. Annamalai Swami, always busy erecting buildings, never free to sit in the old hall and listen to Bhagavan's answers, infinitely prized the moments when he had Bhagavan to himself.

Or the time when he gave Suri Nagamma the rest of the piece of dry coconut that he was eating, saying it was very tasty, there was none left in the kitchen and this was her share; she had come just in time. She received it from his hands as a piece of incredible good fortune.

Sharing food is, at least easy in theory, when there is plenty. During much of Bhagavan's early life in Tiruvannamalai food was very limited. Yet what existed was shared equally between not just Ashram members or the bhaktha group but all present, beggars and animals included. Kunjuswami's reminiscences record that Bhagavan had once gone without an evening meal for a year. He broke his fast (probably out of compassion to a visitor) with half a scraped coconut and a small helping of pongal boiled into a watery gruel, so that all present could share it. The group, at that time, possessed neither sugar nor salt to flavour this fluid. The phrase in North India which captures the absolute of barren poverty is 'two dry rotis and a pinch of salt'. Bhagavan seems to have lived on less than this during periods of his life. Since the group, in the early years, lived on what visitors gave, or by begging in a different street each day (to minimise the burden to the giver), the quantity of food might have varied from scarce to nonexistent.

Bhagavan's compassion remained a constant. His was a value ethic which recognised that one can live conserving and sharing all scarce resources and taking only the minimum that one needs, from an earth that is alive and not different from one's own Self. He received the gift of food and gave the endless gift of His Grace; his darshan, his teaching through silence, example, writing and speech and his compassionate love and protection.

The incident on which the following poem is based also occurs in the reminiscences of Kunjuswami. It seemed attractive in that it stemmed as so many others, from food. Bhagavan valued food, wasted nothing on his plate and gave loving care (one that he indeed bestowed on all his efforts) to its preparation. Many have admired his even chopping of vegetables. The cooks who made Aviyal the lazy way, without grinding the masalas, certainly did not escape correction and in this instance, it was completely in character for him to ignore his own discomfort and continue grinding chutney.

Not without its comedy, at deeper levels, the incident displayed Bhagavan's mode of silent instruction; it demonstrated to the disciple that however difficult the lesson Bhagavan was teaching, he needed

to stay the course and learn, rather than evade and escape; indeed he could go nowhere, bound as he was in Bhagavan's loving care.

Most important of all, as with so many of Bhagavan's rebukes, his reprimand to Kunjuswami seems to be not merely an attempt to check the disciple from ruling the Master, but to root out the ego's tendency to find a resting place in propositions such as "I am Bhagavan's attender and (irrespective of his wishes) I need to protect him." Kunjuswami comments that the whole was a drama, a play generated by Bhagavan. Perhaps Ramana enacted the steps of distance and nearness, feigned anger and real love, because he had a secret purpose, often much larger than the immediate one that the disciple could see. ▲

Egomania

Alan Jacobs

It would be good if one could write a perfect verse
Of Truth; a poem which expresses the reverse
Of falsity and delusion. Man is trapped in illusion.
Vast populations dwell in chronic confusion,
Because of a dire disease called egomania,
Stretching from Greenland right down to Australia.
Symptoms of egomania obscure Real Being,
The Knowledge of True Self without really feeling,
The pure bliss of consciousness awareness grace;
Realising 'That' as one's own original face,
Not the one we see in the silvered looking glass,
That idolatry is one through which we must pass.
The way to achieve this more blessed sacred state,
Is by Self Enquiry, before it is too late.
We enquire within through attention 'Who Am I?',
And persist resolutely before we die.
Then the perfect Poem is unveiled, to be you,
Ones own pure loving Self.'That' alone is really True!



Sri Gopalakrishnan

The Quest

Chapter Ten

Self-realisation and the Guru

LUCIA OSBORNE

When someone asked Bhagavan what the greatest miracle in this world is, He replied that it was the human body. “It is insentient like a log of wood and yet behaves as if it was an individual being. It is the Self which illumines it and gives it some intelligence and understanding but the light is mixed with the *tamasic* propensities of the body. We only function by the Light of the Self mixed with darkness. Like electric bulbs in various stages of cleanliness and of different voltage which come to life (light) when the electric current passes through them. The current is the same in all. Christ-Brahman, the Self in one’s heart.”

On another occasion He said: “Everything is unreal, like dream objects. A *jnani*’s job is to awaken the ignorant to the fact that what

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

they see and feel is unreal and the Reality is their own Being. This can be compared to an elephant dreaming of a lion and suddenly waking up and finding that the lion is unreal and that it alone is real. The elephant is the *jiva* or individual, the dream is the unreal world and the lion the *jnani* or guru. The guru is the link between the unreal and the Real.”

“Is it not ignorance to know everything else without knowing the Self which is the Source of knowledge?

“What is neither knowledge nor ignorance is (real) knowledge. Knowledge of (objects) cannot be knowledge. The self which shines without there being anything else to know or be known is knowledge. Know that it is not nothingness.

“If the first person exists the second or third person will also exist. If the Reality of the first person is enquired into and the first person (ego) ceases to exist the second and third person will also cease to exist and our real State will shine as One.

“Attaching itself to a form (that is the body) this formless ghost of an ego comes into existence. Attaching itself to a form it endures. Attaching itself to a form it feeds (experiences) and grows. On relinquishing one form it attaches itself to another. But when sought after it takes to flight. This know.

“If the ego is, everything else is too. If the ego is not, nothing else is. Indeed the ego is everything. Therefore the enquiry what it is really means giving up everything.”

“We speak of a past and a future only with reference to the present. The past in its time was called present and the future when it comes will also be called present. Hence what exists at any one time is only the present. To seek to know the past and the future without knowing the real nature of the present is to seek to count without the unit (One).

“Is there time and space apart from us? If we regard ourselves as the body, we will be bound by space and time. But are we the body? We are the same now, then and always.... We alone exist who are beyond time and space.”¹

¹ *Ulladu Narpadu*, Forty Verses on Reality.

Over the years the same questions and doubts kept on cropping up and Bhagavan kept on explaining again and again tirelessly, patiently from various angles adapted to the level of understanding of the questioner. Most often asked was the question how to practice the *vichara* or still the mind.

Some devotees found it difficult to believe that we are unreal, dreaming ourselves and the world. Bhagavan explained: “Man identified himself with the body which is insentient. A spurious ‘I’ arises between pure Consciousness and the insentient body and it imagines itself to be limited to the body. Seek this and it will vanish like a phantom. The phantom is the ego or mind or individuality.” The whole *sadhana* consists in the illusory limited self — the individuality — finding out that it never ceased to be the Self.

On another occasion Bhagavan said: “Everything is unreal, like dream objects. A *jnani*’s job is to awaken the ignorant to the fact that what they see and feel is unreal and the Reality is their own Being.” Here He repeated the comparison to elephant dreaming of a lion and suddenly waking up and finding that the lion is unreal and that it alone is real.

“By and by comes the great awakening, and then we find out that this life is really a great dream. Fools think they are awake now and flatter themselves they know if they are really princes or peasants. Confucius and you are both dreams, and I who say you are dreams, I am but a dream myself.”²

There is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself is the view of Einstein. In other words, the world is a reflection of the ‘beyond’ and to a discerning mind symbols become evident. For instance, diamond and coal both consist of the same chemical substance carbon and point to the fundamental unity of all substances and their inherent faculty of transformation as pointed out in *The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* by Lama Anagarika Govinda. It displays all colours but a pure diamond is colourless itself. This symbolises the transcendental state of emptiness

² Chuang Tsu.

or the void and the relation between the highest and the ordinary state of consciousness. To put it simply, a cup or a room both consisting of space encircled by matter, porcelain or bricks. The emptiness or void in the cup or room which gives itself to so many uses, is what is of importance. The matter encircling the space serves a purpose.

Both point to a profound parallelism between the material and the immaterial world. Emptiness — Space and galaxies.

The faculty of transformation as shown in coal and diamond is universal. It applies to matter as well as to living organisms and to the psychic forces inherent in both. What about food? Whatever we eat turns into the body and affects the mind. People in South India, for instance, are predominantly vegetarian and of a gentler disposition than those in North India who are known to be fighters and non-vegetarian. It reminds one of Walter de la Mare's quaint little poem:

It is an odd thing
As odd as can be
That whatever Miss T eats
Turns into Miss T

Buddha spoke of the void containing millions of universes, a void which is no void or the All-Source or more than anything one could say or imagine. It is not augmented by the appearance of worlds nor diminished by their disappearance. Like a screen which remains unchanged whether pictures appear or disappear on it. We are caught up in the pictures. Spiritual Reality is the absence of all particularised relative realities, all particularised forms of knowledge or concepts.

Ramana Maharshi: "Realisation is only removal of obstacles to the recognition of the eternal, immanent Reality. Reality is."

"If Reality did not exist, could there be any knowledge of existence? Free from all thoughts, Reality abides in the Heart, the Source of all thought. It is therefore called the Heart. How then is one to contemplate it? To be as it is in the Heart (to be it) is Its contemplation."³

"To know the Self is to be the Self. When one's true nature is known, then there is Being without beginning and end; it is unbroken Awareness-Bliss."

The German mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart said: "In the case of God being and knowing are identical."

The Dutch mystic Ruysbroek wrote: "To know It we must be It beyond the mind and above our created being; in that eternal Point where all our lines begin and end, that Point where they lose their name and all distinction and become one with the Point itself."

St. John of the Cross speaks of the dark night of the soul which sets the house of flesh at rest and is that of the Spirit where all forms of vision and intelligence are absent or in emptiness. He teaches that the light of God shines in an emptiness where there is no subject to receive it. "To enter the way is to leave the way for the way itself is emptiness."

Zen enlightenment according to Thomas Merton is a full alert superconscious act of being which transcends time and space. It is a direct revelation of one's original nature. And this implies the absence of all conceptual thoughts or media so that one arrives at Mind by having no mind (*wu h'sin*. *wu*-without; *h'sin*-mind, heart. That is, stilling it), in fact by being Mind instead of having it. True identity is found not in separation from all that is but in oneness with all that is.

For Hui Neng all life was Zen. He apprehends the unity of Being in a simple direct intuition. It is not found by turning away from life to become absorbed in meditation. "Zen is the very awareness of life living itself in us." Bhagavan is not known to have encouraged young people to renounce the world but to practise *sadhana* while performing the duties of life which fell to their lot. This cannot be repeated too often.

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

Inspired poets like Shakespeare and William Blake among others say that the visible is not the Reality at all. By merging the observer with the observed one arrives at true insight because it is not conditioned by fallible instruments (sense-perceptions, intellect etc.)

In *Vivekachudamani*, Sankara writes that those who have attained *samadhi* by merging the sense-organs, the mind, the ego from which the external universe springs in the pure consciousness of Brahman — they alone are free from the bonds and snares.

Samkhya admits of a yogic perception which is a direct intuitive knowledge. *Pratyahara* means checking the outgoing mind and gaining detachment from sense-objects. He who succeeds in this frees himself from all limitations and conditioning.

“The tortoise can draw in its legs, the seer can draw in his senses.”

The Sufi saint of the 9th Century, Abu Yazid al-Bistani said: “... In the presence of Unity there is neither command nor prohibition. All this talk and turmoil and noise and movement is outside of the veil; within the veil is silence and calm and rest.

“Do you hear how there comes a voice from the brooks of running water? But when they reach the sea they are quiet and the sea is neither augmented by their incoming nor diminished by their outgoing.”

In the *Jnaneshwari* Krishna instructed Arjuna: “Whatever leads to one’s welfare is always disagreeable to the senses. Constant practice is therefore required to subdue these senses. Removed from the disturbing influence of the senses the mind automatically starts merging in the Self resulting in supreme bliss beyond which there is nothing and which is not attainable by the senses. No worry or sorrow even as great as Mount Meru can oppress it any more. After such an experience the whole world becomes a temple of happiness....” ▲

(To be continued)

BOOK EXCERPT

Revolutionary Gandhi

PANNALAL DASGUPTA

TRANSLATED BY K.V. SUBRAHMONYAN

The following excerpt is from a recently published translation of the Bengali book Gandhi Gabeshana by Pannalal Dasgupta. He was a man of deep conviction and action who played a major role in the rural development and promotion of arts and crafts in Bengal. This excellent translation reflects the integrity of the man and his ceaseless quest for Truth. His understanding of Mahatma Gandhi’s concept and application of non-violence were revolutionary. He said that non-violence, like Truth, is ‘as old as the hills’ and he only re-discovered it, and the re-discovery continued till the end of his life. Hence he refrained from defining it and let it evolve both in his own life and in the social movement in which he was involved. It was his experience and conviction that non-violence was inseparable from Truth, though Truth was greater. It is also clear that to Gandhi non-violence, as re-discovered and practised by him, was never ever for the weak and cowardly. It was not a passive state but a deeply active force rushing out wherever violence reared its ugly head to meet it with soul-force which, he said and showed, can work miracles. It would

seem that few had practised his kind of non-violence and none on such a vast scale and for such a long period against such a might.

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Ahimsa (Non-violence)

Gandhiji said that he had an innate and natural attraction for truth from his early years, but *ahimsa* or non-violence was not an innate trait for him. It was in the pursuit of truth that he discovered non-violence. In his autobiography, he put on record the fact, that, in his younger years, he ate meat on the sly. He took to meat because his classmates told him that if he did not eat meat, he could not gain physical strength, nor would he be a match for an Englishman in a duel. However, he gave up the habit one day, not because he realised that meat-eating was wrong, but because he was ashamed that he had to do it secretly and tell lies about it. His ideas on non-violence were born later, during the most difficult crises and conflicts of his life.

What is meant by non-violence?

Gandhiji says:

“*Ahimsa* is theory, no one knows. It is as undefinable as God. But in its working we get glimpses of the Almighty in His working, amongst us and through us.” (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. V, p.307)

Gandhiji himself was unable to formulate a clear definition of nonviolence, but we may try and formulate his ideas on non-violence by letting the nature of his non-violence emerge from his work and writings. We may first essay a sketch of the actual development and practice of non-violence, and out of that, hopefully, a complete picture will emerge.

It is obvious that it will not suffice to merely define non-violence as the opposite of violence. Nor will it make sense to see it as mental force as opposed to physical force, for there is an intimate connection between these two forces. It would be unfair to brand all those involved in armed conflict as violent, for history has offered many instances of self-sacrificing people who were engaged in armed conflict. Again, it

cannot be claimed that a *satyagrahi* is free from all violence. Instances of secret violence, malice and various kinds of weaknesses, even fear, have been found in many *satyagrahis*. At any rate, Gandhiji himself had admitted this fact. We cannot therefore provide a quick and ready definition of *ahimsa* or non-violence.

If we say love is non-violence, that too will not be quite correct. For, inspired by heroic love one may engage in a war against injustice, sacrificing one's possessions, even one's own life, and yet be without any sense of enmity or hatred. We have all heard about the great and noble words and deeds of great people of the past, about their moral qualities, the loftiness of their ideals, the greatness of their love, their supreme self-sacrifices. We have heard about the compassion of the Buddha, the love and forgiveness of Jesus and so on, but we rarely take these accounts so seriously as to believe that they relate to actual happenings. Gandhiji, however, believed in them completely and wanted to find out if all those noble qualities could actually be put into practice in our time in order to save people from the terrible crisis that faces them. He started by experimenting on himself, then on his immediate surroundings and finally on the whole country and he saw for himself that all these virtues were of real practical value. That was why he could say that he had only re-discovered non-violence and had not invented it. He believed that non-violence, like truth, is as old as the hills. All that he did was to apply it on as large a scale as possible, in the form of *satyagraha*. He endeavoured to make this instrument of non-violence powerful and effective by putting it on a scientific foundation. He wrote:

“Thousands, indeed tens of thousands, depend upon their existence on a very active working of this force. Little quarrels of millions of families disappear before the exercise of this force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not and cannot take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love on the soul . . . soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history.” (*Satyagraha*, pp.10-11)

History is as if a chronicle of wars, unrest, civil wars, class wars, and similar unnatural events, and it does not care to note the natural,

peaceful periods of human life. But we cannot conclude that there is no area of peace and love in the world, in human society and in the lives of families, simply because history is reticent about man's peace and eloquent about his conflicts. On the contrary, by the sheer exercise of the power of *ahimsa*, in which there is love, self-giving, self-sacrifice and other forces of the soul, and not by the use of any weapon or violence of any kind, human beings resolve their own little quarrels every day and live in peace. Gandhiji wanted to refine this force and give a complete form to *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*.

The words *ahimsa* and *himsa* have been used to carry the meanings of the English words 'non-violence' and 'violence', respectively. I am not talking about malice, jealousy, vulgarity, etc. Our main subject of study here is the use or non-use of physical force in conflicts.

It has to be mentioned at the very outset that non-violence does not mean bypassing violence. Non-violence cannot fight against non-violence. Its fight is only against the insolence of might and against violence. Hence he alone is non-violent who is not afraid of violence, because the bravery and effectiveness of non-violence consists in the very challenge it offers to violence. That is to say, those who wished to close their eyes to any trouble, to warfare, to avoid the very sight of war, to bypass the path of the wrong-doer, were, in Gandhiji's eyes, laughable creatures. And pitiable were those who sought the path of peace and compromise and took recourse to non-violence out of fear. Gandhiji said that the nonviolence of the weak was meaningless. A mouse can never be nonviolent against a cat. In fact, a mouse can never be non-violent, for bravery, which is the essence of non-violence, is absent in it. Rather, those who are capable of violent fight can become nonviolent, not the weak and the cowardly. There is no such thing as the non-violence of the weak. And non-violence can take place and be in operation only when practised against violence.

In the woods and hermitages there is no non-violence in the sense Gandhiji meant. There is no non-violence in good relations with good people. Good relations with good people are absolutely natural, but the test of true goodness is when there is good behaviour towards bad people. The non-violent *satyagrahi's* place is where violence raises its

ugly head, where evil shows up with all its arrogance and strikes terror among people, where hypocrisy and mean conspiracy are brewing. The non-violent fighter never turns his back to the frightful form of violence under any condition. On the contrary, non-violence rushes in where violence rears its head. In Gandhiji's own words:

"Marching right into the jaws of *himsa* means (that—and) nothing else, nothing else." (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. V, p.115)

The passivity of the weak too is not non-violence. Non-violence is a tremendously active force. We shall try to substantiate these remarks in the light of Gandhiji's own words and deeds.

Those who thought that non-violence was to be used as an escape from death, those who wanted to see the country become independent but did not wish to die and who thought that Gandhiji discovered non-violence to give refuge to their opportunism and cowardice, were utterly deluded people. Equally deluded were believers in armed struggle who thought that Gandhiji feared death and discovered a soft path in order to avoid bloodshed in the country. Standing in Bombay's Azad Maidan in 1931, Gandhiji declared:

"I would not flinch from sacrificing even a million lives for India's liberty. I told so to the English people in England." (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. III, p.186)

We all know how many thousands of people sacrificed their lives in the Gandhian movement and how many hundreds of thousands of people gladly suffered oppression.

In his book *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji wrote:

"That nation is great which rests its head upon death as a pillow. Those who defy death are free from all fear."

In a speech given in Midnapore, he said:

"People committed the mistake of thinking that all that did not involve killing was non-violence. Sometimes killing is the cleanest part of violence." (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. III, p.30)

He said in 1924: "I like to die for India's freedom and would die for it, because it is a part of truth, only a free India can worship the true God."

He also said: "Man does not live but to escape death. If he does so, he is advised not to do so. Man is advised to learn to love death as

well as life, if not more so. Indeed, a hard saying, harder to act up to, one may say. Every worthy act is difficult. Ascent is always difficult. Descent is easy, and often slippery. Life becomes liveable, only to the extent death is treated as a friend, never as an enemy. To conquer life's temptations, summon death to your aid. In order to postpone death, a coward surrenders his honour, his wife, his daughter and all. A courageous man prefers death to the surrender of self-respect. When the time comes, as it conceivably can, I would not leave my advice to be referred, but it will be given in precise language. That, today, my advice might be followed only by one or none, does not detract from its value. A beginning is always made by few, even one.” (Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. VII, p.249)

This clarion call contained the thundering message of Gandhiji's non-violence of the brave, its nature, its investigation and its actual application. During his last days, Gandhiji was very deeply involved in discovering the truth in all its pristine purity. It was at that time that he fell to Godse's bullets, giving ultimate proof of the value of his words quoted above. Gandhiji's encounters with death are a very fascinating aspect of his life. It is hardly necessary to recount the innumerable fasts that he undertook putting his life in jeopardy and all the other hazardous paths that he blithely trod, for they are part of India's history. We have seen so far how the courting of death is inseparably linked with non-violence and there is not the slightest hint in it of a fear of danger or of death. Let us see how Gandhiji takes the help of his idea of God to give strength to this sense of fearlessness.

He said:

“Nations have progressed both by evolution and revolution. The one is as necessary as the other. Death, which is an eternal verity, is revolution at birth and afterwards it is slow and steady evolution. Death is as necessary for man's growth as life itself. God is the greatest revolutionist the world has ever known or will know. He sends deluges. He sends storms where a moment ago there was calm. He levels down mountains which he builds with exquisite care and infinite patience.”

Thus God becomes a revolutionary God at Gandhiji's hands. ▲

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Jnaneshwar Makes a Buffalo Recite the Vedas

NABAJI SIDDHA

Sant Nabhaji, pleased with the eagerness of the saints in listening to the story, continued further:

Next day, Jnaneshwar, taking his father along, reached the king's court. The king, pleased to meet Vithoba, humbly asked him, “O pure one, O great ascetic, what has made you leave the society and seek the asylum of solitude in a dense forest? Please enlighten us with your wise words.”

Vithoba replied, “O noble king! O valorous and auspicious leader of citizens! O benevolent king who rules the country without tyrannical tendency!

A country needs citizens; the citizens need a king.

A king's life should exemplify good conduct; good conduct is sustained by self-examination.

Self-examination takes place in a peaceful mind; peace prevails where Dharma is protected.

Dharma draws its strength from saints; saints take refuge only in God.

Lord adores the saints; equal vision is a saint's hallmark.

Equanimity is necessary to be fixed in the Self. ...

Scriptures are necessary as pointers to Sakshatkar... .

Dispassion is necessary for sadhana; renunciation (formal) is necessary for detachment from the world.

One-pointedness is necessary for absorption.

Tapas is necessary for absorption.

Solitude is necessary for tapas.

Therefore, O King, I had to seek the forest to engage in ascetic practices."

The king fell prostrate at his feet and said contritely, "O Rising Sun that dispels the darkness of ignorance, I beg your forgiveness for the hardships that you and your family had to undergo through the expulsion of your family by Brahmins which took place without my knowledge. Being the king, I have to accept the sin of this grave offence."

However, Vithoba poured his blessings on him. The king instructed the minister to accompany Vithoba's family to Paithanapuram. He also sent a letter to the Acharya of Paithanapuram asking him to absolve Vithoba's family and issue a certificate of eligibility to return to the Brahmin-fold.

The Acharya had already been apprised of the subject by the Brahmins of Alankavati. He called the assembly of Brahmin scholars and said, "Have you ever heard of such a disgraceful thing? We have been asked to honour this man, who having adopted Sannyas and taken food in strangers' homes, returned to the householder's life. In addition, we also have to honour the brats whom he begot after resuming householder's life and who assaulted the Brahmins. Now, we have to issue a certificate absolving them of all these transgressions and accept them on par with Brahmins. What an outrageous request! Is it possible to change the skin colour of a black dog or of an elephant into white? Accepting such a person into our fold and legalizing his status is like recognizing a prostitute as a chaste woman and according her appropriate honours."

The Acharya tore up the letter from the king and turning to the minister, he said, "Tell the king that it is not possible to endorse Vithoba's return to the fold of Brahmins in this birth. The king may help him to attain this status in his next birth." The minister, realizing the futility of attempting to change the ways of society, left for Alankavati.

Then Jnaneshwar initiated a dialogue with the Acharya, apprising him of Vithoba's aspiration for Realization which had culminated in Sannyas and the circumstances which had brought him back to the household in obedience to his Guru's command. He added, "Under these conditions, wise people will not pass such strictures."

Acharya burst out in anger, "O rascal, how dare you preach to me? You speak as if you know who is wise. Brats like you will never move forward to a life of dignity."

Jnaneshwar countered, "You are mad with pride and blinded by ignorance. You don't have the power of austerity and self-control. You supplicate before other castes like beggars and collect your wealth. Sins will pursue us."

At this juncture, learning the names of all the children, the Brahmins sneered at them, "Ah, having been born to a renegade Sannyasi, you have been given remarkable names. It is like tying the broom with a silk thread; or addressing the beggar as My Lord; or calling a deceitful man a public worker; or calling a greedy fellow a Yati; or treating an immoral widow like a chaste woman; or considering a slanderer of the Guru as supreme disciple." Passing such disparaging remarks and mocking them, the Brahmins were having a good time at the cost of Vithoba and his children.

Jnaneshwar said with great dignity, "O Brahmins, by barking at the mountain, only the dog becomes weary; it does not affect the mountain in the least. Those who slander the noble souls cause their own downfall. How can it affect the noble men? Does God come to any harm if agnostics vilify Him? Your ignoble conduct poking fun at us is a disgrace on you. It causes not any harm to us."

The Brahmins, jumping with fury, screamed for retribution. Nivritti, intending to bring peace to the situation, pleaded with them,

“O Brahmins, we only tried to make you understand our plight. You may not like to issue a letter of absolution, but you can at least refrain from humiliating us. O noble souls! Veda Vyasa, Valmiki and Viswamitra, though not Brahmins by birth, became exalted souls and came to be worshipped by high-born people owing to the power of their austerities. Then by what yardstick has our father, who sought Sannyas Ashram only for attaining the highest goal of life, been made an outcaste?”

Brahmins said in one voice, “You are quoting these examples out of context to strengthen your case. There is no use in your repeating the same story. We cannot condone your father’s lapses.”

Nivritti queried, “Is there any proof in the scriptures condemning a Brahmin Sannyasi as an outcaste?”

“Of course, scriptures do not applaud a Sannyasi if he is given to taking food in the house of those who are not Brahmins. Our forefathers would certainly declare such Sannyasis as outcastes,” asserted the Brahmins.

Jnaneshwar, pointing to a buffalo passing by carrying water vessels on its back, said, “You are obstinate like this buffalo. Had you really studied the scriptures, you would have known the teachings found therein. You, ignorant fools, are not fit to even argue with this buffalo. Then how can you stand up against Nivrittidev? Our time would have been more usefully spent if we had engaged in discussing scriptures with this buffalo than breaking our heads against dunces like you.”

Brahmins retorted, “Indeed, you have found the right company for yourself. Someone lesser than a buffalo only would choose to indulge in a debate with a buffalo!”

“Even this buffalo has better brains than you have. If you have even one thousandth of the intelligence of this buffalo, you will be highly honoured,” was Jnaneshwar’s rejoinder.

One of the Brahmins screamed, “O scoundrel! What kind of intelligence has this buffalo? If you claim that it has any brains at all, then prove it to me. If not, I will forthwith put an end to your existence on this earth.”

Jnaneshwar assured him, “I will show its worth to you right now.”

Patting gently the head of the buffalo, he addressed it, “Will you please enlighten us whether one becomes Brahmin by birth or by austerities or by attainment of the Self? Or by performing Karmas? Let words of truth emanate from your mouth!”

Immediately, the buffalo started reciting the four Vedas, quoting examples in clear tones: “A Sudra is known by his birth; a twice-born is known by his action, Karma; a Vipra is known by his knowledge of the Vedas; a Brahmin is known by his abidance in Brahman.”

It ended thus: “Narada, born to a maid servant, became a Brahmin by virtue of his Tapas; Vasishta, born to Urvasi, the celestial nymph, became a Brahmin by virtue of his Tapas; Sanaka and his brothers, born to Sunaki, became Brahmins by virtue of their Tapas.”

Thus citing these passages, the buffalo upheld the qualifications for being a Brahmin. Amazed by this miraculous event and also frightened by the display of Jnaneshwar’s power, all the Brahmins scampered away.

The Acharya, wonder-struck at these developments, prostrated at the feet of Jnaneshwar, Nivritti, Vithoba and the others and, apologizing to them, said in a humble voice, “What the buffalo proclaimed is indeed the truth found in the scriptures. Those who deny this will be ill-fated. Ignorant of your greatness, I have incurred your displeasure. Forgiving my lapse, accept me as your own.”

Then the Acharya took them home and extending a warm and grand hospitality, made them sit for the feast along with Brahmins who had developed similar respect and love for them. But the detractors’ minds were set on slandering and embarrassing the Acharya as well as those whom they considered now as outcaste, by virtue of keeping Vithoba’s company.

Meanwhile, the death anniversary of Acharya’s father approached for which he invited the Brahmins to partake of the ritual feast hosted in honour of the ancestor. As was expected, the Brahmins ridiculed the Acharya, “Deluded by the supernatural powers that the boys flaunted, you have accepted them in your fold; thereby you have lost your caste. We cannot participate in any of the ceremonies in your house.”

Noticing the gloom on the Acharya's face, Nivriddhi enquired about the cause of his depression. The Acharya revealed his plight and said that it was indeed difficult to change the bigoted outlook of society.

Nivriddhi comforted him saying, "He who has noble character alone is high-born; the rest of the society belongs to the menial caste. What is the benefit of inviting such lowly people to the feast for such ceremonies? On the contrary, you will be incurring sin."

The Acharya replied, "As long as we live in society, we have to act in accordance with its decrees; if not, we should renounce and retire to the forest. Caught in the middle, one has to bear with the ridicule of the society."

Nivriddhi replied in sorrowful tones, "When we could not make them see good sense even through a buffalo, what other course is left for us? You also have been thrown out of the caste because of your association with unfortunate people like us."

Acharya said, "Though we who are spiritually inclined need not pay attention to these Brahmins, the food-offering to the *manes* cannot be partaken by anyone other than Brahmins. If we do not comply with this edict set out in the Karma Kanda of scriptures and propitiate our ancestors, the performer of the ceremony and his family will be doomed to hell."

Jnaneshwar interjected, "The food meant for the *manes* should be eaten by the deities of the *manes* and not the Brahmins."

"But we don't have such powers to summon the deities from the world of *manes*," was the Acharya's rueful reply.

Jnaneshwar assured him, "To relieve you of your depression, I will bid the gods of the *manes* to appear at this anniversary feast."

He called out in a loud voice, "O gods of the *manes*, please be kind enough to appear at this feast and partake of the offering and delight the heart of the Acharya. By doing so, you will impart good sense to these thickheaded Brahmins."

Instantaneously, in the presence of the wonder-struck village folk, a number of gods, descending from the skies in their aerial cars and entering the Acharya's house, took their seats in front of the leaves placed for the *manes* and partook of the food offering. The surprised

onlookers, overcoming their envy and enmity, entered the Acharya's abode and prostrated before the gods, Acharya, Nivriddhi, Jnaneshwar and others. They cried penitently and adored them as the very embodiments of the Lord. Overcome by great joy, the Acharya fell prostrate at the feet of Jnaneshwar and, with his eyes wet with tears of joy, sang his praises.

The other Brahmins who had harassed them came forward and humbled themselves before Jnaneshwar and said, "O Lord, to err is the nature of lowly people. You are all-merciful. Take pity on us and forgive our incorrigible and ignorant behaviour. Rooting out our egoism, give us refuge and make us Your servants."

The gracious Lord forgiving them, allowed them also to participate in the feast. Vithoba, Jnaneshwar and others also ate the offering, making the Acharya thrice blessed.

The king and citizens of Paithanapuram were very thrilled to have the company of Vithoba's family. They adored them and did all honours due to them. After spending some blissful days in Paithanapuram, Vithoba's family left for Alankavati. The people of the town accompanied them all the way and happily spent a few days with Sidhopant and others. The king of Alankavati was pleased with their return. Though they were young, the king was aware of their greatness and wisdom and spent a great deal of his time in their company. Jnaneshwar and his brothers and sister carried on their holy sport, formulating a fusion of Bhakti and Jnana, thus establishing Dharma on the earth. ▲

TRANSLATION

Arunachala Purana

Chapter Three

The Holy Avatar — Parvati Devi

SAIVA ELLAPPA NAVALAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

“[Indra’s] *vajra* has snapped off; the edge of Isanya’s axe is blunted; Yama’s trident is bent, and the weapons of all you others are broken; even the crowns which, as gods, should adorn your heads are missing. Tell me, what is ailing you?” he asked. The King of the gods replied, “It is the *asura* Tarakan who has brought about our ruin.” (208)

Then lotus-dwelling Brahma said, “Could his might be overcome by Yama? By Agni or Vayu? By Vishnu, myself or you? Only Murugan, as the son of Him whose throat bears the poison *halahala*, and of Parvati, the daughter of the Himalaya Mountain, might vanquish him. He it is who will free you entirely from your servitude. (209)

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has recently published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacakar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

அருணாசலேஸ்வரர்.
Arunachaleswarar and Apitakuchambal

See to it swiftly that the Lord, who is now seated in yogic contemplation, ties the marriage thread about Lady Uma's neck," said Brahma, dismissing them from his presence. Returning to the heavenly realm, the thoughts of the gods turned to Matanan.¹ Whereupon Mara² appeared, mounted upon, as his chariot, the gentle, southerly breeze which dispels sorrow, and spoke as follows: (210)

"Whose *tapas* is to be spoiled? Where are the maidens I am to ensnare in delusion? What affliction is the cause of your dismay? What is the reason for your summoning me?" he said. Drawing him close and embracing him, the King of the gods with a look of grace, clarified the matter, saying, "We have called you, desiring that you should disturb the *tapas* of Lord Siva himself!" (211)

Even as Indra, he dwells in heaven, spoke, Kama, angry and fearful, replied, "Siva is not a woman, nor an androgyne, nor a man. He is untouched by either birth or death. His measure cannot be taken by the eye, by the mind or by holy scripture.² Who could have the power to disrupt the *tapas* of Him who wears the cool moon in his matted locks? (212)

Gauri is a virgin; Lord Siva is a flawless celibate; through the nature of their presence, all beings subsist and flourish; all living things are reabsorbed into Him, just as they evolve from Him in the beginning, in the same way that all the things that appear to exist in the mind subside back into it. (213)

Because of His function as the destroyer, He is said to possess *tamas*, [but that is not so]; it is simply His grace in removing the distress of all beings for their own protection; the [three] great defilements do not exist in Him [as they do in the other gods]; His form is fire; if

¹ *Matanan* and *Mara* are names of *Kama*, the god of love.

² *alavai nul* can mean a *work on logic*, but here the sense is *the scriptures*, such as the Vedas and Agamas, which are finite in nature.

I were to shower my flowery arrows upon Him, they would burn up in a puff of smoke. (214)

It is quite impossible to do battle with one who cannot be perceived as having form, and who cannot be perceived as being formless, one who possesses neither form nor formlessness." So saying the terrified Kama set off fearfully for his home. Just then Catamakan,³ he who dwells in the grove of the trees of heaven, began to speak: (215)

"It is thanks to you, is it not, that Vishnu bears [Lakshmi] on his chest, Brahma bears [Saraswati] on his tongue and the Lord holds [Ganga] upon his head? And is it not through your prowess that the body of fair, fiery Surya was ground down,⁴ and that I came to have these one thousand eyes?⁵ (216)

You must go there on our behalf and restore life to the gods; you must conquer Lord Siva, and conquering Him, you must awaken in Him love's desire. Do not reject my words!" Grasping his two arms, he said, "Grant me this goodly boon," to which Kama courteously assented, saying: (217)

"Though Lord Siva has Mount Meru for a bow, Lord Vishnu for his deadly arrow, and the serpent Vasuki as the bowstring nocked at either end, I shall vanquish him with my bow of sugarcane, my five flowery arrows, and my sapphire bowstring of hovering bees." With these words he made obeisance and took his leave. (218)

³ *Catamakan*, Sanskrit *Satamakha* is Indra as the performer of 100 sacrifices.

⁴ *Surya*, the sun, was married to *Samjna*, the daughter of *Visvakarman*, the architect of the gods. *Samjna* could not tolerate *Surya*'s heat, so *Visvakarman* reduced it by reducing *Surya* on his grindstone.

⁵ Taking the form of the rishi Gautama, Indra tricked Ahalya, his wife, into letting him make love to her. He was punished by Gautama with a curse that one thousand vaginas would cover his body in a grotesque and vulgar display, and that his reign as king of the gods would meet with disaster and catastrophe. Gautama later commuted the curse, upon the pleading of Brahma, to one thousand eyes instead.

That day [as Kama set out], accompanied by his minister Vasantan [Spring], the balmy southern breeze blew from mount [Potiyam], bearing the fragrance of sandalwood and a wonderful scent of divine sweetness. The moon too cast his silvery net; everywhere *kuyil* sang in the young mango trees with their clusters of flowers. (219)

With honey bees [for suitors] raising a hum, using jasmine buds for conches, maidens whose words could melt iron, copper or stone, scattered flowers and nectar all around, *mullai*, *champaca*, *asoka*, lotus and many others. In their hands they held the *kurinci* lute.⁶ (220)

On came the God of Love [with his army]. The night was his matchless elephant; the spots on its fair face were the myriad stars, and the ruddy sky, the red spot on its forehead; green parrots were his chargers. The maidens at his side, with their ample breasts and coral-red lips, were his warriors brandishing the swords of their eyes, which resembled tender young mangoes. (221)

Accompanied by his consort Rati, she of the bright forehead, with his curved bow and his fivefold array of arrows, and bearing a banner emblazoned with the fish, he reached Lord Siva's auspicious grove. Terrified by the aspect of the Lord performing tapas, he with the bowstring of hovering bees shrank back, quivering with fear. (222)

Reflecting, "Who knows what will happen if I attack him in the open," he first hid himself behind [Lord Siva]; seeing Parvati coming that way, he was overjoyed; Kama drew his flowery arrows, which induce the great delusion of desire, and flexed his bow; then, fixing an arrow to the bowstring of honeybees, he discharged it. (223)

Thinking in his arrogance, "Even if this one bow of sugarcane should break, there will still be the two sugarcane bows that are the

⁶In Classical Tamil literature the *kurinci yal* is a *karu-p-porul* - indigenous artefact of the hilly or mountainous tracts of Tamil Nadu, the *kurinci tinai*.

dark eyebrows⁷ of Her who gave birth to the world," he went on discharging his arrows of war; thereupon He who destroyed the three cities of the Asuras with the arrow [of His smile], loosed a single arrow, [a glance from His third eye], which burned up Kama's entire body. (224)

When they saw the deceitful one who goes by the name of Anangan,⁸ burnt up by that fiery eye, like the white fibre of the *erukka*⁹ plant [thrown onto a fire], the gods and the Guardians of the Eight Directions were afraid and hid themselves from sight. As for the Lord who rides the bull, He disappeared in a flash, and returned to silver Mount [Kailash] with His goblin hordes. (225)

Desiring marriage with Lord Siva, Parvati performed noble austerities. In order to bring the marriage about, the Peerless One spoke to the seven rishis, joyfully sending them to [Himavan to] request the marriage, and the seven rishis announced this happy circumstance to the Lord of the lofty mountain. (226)

The Lord of the [Himalaya] mountain was overjoyed. When His son [Mainaka] asked, "What is the Lord's caste? The name of his parents? What is the name of his family? What is his native place? Pray tell!" the rishis laughed and informed him, "He is beyond measure, and is born of goodly stock." (227)

Himavan was filled with great joy. Establishing [Parvati's] astrological compatibility with the Lord who wears the crescent moon

⁷ Tamil text: there is a nice play on words; *iru karum puruva capam* means *the bows of her two black eyebrows*, but split as *iru karumpp(u) uruva capam* it means *two bows in the shape of [sticks of] sugarcane*.

⁸ Literally, *the deceitful one who became Anankan* [Anangan Skt]. *Anankan* - He who is without a body is a name given to Kama, in view of the incident described above.

⁹ *arukkam*, *arukka* also spelt *erukkam*, *erukku* is *Calotropis gigantea*, a common wasteland plant in southern India. Its stems can be used to produce a cotton-like fibre.

in his locks, and selecting a day for the marriage, he praised and made obeisance to the rishis, and dispatched them with a marriage notice, drawn up in due form. Bowing to the Lord in whose locks the river Ganges flows, they informed him of all that had taken place.¹⁰

(228)

Bearing the marriage announcement from the King of the Himalaya mountain, [messengers] announced the marriage of Her who is as slender as a *vanci* creeper to the Seven Mountains,¹¹ to great Mount Meru with its [tall] summit,¹² to the great Chakravala Mountains of ruddy gold,¹³ to the seven great, roaring Oceans,¹⁴ to the *caranar*¹⁵ with their supernatural powers, to the sages and to all the gods.

(229)

¹⁰ *per nal poruttam - compatibility of name day*. The paraphrase equates *day* with *natcattiram* (Skt. *naksatra*). Each *naksatra* represents a division of the ecliptic similar to the zodiac (13°20' each instead of the 30° for each zodiac sign). The orbit of the moon is 27.3 days, so the moon takes approximately one day to pass through each *naksatra*. *per nal* presumably refers to the *naksatra* in which the moon was at the time of birth, a key element in determining the compatibility of a couple for marriage. This is strongly linked to the name, because in the Hindu tradition a name must be given to the newborn child which is suited to their birth *naksatra*.

¹¹ The terrestrial world, *Jambudvipa*, as envisioned in Hindu cosmology, contains eight mountain ranges of which the Himalaya is one. The eight ranges are *Imayam*, *Mantaram*, *Kailacam*, *Vintiyam*, *Nitatam*, *Emakutam Nilam* and *Kantamatanam*.

¹² *Markandeya Purana* and *Brahmanda Purana* divide *Jambudvipa* (see note 41) into four vast regions shaped like four petals of a lotus with Mount Meru being located at the centre. The paraphrase says *koti muti poruntiya Meru malai - Mount Meru with banners on its summit*.

¹³ *tigiri mal varai* or *Cakkaravalakiri* is a range of mountains supposed to encircle the golden region which bounds the seventh circumambient continent and sea.

¹⁴ According to Puranic cosmography the entire cosmos is divided into seven concentric island continents (*sapta dvipa vasumati*) separated by the seven encircling oceans, each double the size of the preceding one (going out from within). The seven continents of the Puranas are stated as *Jambudvipa*, *Plaksadvipa*, *Salmalidvipa*, *Kusadvipa*, *Krauncadvipa*, *Sakadvipa* and *Puskaradvipa*. The seven intermediate oceans consist of salt water, sugarcane juice, wine, ghee, curd, milk and water respectively.

¹⁵ The *caranar* are one of the eighteen classes of celestial beings.

As soon as they saw the letter, the Seven Oceans, the noble Seven Rivers, which flow like a garland adorning the Goddess Earth, and Nilagiri and all the other mountain ranges, came crowding all together. Sages excelling [in *tapas*], *siddhas* and the gods themselves came flocking.

(230)

They filled the eight directions entirely with chariots and banners, and masked the heavens with flying vehicles and garlands without number. They lined the streets with row upon row of long-leaved banana plants, and areca branches, and smeared the ground everywhere with civet musk from the mountains, beaten out [and dissolved in water].¹⁶

(231)

They made *toranam*¹⁷ festoons and hung them all with strings of pearls; they put out *purna kumbhas*¹⁸ [bringing water from the heavenly Ganges] in the sky and lit wonderful jewelled lamps, such that, when they saw that sight, the worlds of Brahma and Kubera, the world of the gods and the world of Vishnu were ashamed for themselves. (232)

Gathering together, celestial mountain maidens bathed the maiden [Parvati], pretty as a jewelled lamp, in Ganges water, redolent of the scent of flowers, bound a silken girdle (tightly) around her waist [so that she felt faint], and hung strings of jewels and pearls and fragrantly

¹⁶ The aromatic musk of the civet cat is obtained by beating the dried flesh.

¹⁷ *toranam* are hangings made of leaves and flowers or cloth, and hung from cords, used to adorn roads and houses on auspicious occasions.

¹⁸ *The purana kumbham - filled pot* signifies plenty and is used in Hindu marriages and other ceremonies. It consists of a water-filled pot having a coconut on top of it and decorated with leaves. Traditionally a brass pot is used but mud or copper pots are also common. This pot is called *kalash* or *kumbham* in Indian languages and is sometimes filled with rice rather than water. White or red thread is tied around its neck or all around its body in an intricate diamond-shaped pattern. Mango leaves are placed at the mouth of this *kumbham* in a circular decorative pattern. Sometimes a small clean cloth is wrapped around the coconut that is placed above the *kumbham*. In this way the water or rice filled pot is known as *Poornakumbham* and it is believed to be divine and sacred when all the above things are done with appropriate mantras.

scented flower garlands around her neck, whilst on her beautiful forehead they placed a vermilion mark. Thus did they carry out the ritual as prescribed by Vedic lore. (233)

Brahma and the rest of the gods crowding together, dressed up in marriage attire the ash-besmeared Pure One, who had adorned Himself with the flowery fragrance [of the arrows that Kama had unleashed upon him]; they dressed Him in a garment decorated with immaculate gems, and a garland of blossoms from the trees of heaven; removing his great snake ornament, they fastened upon Him ornaments set with fine jewels. (234)

Upon his head they placed a crown which shone with the lustre of pearls, so that it seemed that the hosts of stars crowded around the young crescent moon, thinking Him their Lord. At His ears they hung two beautiful earrings, such that it appeared that the moon and sun, which are properly the eyes (of the Lord),¹⁹ had taken up residence there. (235)

At his feet they fastened anklets [inlaid with] bulky sapphires, which diffused a dark radiance as if from the flowery eye which holy Mal placed upon those feet to obtain the boon (he sought)²⁰ adorning him in a manner pleasing [to all]. Then the Lord mounted a powerful bull,²¹ and celestial courtesans, crowding about, waved pure water [mixed with saffron] before Him.²² (236)

¹⁹ Lord Siva is depicted as having three eyes: the sun is his right eye, the moon the left eye and fire the third eye. The two eyes on the right and left indicate His activity in the physical world. The third eye in the centre of the forehead symbolises spiritual knowledge and power, and is thus called the eye of wisdom or knowledge.

²⁰ See the note to v. 197.

²¹ The word *mal* has been taken to mean *greatness*; the paraphrase glosses *mal vitai* as *a bull in the form of Visnu*, *mal* being a name for Lord Visnu, who assumed the form of a bull to support Lord Siva when He destroyed the three aerial cities of the *asuras*.

²² *ancanam* is taken by the paraphrase to mean *manca aratti - the waving of lights or water mixed with saffron* before a holy person or image. The phrase *nir ancanam* is explained in Winslow's dictionary as 'holding a lighted wick in water in which turmeric and lime are dissolved and *margosa* leaves placed, and waving it around the idol.'

When Vishnu, resplendent, bowed to Him in worship, He replied from that holy mouth which is like a red water lily, [bidding Him approach]. When lotus-borne Brahma made obeisance to Him, he inclined His jewel-crowned head ever so slightly. And when [Indra], the King of the gods, saluted Him with reverence, a smile played upon His lips. When the multitude of the gods came forward, worshipping and praising Him, He conferred upon them all His gracious glance. (237)

Above him was a tall, white parasol; it seemed as if the crescent moon, watered by the river Ganges upon his head, had put forth shoots, rising up, budding and blossoming forth. [At either side] fluttered two yak-tail fans, which resembled the surging waters of the river Ganges and the rays of the moon, cascading down together in unison. (238)

He was accompanied on one side by the consort of Lakshmi, bearing a betel pouch, and on the other, by [Indra], Lord of the celestial grove, bearing a spittoon. Four-faced Brahma stood nearby, waving a large, circular fan, whilst, on either side, Narada and Tumpuru²³ praised him in song. (239)

Yama was nearby bearing sandals of pure gold, and [Vayu], the Lord of the Wind, diffused the fragrant smoke [of *aquila* and frankincense] in all [the eight] directions. [Isana], the Lord whose vehicle is the bull, [came on], brandishing a short hand sword, and [numerous] shining suns and bright[-rayed] moons surrounded Him, bearing lamps. (240)

Celestial maidens bore many chests [full of] rich raiment, and serpent maidens [from the nether world] were there with ornaments [inlaid with] the nine jewels. Singing praises, the *kinnaras* and others played on their lutes, whilst the incomparable Four Vedas walked by his side, proclaiming the Lord's supremacy. (241)

²³ *Narada* and *Tumpuru* are celestial musicians, famed for their skill on the lute.

The seven planets, the eight Vasus and the rishis exulted, and the hearts of the denizens of the serpent realm,²⁴ the *vidyadhara*s²⁵ and the gods melted in joy as they looked on. The [eleven] Rudras poured forth a rain of flowers from both hands, and Lakshmi and [Saraswati], the white-clad maiden of the arts,²⁶ sprinkled fragrant water. (242)

The consorts of the Guardians of the Eight Directions shone out, each in their quarter, and the seven great Mothers chanted benedictions. The water nymphs, whose words are like sugarcane juice, intoned paeons of praise, whilst a loud chorus of comely *vidyadhara* maidens singing *pallandus* of praise rose up. (243)

The roar of bells, kettle drums, clay pot drums, *maddala* drums, trumpets, *tavandai* drums, *mallari* drums, cymbals and whorled conches rose up, and the tinkling of the anklets of the maidens who dwell at the limit of the universe's outer shell rang out. In the eight directions the sound of [Nandi's] cane was heard [restraining the assembled hosts]. (244)

Thus it was that the bull [mount of Lord Siva] descended to the foot of silver mount [Kailash], which is venerated [by all]. The vanguard of the Lord's army reached the land of the Himalayas. With the vehicles of the gods crowding together so densely that there was not a spare inch of room either in the heavens or upon the earth, the great bull, fittingly adorned, travelled on its way until it reached the city [of the Himalayas' King]. (245)

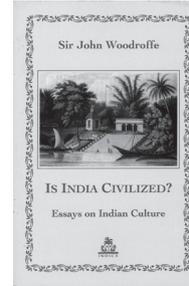
(To be continued) ▲

²⁴ The seventh and lowest of the nether worlds is called *Naka loka* and is the abode of the snake people, *Nakas*, who are demi-gods with a human face and the tail of a serpent.

²⁵ *Vidyadhara*s, literally *wisdom-holders* are a group of supernatural beings in Hindu mythology. They possess magical powers and dwell in the Himalayas. They also attend Lord Siva. See also chapter 6.

²⁶ *Sarasvati*, is the goddess of knowledge and the consort of Brahma. She is usually dressed in pure white.

BOOK REVIEWS



IS INDIA CIVILIZED? Essays on Indian Culture by Sir John Woodroffe.. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. 2009. pp225, Rs 275. ISBN 81-86569-81-2 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

Though this small book was first published in 1918 it is as relevant today as then. Sir John Woodroffe was chief justice of the Calcutta High Court and scholar of British Indian law and taxation system. He was an Indophile and student of the Tantras. His great contribution to Indian philosophy lay in his thorough exploration of Tantric literature and the subsequent publication of about 20 Tantric texts. Some of his introductions and commentaries are classics in the genre. *Is India Civilized?* is a passionate rebuttal of a scathing critique of India by the Scottish drama and social critic William Archer in his book *India and the Future* published in 1917. It created a furore in India and Woodroffe was much admired by the Indian intelligentsia for his riposte. It went into a second reprint and official British opprobrium was possibly one of the reasons which contributed to his early retirement.

The book may be redundant in some ways but it is still a fascinating study of Hindu history, culture, social observation and politics as it was when first published. In fact, Woodroffe's profound insights into the Indian psyche are astonishing for a person of his background and though it may be viewed as an historical document it still holds its own as an explanation of Hindu culture. He gives us a summation of Hindu dharma and philosophy in pages 26 to 34 that can't be bettered for its clarity of thought and style.

— TV Ramamurthy

PATHS TO TRANSCENDENCE According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart by Reza Shah-Kazemi. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. 2009. pp225, Rs 262. ISBN 81-86569-87-1 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

This book is a rigorous scholastic analysis of the concept of Transcendence in the mystical thought of Shankara, Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart.

Comparative religious studies are tricky in that, on the one hand, various aspects appear similar, even identical, while on the other, concepts in Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity generally derive from different paradigms. This work contains both an analytic rigour and a depth of synthesis that offers food for thought. It is not an easy book to read, not only because of its academic style but also because its subject matter concerns “that which is beyond thought”. For those who will invest the effort and time, swimming in an analysis of the depths of the most profound of absolute non-dual mystic experiences will be one’s reward.

This book analyses three themes regarding Transcendence *vis a vis* three mystics: i) How each mystic conceives and designates the transcendent Absolute; ii) How does a person realize the Transcendent and what constitutes “mystical union”; iii) How Realization translates into everyday life in the world, how does a *mukta* behave? What is noteworthy is that each of these three mystics based his doctrines, not on intellectual grounds but on their personal realization experience. The last chapter brings together not only the central features of Transcendence held in common by the three mystics, but also differences, which the author attempts to reconcile. The overriding conclusion of the author is that one can speak of a single, Transcendent essence of spiritual realization, whatever be a mystic’s religious starting point. If a person has permanently transcended duality, the Absolute is the Absolute. — John Grimes

ILLUMINATED SPIRIT Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy. The Wit Lectures, Harvard University. pp.86, Rs.30. Available at the Aravind Eye Hospitals.

Dr V. as he was known, was the founder of the Aravind Eye Hospital at Madurai in 1976. With only his pension and help from members of his family he proceeded to build what is now the biggest eye hospital in the world with branches in other parts of India. It treats over 1.5 million patients each year, two thirds of them for free. A devotee of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, he created an institution that cares particularly for the poor who need medical help. The hospital is renowned for its spirit of service and remedial proficiency.

This booklet is a transcription of the Wit Lectures he gave at Harvard University in 1991. Dr. V. tells his life story and explains the philosophy which inspired and sustained him through the many challenges he encountered. Born into a farming family in 1918, he was enthused by Swami

Vivekananda and the Bhagavad Gita. After completing his medical studies he joined the British Army and served in Malaysia and several parts of India. In 1947 he developed severe arthritis to such an extent he could not walk or use his fingers. After a long, painful convalescence he became an eye surgeon. Eventually he became a professor and retired from government service in 1976 at the age of 58. His life’s work was yet to begin.

One can do no better than to quote him on his attitude towards work: “I want to radiate love and goodwill on all occasions, without giving any place in my consciousness to pride or prejudice. I want to love the patients and staff uniformly all the time. But I know that I create a sense of fear in my staff if they come late, or if they are not efficient in their work. This has become a strong habit in me, as I have been keen to maintain discipline in work. I should have tried love and kindness rather than instilling fear in them. I find that when people are not effective in maintaining discipline, moral declines, the quality and quantity of work also decline rapidly. It would be ideal if discipline could be maintained with love and kindness. But when some people have complete freedom to act, they degenerate very quickly. They still need some amount of external force to maintain discipline. If people could grow into the higher consciousness and act from the higher level, they could influence others. Real discipline will come only when people are motivated by spiritual force.” — Christopher Quilkey

Ganapati Muni’s UMA SAHASRAM. Translation with notes in English by S. Madan Mohan Sharma, Hyderabad, A.P. pp.327, Rs.250.

The translator deserves our thanks and congratulations for publishing what seems to be the first ever English translation of this masterpiece in Sanskrit verse by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, one of the greatest Sanskrit poets since Kalidasa. As devotees of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi know, the last 300 of the 1000 verses of this work were composed by Ganapati Muni in one night in the presence of his Sadguru Ramana.

The translation under review is like the proverbial curate’s egg: it is good in parts! While there is a none-too-generous sprinkling of satisfactory translations in the book, there are a whole lot of verses which have either been incorrectly or inadequately translated, failing to reflect the beauty and power of the original.

The book teems in typographical errors in the Sanskrit verses and in the prose translations. One wishes that the translator had done a much

more meticulous job involving in it someone with a sound knowledge of Sanskrit. However, we commend the author for his book, obviously the result of self-publication under what were, no doubt, trying circumstances. Whatever it's short comings, his labour of love is now available to readers so they can see at least a glimmer of the great Muni's genius in Sanskrit and esoteric lore. — V. Saptarishi

AMUKTAMALYADA by Sri Krishna Deva Raya trans. by Srinivas Sistla. Drusya Kala Deepika, 4-61-7, Lawson's Bay Colony, Visakhapatnam 530017. 2010. pp474, Rs 495. sistlasrini@gmail.com

Sistla's commentary and translation of Krishna Deva Raya's poem Amuktamalyada is a scholarly work. At the core of Amuktamalyada is the story of the Vaishnava saint Vishnuchitta's daughter, who gives herself in marriage to the presiding deity of the Srirangam temple, Lord Ranganatha. The title of the poem is a composite of three Sanskrit words: Amukta (her name), mala (garland) and da (gave). It tells how Amukta gave herself in marriage to Lord Ranganatha by first wearing a garland of flowers and then offering it to him. Sistla aptly compares the work to a flower garland, the central floral pendant being the main story, with the description of Krishna Deva Raya's empire being the two long strings.

The original poem is in high flown Telugu, and Sistla's book makes it accessible and comprehensible to the lay reader. His commentary seems complicated at first. I had to keep backtracking every now and then to make connections. However, the chapters are short and with perseverance the reader will be fascinated with the web of information. The first half of the book is a commentary and explanation; the second half is a direct translation of the poem into English. (I use the word poem rather loosely, for there are prose passages dotting the landscape of verse in the original.) Though Sistla maintains the poetic feel, the metre is not obvious in the translation, and justice I think, has not been done to the beauty of the original. He uses photographs to good effect, making the ancient poetry come alive. Sistla brings out in his extensive research the fact that Amuktamalyada is as much the story of Amukta as it is about the poet Krishna Deva Raya, his kingdom, his conquests, and the way of life and nature during his reign, all of which makes this book worthwhile. — Jayashree Kumar



ASHRAM BULLETIN

Deepam

Throughout the Festival, during each day and night there were processions circumambulating the four streets of Arunachaleswarar Temple. The *Dwajaroohanam* (flag-hoisting), which officially starts the Deepam Festival, was conducted on the morning of the *29th November*. In the evening, the *Panchamoorthies* (Vinayakar, Muruga, Arunachaleswarar, Apeetakuchambal and Chandikeswarar) were taken out on procession. On the *30th* the *Panchamoorthies Silver Indra Vimana*; on the *1st December* the *Panchamoorthies Simha Vahana* (lion chariot); on the *2nd December* the *Kamadhenu* (celestial wish-fulfilling cow) and *Kalpavriksha* (celestial wish-fulfilling tree); on the *3rd* the *Silver Big Rishabha Vahana*; on the *4th December* the *Panchamoorthies* in the *Silver Chariot*; later that morning the sixty three Saivite Saints (*Nayanmars*) along with Chandrasekharar and Ganesha were taken to the Durgambal temple as well as around the main temple. On the *5th December* one of the major events of the festival was conducted: the *Maha Ratham* (big wooden chariot) performed a circumambulation of the temple perimeter that took some twelve hours; On the *6th December* the *Panchamoorthies* started on the *Horse Vahanams*; the same evening the *Pichandavar*, Lord Siva as beggar comes out to ask for the *biksha* of devotees. On *7th December* the *Golden Meru (Kailasa Vahana)* came out of the temple. On the morning of the *8th December* there was the *Bharani Deepam* in the inner sanctum of the temple: In the evening at 6 p.m. the climax of the festival took place: the *Maha Deepam* on the top of Arunachala. The *Panchamoorthies* in *Golden Rishaba Vahana* were paraded the same evening.

Chromepet, Chennai

Land donated by the family of Anandavalli Ammal has provided for the new Ramana Centre in Chromepet, Chennai, (Rajendra Prasad Salai, Nehru Nagar, 600 044) with a large hall to accommodate nearly a hundred for meditation and prayer, four rooms for guests in transit

to and from Tiruvannamalai and one room each for library and for free medical consultation on a voluntary basis. The centre is near to the Chromepet railway station, bus station and the international airport (within 5 kms). The inauguration took place on Saturday, 22nd October, starting at 8.30am with *Vedaparayana*, followed by the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*, *Ramanashtottara*, *puja* and lunch.

Dining Hall

Current work on the Old Dining Hall includes the removal of a later structure added on to the roof which conservation engineers feel threatens the overall structural soundness of the building. This has the added benefit of bringing the building back to its original design. Plans for an eventual full restoration of the entire building are being drafted.

Dispensary

The ashram is slowly renovating the old ashram dispensary where Bhagavan was operated on three times for sarcoma. Niranjanananda Swami had his quarters on the side of the dispensary in which in later years, Viswanatha Swami also stayed there. The Tanjavur architect and restoration expert, Sri Sakti Murugan who is supervising the renovation, is an award winner in the field of historical building renovation. The restoration has been done employing the same materials as when the building was first constructed in the early 1940s. A special mixture of lime and other natural products have been used for the plastering and the same type of wood has been used whenever it was necessary to replace decayed pieces. The building will be reopened soon and used as a photographic gallery.

New Library

The new Library behind the dining hall will be officially opened in a small ceremony on the 8th January. The ashram commissioned a seven foot high Dakshinamurti statue along with a large ornamental lamp donated by a devotee from Thrissur, which will grace the new building. We expect the books from the present old library to be shifted to the new building at a later date once the new building is completed. The old library will be demolished and a new series of cottages installed.

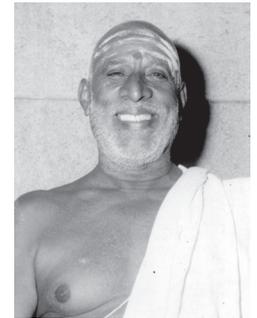
Morvi Guest House

The new guest house compound is on schedule and is expected to be opened in June 2012. After which time we expect the ashram will be able to cater as usual to the needs of devotees who wish to stay and enjoy Bhagavan's grace. The ashram has planned a car park in the compound for some 35 cars that we hope will make it easier for those devotees who use their own transport.

The ashram office appreciates the patience of devotees over the past year due to the shortfall in rooms.

Obituaries

With deep regret we wish to inform the passing away of **S. Narasimha Iyer**, a well known devotee who was absorbed in Arunachala on the 18th September, at the age of 99 years at his residence in Ramana Nagar. He was a school teacher and during his working life would regularly visit the ashram on the week-ends. He was in contact with Sri Bhagavan from his young age of fifteen. After his retirement, he settled at Ramana Nagar and was in service at *Veda Patasala* till he was of 90. His mentally alert service and loyalty to ashram was commendable. Though aged he was healthy and attended to his own needs till he breathed his last. He was close to Niranjanananda Swamy, the brother of Sri Bhagavan.



By temperament he was a contented person and was known for his winning smile and soft approach to the people and visitors. He had the opportunity of working in the kitchen along with Sri Bhagavan in his early days, and had the rare quality of not asking anything from others. He said that he never made any request (though he was very poor) even to Sri Bhagavan for the welfare of the family as he had a firm conviction that Sri Bhagavan knows the best. We pray that his soul may rest at peace at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan.

Mahesh Chandra aged 65, fondly called Chandru by everyone, was absorbed in Arunachala on 30th September at Bangalore

after battling prostate and bone cancers for some years. He was the son of K.Ramaswamy, who first came for Bhagavan's *darshan* sometime in the late 1930's, along with Maurice Frydman, and who remained an ardent devotee throughout his life. His complete undivided devotion to Bhagavan was fully inherited by all his six sons and their wives.

Chandru first came to the Ashram in 1966. He became deeply attached to Viswanatha Swami, with whom he would go round Arunachala, listening to the numerous anecdotes from Bhagavan's life. He would come every year to the Ashram during the Navaratri and stay for three weeks till some years ago.

Chandru last visited the Ashram for nearly a month in January 2011. Soon after he went back to Bangalore, his condition worsened and he was bedridden with excruciating pain only partly managed with pain-killers. His main strength was his surrender to Bhagavan and his living by the Master's words. Till the end his voice was booming and he retained his customary good cheer, chanting 'Arunachala' and 'Ramana' during his wakeful hours. He knew that his end was near but there was never a trace of fear or regret.

Veena, Chandru's wife, says that she had been asking herself what she had gained during the 30 years she had been devoted to Bhagavan and she now got the answer. Bhagavan has freed her from grief and filled her with unconditional love. There is no doubt that Veena and daughter Lakshmi will continue the family tradition of undivided devotion to Bhagavan.

Vajra Gogoi (born J. Diane Turner) passed away on Tuesday, 15th November, at CMC hospital, Vellore, having sustained head injuries in a traffic accident four days earlier. Born in 1943, Vajra lived most of her early life in Toronto where she did social work in a women's shelter. In September 1990, she flew to India and a year later, met Dev Gogoi whom she would marry in 1993. Known for her great cooking, the two settled in a house ('Dakshina') on the banks of the town lake (*samudram eri*). In recent years Vajra managed the *Agasthya Ganapati Library*, a free community resource which, under her care, has grown to over 20,000 volumes. ▲