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82. ओँ मातमुक्तिविधायकाय नमः
Om Mātmuktividhāyakāya namaḥ
Prostration to the Ordainer of Mother’s moksha.

In some ways, this is the most significant of the 108 Names. What happened on May 19, 1922 (Vaisakha Bahula Navami) was only next in importance to the great illumination in July 1896. Mother Alagamma had in 1916 come finally to stay with Bhagavan and, during these six years of loving service to him and the devotees in Skandasramam, had re-established the link between nature and the supernatural. On the last day, as she lay dying, Bhagavan was by her side, his right hand on her heaving chest, his left upon her head. Some devotees were chanting Ramanama, others reciting the Vedas. In such a holy atmosphere sanctified by Bhagavan’s close contact, she breathed her last. It was then 8 p.m. and Bhagavan seemed to feel free as a bird, having been released from his obligation to Mother. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni declared that she had attained moksha by the grace of her son. Her body was buried, not cremated. Attaining, giving ‘moksha’ are conventional terms for restoration to the original state of Being-Awareness-Bliss.

In giving mukti to his mother, Bhagavan played the part of Siva, Mrtyunjaya, the conqueror of Death. The auspicious functioning of a regular temple over Mother’s samadhi is solid proof of the supreme Grace of Bhagavan. Again, matru means ‘cow’. The Name refers also to the grace bestowed on the Cow Lakshmi. Like the mutual love of Mother and child, the cow-calf relationship is a concrete fact, besides being a powerful symbol. Love is the living link between nature and the supernatural, between time and the timeless.

Also, matru means the measurer, calculator, knower, and refers to the jiva, the individual. Bhagavan’s grace and the gift of moksha are available to anyone who turns towards him in love and lets his love govern one’s life.
During Bhagavan’s lifetime, amongst all the many attributes we came to expect from a jnani, there was the more human one of scrupulous good manners. He was always punctual because to be anything else would have been inconsiderate of the feelings of others, many of whom came long distances just to see him. Punctuality is universally recognised as an aspect of good manners so much so that it is supposed to be the attribute of kings. Kings are taught this from an early age, out of respect for their position; with Bhagavan it was natural.

Every culture has put a premium on decorum. Good manners have always been a yardstick for measuring whether a person was deserving of our respect or not. There are those who may have political power or who are rich beyond our reckoning but even though they may earn our envy they do not gain our respect. “For a man by nothing is so well betrayed/As by his manners.”¹

¹ Spencer, Edmund, *The Fairie Queen*, Bk.vi, c.iii, i.
Self-control and performance of duties can be subsumed under one heading: good manners. This presupposes a reverence for life, *sraddha*, a selflessness and respect. If you took all the rules from the *Dharma Sastras* to the Christian Ten Commandments, you could throw them all away and substitute an attitude of respect for others which reveals itself as good manners. It could serve equally well for all the admonitions, rules and complex constraints enjoined on us by religious ethics. To be a good person does not mean following all the pettifogging rules, it means living the spirit that the rules are meant to facilitate.

Bhagavan had a spontaneous reverence for life. His daily interactions with people and animals are well documented. Animals did not fear him and humans who came for his darshan were, in many cases, enchanted by his luminous eyes and gracious demeanour. Bhagavan’s instinctive good manners were due almost entirely to his consideration for others and empathy with their feelings. He had absolutely no ego himself — no desire to put himself forward. This freedom from all desire to be a ‘personality’ is why he could go beyond rules and restrictions to the underlying spontaneous good manners which transcended historical religious behaviour, caste, culture or politics. This was also why he could effortlessly see into the hearts of all who came to him however different they might appear to be.

How is this so? How could Bhagavan remain naturally free? He was so because his external attention, like the one note of the *sruti* in classical Indian music, was focused on one object, Arunachala, the still, silent centre that transcended all attributes. His heart too, in an attitude of complete surrender, was utterly identified with his Beloved. How could one not express harmony and fullness except as gracious, good manners?

How do we arrive at this state?

Firstly, we should avoid all forms of exploitation and cruelty as much as possible. The secret of Bhagavan’s *jnana* is that he treated all beings with equal respect. He was a *samadrk*, one who sees oneness with an even and impartial understanding.
GOOD MANNERS

It is what we all aspire towards when we seek to remedy our sense of inadequacy or alienation. There will always be someone with more knowledge, wealth, and social position just as there will always be someone who has less knowledge, wealth and social position. There is no end to the lack of equality. We are not concerned with quantity but quality. All Bhagavan’s worldly possessions were a loincloth and a water pot and yet he was an aristocrat. He effortlessly demonstrated it. It was as natural as breathing to him.

For most of us it is impossible to sit in quiet contemplation for the majority of the day. We may have a family and are responsible for its welfare. We are obliged to work. And even if we are blessed with ample free time our vasanas will compel us to act. Bhagavan has given us the tool self-enquiry (Nan yar?) to discriminate between what is real and unreal. It is essential that coupled with self-enquiry is an attitude of reverence, of giving what is best in us. There is a saying: ‘A man respects his tools of trade’. And for this to happen we should pay attention to what has been ascribed to us as the tools of our journey of Self-enquiry.

The first and most important step in developing attention is our attitude. If we are not conscious of our motives by default we will identify with the play of the gunas (dispositions) and invariably there will be a negative content to some degree. If we are arrogant we will not recognise the signs of dissatisfaction in others and the consequence of their resentment and conflict becomes inevitable. If we are afraid our development is frozen and we become reduced to a small carefully controlled world of stifling inconsequence. If we are greedy we will use circumstances and others to enrich ourselves, the result of which is a hardening of our minds and hearts. We develop a thick and unresponsive skin. We become isolated and bitter. We will blame others or circumstances but never our own attitude.

Our task is to strive for that which is greater than the circumscribed world made by our vasanas. These limitations are an opportunity to transcend our supposed inadequate resources, not just physical but mental or emotional, with patience, fortitude, perseverance. It can be
conceived as a battle until such time as, because of our one pointed devotion to what we believe, it becomes by persistence and grace, a dance as exemplified by Lord Nataraja.

There is an apposite parable told by Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: “A certain person asked Sri Ramakrishna if it were possible for a householder to be devoted to God. Sri Ramakrishna smiled and replied: ‘In the villages about my birthplace I have seen women preparing cheera (flattened rice). With one hand a woman would stir the cheera in the mortar of a dhenki (a husking machine), with the other she would hold the child to her breast and suckle it, and at the same time she would bargain with a purchaser. Thus, though manifold are her occupations, her mind is fixed on the one idea that the pestle of the dhenki shall not fall on her hand, crush it and disable it forever. Be in the world, but always remember Him. You shall be lost if you turn away from Him.’”

There has developed over time in all the major religions innumerable attitudes or moods (bhavas) which help us to act, think and feel appropriately. The sanatana dharma sees every aspect of human life as an opportunity to reveal the richness of the divine. The bhakti movements of the medieval period developed attitudes of devotion towards the Lord by personifying the relationship. They identified and developed six ways of adoration: of God as master (dasya), as child (vatsalya), as friend (sakhyaa), as the beloved (madhura), as intoxication (unmada) and as peace (shanta). Bhagavan expressed many of them in his Akshara Mana Malai, the Marital Garland of Letters. These attitudes keep us from being crushed by the world.

By the laws of inertia it is much easier to indulge in a negative attitude than a positive one. It requires effort and concentration to be positive. We know from stories about Bhagavan he always saw some redeeming feature even in the most unpleasant and unpopular person (much to the astonishment and discomfiture of devotees!).

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Attention and attitude are interlinked. When we drive on the public roads we follow certain established rules that are created to protect us from harm and facilitate the smooth flow of traffic. By paying attention to the road and observing the rules we safely reach our destination. The way in which we drive is determined by our attitude. If we are aggressive sooner or later we will meet someone equally aggressive and the result could be mayhem. If we are timid we could impede the flow and cause an accident. For the right balance we require self-control and appropriate adherence to the rules.

We develop the right attitude by a conscious act of giving. This may sound strange but by giving ourselves to what we see, feel or think, we quickly learn that what we give we receive. If we give love we will receive it in return. If we give contempt however subtle, we swiftly feel the blow-back of simmering antipathy or open disdain. We always get feedback; it is just a question of whether we are attentive. Feigning ignorance is no excuse.

One of the greatest scholars of Judaism was Rabbi Hillel who lived from 110BCE to 10CE in Jerusalem. It is said he was asked by a gentile, a non-Jew, that the vast intricacy of the Torah be explained to him while he stood on one foot. This would be akin to asking a Vedic scholar to give the essence of the Vedas. Rabbi Hillel chided the man for his behaviour, but in a constructive way said: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.”

This is called the golden rule: Do to others what you would want others to do to you. The good manners we display towards others are the self same respect we show to ourselves. Likewise, we need not concern ourselves with the negative behaviour of others, as in their heart of hearts that is the way they treat themselves. By doing evil to others we damage ourselves. And who would want to do that?
Rani ki vav (The Queen’s Stepwell) at Patan, Gujarat
Karma, Reincarnation and World Suffering

There is a great deal of misery and anxiety occupying peoples’ minds these days about the suffering currently undergone on the Planet through terrorism, local armed conflicts, starvation, disease, natural disasters and economic depression. Many of the contemporary evangelical atheists and agnostics, now in vogue, base their scepticism about the existence of God on the observation that a benign and benevolent God of Love could not possibly exist, or else he would not permit so much world suffering.

According to the sages, the highest teachings of the world religions are contained in the idea that we are all ‘One’ and that we come from the same divine source to which many names can be given. Sri Ramana would say that, “God is the actual form of love”.¹ So why


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then is there so much suffering in the world? From the standpoint of our own teaching, that of the supreme sage, Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, we must first understand that this plane of existence, is better to be seen as a field of karma in which the plan for human evolution is embedded.

As the Bhagavad Gita and Sri Ramana Maharshi point out, men and women are born into this planet with a karma or destiny preordained by Iswara or Almighty God, for their own spiritual development. This was stated to Paul Brunton in his dialogue with Ramana and is recorded in Conscious Immortality and in Be As You Are.

Bhagavan says, “Individuals have to suffer their karmas but Iswara manages to make the best of their karmas for his purpose. God manipulates the fruits of karma but he does not add or take away from it. The subconscious of man is a warehouse of good and bad karma. Iswara chooses from this warehouse what he sees will best suit the spiritual evolution at the time of each man, whether pleasant or painful. Thus there is nothing arbitrary.”

The Bhagavad Gita tells us that nobody actually dies in reality. Lord Krishna told Arjuna “Do not grieve!” After an interval of rest, the soul or jiva is reborn into a new life, again chosen from its latent tendencies, accumulated in previous lives, for his or her spiritual growth. This cycle continues until as a result of meritorious deeds they are, then through Grace, eventually brought to this Teaching which in due course will lead them to Self-realisation. Then the whole karmic scheme collapses and nature of God or Existence as Reality-Consciousness-Love is realised.

Sri Ramana’s point of view is well and fully expressed in the following:

D.: God is perfect. Why did He create the world imperfect? The work shares the nature of the author. But here it is not so.

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KARMA, REINCARNATION AND WORLD SUFFERING

M.: Who is it that raises the question?
D.: I - the individual.
M.: Are you apart from God that you ask this question?
So long as you consider yourself the body you see the world as external. The imperfections appear to you. God is perfection. His work also is perfection. But you see it as imperfection because of your wrong identification.
D.: Why did the Self manifest as this miserable world?
M.: In order that you might seek it. Your eyes cannot see themselves. Place a mirror before them and they see themselves. Similarly with the creation.
“See yourself first and then see the whole world as the Self.”
D.: So it amounts to this — that I should always look within.
M.: Yes.
D.: Should I not see the world at all?
M.: You are not instructed to shut your eyes from the world. You are only to “see yourself first and then see the whole world as the Self”.
If you consider yourself as the body the world appears to be external. If you are the Self the world appears as Brahman.”

Briefly Bhagavan states that from a higher perspective the question concerning the triad of world, God and individual should be seen as inventions of the mind. From a lower perspective, instead of worrying about the world, we should allow ‘He who created it to look after it’.

If this is accepted then the sufferings which people endure are benign in the sense that this is their preordained karma for the soul’s spiritual development. Bhagavan was asked by Swami Yogananda: “Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realisation of God?” Bhagavan replied: “Suffering is the way for Realisation of God.” Nobility of soul and very many virtues are only born out of suffering. This samsara which is a time of purgation

4 Ibid., § 107, 29th November, 1935, p.103.
and purification uses suffering to bring its children back to true values rather than linger in the hedonism of a decadent and corrupt culture.

As Hafiz wrote,

“Never the greatest man that yet was born
Has plucked a rose so soft it has no thorn.
We live in a world based on the law of polar opposites,
Which we have to surmount.”

There has always been suffering on the planet. The suffering endured in the two great world wars makes contemporary suffering almost infinitesimal in comparison. At the same time we must never be hard hearted and indifferent to any suffering, and always act with compassion. As Bhagavan taught, if suffering comes our way, and in our path, we must do our utmost to relieve it. The jnani is all compassionate, not only to human beings but to animals and plants as well. The greatest help we can bring to Humanity is our own Self-realisation which mitigates world suffering both amongst believers and the faithless.

The question is often asked, “How do I deal with suffering when it happens?” Primarily one must ‘accept’ that whatever it is, ultimately it is all for the best. The human mind cannot understand the higher wisdom. With this form of surrender, one gradually perceives the lesson that we were meant to learn from our suffering. Every day living is full of stress, anxiety, loss and disappointment. After the acceptance to which I have referred we must hand over the whole burden of our life to God or the Sat-guru in our Heart as an act of surrender. Then he carries our burden, and all our cares are his.

Ultimately we must accept that everything which happens from galaxy to atom does not move without the permission of the divine Will. Who are we with our petty egotistic humanoid perception, based on personal pleasurable satisfaction, to question the actions of the master of the universe, which are beyond our intelligence to even remotely fathom?

Whenever Sri Bhagavan was asked about the problem of suffering, he suggested a method to eliminate it. Most others trim the branches.
Sri Bhagavan tackled the root of the problem. He said that whatever be the gravity of the suffering, we are not aware of it in deep sleep. When we have a terrible tooth ache, we can’t think of anything except the pain. But the pain is not felt in deep sleep. In deep sleep, we are not conscious of the body and hence there is no pain. When the mind merges in the Self, there is no body-consciousness and therefore there is no pain. Sri Bhagavan says that physical pain only follows body-consciousness. It cannot be in the absence of body-consciousness and pleasures. Pains are dependent on the ego; they cannot be without the ‘I’ but the ‘I’ can remain without them.

Even ordinarily, we notice that our pain is related to the attitude of our mind. When we have some acute pain, and a person we like walks in, our pain is relieved to some extent. When a person we dislike walks in, our pain becomes worse. In other words, our pain increases or decreases according to the state of our mind at a particular moment. Sri Bhagavan asks us to remove the mind altogether so that we won’t feel the pain at all. He says: “Therefore turn inwards and seek the Self and there will be an end both of the world and its miseries... When body-consciousness goes, suffering goes. Prayer is good in that it makes us lose ourselves in the contemplation of the Supreme Being. When the mind is lost in contemplation, there is considerable reduction in pain. But prayer will not remove suffering totally. The individual will feel the suffering when his mind is not at prayer. Puja, japa and prayer are all good in that they take our mind off our suffering for a while.”

While they are all good as a temporary measure, removal of suffering is possible only through elimination of body-consciousness. Sri Bhagavan says, “If one remains free from pain thus, there won’t be any pain anywhere. The trouble now is due to your seeing the world outside yourself and thinking there is pain in it. But both the world and the pain are within you; if you turn inward, there will be no pain.”

To the charge that those who eliminate suffering thus are selfish and do not worry about others, Sri Bhagavan says, “The world is not

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6 Ibid., p.58.
external to you. Because you wrongly identify yourself with the body, you see the world outside you and its suffering becomes apparent to you; but the world and its sufferings are not real. Seek the reality and get rid of this unreal feeling. The understanding of oneself is the ending of suffering. The question of selfishness doesn’t arise as in that state, only the Self will be seen in everybody and everything.”

But Sri Bhagavan doesn’t say we should be indifferent to the sufferings of others. So long as we have body-consciousness, we shall be conscious of our sufferings and those of others and would be interested in removing them. Compassion is really your pain in my heart. When we remove the sufferings of others, we become less me-centered. But in this way, we cannot remove all the pain in the world. As pain is dependent on the ego, Sri Bhagavan suggests the removal of the ego; pain will also disappear.

This is not just theory. Sri Bhagavan exemplified what he said. When he had cancer, he behaved as if it belonged to another. He was as serene as ever and gave darshan to all till the very end. There wasn’t a trace of pain on his face. His detachment from the body was total.

7 Ibid., p.58.

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**The Prime Mover**

D. Samarender Reddy

Don’t be too quick to take credit
For the movement of your body —
The earth too moves.

If you hold up thought
As the lynchpin of motion
Ask yourself

“What sets thought in motion?”
If you say it is ‘I’
That ‘I’, too,
is a thought.
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Two

Sadhu Om

as recorded by Michael James

10th December 1977 (continued)

Sadhu Om: People want to leave something for the world when they die, but when the body dies this world, which is our projection, ceases to exist. If we care about the world, we haven’t understood Bhagavan properly.

In the English translation of Who Am I? in Words of Grace the world is said to appear or be perceived ‘as an apparent objective reality’ (which is a term that Bhagavan did not use in the Tamil original). What does ‘objective reality’ mean? Objects have the same degree of reality as the subject, but both are unreal. Reality is neither objective nor subjective.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and Guru Vacaka Kovai. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.
Even Krishna talks of the earnest enquirer passing on to enjoy celestial worlds and then returning to do sadhana in this world, as if all these worlds existed in our absence.

Bhagavan said that not only does self not know other things, but it does not even know itself. Knowing is part of a dyad (knowing or not knowing) and a triad (knower, knowing and what is known), but self is just being, and hence devoid of all forms of doing, including knowing. Being is knowing, but not in the ordinary sense of this word, which refers to an action. Therefore when Bhagavan said that self does not even know itself, he meant that its self-awareness is not an action but its natural state of just being. He did not mean that it does not know ‘I am’, but that it is devoid of knowing as we commonly conceive it.

This world is nothing but a projection of our own vasanas (dispositions), so anyone who reacts to it with feelings such as curiosity, desire, anger, fear or hatred is like a small child or monkey when it first confronts its own reflection in a mirror. At first it is curious, then it becomes angry, then it gives a blow, and finally it runs back to its mother in fear.

If we desire anything from God or guru, we do not have deva-bhakti or guru-bhakti [true love for God or guru] but only visaya-bhakti [love for objects or objective experiences]. Only when we desire nothing are we qualified for the third (b) or fourth standards [in the ‘school of bhakti’ described in The Path of Sri Ramana].

When they first come to the guru even sincere aspirants desire moksa, peace or whatever else they call it. Mumuksutva is necessary for the fourth standard [guru-bhakti], but what the guru makes the aspirant understand is that moksa (liberation) is not gaining anything but losing everything. To learn this is the purpose of the fourth standard, and when it has been learnt thoroughly we will be in the fifth standard [pure svatma-bhakti or love for self, which is the state of moksa].

Many like Muruganar and Natananandar came to Bhagavan for moksa alone and prayed accordingly. Their prayers purified their minds and gave them the discrimination to understand that complete loss of individuality is the only true moksha.
Bhagavan has taught us how to pray: in verse 30 of *Aksaramanamalai* he sang, ‘Destroying [my worldly] greatness and making [me] naked [in the state of nirvana], give me the greatness of [your] grace’.

He said that even surrender (as it is usually understood) is not true *deva-bhakti*, because everything is already God’s, so we can only return what was never ours, as he taught us in verse 486 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*: ‘[Imagining our self to be separate from God] our lovingly offering that self to God, who exists as [our real] clearly experienced self, is just like breaking [a piece from] a sweet sugar [idol of] Ganapati and offering [it back in worship] to that Ganpati’. True *deva-bhakti* is not to rise as a separate self in the first place, even to surrender that self to God.

In verse 29 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he sang, ‘Abiding in this state [of self-knowledge], [which is] the way to experience supreme bliss devoid of [any thought of] bondage or liberation, is abiding in the service of God’. By abiding thus, without rising as a separate ‘I’, we are sparing God the trouble of having to save us from our own self-created ignorance. This is the best service we can do for him, and is therefore the only real *deva-bhakti*.

**13th December 1977**

**Sadhu Om:** The mind will always feel that self-attention is difficult, because it can never attend to self. Only self can attend to self.

When a French devotee told him that Swami Siddheswarananda [the founder and head of the Ramakrishna Mission centre in France] had said, ‘Very few have known who Bhagavan is’, Muruganar replied, ‘That is true. Bhagavan’s *ashram* is not confined within the four walls of this compound. The whole universe is his *ashram*. The whole universe is himself’. He later added, ‘Bhagavan alone exists’.

During his final illness, when some devotees suggested that he pray to Bhagavan to relieve his suffering, Muruganar replied, ‘You can pray to your God, but I cannot. My God doesn’t answer. My God cannot answer’.
Sastra-vasana (the disposition to study numerous spiritual and philosophical texts) is created only if one does no more than sravana (reading) and superficial manana (reflection). If a learned pandit who seeks name and fame did a little deep manana, he would reflect thus: ‘If brahman, the one self, alone exists, why do I want the appreciation of others? Where are any others? Who am I?’

If reflection on the guru’s words is done only as an aid to practical sadhana, it will not create any sastra-vasanas. The guru’s words will always turn the mind back to self-attention, because they all point only to self.

For a young and earnest aspirant whose mind is still fresh, only a little manana is needed. Whenever his mind strays outwards he will reflect, ‘All that is perceived through the five senses is known by me, so knowledge of anything only indicates that I am’, and thus he will easily restore his self-attention.

During nididhyasana (contemplation on self) a little manana (that is, just a few thoughts) can sometimes help to prevent the mind from straying away from self-attention, but ultimately all these aids must go. In Who Am I? Bhagavan says that a time will come when we will have to forget everything that we have learnt. To forget second and third persons (everything other than ourself) is peaceful; to remember them is troublesome.

When he was young, Natanananadar once said to an older devotee who was asking Bhagavan many questions about how to practise atma-vicara: ‘When the infinite self-shining “I” is standing inside you like a rock, why do you have so many doubts?’

19th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Dispassion (vairagya) comes only through knowledge. It is cultivated by reflection (manana) and discrimination (viveka), and sustained by the clear conviction that everything is ‘I’, that nothing is independent of our own self-awareness, and that self alone exists.

Why to say that a mind or ego exists in sleep in order to know ‘nothingness’? Why not understand instead that it is self that knows that ‘nothingness’, and that that ‘nothingness’ itself is nothing other
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

than self. If you can understand that, then you can understand that self also knows this ‘everythingness’, and that ‘everythingness’ is also nothing other than self.

In fact no ego or mind exists even now, so why to say it exists in sleep? There is only one ‘I’, so the ‘I’ that knows all this is only self. Why to admit the existence of an ego?

In Bhagavan’s path we cannot admit the existence of any state of ‘void’ or ‘nothingness’, because in order to experience such a state we would have to exist in it, and hence it would not be devoid of ourself, but only of other things. Since nothing else exists in it, it would be full of ourself, and hence purna, not sunya. To anyone who imagined they have reached a void, Bhagavan would say, ‘Investigate who experiences it’. However, even that would not be necessary if we firmly cling to self-attention.

In the mangalam verse of Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham Bhagavan says that everything is self: self is that in which, of which, from which, for which, by which and which everything actually is. To tell the truth, even this (our everyday activity) is self-attention. Why then are Bhagavan’s clues necessary? Only because we now mistake our natural state of self-awareness to be a state of awareness of many things other than ourself. It is only as a means to remove this mistaken experience of otherness and manyness that Bhagavan asked us to attend only to self.

An elderly devotee did not visit Bhagavan for a while because he thought he could become like Bhagavan on his own. After a long time he returned, just as Bhagavan was stitching some leaf-plates, and Bhagavan said to him, ‘See, we take so much care to stitch these plates, but after eating from them we throw them away. Bhagavan is like a leaf-plate: only when he has served his purpose should you throw him away.’ Therefore Bhagavan and the clues he has given us are necessary until we experience the dawn of self-knowledge, and after that we will see that we – the one self – alone exist, and that Bhagavan and his clues are also only ourself.

Our mind experiencing objects is like sunlight falling on a mirror and being reflected onto a wall. The reflection (which is like the objects we experience) is light, the reflecting mirror (which is like our
experiencing mind) is light – and when looked at directly it seems to be another sun – and the sun (which is like self, the source of our mind’s light of consciousness) is light. Everything is light, and the light is one. Likewise, we and all that we experience are only the one light of consciousness, which is self.

Can the mind rise without the support of self? Can it exist without self-awareness? It is all so simple, but immature minds think, ‘Then self-knowledge is only like the nothingness of sleep. It doesn’t look very tasty in comparison with all the interesting things outside in the world’. What can we say to them? We cannot change them, so we just have to let them suffer a bit more until they understand that oneness is peace and manyness is pain.

In the shade it is pleasant, in the sun it is scorching. We always have the freedom to turn within to see the light and thus enjoy the shade. When by force of old habit we wander out again, we say to Bhagavan, ‘That was only laya, I want nasa’, and he replies, ‘Turn again to the source and see if manyness exists there’. By repeatedly turning away consciously from the manyness in this way we come to see that it does not exist apart from us, and that it is therefore not something we need to fear. Some reach this realisation after just a few attempts, but for others it takes longer because their attention is not so sharp and clear.

Extracts from a tape-recording: 13th March 1977

Sadhu Om: Self-attention is ever going on. It needs no effort.

Here the whole philosophy is based on the principle that people are not contented by attending to second or third persons, so vairagya (freedom from desire to experience otherness) must be the base. One should know that attention to second or third persons brings misery.

When Bhagavan was asked, ‘Why should we attend to the first person or atman?’ he replied, ‘If you do not attend to the first person, you attend to second or third persons instead. If you do not do atma-vicara, you do anatma-vicara. Neither is necessary. To be is not doing, not attending’. Until one comes to the conclusion that attending to second or third persons – or even to the first person – is ultimately unnecessary, one should attend to the first person. But if that is felt
to be tiresome, be free from that also, and just be happy with your mere being.

[Later Sadhu Om explained that this is like saying, ‘If you do not like this coin with a head, you can have this one with a tail’, knowing that both coins are one. Remaining with only our being is the state of attending to nothing other than self.]

There must be a first person to attend to second or third persons. Must not the first person exist before it can start to attend to any second or third person, and does it know that it is? After waking up from sleep as so-and-so, the first knowledge that comes to us is about our own existence. That itself is self-attention. Knowing that ‘I am so-and-so’ is knowledge of the first person. How does this knowledge come? Only by attending to the first person. So attention to the first person is always going on, even while we are attending to second or third persons. Without attention to the first person, attention to second or third persons cannot occur.

The knowledge of second or third persons indicates the presence of the first person. When the world is known, that shows that the first person is present. This is self-attention without effort. A jnani is always paying attention in this way. He is not actually paying attention, because he is self-attention. If he knows anything, he clearly knows, ‘Because I am, these are known. Because I am, I hear this. Because I am, I smell this’. This ‘I am’ is a constant knowledge. This constant self-attention does not fade away when he seems to attend to second or third persons.

This is the difference between a jnani and an ajnani. The ajnani forgets that he is experiencing his being, whereas the jnana does not forget this. He is fully aware of this ‘I am’. How can this awareness be there unless there is an attention? Since awareness and attention are one and the same, if we are aware that ‘I am’, we are attending to ‘I am’. There will be no exertion in such self-attention, and there will be no forgetfulness of the first person even when attending to second or third persons.

Can we actually forget self? No, we cannot. We cannot but know self.
In deep sleep our self-attention is without second or third persons. In sleep we do not need any outside indicators, any second or third persons, to know that ‘I am’. Self-attention is ever present in sleep. Though second and third persons, the outer signs, are absent, we do not doubt whether or not ‘I am’. Our being is our attention; our sat is our cit; our mere being is knowing.

Now we want to know, so we have to attend. Attending is a verb, but though ‘I am’ is also a verb, it is not an action, a kriya-rupa, but is just being, a sat-rupa. So in ‘I am’, in just being, there is no exertion and hence no tiredness. Self-attention is our svabhava, our very nature, not our doing, not our making effort. It is constant, even in sleep.

When we once discover that we are fully aware of our being in sleep, we will know that we will be fully aware of it in death and in pralaya (the dissolution of the universe). We alone are; nothing is ever destroyed.

In sleep there is no fear. Bhagavan said, ‘Where there are thoughts, there will be fear. When thoughts subside, there is no fear’. Fear, sorrow and desire are nothing but thoughts. Thought creates them. In sleep we remain alone, without thoughts. When we are alone there is no fear. Fear comes only due to thoughts, and thoughts are cheating us. We can be fearless only when we are perfectly alone, when we simply remain as we really are, devoid of thought. In sleep there is no fear because there is no thought.

The thinker is the first thought, the ‘I’-thought. Who is thinking? The ego, the first person. This first person, the first thought, rises on waking from sleep. The knowledge of the first person is the first knowledge we get on waking from sleep. Therefore, self-attention is ever going on. Until we know that, we have to make effort to attend to self, and after knowing it, we never have to worry about it or anything else.

Knowing self happens in a split second. It makes everything, the entire universe, dissolve.

Both light and darkness are necessary to make a film show. In the projector there is light, but the film has darker portions that prevent the light passing through. Only through the less dark portions does
the light escape to the screen. If light alone were present, no film show would be seen. Likewise, if a uniformly dark film were present, nothing would be seen. Therefore both light and darkness are essential. To make the show of this world, both *vidya* (knowledge or self-awareness) and *avidya* (ignorance or self-forgetfulness) are necessary. But is it necessary to have this show?

(To be continued)

The South

Upahara

As I walked out
into the glowing breath of morning;
Somewhere to the South
of all imagination, hope, regret…

Out of the cave of dreams
Into the dancing flow of silence,
grace of Your golden Hill,
Beyond all meaning, praise or sacrament —

the Existence stood up
to chant in myriad radiant tones
Your Heartsong, immemorial, ever-new,
Familiar and amazing —

The glory passes,
turns round into the all-embracing silence;
Your smile crosses my heart,
And the Way unfolds in peace.
Ra. Ganapati

Writer, Scholar, Sadhak and Mystic

Christopher Quilkey

Sri Ramachandran Ganapati or as he was better known, Ra. Ganapati, was a remarkable writer on spiritual subjects in Tamil and English. He was absorbed in Arunachala around 7:30 pm at his residence in Chennai on the auspicious Mahasivaratri evening, February the 20th 2012. He was well aware that the end was near and indicated as much in his last few days to those close to him. Even though his food intake had become mainly liquid in his last years, in the last few days, it was barely a few spoonfuls, and even then he would not always take them. Mentally sharp as ever, he wrote a few notes and long letters. It was reported that on the last day, he wrote a note in Tamil, saying, “The Goddess of Salvation is waiting to welcome me with a carpet of jewels.” His family has stated that he was fully conscious and aware at the moment of his passing. He had begun chanting \textit{(japam)} as the end came that night of Sivaratri, at around ten minutes past seven.

Christopher Quilkey is a member of the magazine's editorial board.
“It is said he sat and fixed his gaze on the calendar picture of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. And leaving the body, he became One with that Light!

“The next day, adorned by a garland, his body was taken on its final journey to the cremation ground. That garland was a special one. It was one that had adorned the Ramaneshwara Mahalinga on the night of Sivaratri! A devotee had brought it from Arunachala. The ‘pen of God’ was united with the akshara-mana-malai (Marital Garland of Letters) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana!”

His Career and Relationship to the Paramacharya
Over a long career first as a journalist and then as an independent writer he composed around thirty five books and other articles on the sanatana dharma with particular emphasis on the great saints and sages notably AdiSankara, His Holiness Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Paramacharya of Kanchipuram, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa-Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Satya Sai Baba, Bhakta Meerabai to name but a few.

He was born on the first September, 1935, which was Vinayaka Chaturthi, the day on which Lord Ganapati is celebrated each year. His father Sri C.V. Ramachandran was originally from Chidambaram, and his mother Jayalakshmi was from nearby Cuddalore. He was a sensitive child and suffered from an ulcer and asthma. Sometime during his final school years he came under the influence of Vada Palani Murugan. After his graduation, he became a journalist and worked for the evening paper from Madras, The Mail.

He acquired the necessary skills as a reporter. After sometime, an odd incident occurred when due to an asthma attack he was unable to file a report on an election where he should have been present. He left the burden in the hands of Lord Murugan. The next morning he was surprised at the office to learn the file had been submitted and

his job was not at risk. He realised that with his talents he was meant for a higher purpose.

His true calling as a professional writer began with *Jaya Jaya Shankara* in 1962, a biography of AdiSankara, which was published as a serial in the influential and popular Tamil weekly *Kalki* and was later published as a book. He spent ten years at *Kalki*, and then another twenty five years as a freelance writer.

He was also a gifted musician, specializing in composition and some of his *kritis* and *bhajans* have been sung by well known Carnatic musicians.

Ra. Ganapati was a frugal man and was known never to touch money. He sought neither fame nor material possessions and long before he had acquired any general recognition for his saintly qualities, his basic needs were miraculously met. He had implicit faith in God.

Ra. Ganapati was unusual in that he did not follow the traditional path of a spiritually dedicated person who was not married. Though he did not attach himself specifically to an ashram nor did he take *sannyas*, yet he was close to the Paramacharaya^2^ and took his words as *upadesa*. The discernible modesty that marked his life was in accord with the Paramacharya’s own humble demeanour. As a bachelor he earned a sufficient living for his minimal needs and was not dependent on anyone. He lived in a small apartment in T Nagar, a district of Chennai which was sparse with a minimum of essentials; a bed, a few books and a small table to hold medicines. There were a few photographs of sages on the walls of the house and nothing else. It could have been a cave for all its simplicity.

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2 The various titles by which Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the 68th Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram is known may be confusing for non-Tamils. He was born in 1894 and from his ascension to the *gaddi* (throne) of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham in 1907 to the latter quarter of the 20th Century, he was principally known as the Sankaracharya. After his retirement as head of the *peetham* in the early 70s, he was increasingly called the Paramacharya, or the supreme teacher. In his final years the affection and reverence felt for him throughout Tamil Nadu was such that he was given the sobriquet, *Periyava*, the great swami. He attained *mahasamadhi* in 1994 at Kanchipuram.
He was a *naishthika brahmachari* (sworn lifelong celibate) and it showed in his eyes which glowed with a deep radiance of *tejas*. Mentally quick and alert, he spoke with direct and fearless honesty. Quiet and attentive, he listened with care. His writing reveals a vast erudition but he was more a mystic than an academic scholar. He wanted to live the truths of Vedanta and the bhakti schools not just comment on them.

Ra. Ganapati is best known for his *Deivattin Kural* (known in English as ‘Voice of God’) which is a compilation in seven large volumes of talks given by Jagadguru Paramacharya of Kanchipuram, beginning in the 1930s and spanning several decades. Each of these seven volumes is a thousand pages or more. If it weren’t for him the prodigious scholarship and acumen of the Paramacharya or Periyava (Maha-Swami) as he is more commonly known among Tamils, would have been lost. He noted down Periyava’s talks which he attended and to which he made cross-references. He spoke to those who attended other talks and made use of their notes. He consulted those who knew the subjects on which Periyava spoke and got the required clarifications. Periyava would speak briefly on a topic in one place and would leave it at that. He then again would take up the subject at another venue usually in a temple and elaborate it further.

The challenge for Ra. Ganapati was to maintain the flow and cohesion on the subject. He had a sharp memory and was vigilant in observing Periyava’s low-key observations and insights into the *dharma* in all its aspects. Ra. Ganapati would then give final shape to each article which was as close to the original speech as a person could possibly get without a tape recorder, so that there would be no ambiguity. One Periyava devotee G. Vaidyanathan, Secretary, Sankara Bhakta Jana Sabha, noted that, “He used the same language that Periyava used so that the reader would feel as if he was listening to Periyava!”

It says much about Ra. Ganapati that he as the ‘author’ is not anywhere in evidence in the volumes of *Deivattin Kural*. We are brought the uplifting wisdom of the Paramacharya in all its purity free of any colouring or ambiguity unrefracted by the compiler. This shows his humility and strict adherence to the truth. The former President of
The young Mahaperiyava Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal
India, R.Venkataraman, a devotee of the Periyava, accurately described *Deivattin Kural* as the *Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Upanishad*.

**Bhagavan and the Paramacharya**

Ra. Ganapati was graced with several *darshans* of Bhagavan Ramana as a boy and later had a long relationship with Sri Ramanasramam when his father was a sub-magistrate at Tiruvannamalai. He wrote extensively on Bhagavan Ramana including some twelve articles in the *Mountain Path* from 1977 to 1988 plus two volumes that have been published in Tamil titled *Ramana Manam* (Ramana Fragrance). His valuable suggestions were accepted while editing the Tamil translation of Suri Nagamma’s Telugu classic *Lekhalu* (‘Letters from Sri Ramanasramam’).

For devotees of Bhagavan among the most interesting of his articles is a long piece published in a Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham Souvenir about the relationship of respect between the Paramacharya of Kanchipuram and Sri Ramana Maharshi.

During Bhagavan’s physical lifetime, the Paramacharya twice visited Tiruvannamalai, once in 1929 and again in 1944, for the Karthikai Deepam festival in November-December. On both the occasions he made the customary *giri pradakshina* of Arunachala. As we all know Sri Ramanasramam lies on the route.

Ra. Ganapati wrote that the Sankaracharya in a discourse in Madras in the early nineteen thirties, had indicated that the Maharishi, whom he referred to as Ramana Swamigal, was a *jivan-mukta*, that is, liberated even while living in a body. For the revered head of a strictly orthodox Sankara Math, to give such praise to the Maharishi in public was unusual.

Ra. Ganapati was therefore eager to find out what actually transpired, and spoke to two knowledgeable people associated with Ramanasramam, Kunju Swami and Suri Nagamma. Kunju Svami was present on both the occasions and Suri Nagamma on the latter one.

For those who are not aware of the background a short explanation is required concerning the Mother’s samadhi in the light of the strict orthodox tradition, which the Paramacharya in his official
position as pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham was obliged to maintain. First of all, opinion was divided among the orthodoxy on the very question of the eligibility of women for *sannyasa*; and secondly, even if that was accepted, the mother of Maharshi was not initiated to that order in the formal, scriptural way. Hence her place of burial was regarded as just a grave-yard and therefore according to the strict tenets of the Brahmin code of conduct, pollutes any who enter the area.

Bhagavan’s had no quarrel with this attitude since Kanchipuram is an orthodox *peetham* (centre of a tradition or lineage, with a person of spiritual authority presiding) while Ramanasramam was an independent ashram, for so long as the Sankaracharya is the head of that *peetham* he must only follow or ‘demonstrate’ the ways and rules of the *peetham*. The Paramacharya therefore was obliged to issue a directive that as entering Ramanasramam would cause pollution, it had to be avoided.

Bhagavan had already prepared the ashramites not to be offended if the Sankaracharya, did not enter into the Ashram to see him. Because not only due to the question of pollution but also according to one tradition, the Sankaracharya or holder of the Jagadguru Peetham (Seat of the Worldteacher) should not visit another holy man on his own. Bhagavan then explained that since he had no desire or need to see anybody or anything, though he did not say it, he would not extend an invitation to anyone. As for the ashramites, he gave his blessing that they could gather outside the ashram gates and receive the darshan of the Sankaracharya as he passed by on *giripradakshina*. Most of them did just that.

By the time of the Sankaracharya’s second visit to Tiruvannamalai his stature had grown considerably, and respect for him was widespread throughout Tamil Nadu, both for his austerity, adherence to the spirit as well as the law of *sannyas* and just as important, his quiet and dignified defence of the *sanatana dharma* in the face of virulent attacks by Tamil atheists. The ashramites also kept in mind that it was the Sankaracharya who through his yogic vision saw the greatness of Bhagavan and urged Paul Brunton to come to Tiruvannamalai.
Brunton then became the instrument that opened up the way for others both in India and abroad to know that a living sage was available for all who aspired to deeper spiritual knowledge. Brunton’s account in Search in Secret India clearly revealed that the Sankaracharya considered Bhagavan a realised master who could give initiation into the higher levels of yoga.

On both the occasions of his visit to Tiruvannamalai, the Sankaracharya turned his eyes towards the entrance of the Ashram, stopped for a few seconds looked around and continued to walk along the pradakshina route.

Suri Nagamma was present in the ashram during the second visit in 1944. Because she was a widow she did not go out with the others and wait at the gate for His Holiness, and was left alone with Bhagavan. He asked her why she did not go out with the others and she replied that the Sankaracharya did not see widows who had not shaved their heads.

Ra. Ganapati wrote: “Though mature and tolerant not to denounce the orthodox custom, she felt a tinge of sadness. The Maharishi just nodded his head and looked at her with compassion, the compassion assuaged her sadness. The simple nod too conveyed a lot to the discerning disciple. It signified the Maharishi’s acceptance of both the Acharya’s adherence to the institutional customs, and Nagamma’s wisdom in not following the other such widows who used to peep at the Acharya from a hidden place.”

He also quotes Suri Nagama as saying to him that the very same night the Sankaracharya gave a public discourse in which he spoke at great length that “every head of a religious organisation has to observe established traditions while one who is an athyasrami (one transcending the four stages of life prescribed by the dharma sastras) has no such inhibitions... (To) attain that state is very difficult and that had been possible only for a great soul like Ramana Maharishi.”

It is instructive to observe how each of these great souls acted according to their dharma when faced with complex issues fraught with possible misunderstanding. The Sankaracharya as the upholder in south India
of the **sanatana dharma** strictly observed all the distinction laid out by the **dharma sastras** and orthodox traditions, whereas Bhagavan who exemplified the **ativarnasramin** (beyond the rules of caste and stages of life) was the very paragon of **samadrshti** (equal vision). Both understood each other’s position perfectly.

According to Ra. Ganapati the orthodox interpretation of the Paramacharya changed later on. For nearly a decade from the early seventies Ra. Ganapati often felt a strong urge to pay his respects at the samadhi of Bhagavan.

“At that time I had asked the Periyava (Maha-Swami) about my going to what was said to be the Mother’s temple there. He said with a smile, ‘I think you say “what is said to be” because you have heard about my pronouncement (**uttaravu**).’ He continued, ‘That was before the **kumbhabhishekam** (formal consecration of the structure as a temple) was elaborately performed there.’ The Maha-Swami indicated that with the full paraphernalia of rites performed at the **kumbhabhishekam** in 1949 for the Mathrubhuteswara Temple raised over the samadhi of The Mother, it had attained the status of a temple and there was no further question of pollution.

Lastly, when in the 1970s Ra. Ganapati felt an increasing urge to visit Ramanasramam, he wrote that “it is a fact that the Maha-Swami permitted me, who may be said to be on the side of the orthodox, to visit the place as a temple. That applies to all others of the same persuasion.”

**Mountain Path articles on Bhagavan**

His articles in *The Mountain Path* both Ra. Ganapati’s deep knowledge and profound love for Bhagavan shines through. His articles are potent with insights gained from his remarkable understanding of the **sanatana dharma**. It is obvious that his knowledge was not learned by rote but came from his own intimate experience. In this sense he will perhaps be recognized in time as a modern sage who was in the world but not of it.

It is not possible in the confines of this article to comment on all his articles in *The Mountain Path* but I would like to elaborate on just one section where he writes about Bhagavan as a poet for it is a subject dear to him for he too was a poet at heart. It is in the article *Maharshi The Poet* in the January 1987 issue.
He discusses the meaning of *rshi* (seer) and *kavi* (poet) and writes that “In our hoary and holy culture, where poetry was the expression of the highest spiritual aspirations and attainments, the *rshi* and *kavi* (poet) were one and the same. There is, in fact, an adage, *naan-rshih kurute kaavyam*, ‘None save a *rshi* creates poetry’. The very words *rshi* and *kavi* signify the same role and goal.

“*Rshi*, in its primary [*mukhya*] sense, denotes the *mantra drashta*, the one who has seen the mantras, i.e., the one who has discovered [to whom have been revealed and disclosed] the vocable-equivalents of the divine vibrations in the etheric expanse. These mantras have the power to confer on those that chant them various spiritual benefits by the potency of their very sounds and accents.”

How then does Bhagavan qualify as a *rshi* if he is immersed in the silence of the Self?

“He was the embodiment of *drkdrsyaviveka*, the realisation of the truth that the seer, seen and seeing are all illusory. Does it not seem strange to call Him a *mantra drashta* [seer] or a *kraanta darshan* [poet]? Does it not appear incongruous to call him, who was established in what is beyond words, a *rshi* or *kavi*?”

For Ra. Ganapati, “Sri Ramana’s was not the silence of the void, but the silence of the plenum from where emerge all sounds, mantras [and also all sights]. More so because Ramana himself gave him [Ganapati Muni] what he considered a *maha mantra* touching this: “If attention is directed to the source whence mantra-sound is produced, the mind is absorbed in that. That is Tapas.”

“...Ganapati Muni found that this ‘teaching was quite original and nothing like what had ever been found in any book.’ So it was a new great revelation of a spiritual truth and that too, given as vocal Instruction and therefore entitled to the status of a *mahamantra*. He who discovered the *mahamantra* was undoubtedly Maharshi.”

From this we gain some idea of Ra.Ganapati’s range and originality. He both instructs and inspires with his flights of learning and poetic imagination. His legacy is a bountiful one, which will enthuse all who cherish his memory and value his profuse, wise and incisive writings.

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Every person is this world, except for the rare sahaja nistha Sage who is in sahaja samadhi, perceives a world of multiplicity, of myriad subjects and objects. To deny this is to fly in the face of the obvious. The question arises whether it is pertinent, appropriate, more advantageous to totally deny multiplicity and proclaim, “I am That”; that nothing has ever been born or dies, or to acknowledge multiplicity and use it to progress on one’s spiritual path.

Sri Ramana Maharshi sometimes spoke of a distinction made between the Absolute (paramartika) and the relative (vyavaharika) points of view. What is true from one point of view is not so from another. To put this in simple terms, from the sun’s perspective, the sun neither rises nor sets; there is neither darkness nor concealment.

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Opp. page: A rare photograph of ‘Mahaperiyava’ Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal
nor varying shades of light. By definition, darkness cannot be where light is. However, from the perspective of an individual upon the earth, the sun rises and sets; there are both light and darkness and varying shades in between and, it is valid to label the sun an enemy of darkness. Two seemingly contradictory propositions, both equally valid and true, once their particular perspectives are correctly understood. Nevertheless, note that what is valid from one perspective is not from another. From the sun’s perspective, all is light. From darkness’ perspective, there is relative light and relative darkness and every shade in between. Sri Ramana used both definitions depending upon context and convenience. Until a person is a mukta, can the relative point of view be ignored?

Sri Ramana acknowledged that while distinct appearances are observed at the empirical level, all distinctions, while perceived, lose their distinct subject-object dichotomy from the Absolute point of view. That is, “All this is Brahman” is absolutely true while ‘all this is individually separate and distinct’ is relatively true. What is true from one point of view or level of reality is not from another. However, this does not mean that there are two realities, two truths. There is one Truth, one Reality, as seen from two different perspectives.

This distinction between points of view is sometimes spoken of in the Advaita tradition as: the essential (svarupa) and the accidental/modal (tatastha) definitions. An example of tatastha-laksana is that Brahman is the cause of the origin, sustenance, and cessation of the world. In Advaita philosophy, the cause is not interpreted as the changing material of the world but as the unmodified ground of the appearance of it. The world is not a modification of Brahman but a non-real or illusory appearance that is mistaken for it. For a seeker, Brahman is known only when the appearance which covers It is negated. Brahman is not one real and the world another. Brahman is the reality of the world, its very essence. Without negating the appearance one cannot know Brahman. The progression is from the appearance to the real, from the false to the true.

Sat (Truth/Existence), Cit (Consciousness/Wisdom) and Ananda (Bliss/Infinitude) constitute the traditional Upanisadic definition of
Brahman and thus, according to Advaita, they are examples of the essential definition (svarûpa-laksana) of Brahman, as different from its definition per accidens (tatastha-laksana). Unlike the essential characteristic, secondary or accidental characteristics do not last as long as what supports them, distinguishing them from other things.

The Absolute is Truth, Wisdom, Infinitude, says the Upanisad.¹ “The Absolute is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, says Sri Ramana.² What is the Reality? Silence is his answer, for Reality is that whence all speech along with the mind retreat, being unable to reach, not attaining It.”³ Note that any essential description of Brahman, though more accurate than accidental descriptions, cannot directly convey the idea of Brahman. It only serves to direct the mind towards Brahman by denying it of finiteness, unreality and unconsciousness.

Sri Ramana replied, when asked which is the best method of spiritual practice (sadhana), “That depends on the temperament of the individual. Every person is born with latent tendencies (samskara) from his past lives. One method will prove easy to one person and another to another. There can be no general rule.”⁴ There are many methods. You may practise Self-enquiry asking yourself, “Who am I?” or if that does not appeal to you, you may meditate on “I am Brahman”, or some other theme; or you may concentrate on an incarnation or invocation. The object in every case is to make the mind one-pointed, to concentrate it on one thought and thereby exclude the many other thoughts. If we do this, the one thought also eventually goes and the mind is extinguished at its source.⁵ Accordingly, spiritual practices (sadhana) are not performed in order to gain the Self, for one is already That, but to remove the impurities which cover it hiding its presence from the seeker.

¹ Taittiriya Upanisad 2.1.1. satyam jnanam anantam brahma
² Nagamma, Suri, Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, p.196.
³ Taittiriya Upanisad, 2.4.1 yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasa saha
⁵ Mudaliar, Devaraja, Day by Day with Bhagavan, II, p.30, 19-10-45 morning.
Sri Ramana is not actually opposed to these prerequisites for a spiritual aspirant and most likely would agree that without them, it is unlikely that a person would even begin a spiritual discipline, let alone be successful. “The very fact that you are possessed of the quest for the Self is a manifestation of divine grace . . . but such grace is vouchsafed only to him who is a true devotee or yogi . . . effort is necessary up to the state of realization”. These disciplines help to purify the mind and without them being present in at least some degree, practising a spiritual discipline would be like pouring water into a pot that has holes in the bottom. No matter how much water is poured into such a pot (be it Self-enquiry, meditation, etc.), the fruits of such practices will just run out the holes at the bottom of the pot.

One notices that Sri Ramana, in a manner similar to the Advaita tradition, would define Reality either by stating its essential nature (svarupa-laksana) or, for the purpose of distinguishing it from other things, by stating its accidental attributes (tatastha-laksana). Individuals may be defined in terms of their essential nature as Existence, Consciousness, Bliss or by any of their accidental attributes, e.g., maleness, femaleness, profession, etc. While both definitions define a thing from all others, the essential nature of a thing is eternally present while accidental attributes remain in that thing only for a limited period of time. Which definition Sri Ramana used depended upon context and convenience.

While the Advaita tradition makes use of both definitions, it traditionally begins with the definition of accidental attributes first. It does this for two practical methodological reasons. First of all, a definition that is based on familiar modes of thinking is easily comprehensible to most people. The teacher leads a seeker “from the known to the unknown.” First attributes, qualities and relations are superimposed on the Reality so as to enable a person to form some sort of rudimentary understanding. Then gradually these attributes are negated as a deeper and deeper analysis is performed. From the

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6 Ibid., 24-12-45 evening.
7 Vedanta Paribhasa.
familiar, one is led to the unfamiliar. Secondly, there arises an unusual difficulty in the case of *Brahman/Atman* because it is not an empirical object. We have already noted that the non-dual Self cannot be defined using words since it is beyond, it transcends the reach of words and the mind.\(^8\) This being noted, the *Upanisads* do attempt to define the Absolute from both the *svarupa* and *tatastha-laksana* perspectives for teaching purposes. Since individuals are familiar with the world and the concept of causality, *Brahman* is first defined as the cause of the universe. This causality is an accidental attribute superimposed on *Brahman*. Such a definition makes the Absolute appear subject to categories, attributes, and the causal scheme. Such definitions are always open to challenge. The concept of causality or the ‘proofs for the existence of God’ are evidence enough to show the tentativeness and uncertainty that accompanies such a definition. Categories cannot transgress their logical limits. Either the unconditional Absolute is within the realm of the phenomena, and thus not unconditional, or else its existence and nature can only be dogmatically asserted. Acknowledging this, it is said that such a (provisional) definition is still useful in certain circumstances.

Then, having defined *Brahman* in this preliminary manner as the cause of the world, the *Upanisads* go on to define *Brahman* in terms of its essential nature: “*Brahman* is the Truth of truth, the Real of the real”; “*Brahman* is Real, Wisdom, Infinite;” “Being, Consciousness, Bliss.” It should be noted here that these terms are not separate or accidental attributes of *Brahman* but Its essential nature; *Brahman* is Real, Is Being, Is Consciousness; Consciousness is Infinite, is Bliss, etc.

Sri Ramana, not being overly interested in philosophy, was, more often than not when asked, either silent or presented a *svarupa-laksana* definition of Reality. Unless pushed, he rarely spoke of accidental definitions though, like the Upanishadic methodology, he always began with what is known to an individual, i.e. ‘I’. On the other

\(^8\) *Taîttrīya Upanisad* 2.4.1. Also see *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* 2.3.6., wherein Sankara states, “The Absolute can never be properly denoted by any word(s), including the word ‘Absolute’.”
hand, he quite often spoke of the Reality as Existence (Sat in Sanskrit and Ulladu in Tamil).

One should be aware that the term Existence in this context does not mean any particular existent, anything with name and form. It is not a predicate of an object. It should be noted here that this is a fundamental distinction propounded by Sri Ramana. If this is not correctly understood, inappropriate interpretations may rise, which they often did.

Sri Ramana regarded Existence as the essential nature of the Reality. The Reality is Existence and Existence is the Reality. This Existence is not the existence that is meaningful only in an object. Pure Being or ‘Sat’ is not one being among beings. Existence, as it is usually used in both empirical and philosophical discourse, is a determinative description, a categorical expression, e.g., the man exists or the house exists.

He was quick to point out that the Reality is neither ‘existent’ nor ‘non-existent’ in the ordinary sense of those terms. He said: “Reality must always be real. It is not with forms and names. Reality is that which is. It is as it is. It transcends speech and is beyond the expressions ‘existence, non-existence’, and so on.”9 The Reality merely is, and can never be designated exclusively as this or that. As it is pure Being, no causal relationship can be applied to it.

Sri Ramana would quote an analogy from the Chandogya Upanisad to explain the relation between Reality as Existence and the various appearances that are existents, appearances with names and forms. Gold appears in a variety of forms, as rings, necklaces, bracelets, cups, plates, and so on. In the various objects, what is real is gold and the names and forms of each object are superimposed upon the gold. Gold persists while names and forms come and go. When the superimposition of names and forms is removed, all that remains is gold and gold alone. In his Forty Verses on Reality, Sri Ramana said: “The many ornaments are illusory. Say, do they exist apart from the gold which is real?”10

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10 Forty Verses on Reality, verse 13.
The Chandogya Upanisad says: “Just as . . . by one nugget of gold, all that is made of gold becomes known.”\textsuperscript{11} In a similar way, the entire world with all its names and forms, all the existent particulars, are superimposed upon the Reality that is Existence. The upshot of this is, whether from the standpoint of Advaita or Sri Ramana, the \textit{tatastha laksanas} of the world of multiplicity have a utility, a moral necessity, and a value in the life of an engaged spiritual seeker.

\textsuperscript{11} Chandogya Upanisad 6.1.5

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Where the fervid day
melts into sinuous night;
in that zone, \textit{Sandhyaa},
we worship your black body
and your heart of pristine light.

\textit{Madawalini},
your drunken eyes roll
in red dementia;
your skin erupts in suns,
your dreams into brilliant time.

On the edge of night,
in a deep lotus forest
beyond the north wind,
\textit{Mahapadmatavi samsthaa},
vermilion mother, you dwell.

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.
Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s Commentary

Verse Thirty Five

S. Ram Mohan

Verse 35: True siddhi or ‘attainment’ means “to be established eternally in the Awareness of the Self”. All other siddhis (attainment) are just like supernatural or occult powers experienced in the course of one’s dream. Do these attainments survive on waking? Will the liberated ones, who have transcended the unreal and are established in the Self be deluded by the lure of these siddhis? (No) Know this for certain.

Commentary

The word siddhi means ‘gain’ or ‘attainment’. In this verse, Bhagavan teaches us that we should strive for the Self which is the true gain because the Self is eternal. All else is transient, being part of the world of illusions.

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Awareness of the Self is the natural state. Its nature may remain concealed by an enveloping nescience; but it will not undergo change nor will we ever really lose Self. In the relative state of worldly existence the experiences alternate among the three states of wakefulness, deep sleep and dream. But what we refer to as ‘wakeful state’ is not truly a wakeful state in the spiritual sense. It is a dream of ignorance. *Tripura Rahasya* clearly explains that what is deemed as the ‘wakeful’ state is also a dream-state (*swapna*). Just as a dreamer considers all events in the course of his dream as real, so also, due to ignorance, we consider the dream world of illusion in the so-called wakeful state as real. All experiences of dualities belong to the wakeful/dream (*jagrat/swapna*). Bhagavan says that this *samsara*, the sequence of births and death, the world enjoyment and sufferings, occult attainments (*siddhis*), even the personal Gods like Siva and Vishnu — are all occurrences in the dream state. This is due to ignorance (*avidya*).

When a *sadhaka* aspiring for Self-realization performs intense *sadhana* some incidental *siddhis* may manifest. An aspirant who is dedicated to *sadhana* is not distracted by them. He waves them aside and pursues his quest with determination. Others get distracted by these temporary attainments and freeze in their development and start pursuing the path of fame and fortune. We should not be carried away by the display of *siddhis*. We should recognize that there are different levels of consciousness. Compared to the flora and fauna, man is at a higher level of evolution. Therefore, what a man ordinarily does may appear to be a supernatural attainment to an animal! Likewise, there are planes of consciousness higher than that of an ordinary person. When a person during the course of his *sadhana* ascends to these planes, he will discover there are subtle powers, which he can operate. What appears as an astonishing supernatural act to an ordinary man will be just natural to him. But when a man is dedicated to the attainment of Self-realization, the supreme *siddhi*, he should not be distracted by the co-called *siddhis*. Supernatural *siddhis* operate only in the mental plane where the triad of seer-object-act of seeing prevail, whereas the state of Self-realization is transcendental, beyond time and space, cause and effect.
Bhagavan says, even now, in this state of ignorance, we are the Self. There is no need for us to ‘become’ the Self. Therefore, the Self is ever-won, nitya-siddha, there is nothing to be attained anew.

Whatever is not ours by nature but is obtained by us through some means is sure to be lost. This gross body, which is gained by birth and will be lost by death, is itself evidence. This is the natural law. Therefore, apart from the Self, all else are false, they are like the accomplishments attained in one’s dream.

The ignorant believe that the well-known eight kinds of powers (ashta maha siddhis) are great attainments. To the jnani, these do not appear as real, because his state is the supreme state, transcending the world of illusion. For the others, who revel in siddhis, who have no desire to wake-up from the dream of samsara, taking place in the sleep of ignorance, these siddhis occur as pleasant dreams!

The dreams last only so long as we are in dream-sleep state. They appear as real in that state. On waking, we find that they are not real. In the same way to the jnani, who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance, these siddhis are not real. Hence Bhagavan puts the rhetorical question in the last part of the verse: “Are they real to the one who has awakened?”

There is a beautiful story, narrated by Dravidacharya in his commentary on Upanishads and which is exemplified by Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary. When a king was killed by a conspiracy, his queen escapes to the forest and delivers a child there. She dies during childbirth. The child is brought up by the hunters in the forest. He acquires all the habits of a forest-dwelling hunter and grows up to be a hunter. Then, the prime minister of the killed king comes to the forest. At the very first sight of the boy, he recognizes royal signs in him. When he enquires, the boy stoutly denies that he is anybody other than a hunter boy. Enquiry from the elders confirms that the boy is actually the prince. He then makes the boy realize his true identity as the prince. On knowing this, the prince overcomes the usurpers and regains the throne. Sri Sankara says that allegorically the prince is the jiva, who lives in the world of delusion not knowing his true identity and thinks that he is only a hunter-boy. The minister
is the guru who reveals the true-identity of the boy to him, as the prince or as the Self. Then the sadhaka (prince) overcomes the usurpers (sensual attractions) and ascends the throne of Self-realization. When a guru instructs the sadhaka on his true identity, the sadhaka knows for himself that he is not the ordinary form of body-mind-intellect complex but the child of immortality. When ignorance is removed our true nature stands unveiled.

Bhagavan also cautions the aspirant against hankering after occult powers and becoming ensnared in the quicksand of siddhis. When a devotee questioned whether wisdom and siddhis are opposed to each other or they are complementary, Bhagavan replied, “To be established in the natural state is incessantly performing difficult penance; spontaneously powers come to the sage by such ripeness of tapas. He will show such powers only if so ‘destined’. ” Bhagavan also said that the wise do not see the world as apart from the Self. Even when they manifest such powers, they do not regard them as other than the Self. The true jnani always abides in the Self like a waveless ocean. The siddhis, attained as a result of prarabdha are no hindrance to him.

In verse 15 of the Supplement to the Forty Verses, Bhagavan compares the manifestation of the siddhis to the ‘dance of mad men’. Yogi Ramiah narrated to Bhagavan the performance of a conjuror who could materialize any object from space, yet had to beg for alms for quenching his hunger. When he was asked by the Yogi as to why he could not produce food for himself by a mere wave of his hand, the conjuror replied that his powers, obtained by penance and prayers to a spirit, could not be used for his own benefit; nor could he opt out of the exercise of his magical powers. He could do so only at his peril! Thus he was driven to beg for his food. On hearing this Bhagavan commented, “The fate of all who run after siddhis is the same as that of this poor person.”
The Jackal: Young and Old

Reminiscences of Narikutti Swami

My personal reminiscence of him begins in the early 1980’s when I went to India for the first time. I had arrived with only the clothes I stood in. It was winter in England, thirty degrees in South India and my summer clothes were in my luggage which the airline had sent back to England. After a gruelling but interesting five hour bus journey I got to my destination, Arunachala. I looked up a friend whom I had met a year before in England. He told me that the best person to help me to get some new clothes was a man called Narikutti Swami. We walked into town where he pointed up the lower slopes of the mountain and showed me the building where he said I would find Narikutti Swami.

Half an hour later I got to Narikutti Swami’s house which looked like a cross between a cave and a lean-to but which was actually a

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very small converted old temple. I explained my problem which was obvious because I was drenched in sweat from my climb in western clothes. We both laughed at my minor but uncomfortable predicament. He had short cropped white hair with matching stubble and two pieces of white cloth which covered his broad sturdy frame. He was barefoot and seemed light of heart.

He took me down the hill to a tailor and by the time we had finished several cups of coffee I had a new cotton shirt and pair of trousers and a certainty that this man not only had integrity but that he was very unusual. We met many times over 10 years, usually for a three hour cup of coffee in the steamy heat of a South Indian teashop or for a walk around the hill. I developed great respect for him, and whenever I visited Arunachala, I always looked out for him.

I remember our conversation the first time I met him because not only did he have a razor sharp in depth understanding of so many things that interested me, but he also had an interesting way of explaining things. I was also intrigued by what underpinned the enigmatic nature of this friendly man with no past. After our first meeting I wrote down what I remembered we had discussed, so the following is my recollection and not a verbatim account.

“How long have you lived here?” I asked.

“I’ve been here many years. Do you see those trees up there?” He said pointing up the mountain. “I’m trying to restore some forest to the hill. Once it was a dense forest. When I came here there wasn’t a single tree on it.”

“Are you Australian?”

“Yes. I came in my twenties and went to Sri Lanka. Yoga Swami was my guru there.”

“What made you come here?” I asked

“No-one knows this here, so please don’t tell anyone, but I trained as an architect in Australia. That kind of life was not me. When Yoga Swami died in 1964 I came to the mountain, just like he’d done. I’ve lived here ever since.”
“And your name. Where is it from?” I asked.
“They call me Narikutti Swami, but I don’t’ like all that Narikutti nonsense. I got the name from a wild dog who kept me company when I first arrived here from Australia. Narikutti means young jackal. I’m just an old jackal now. An old fool after thirty years here,” he said.

“That’s a lifetime here.” I said.
“But I’ve been lucky to be so happy here.”

“You must know the people here well then?” I asked.
“Yes I seem to understand them. Not too bad for an old Australian fool who tends to the trees on the hill.”

“You must have met some wise people here during that time.”
“Many fools just the same as me.”

“Usually the fool is the wisest of all because he has insights and humour which most don’t have.” I said.
“There’ve been just a few here over the last century or two.”

“Anyone special?” I asked.
“The man Venkataraman who became known as Ramana Maharshi who lived here and probably the young Swede called Swami Ramanagiri.” The Australian Narikutti seemed deeply reflective and there was a silence. “And maybe an old friend of mine called Annaikutti. He had so many aliases like Annaikutti, Sandeswami, and Santhaswami (Soulbury Swami). In fact he was Viscount Lord Soulbury’s son. He went back to England to take up his position in the House of Lords.”

Narikutti was very funny and indeed a very wise fool. He saw everything in a positive humorous way. He was almost like a happy child. I felt like I had known him as a friend since I was a boy. He was almost always at the same time serious and humorous about everything; as is somehow pointing out the unimportance of thinking. I was particularly interested in what he thought about suffering, therapy and the direct path.

“On a practical level, if a person still has profound issues which have not been resolved such as some past trauma, then it will be
difficult for them to simply be calm inside themselves. Healing should be looked at by some sort of self examination, perhaps writing or talking to someone, even a friend. Spirituality is not a substitute for dealing with this and any kind of ‘searching’ is most likely to be just avoidant play which feeds the need of the mind to escape from the more ‘needy’ unpleasant reality. All this un-worked out stuff has to be processed, otherwise it bothers you and will block you. After the Second World War several people came and lived here who had been in POW camps and were either tortured or very shaken by what happened to them. They sorted themselves out here first and then they practised what the old man showed them about ‘just being.’

“It’s a fundamental reality check, which without exploring first, means you shouldn’t look anywhere else. It’s a hierarchy of needs check. You may need to get off your cross because you need the wood for a fire to keep warm or cook your food. But these things have to actually be in place or action still being taken about them before any journey starts into the spiritual. Avoidant spirituality is common not just in India but everywhere in temples, therapy sessions and being with a guru.”

“What about therapists, Gurus and priests?”

“The main difficulty in looking at religion, spirituality and therapy seems to be sorting out of who is authentic from all of the religious leaders, gurus and therapists because all of them seem to have unexpected dark sides to them. Sorting out which one you may need, if you do, is another question which I spent years looking at before I came here. I’ve met a lot of people who have got lost with Gurus, therapists and religious leaders. Now the reasons why seem much clearer to me. If it helps you not having to tread all the paths that these people have trod, then I’ll explain.

“Part of a religion’s function was originally to unite and to keep certain groups of people together by providing each person with a shared sense of purpose and meaning. Rituals, religious mantras and rosaries mesmerise people and are the glue that binds them together. Every religion, even if it’s just the belief of a small group of people, attempts to provide meaning about everything in life, from how to
THE JACKAL: YOUNG AND OLD

grow up, work and even what to eat and what not to eat. Religion provided a common explanation of everything in life and life’s ultimate outcome by belief in a better fate for each person in the next life.

“The focus of faith is largely based on fear. Through fear, religions have clearly kept a great sense of order in the world for a very long time. But they are institutions, in some ways like schools. And they have also been responsible for a lot of conflicts.

“These days, some people who seem lost don’t look to religion; they come here. They come here because religion is the most obvious thing in India as it seems to be everywhere you turn, which is certainly not the case in Western Europe. There are thousands of different Gods and Goddesses. Most visitors look in India for something that’s common to them all, something which unifies these, the essence of all religions. In India you soon realise that the unifying common denominator is not in the religions but in you. It could easily be said that spirituality is all psychological and that God is really inside us. Spirituality is our highest function. It is our highest way of being. God is really inside us, not outside us.

“Let me try and get you to see this. The English poet Shakespeare said it when he wrote, ‘To thine own self be true.’ This is the same as the message from the old man to ask yourself ‘Who am I.’ There are two things written on the portals of the Temple of Adelphi in Greece, ‘Know the Self’ and ‘Nothing to excess.’ Christ said that the kingdom of God is within. What could be more plain and simple than that? They are from different cultures and ages but essentially saying the same thing.

“But there are all sorts of levels of attainment. For most people in the world’s larger traditional religions, their fundamental beliefs are really very much unchanged today from how they were two thousand years ago and they can go through their whole life accepting these ready-made explanations of life, God and the universe. However, there are others who as we say in Australia are ‘non-sheep.’ These non-sheep are the most interesting. There is an old saying by the nineteenth century monk Vivekananda which says, ‘It’s a blessing to be born into a religion and a tragedy to die in one.
Mountain Path

“Let me go a bit further and amplify this. It’s a privilege to leave one and discover your own self and find out what you are.”

“Do you think India is a good place to do that?”

“Yes, but only because by being in India you are so overwhelmed by the plethora of religious thought that eventually you are forced to give up all beliefs and all sets of rules. It’s unique.

“It’s more to do with the discipline of attending to the inner self. And not an outer set of rules. It’s inner discipline, not an outer theory about the inside like therapy and religion. It’s like riding a bike. You have to get on it and start pedalling. You can’t sit on it and discuss it. You have to do it. You have to get going. You have to start having time to ‘just be,’ to be your inner self.

“It requires repeated daily work and this is probably the essence of the modern day true spiritual path. Perhaps this is why the more modern gurus of the last two hundred years have apparently seemed so popular in recent years. In the last hundred years therapists have tried to take over their function, but unsuccessfully.”

“And Jung. What do you make of him?”

“Ah Jung! It was Jung’s thoughts that made him unhappy, like many people who come here. Jung was seen as a genius of his time but he probably regretted not coming here because he wasn’t willing to take the risk. I was fortunate because I had nothing to lose. So like a fool I came here to live. The mountain has looked after me and it’s never let me down. It’s really good to be a fool.” He was looking up at the mountain as if still in awe of it and he was smiling.

“You look at the mountain like a familiar friend.”

“It has always been my best friend. I think ‘good friends’ are usually less risky and perhaps better than therapists because their only motivation to help you is because they like you. There is no investment in carrying on with you other than friendship. There is only enjoying being with you. They are not getting a sense of expanding their ego, power base or popularity by seeing you. I’ve often wondered if people who present to therapists only do so in many cases because they don’t have ‘good enough’ friends.
“I’m only telling you this because I have seen so much of the underlying reasons why people come here. There are lots of spiritual tourists who come here on a vacation out of an intellectual interest in what is here. But they are not interested in finding out about themselves. They don’t actually try and ‘just be’ and find out who they really are.

“I’m not sure I’ve met many normal people here. Lots of the people who come here and stay a while would probably be taking medication from their doctors if they weren’t here. This place really does help them.

“In answer to your earlier question, ‘Is India the best place to do this...probably but you have to be cautious. Some people can become very unstable who are probably unstable anyway. I’ve see a lot of people become very strange and well...crazy. Some people appear to have breakdowns whilst they may actually be breaking through, away from what they have been. It can be as consuming as total devotion and the effects are probably the same. I have seen people pour themselves in to this and I now know that consciousness can be a painful thing for some people and it may be best left alone.”

“Basically you’re saying that some people shouldn’t dabble?”

“Yes. Some people are probably best just to worship and devote themselves to a god, goddess, a mountain, a rock or a river but not to really question. This is another function of some gurus; to be devoted to. This might appear to be true for some therapists too. With some people a guru can appear to unconditionally accept a disciple’s unspoken love for them, as well as their unspoken problems and faults or sins, and the devotee can then think that they are being given love back from the guru, without all of the basic human worldly things that would usually go with loving someone. The problem with this type of relationship is that the devotee projects on to the guru, god, statue or stone and these people have to largely imagine what they think they are receiving back in return. But sometimes this might be all a person needs in their life at that time and their vulnerability may be reduced, which can be the whole point.

“Others may feel that the only way they can show love is by giving money and that’s why so many gurus or ashrams are very wealthy.
Perhaps it’s a sad thing to accept, but it’s a fact that some people only see themselves as being able to give money in return for everything in life. But if money is their form of personal energy then it’s probably a fair exchange. It probably only seems strange because the people who receive the money can look amusingly hypocritical by what they choose to spend it on. I’m sure you’ve seen them with their dozens of luxury cars.

“If you don’t ask about your life, or question yourself about how to lead it and you don’t follow any religion, guru or therapist, you may appear to look happy. You may appear to be very fortunate and not be needy or vulnerable. But the truth is that we all know that this is not the case. Because as life progresses, it usually deals out a lot of pain.

“If you are wealthy and overprotected by wealth you are usually cut off from the inner self. That’s what the Bible meant by saying that it is more difficult for a rich man to get to heaven than to get a camel through the eye of a needle. In India God is seen as being the inner self and this is actually what Christ meant when he said that the ‘kingdom of God is within’. They are different ways of saying the same thing. Preoccupation with wealth and what it brings distract you from your real neediness, from what you can be. It is all simple psychology. But Christ wasn’t the first to say this. Five hundred years before him a prince Siddhartha Gautama gave up everything to find the inner self.

“After some time in India you begin to notice that people who seem to be in search of ‘enlightenment’ most commonly go in search of someone else to follow. They will look everywhere and repeatedly search out guru after guru, sometimes for years, but they won’t look inside themselves and stick with that. It’s the single most frustrating thing to observe in these people and after some time it can become an amusing thing as well. Any simple honest person would simply point a finger at them telling them to look inside themselves. The Inner guru rather like the inner physician is to be always trusted above everyone else. You know when you’ve got a good doctor or a bad one. The same can be said for the self.

“India is a good place to visit and explore this, but rather like a raft, it should only be used to cross a difficult river and not to actually live
on. Once you get to the other side you have to discard it and walk away as there is no point in carrying a raft on your back on dry land. The same could be said for therapy. Sadly this is not seen by most people and they easily become slaves to their need for an external Guru or a therapist.

“I’ve spent years here seeing all sorts of people come and go trying to answer the same question, trying to find themselves. It really is simple and you just have to look within. You have to just be and get rid of the thoughts.”

“What happens as you get more in touch with the silent part, with the inner peace?”

“You eventually see that your worst enemy is thinking about it because thinking only leads to mental constipation. Thinking blocks your ability to just be. When you get through this, you can ‘just be’ and everything is just a dance in front of you.”

**Seduction**

Ana Callan

His eyes are not eyes.
They are the essence 
of perfect god light, streaming 
past all of creation, 
merged with eternity. 
They are married to The Secret, 
God’s exquisite kiss. 
They are the chalice 
that can speak 
a thousand languages 
in one whisper of silence. 
They are galaxies of liquid, 
disembodied. 
They are the fire 
that can free you 
and transport you 
into Love’s ecstatic bliss.
Srinivasan Sridharan

Srinivasan Sridharan (1942 - 2011) was a professor of civil engineering at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. He enjoyed rigorous intellectual enquiry as a scientist and academic, and treasured his role as a guide and mentor to countless students. He was an ardent admirer of Sri Ramana Maharshi, J. Krishnamurti, and Sri Aurobindo, as well as a devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba. A relentless seeker of Truth unvarnished by belief, dogma, or ideology, he charted a course that valued enquiry over conclusion.

Saguna and Nirguna

From time immemorial, Indian spirituality has had two dominant strands: Saguna worship: the adoration of Divine with a particular name and form; and a yearning for Nirguna, an enquiry and feeling into that which is nameless, immeasurable and indescribable. More than just being forms of worship, they are corollaries respectively of two fundamentally different philosophies of life and approaches to spirituality — one leading to action in the world and the other to pure contemplation. In this article we attempt to show that they are both complementary and it is at the Saguna-Nirguna interface that Life and Yoga find their fulfilment.
Whither Saguna?

The term Saguna means ‘the one with qualities and attributes’. Thus the divine is conceived and meditated upon as having certain qualities which evoke adoration as well as being a form that is delectable. In so far as all qualities are based on sensory perception, triggering of brain reactions to that perception and the associations based on what has already been experienced and programmed in the brain, it would seem that Saguna worship is confined to the realm of likes and dislikes and pain and pleasure. Clearly in this track there is a subject-object relationship between the human and the Divine. Further, since life in general is dogged by uncertainty, humans turn to the Divine as the redeemer, as one who would protect them from physical pain, emotional turmoil, and the nagging insecurities of day to day life and help them fulfil their agenda, that is, whatever they seek to achieve either for themselves or those to whom they are attached. Given this general notion of Saguna worship, one may enquire, what power and potential does it have, to lead man away from a life of spiritual mediocrity, into realm untouched by egoistic turmoil, to open the heart to compassion and universal love and to a state of divine awareness and ananda.

Nirguna paradox

With respect to Nirguna worship, there is perhaps a more fundamental problem. Indeed Nirguna worship is an oxymoron. How can one conceive that which has no form or attributes, much less worship it? Obviously, the human mind does need the medium of form however subtle, (may be some kind of light?), attributes and associations to be able to relate to the so called Supreme Being.

The human condition

Our day to day lives are spent in the Saguna realm in the sense of subject-object division. To live is to be related and relationship implies ‘me’ and ‘the other’. This brings in multifarious complications, such as fear, hurt, embarrassment, self-consciousness, desire to possess and control which all may be collectively referred to as ‘conflict’. Nature has ingrained in the living beings the instinct of self-preservation and desire to procreate – as part of its intelligent design. But because of
a quirk in the evolutionary process, the operation of this intelligent mechanism is rendered morbid by the mind’s embroidery: anticipation of future in terms of pleasure and pain, its calculations and divisions of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ and its body-consciousness made acute by remembered pleasure-pain. This self-defensive and self-aggrandizing machinery of reaction of the human brain is its conditioning and is the source of all human conflict and sorrow. Finally there is the inevitable deterioration and dissolution of the body with time, bringing with it the ending of the very frame of experience. So, human life is often declared as transient and painful (dukhhalayam asaswatham; anityam asukham).

Seeing all this, what is one to do? Is there a way out? However, any effort on the part of the conditioned brain to extricate itself from itself is vain and but a perpetuation of its conditioning.

**Nivritti**

To a serious enquirer verbal explanations of how this question may be resolved will appear futile. One therefore has to take an operational approach. Being sceptical of the reactions of the conditioned brain, one should only watch its activity as a witness (cf. *sakshi chaitanya* of Sankara, ‘Will-less contemplation’ of Schopenhauer). This awareness at its greatest depth exposes the totality of the activity of the conditioned psyche to itself. This complete exposure is tantamount to complete negation and therefore an invitation to the fathomless depths of utter tranquility (*parama shanti*) — an inner sanctuary beyond the tribulations and turbulences of ego — a sanctuary with secret doors to the divinity within.

The foregoing in a nutshell is a rough outline of *Nivritti* way of life — *nivritti* as against *pravritti*, negation as against affirmation, withdrawal rather than engagement in life, contemplation rather than action — the quintessential Nirguna ethos. In order to appreciate this approach, one has to abandon the point of view of a particular individual and observe the entire cosmos impersonally from an universal standpoint (something one caught in the web of day-to-day mundane problems would consider impossible). Observed from this vantage point, it is clear that all actions, including all the
reactions of brain, are performed by nature by the permutations and combinations of *gunas*. The individual ego, however, is deluded into thinking that he is the doer (*Prakrithe: kriyamanani gunii: karmani nityasha: Ahamkara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*). All the choices made by the individual are indeed dictated by a conditioned brain and have at their very root the pleasure-pain motivation. It is then clear that Free-will is but an illusion. Krishna says in the 14th chapter of the Gita that if there is a clear perception that there is no doer other than the *gunas* of *prakriti*, (*na anyam gunebhya: kartaram*) then there is a possibility of insight into that which is beyond the *gunas* (*gunebhyascha param*).

What then is the action called for? The answer follows in the last section of the chapter fourteen. Nothing can be done by the individual and nothing needs to be done at all. For individuality is a construct of the brain, which is a figment of *Prakriti*. This becomes clear against the backdrop of a choiceless, effortless, total awareness of the whole movement of *prakriti* within and without. Any transformation that does occur is not the result of the initiative of the individual ego, but the work of Nature. This is a voyage into uncharted seas with results that are completely unpredictable in details, but it does lead to true enduring freedom and fathomless felicity. Verily our real nature, if anything, is awareness, that has the power to burn all the *vasanas*, complexes, inhibitions and contortions of the ego — this done in its completeness, opens the door to the expanse of the universal and transcendent on which the body-consciousness and the three states of deep sleep, dream and wakefulness associated with it are but passing ripples (*avasthaatraya sakshyasmi*).

Action called for is thus inaction – find in yourself the status of a *sarvarambha parityagi* (one who abandons all undertakings) — be the immutable witness untouched by the movements of *Prakriti*. Stay focused in the understanding that you are that light by which you know you are. Shall we call it the Nirguna way? How then, does action proceed — action that is necessary to sustain life and its drama – in this Saguna frame of experience? This is a dichotomy which we shall have to resolve.
Saguna bhakti

While all this is intellectually enchanting and theoretically feasible, it is bound to cause confusion in those who are naturally drawn to devotion to personal Godhead and a life of action informed by such devotion. Krishna of the Gita is well aware of this danger (cf. *na budhhi bhedam janayet agnananam karmasanginam*). The last but one sloka in chapter fourteen is precisely addressed to these devotees: “One who is in a state ecstatic and intimate personal adoration of Divinity (*bhakti-yogena sevate*) without a trace of worldliness (*avyabhicharena*) transcends the play of the *gunas* and becomes one with *Brahman*.”

Human is intrinsically divine. Though enmeshed in the complex web of fear-desire pain-pleasure *raga-dwesha* dualities, propelled by ego and attachment (*ahamkara-mamakara*) and lost in the world of names and forms, he can be potentially sensitive to the call of the divine and has a natural attraction to beauty, goodness and truth. How and why in certain (small minority?) individuals this becomes a dominant instinct is beside the point. The fascination for the divine name, form and attributes, be it Lord Krishna or Goddess Lalita, once engendered in the heart, overrides every other temporal interest and in fact has the power to cleanse the heart of its complexities and hidden motives and dirt (*kalmashas*). So the *gopis* sing “Your story is the nectar which brings life to many a burnt-out soul; cleanses the heart of its dirt ... makes one forget all other desires (*tava kathamrutham tapta jeevanam ... kalmashapaham ... itararagavismaranam...*)” To the devotee, the invocation of name and form of the *ishta* (*chosen deity*) brings in a flood of light, peace, *ananda* and indomitable courage in the direst of life’s crises.

In its highest form, Saguna worship takes place in the inner chambers of heart between the devotee and his *ishta*. The unconditional self offering and surrender at the feet of *ishta*, opens the heart to the ecstasy of love and initiates him into the beauty of a state without defenses, pretences or pretensions. Surely the divine reciprocates with grace which signals the breaking down of the tightly closed doors of the chambers of heart and opens the whole psycho- somatic apparatus of the devotee to a bliss hitherto unknown.
Saguna-Nirguna nexus

The Saguna trajectory expands farther. Once the surrender of the devotee is complete, a transformation sets in which gives him ‘spectacles of beauty’. He sees the divine not only in particular name and form but also sees the creation brimming with that divine beauty, that divine essence and effulgence. The cavern of the heart expands endlessly to cover the inner cosmos (chidakash). The devotee sees One in All and All in One (yo mam pashyati sarvatra, sarvancha mayi pashyati) and he is the yogi who ever dwells in the ishta (sa yogi mayi vartate). This is parabhakti which is uncannily close to the universality of the Nirguna approach. The transition from one to the other is seamless: Nirguna approach with a slight change of perspective opens to the perception of the whole creation as the manifestation of the supreme Being (sarvam khalvidam Brahma); the Saguna devotee doing the same just by letting go his exclusive preoccupation with one particular name and form.

Action-contemplation nexus

The Saguna approach calls for engagement with the world which is a concrete manifestation of the divine — but then in so doing its practitioner might lose his hold on the ineffable peace, freedom and silence that is the home of the transcendent. The Nirguna approach when carried to its logical conclusion can also very well miss the delight of existence in a world of divine Leela which is the manifestation and realization of the divine clothed in myriads of material forms. But it does not have to be one or the other. At the nexus of Saguna and Nirguna, a person finds completeness and fulfils his or her destiny of perfection; “Man becomes perfect only when he has found in himself the utter passivity of the Brahman and supports by that passivity and that silence inexhaustible activity.” (Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Chapter Four, 2006. p.31.). That is the beatific state of deep meditation, of samadhi that uses the power of the mind when necessary for impersonal action while living in mindless silence. Action then proceeds from joy, the joy of love, expansiveness of compassion, passion of untrammelled energy and the well springs of creativity. It can work wonders in the world.
We now present part two of extracts from Paduturai, a work of Tattuvaraya that includes poems on his teachings, praise of his Guru Sorupananda, and many expressions of his own enlightened state. The translations are by Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramanian, and David Godman.

Paduturai 58: Sivaprakasa Kuravai

When Manikkavachagar composed Tiruvachakam more than a thousand years ago, he used the motifs of children's games and women's pastimes to express the journey that the jiva must make towards union with Siva. Tattuvaraya adopted this literary form in many of the sections of Paduturai. However, in the four examples we are giving here, the theme is not a longing for union with the divine but a celebration of the definitive final state that is attained once that union has been consummated.

The ‘Sivaprakasa’ in the title is the Guru of Sorupananda. Kuruvai is the name of a dance, performed in a circle. It is also a shrill celebratory shout exclaimed by women on auspicious or festival occasions.
Singing of the nature of those feet that, though far beyond the Vedas’ reach, came easily to wretched me, raise the cry called kuravai.

That all the world may know the greatness of the grace with which the Supreme Lord made me his, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of how he bestowed his glance of grace, so that in a trice births which grasp and cling were rooted out, raise the cry called kuravai.

Saying, ‘All thought has perished, learning has been destroyed. Jnana itself became my eye,’ raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of the richness through which, with a single matchless word, he revealed the whole [truth], raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of how in an instant he wiped out the bonds of births that endure for aeons of time, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of the nature whereby a unique clarity, impossible to describe, suffused my mind with sweetness and remained there, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of the perfect nature whereby he seeking came, thinking us poor wretches to be worthy, and bent us to his rule, raise the cry called kuravai.
3 Singing of the radiant feet that consumed even that consciousness which is the light that swallowed up the seven worlds, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of the enduring state of him who is the deathless reality, which has become form, formless, and neither with or without form, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of the goodly worth whereby he transformed my mind, which trembled like the moon reflected in water, into Sivam, his own nature, raise the cry called kuravai.

Singing of how his jnana utterances and a smile abolished the [so-called] wisdom of wretched me, raise the cry called kuravai.

**Paduturai 59: Sri Sorupananda Swamigal Kunalai**

Kunalai is *either a dance accompanied by shouting or a warrior’s shout of valour or defiance.*

1 Proclaiming how the reality that the Vedas speak of came in human form, cry kunalai!

Telling how he placed upon my head his feet, which even Vishnu in delusion [could not find], cry kunalai!

Telling how my mind, which heaved like the thundering ocean, in an eye’s blink was destroyed, cry kunalai!

Proclaiming how impossible it is to see [the mind], except as the form of consciousness, cry kunalai!

2 Telling how the path we walk twixt birth and death was blocked, and grass grew thereupon, cry kunalai!
Telling how, even while existing with this body, we dwelt in the state of liberation, cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming how we dwelt as consciousness, free of forgetting and remembering, cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘We shall not forget the might of the Liberal One who granted us his grace,’ cry *kunalai*!

3 Proclaiming, ‘Even if we recite a crore of srutis, [bliss] will not be revealed,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘With a single word from Sorupananda, bliss will appear,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘We have seen with our own eyes the reality that cannot be conceived by mind,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘Seeing his fair and compassionate feet, we have beheld a vision of delight,’ cry *kunalai*!

4 Proclaiming, ‘We have freed ourselves from the agitating net of the scriptures, that come to us in the form of words,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘We have experienced delight in the blissful ocean of the Self, impossible to describe,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘We have forgotten the mind that values the filth-ridden body,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘We value the understanding which comes when [such a] mind is abolished,’ cry *kunalai*!

5 Proclaiming, ‘The flood of endless bliss abounds everywhere about us,’ cry *kunalai*!

Proclaiming, ‘The idea of “all” will not occur even though forgetfulness,’ cry *kunalai*!
Ever asserting his [Sorupananda’s] skill in saying
‘Remain still and see,’ cry kunalai!
Continuously praising the one who granted
that we should thus live and prosper, cry kunalai!

*Paduturai 60: Pakati*

Pakati is a masquerade dance, or a dance performed around a pole.
The ‘he’ mentioned in all the verses is Sorupananda.

1  Saying, ‘He is the destroyer of the sins that, never leaving,
 accompany us from age to age,’
 dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He is the great mountain of compassion,
 who has raised his banner,
 vowing to bring me under his rule by revealing his feet,’
 dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He is the Skilful One, who through his glance,
 contrived that I should perish, becoming his own Self,’
 dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He is the hero who, despite pervading them,
 is not touched by the whole that consists of bodies,
 worlds and jivas, all combined,’
 dance pakati.

2  Saying, ‘He is the Wise One, who slew religious rituals
 that rise in ten crore ways,’ dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He is the one who, for the four Vedas
 and the Three [trimurti],
 was impossible to reach,
 though they worshipped him with heads bowed low,’
 dance pakati.
Saying, ‘He is the One who came and subjected me forcibly to his rule, as I lived in deceit with arrogant pride as my support,’

dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He bestowed upon me his own nature, which no word can describe, as clearly as the gem in my palm,’

dance pakati.

3 Saying, ‘Beautifully did he transmute the sorrow that arises as the knower and the things known,’

dance pakati.

Saying, ‘Having revealed that the things that are known exist in [objectified] consciousness, he annihilated that consciousness in the knower,’

dance pakati.

Saying, ‘He gazed upon me so that the entities known as the senses, assumed to be different, were all abolished,’

dance pakati.

Saying, ‘We have become the incomparable light, the all-embracing fullness that knows no divisions,’

dance pakati.

GANAPATI MUNI’S CATVARIMSAT

A digital presentation of Ganapati Muni’s Forty Verses is available with photographs by Eliot Elisofon.

You can listen to the entire recording by Sri J. Jayaraman and Dr. Lingeswara Rao or, as a learning tool, verse by verse (the recording repeats automatically). The text is in Devanagari, Roman transliteration, and Tamil. The URL is: http://kay.smallsclone.com/40VERSES.HTM

If you have any questions about using the presentation, contact: Barbara Croissant at kay@smallsclone.com
It is a well known saying that there are four sanctified places in India, which give liberation to the soul but each with its own unique characteristic. Thiruvarur is the place where one should be born; Chidambaram the place where one should have darshan of Nataraja dancing in ecstasy; Kashi the place to die and last but not least just to think of Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai) itself is enough to attain liberation. The first is not in our hands, the second involves physical effort and external help, the third is not the option for most but the last is so simple, just thinking of him from wherever you are.

Why did not Bhagavan opt for the easy method of thinking of Arunachala from Madurai but chose to come all the way to Tiruvannamalai? I pondered over the question.

A few days later, while reading a religious magazine I came across the following legend about the holy river Ganga (Ganges). The Hindu king Bhagiratha did penance to bring the holy river Ganga down

Prema Subramanian is an ardent devotee of Bhagavan in Chennai. She comes to Tiruvannamalai as often as it is possible.
from heaven to earth. But the holy river, which is always portrayed as a maiden, was reluctant to descend to earth as the burden of taking upon herself the sins of people who bathed in the river frightened her. The gods told her that holy men, whose only possession is love for god, who breathe, live and think of god and nothing else will also come to her and she will have the good fortune of receiving their blessings. Then the river Ganga agreed to come down to earth. It was Lord Siva’s gift to mankind through Bhagiratha.

After reading this article, I was able to see a pattern in the way God works out his plans. Arunachaleswarar, the presiding deity at Tiruvannamalai wanted his spiritual son Venkataraman to be near him, to see him every minute of every day. Because of Venkataraman, (who will be later known as Bhagavan Ramana), Sri Ramanasramam will spring up as if by divine ordinance, to serve as a spiritual dynamo and as a beacon of light and hope for the devout, irrespective of caste, creed and race. Venkataraman’s mere thinking of Arunachaleswarar from Madurai was insufficient. Arunachaleswarar entered into Venkataraman and took possession of him, body and soul. Until Venkataraman came to Tiruvannamalai and entered the presence of Lord Arunachaleswarar in the sanctum sanctorum, neither Venkataraman nor Arunachaleswarar would be at peace.

Once Venkataraman walked through the great temple and announced his presence in the inner shrine (garbhagriha), “Father I have come home”, the father and son became inseparable. They were so intertwined that sometimes one was the son, the other the father and at other times they became one. When Bhagavan was once asked what it was that he was constantly staring at through the doorway or the window from where he sat, his answer was “I am seeing myself”. It was an amazing statement, not easily understood, except in the light of the above.

When Bhagavan was seriously ill with his fatal illness and the devotees lost hope of his survival, to assuage their grief did he not reassure them with his words, “I am not going anywhere, where else could I go?”, meaning that he will always be present and guide his devotees from Arunachala even after the physical death.
The day Bhagavan came to Tiruvannamalai is fittingly celebrated as Bhagavan’s Advent day, which is as much ‘His’ grace, as well as ‘his’ grace, the former representing Arunachala’s and the latter, Bhagavan’s.

Whenever my husband and I go to Sri Ramanasramam, we would visit Swami Shantananda Puri, who was often at the ashram. When my husband and I went to his room, a few years ago and prostrated before him, my husband sought his blessings for me as it was my birthday. Swamiji with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes said, “Many Happy Returns of not only fruitful years ahead for your wife, but also many happier returns to Sri Ramanasramam for both of you.” His further elucidation, we considered as the crest jewel. “If one is fortunate, he or she comes to Sri Ramanasramam. Thereafter Bhagavan’s grace will continuously flow on him or her, without any effort on one’s part and assure him or her of spiritual realization.” From then on, my husband and I could always visualize and feel Bhagavan’s *sannidhyam* (holy presence) in every nook and corner of the ashram.

Blessed are the cows in the *goshala* (cowshed) in the ashram which yield milk for *abhishekam* (holy offerings) and for offerings to Bhagavan’s *samadhi* and for Mathrubuteswarar’s shrine.

Blessed are the flowering trees and plants which yield flowers which go to adorn the *samadhi* and also for performance of *puja* (religious chants and prayers) for the *samadhi* and the shrine. Blessed are the peacocks which give out joyous calls perched on the roof of the building housing the *samadhi* and the shrine. Blessed are the volunteers in the ashram who have dedicated themselves for service for the cause of Bhagavan.

As an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, I echo the sentiment of one *Alwar* or Vaishnavite saint who sang, “Let me be born as a blade of grass, or as a creeper or even as a stone or insect or bird in the holy hill of Tirumala, the abode of Lord Venkateswara.” Only, I would substitute Ramanasramam in the place of Tirumala. Blessed are the visitors to the ashram, who savour Bhagavan’s presence in its every nook and corner.

Is it Arunachala’s grace or Bhagavan’s grace or both? May Bhagavan remain always in my thoughts, words and deeds.
L'Abbaye Fontenay, Burgundy
What does the direct way of liberation actually mean in daily life? How does non-duality, the understanding of ‘non-separateness’, become our own reality?

This question of ‘how’ arises from the assumption that we are not free, not happy in the deeper sense of the word and indicates that we are eager to know how to become free. This is the question of the seeker.

Indeed, it is quite usual for a seeker to look for advice along the way. This may take the form of reading a book or magazine or by listening to a teacher. It is extremely rare to do this self-enquiry entirely on...
your own, with no external instruction. Why do we seek the advice of others? Why do we read ‘spiritual texts’? Because we assume that it will help us in our search.

Before we continue, let’s briefly recapitulate what the search in fact is.

Searching begins as soon as you notice that what you are experiencing now is not what you really want. Something is continuously lacking in the current moment. You want something different and so you start looking for it, for that something else which is assumed to provide more happiness, freedom, or peace.

The motion set off by this is in fact a continuation of that which caused the inner unrest in the first place. The cause, at least the cause traceable in this lifetime, is the element of being corrected. When you were a child your mother corrected you, your father, your schoolteachers etcetera, and so you have become accustomed to the feeling of being corrected. You have become so accustomed to it that you have continued in correcting yourself; it has even become second nature. With a standard that you erroneously may consider ‘high’ you torment a part of yourself; you see yourself failing and you have come to hate these aspects of yourself. This is an ever-returning self-critical voice.

In listening to the advice of teachers or texts and wanting to apply this advice on our self-enquiry, the advice works in many cases just to reinforce an already present urge of self-correction. The standard may become ‘higher’ or more ‘subtle’ (after all, much spiritual advice contains a subtle suggestion that it refers to ‘the most important’ or ‘the most essential’) with the effect that repeated attempts of self-improvement are made with the help of an array of inner commands. This usually comes down to a manipulation of yourself.

A hierarchy

Is it possible to avoid this manipulation?

Yes, by seeing that there is a ‘hierarchy’, a ‘sequence’.

A simple example of what I mean by this hierarchy or sequence is that you are aware that you are, even before you see yourself in a mirror. This awareness is not a correction of something, not a self-
manipulation. It is *direct awareness*. The awareness that you are and the seeing of yourself in the mirror are not interchangeable things. One always precedes the other, not the other way around. All phenomena, all seeking, all inner impulses and the corrections made to them can be compared to the details of your face visible in the mirror. Even though you may call such inner impulses and corrections ‘subjective’, they are in fact observable as objects. They are mirrored images, temporary reflections in consciousness. Of course, investigation into such subjective impulses has a place, as long as we first have an awareness of the Wonder preceding all else: that we are. That we are aware, that we are conscious. The Wonder that we actually are consciousness, pure Consciousness. This is the recognition of our natural state. Just as a mirror remains unaffected by whatever is reflected in it, so too does the natural state remain unaffected by whatever it reflects. Nothing hides Consciousness. If we lose sight of this sequence then all searching, all ‘working on our self’ will continue endlessly at the same level, just like chasing our own tail.

Being shown this, for example whilst reading this now, is not the next correction. It comprises no correction at all. The idea of a ‘hierarchy’ or ‘sequence’ is not a new standard, not an ideal or command with which you can continue to torment yourself.

It is simply an *invitation*. An invitation to intuitively see that there is something always present, as now, something continuously shedding light, illuminating also all objects arising in you, but which itself is not an object, not a ‘something’. This refers to the most simple that there is – which is why it is so often overlooked. For this reason here the invitation is done not to overlook this but to really come to value it, even to make it the most important in your life, the basic principle. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj referred to this as the highest God that more than anything else deserves to be honoured. That’s why I use the term ‘hierarchy’ (which in Greek literally means ‘first the holy’; from *hieros*, holy; and *archè*, the first, the beginning). It is an invitation for you to relax in this most simple, to consider it enough for now and not to run toward some ‘further’ or ‘higher’.

2012
Satsang is an invitation – to recognize

The invitation that I refer to here, made here in written form, could also be done in a living encounter. Actually it is the basic invitation that is made in satsang, the meeting (sanga) in truth (sat), the meeting of a teacher with visitors and disciples. The teacher is the living form that makes the invitation out loud, the invitation to recognize now, before all else, what your essential nature is. It is the invitation to apply the described hierarchy. First seeing that you are, and after that all the forms ‘visible in the mirror’.

With being invited in person, face to face with each other in satsang, you can experience the invitation as coming from someone who wants nothing from you. The teacher does not want to convince you of anything, he does not want to change you. The teacher forms an interruption in the chain of inner ideas that were just sketched like ‘the other is trying to correct me, he thinks that I am wrong’. Satsang is the invitation to interrupt this chain. Then a gap can fall into this chain carrying with it your complete history along with all your ‘knowledge’, a ‘chain of knowing’ that is genetic as well as karmic. In the interruption of this chain, all the stories that come up along with their fixed conclusions can be recognized ever more clearly as not true, as mere projections from yourself.

Because it is exactly this interruption that is important here, you can say that silence is what satsang is about. Not necessarily a silence of the voice, as you are explicitly invited to ask questions, but a silence with respect to thinking and knowing. All personal ‘knowledge’ is a collection of memories and convictions superimposed on the silence of our essential nature. It is no-knowledge that enables us to see that the true nature of mind, the true nature of our self, is simplicity. It is the simplicity of pure Consciousness. All searching, which itself comes from the urge to know, leads away from simplicity. You could call satsang the invitation to bring attention back now to the simplicity of No-knowledge or No-mind: to the source of attention itself. To That which is before a thought arises. You have never lost That; in fact you cannot lose it, no matter how many thoughts demand attention.
The secret can be found in the word ‘invitation’. An invitation is open for all possible responses. An invitation is never a demand. Freedom is always the case, you are free to accept the invitation and you are free to reject it, you are free to postpone the recognition and to continue with your inner story, with all your ‘knowing’. There is a saying that illustrates the wonder of freedom in a profound way:

“You can lead a horse to the water,
But you can’t make it drink.”

It is not important whether the one leading the horse is interpreted here as the outer teacher or as your own intention to realize truth. The important point is that you see that the horse, though apparently stuck in the chain of its tendencies, is free. You, that which you are, cannot be forced, thankfully so. Not by the best teacher or a so-called well-meaning part of your personality. Your freedom precedes any disciplinary measure whatsoever.

In reply to this it can be argued that the horse’s refusal to drink rather indicates remaining imprisoned in stubbornness! How could that be called ‘free’? Though at first glance this may seem true, actually it misses the incomprehensibility of freedom. Even within this fettered, groove-like habit of stubbornness freedom is still to be found. This is the magnificence, the wonder of freedom. It is always there. You are free to allow yourself to be dragged through the old grooves of habit now, just as you are free to notice that you are already free from the power of these grooves. Just feel where the real attraction is. Then it is a matter of whether or not to listen to this.

Therefore the invitation is actually an invitation to listen to this real attraction, to the possible willingness to stop your story now. In any case, you can stop with your story now, even if you begin once again listening to it later. In satsang there is nothing else than this, the current experience, no story, totally empty pure no-mind. Everything starts afresh; current experience is spotless, without a past.

Tradition refers to ‘two levels of reality’: the level of the timeless, Absolute, and the level of the changing manifestation. Satsang is an invitation to recognize That which is timeless, which you already are, constantly, and which you can intuitively sense in the silence of the
current experience. This is the primary or primordial level; that’s why I call this the ‘first level’. ‘First’ due to the hierarchy that I mentioned earlier. First the level of non-correction, of non-guilt.

**The ‘witness’ and the power of guilt**

In many of the Advaita Vedanta texts, terms such as ‘witness’ and ‘perceiver’ are used. I have noticed that these terms are interpreted by many people as terms for the voice of the inner commentator with its commands. Indeed this commentator or critic is ‘witness’ of our actions, but in most cases this witnessing is connected with guilt. We always seem to be failing in one way or another, or we are guilty of something. Feelings of guilt seem to be our most trusted companion. Many people assume tacitly that this companion is the ‘witness’ spoken of in Advaita. However in most cases it turns out that the emerging witness has an opinion, a social norm. This shows that this witness comes from the same level as that which is observed by the witness; the moment that this witness emerges is simply the next observed element in a series of arising things.

Because of this confusion the term ‘witness’ is perhaps not such a good term. When the witness is mentioned in Advaita texts, reference is actually being made to the ever-present light that you are. Though this cannot itself be observed, it sheds light continuously and the moment that the word ‘witness’ is applicable, it observes a reflection. This witness has no opinion. It does not compare, it does not correct, and it does not improve. It simply observes.

And all this is just a way of speaking, as there is not actually ‘a witness’. No He, or She. There is no light other than yourself. There is only one light, one seeing. All there is, is seeing. Simply noticing.

The difference described here between the two ways of looking at yourself (both ways of ‘witnessing’) is very important.

The power of discrimination with which we notice ‘difference’, and so also the difference mentioned here, could be considered our most essential instrument. This ability, although still belonging to our person and therefore temporary in nature, is
the most refined instrument with which we are gifted: a sort of lens making it possible to see the difference between our personal tendencies and that which is beyond personal tendencies, beyond guilt – ultimately even beyond the discriminative power itself, beyond every distinction. With this instrument it is also possible to see that the way of looking at personal impulses that is still linked to guilt, can never lead to freedom.

Hence you are invited to primarily see That which is guiltless, which is pure innocence. First the ‘first level’. First No-mind, which is the same as No-guilt. Otherwise you just continue chasing yourself in vicious circles. It is not until you recognize No-guilt as your own true nature that you can look without judgement at everything else that continues to arise from the past. This is what makes the discussed sequence so important. For this reason I call them ‘first’ and ‘second’ level. Simply said: ‘First things first’.

Recognition and experience of our true nature is the starting point, the primary element in the discussed hierarchy; it is the ground on which all else is founded. If we follow another order, by first investigating the personality with all its emotional complications, then experience of our true nature will probably (as it will be considered a result of our personal investigation) remain hidden forever beyond the horizon, since the view then remains fascinated by phenomena. Apart from the point that the view with which the arising phenomena are perceived turns out to be an accusing one, because of your habitual fascination for phenomena you will continue looking for your true nature in phenomena, as if it were an object.

Our true nature, the true nature of our mind, is not an object, and is not a result of anything. There are no prerequisites to recognize our true nature; no personal element needs to be transformed or removed to make this recognition possible.

**Seeing our habit patterns**

Consciousness itself is our true nature, the true nature of all our thoughts and feelings. Each thought is made of nothing other than consciousness.
You can immediately recognize that you are consciousness. You can recognize that it has no characteristics, no ‘I am this’ or ‘I am such and such’. In the words of Sri Ramana Maharshi, it is pure ‘I-I’, with no ‘something’, no addition or interpretation.

It is pure seeing, noticing, illuminating something.

Recognition and the intuitive sensing of the characteristic-less can be compared to a light being turned on, illuminating our whole being, our natural state as well as the obscurations of it. This turning on the light can be a very deep experience, an ‘enlightening experience’, an ‘awakening’, though we should not think instantly that this is complete Enlightenment. This experience, the authentic experience of our natural state, means that you really, fundamentally (and perhaps for the first time in your life) come to know doubtlessness. This point is essential, as from here on you can always notice this doubtlessness again. You can turn on the light whenever you want.

However, turning on the light does not automatically mean that all obstacles are instantly eliminated. All things that we experience as obstacles simply continue to arise. The so-called ‘second level’ appears again and again with all its apparent credibility. There is no need to deny this.

Likewise, it need not be denied either that in turning on the light we have found a way of looking at things that carries no accusing attitude with it, no urge toward self-improvement. It is simply noticing, pure noticing.

All tendencies, all karmically passed-down habit patterns that appear to be strung together in chains, may be simply noticed. They apparently form a part of present Consciousness. They need only be noticed, and you can relax in this sheer noticing, in this present Consciousness. Nothing needs to be removed. Nothing needs to get ‘out of’ Consciousness (if that were ever possible).

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1 See the commentary of translator Kennard Lipman in his You Are The Eyes Of The World. Novato, CA: Lotsawa, 1987; p. 59-60. This was quoted in the article ‘Non-dualism and daily life’, Mountain Path, p.63-4, April 2012.
It comes down to accepting that Consciousness obviously, *unmistakeably*, takes on this form. Accepting that Consciousness may even take on the ‘form’ of non-acceptance right now, in other words you recognize that the self-critical part constitutes just another link in the chain of habit patterns, comparable with adding such-and-such a railway carriage to a train. As to the *content* of such self-critical thought, with your power of discrimination you can see that this critical way of looking at yourself is not the same as sheer noticing. Then from this recognition you can immediately return to the original nature of mind, as this is also the original nature of the critical mind. Even ‘return’ is said too much, as recognition itself is already free: it *is* your original nature.

You can abide at the divide where thinking apparently separates from Consciousness, the source of thinking. It is one and the same substance, but the substance continually assumes a new form, so that you then call it ‘thoughts’, ‘feelings’, ‘memories’, ‘bodily sensations’ and so on.

If you remain at this divide you can see both aspects. You can stay in touch with present Consciousness as well as with the form it assumes right now.

This present form *is* nothing other than Ever Present Consciousness. Consciousness itself is homogeneous and always the case. Consciousness forms the substance, so to speak the ‘cells’ of that which is assuming this present form. Ever Present Consciousness is that which now, *in* this present experience, gives reality to any temporary form that arises.

This can be compared to the waves on a beach at night, when both the sea and sky are in darkness. Waves appear as white forms on a dark background, and then disappear again into the darkness. Everywhere white foamy waves appear and disappear. Nothing needs to be done by the waves to completely disappear. Likewise you can recognize thoughts arising from their background, Consciousness, without having to do anything for them to disappear.
The holy sequence

Does this all simply come down to allowing to disappear, recognizing the arising thoughts as being made of the same substance as their background? Do certain aspects of our personality not deserve more attention?

Yes, I believe that some aspects deserve to be looked at in some detail. This is particularly appropriate in the field of relationships with other people, when there is a willingness to really look at particular behaviour or trait, some sort of self-enquiry, especially when someone else makes a sincere comment on it. The lack of such willingness, accompanied by a comment such as ‘Come on, what are you bothered about? You know that all there is is Consciousness’, represents a phenomenon referred to sometimes as the ‘Advaita Shuffle’. This is the trick in which the Absolute and relative levels are shifted in such a way that the other one is fooled with an appeal to his understanding. Under the guise of insight this trick serves to cover up the continuing of all sorts of childhood patterns to define our behaviour. Therefore on the ‘second level’, where relationships play an important role, accountability is an essential point. At the second level we always are susceptible to make mistakes, and acknowledgement of ours, and some enquiry into them holds still a general validity. Some psychological insight, especially in the field of transference and other blind projection mechanisms, could be quite useful at this level.

But no matter how appropriate it is to give attention to the second level, it remains essential to adhere to the sequence described here. Due to this crucial importance I dare to refer to this sequence more and more as ‘the Holy Sequence’.

Why ‘holy’? Because this word reminds you to esteem and honour first the highest, the most important or ‘holy’ – that is Reality as such. Reality is prior to any personal tendency; the person has no control over it. That’s why the Holy Sequence is not a method. A method is something that the person can benefit from. It can be used to achieve something, to get somewhere. With the Holy Sequence, everything
found in the person by way of a method is simply noticed, and its true nature recognized. All methods are resolved in No-knowledge, No-mind. The sequence is holy because that to which you primarily devote yourself is the Supreme, the Consciousness and Reality that you essentially are. So you will no longer overlook this, and you will meet your own willingness or unwillingness to listen to it.

You could say that Jesus was the first to emphasize the Holy Sequence with his statement: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

No-knowledge is your true nature. So the Holy Sequence means: fall into No-knowledge first – and then just look at any ‘knowledge’, any belief or conviction. As soon as this knowledge turns into confusion, dare simply to interrupt this and open again to No-knowledge.

In adhering to this sequence, it is possible that an insight regarding a personal aspect is able to flow from the original understanding of your true nature, No-mind or No-knowledge, the understanding that you are pure Consciousness. All mistakes, all egotistical behaviour, are temporary eclipses of original understanding.

Seeing these mistakes from the correct perspective (that is from the ‘first level’, the primordial understanding of No-knowledge) means on the one hand the willingness to admit mistakes if necessary, and on the other hand to recognize the root of these mistakes. The root is the being-fascinated by our own individual thinking processes, our knowledge, our ‘I’. It is the tendency to stick tightly to the hold that our knowledge gives us.

By abiding at this root, or returning directly to it, you can recognize mistakes in their early stages, and relax in that recognition. This is not about improving an assumed entity, but recognition of an untruth. Therefore you do not need to become entangled in the diverse offshoots of the personality, and you can give open attention to all phenomena, including possible childhood tendencies and projections.

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2 Matthew 6, verse 33; and Luke 12, verse 31.
Only after recognition of our natural state the real practice begins, the training to become stabilized in this state. This stabilisation is not something that happens noncommittally, as it rarely happens that all karmically inherited tendencies resolve immediately with the recognition of your true nature. All aspects of the personality continue to arise, but now, looking from the correct perspective, from the first level, the recognition keeps you from the temptation of beginning a new search. There is no more searching, no trying to get, achieve or change anything. It is looking from openness, without opinion. As long as binding tendencies are not totally extinguished, they will continue to fuel our mind and therefore thoughts and emotions will continue to arise, with the possibility that we become totally overwhelmed by them.

If at a certain point we feel consumed by our thoughts and emotions, and a longing arises to return to the natural state that is not being experienced now, then what actually happens? Is the longing automatically a self-correction? Does the old clinging companion inevitably turn up, saying that what I am doing now is wrong, and that I must return to the original state? Is there any such ‘must’?

No. It is only an invitation. There is no ‘must’ at all. It is not a new command.

What then is the difference? The difference is that the longing for Truth is a real longing, an experience of the inner invitation from freedom. This longing is freedom itself that is calling.

Translated from Dutch by Jenny Wase; from Philip Renard, Non-dualisme – de directe bevrijdingsweg. Cothen, 2005.
Mansur-al-Hallaj

Nawazudhin

When we eat oranges or apples we never think of their seeds in which the colour of the orange or the taste of the apple is embedded. We may taste cheese but not remember the milk hidden in the substance.

From time immemorial man has basically seen two things in this physical world. One is colour, and the other, shape. Ignorant are those who have merely looked into the colour and are unable to see the Dyer; just as those who have seen only the shape, are not able to appreciate the Artist. Those who are fortunate to have seen the form, can perceive the Maker.

Similarly when we behold a form we merely look at the splendid appearance of the form not considering whose manifestation it is that the splendid appearance is revealing.

Of course there are Masters who are blessed to behold not merely the form but also the formlessness of the form. They transcend the grandeur of manifest objects and have perceived the hidden nature of the Artist. Mansur was one such mystic whose outcry of ‘I am the Truth’ put him onto the gallows. Qadre Alam in this anecdote explains the fundamentals of Mansur’s outcry with an example of seed and tree. Let us be guided by the Master to see the unseen.

Nawazudhin lives in Tiruvannamalai and is a retired bank official. He devotes himself to the study of Sufism to which he was initiated by his father, Rafaidia.
Since Mansur-al-Hallaj was aware of the Mystery of Truth solemnly he exclaimed *Ana-al Haq*, ‘I am the Truth’. O friends!! With full attention listen to this discourse.

From the garden of *Marifat*—True Knowledge—, collect the mystical flowers.

Essence of God is the basis of everything that exists. God is the *Wajid*— the Maker, and the Creation is His invention. First, the world existed as knowledge in the Essence of God. Later the Creation became manifest as precisely as He willed. Though the Truth is not within the easy reach of all Knowledge of God is not hidden from the men of Vision.

Mansur was a man of Vision as well as Wisdom. In the Vision of God his eyes ever remained drunk. Firm in his resolve he was not stuck at any stage in his inward journey.

He beheld the Truth in everything, wherever he looked. And finally when he looked into himself he found that he too was Truth. Then the words *Ana-al-Haq* flowed as tears and he exclaimed ‘I am the Truth’.

Every instant like the call of a Stork, ‘laq laq laq’, he cried out this Truth, *Ana-al-Haq*.

Other than reciting the Truth, his lips never said another word. His whole body, the flesh, the bones and every pore of his skin. Every core of his being said *Ana-al-Haq*, I am the Truth.

He simply ceased to be, lost in *Ana-al Haq*. With him there was no divide between substance and non-substance. His knowledge was dissolved in Divine Knowledge. He did not even get fixed in the Station of Divine Knowledge. And becoming very distinctly special he declared, ‘I am the Truth’.

How well the Moulana has said these two couplets in his *Mathnawi*. Knowledge of Sufi is lost in Divine Knowledge. He who understands this dictum is surely a man.
I shall now expound this couplet from *Mathnawi*
Of course seeking elucidation from Moulana Rumi.

Knowledge of the Sufi is the Tree
   and Divine Knowledge is the seed.
The tree hides the seed and the seed the tree.
In reality the seed is the whole tree itself.
The seed has taken the form of tree as a disguise.
O Sufis know that the Sufi’s knowledge is the tree.
Know, Divine Knowledge to be the seed, for sure.
The seed got the illumination of the tree as a form, a body.
Tree became manifest when knowledge became hidden.
The entire tree remained in the seed when it existed as seed.
Now, in the form of a palm, the very same seed is a tree.
The seed is the hidden aspect; the tree is the apparent nature
The same seed has brought out this beauteous tree.

The seed is the synopsis, the tree the whole story.
In other words the tree is the joyous proclamation of the seed.
The tree says, ‘I am head to foot (root to branch) the seed incarnate
What if I have the form of tree’.
This is how the Essence (the seed)
   and the Attributes (the tree) co-exist
Each dies in the other and creates life in the other.
Those misled by their intellect behold (only) the tree.
They know not the mastery as well as the mystery of the seed.
Those endowed with the vision, look at the beauty of the tree
Marvel the seed in the tree.
Celebrations are for those gifted with vision and wisdom
Who behold Him in the seed and in the tree.

Divine Knowledge is ahead of the Sufi’s knowledge
Surrender the Sufi’s knowledge in the Divine Knowledge.
Evidently the whole seed is the tree.
Scholarship (of knowledge) has disguised
the tree in knowing the truth.
The tree eventually is becoming a seed
Though apparently it is the veil of the seed.
Whatever is the first of the last is indeed the first.
That very same is the last of the first.
First all the qualities were in the Divine Essence.
In the end, through the qualities, behold the Essence.
Consider the above couplet arranged in a different order
See the very special meaning of the Moulana.

He who has not this vision is fit not to be called human
Can be called a biped, an animal with two legs.
If you cannot comprehend this mystery
You are caught in the confusion of your flawed intellect.
As long as you won’t separate yourself from yourself
So long will you not attain the Majestic Divine Essence.
Till you separate yourself from your quasi attributes,
because none is your own
You are far from understanding the Divine Essence.
The one who realized has died to his false self
Passed away as possessing qualities of his own.

What is self-transcendence but death?
This death is everlasting life for them indeed
For them there is no more death.
When there is annihilation of I of the slave
What is left is I of Divine Essence.
Even the sense of I-ness of Divine has to be renounced.
O pretender of Divinity!! To proclaim Godhood is no child-play
Verify your claim O son of vanity.

This story is enough to put you on the right path.
When a Master like Badre Alam initiates
Qadre Alam asserts the Truth, what else can he state?
A Reflection In Sixteen Parts

JAMES CHARLTON

The divine dwells within you, as you.
The divine dwells within me, as me.
If I mistreat you, I mistreat myself.
If you mistreat me, you mistreat yourself.

2. A Western woman of Indian ancestry tells me that her guru is the Self. She greatly respects Sri Ramana but has no particular devotion to him or to any other awakened being. I listen closely, but my mind is quizzical. Later, I make these notes: The world is full of endlessly changing, individual expressions of the Self. Since the Self is universal,

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timeless and beyond anything that I can conceive, I feel the need for a realized human being to be a guide or ‘go-between.’ Otherwise, the Self remains too much of an abstraction; in other words, not sufficiently grounded in everyday experience. If the Self is too abstract, I’ll have trouble discerning my projections and superimpositions. In order to develop an integrated ‘universality’ I will need to attend to the ‘particular’. I will need to be both non-dual in my attitude and personal.

3. Today, I remember young Westerners in Tiruvannamalai who keep repeating the words ‘I am the Self’ or ‘I am the unceasing perfection of Brahman’. Sometimes, going too fast on their hired motor bikes, they spray the roadside beggars with grit and dust. I am judging them. I am adding a dose of self-judgment, because I don’t approve of my own criticism. But the question recurs: Is there a tendency for Westerners in Tiruvannamalai to be spiritually narcissistic? I don’t exclude myself from this question. Sri Ramana invites me to maintain the awareness ‘I am the Self.’ He encourages me to see through the dream-world of individualism and to experience the life of universal communion. But he also cautions against the mere repetition of phrases. I don’t think that Sri Ramana wants me to be so preoccupied with the ultimate level of discourse that I ‘by-pass’ the world of relative or conventional truths.

4. Larger numbers of Westerners are visiting Tiruvannamalai. We are attracted to ‘the spiritual’ because it opens up a realm that is beyond the conceptual. But without some interest in theology and philosophy (and the distinctions that both of these disciplines explore), ‘the spiritual’ can descend to a preoccupation with pleasant experiences.

I am not exempt from being a consumer of so-called spirituality. The motor bike of my own self-preoccupation is capable of spraying metaphorical grit in the faces of others. Another memory: In a restaurant, a man exhales cigarette smoke in my face. He declares: ‘I know I am Brahman. I know that you are Brahman.’ If the man is saying (in effect) that what is unchanging and imperishable is Reality with a capital ‘R,’ then I concur. But the hard, conventional truth is that there’s no existential identity between the souls of most of us
and the soul of (for example) Sri Ramana. It’s not always helpful for Westerners to freely adopt the language of Vedanta. We have our own traditional linguistic system: Our conditioned assumptions cannot simply be laid aside when we encounter an older system.

5. It was fun to visit the roadside temple of Dakshinamurti, near the ashram entrance. The faithful priest breathes more than his share of dust and fumes from intemperate motorists. Sri Ramana joins with Meister Eckhart (died 1328) in asking me not to be over-attached to any particular symbol or ritual, since the divine transcends our limited categories and systems. But communion with others (‘Holy Communion,’ as the Christians say) requires symbols, signs and rituals. These rituals can be either formal or casual. Either way, they are important in the creation and re-creation of a living spiritual culture.

6. After staying near Sri Ramana’s ashram for two months, life back home in Australia seems to lack any dimension of depth. Most Australians have justifiably rejected ideas and images that were once regarded as ‘Christian’ but in fact were historically conditioned. In addition, Australia is one of many countries still recovering from a mechanistic model of the universe. And as for our government … well, it takes little interest in ethical values until the news media or private charities bring abusive situations to public awareness. It appears that Australia is led less by its three tiers of government than by business interests that want us to be nihilistic hedonists. Large numbers of young people are encouraged to become addicted to alcohol and to gambling. How do I know this? I can walk in four different directions from my office and find a ‘Bottle Shop’. Just a few years ago there were none. But rather than dwell on such things, I’ll remember some of the people who work at the ashram. They experience everything as openness, everything as compassion. Without words, their open faces say: “I am inseparable from All. There is no anxiety.”

7. The following story was told by a devotee of Sri Ramana, the late Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan. Once upon a time there was a man who
over-identified with the phrase ‘All is Brahman.’ Faced on a narrow road by an approaching elephant, the man reminded himself: ‘I am Brahman. This elephant is Brahman. How can Brahman bring harm to Brahman?’ But the elephant had not filled her head with Absolute truth to the exclusion of conventional truth. She remained faithful to her evolutionary heritage. She trod on the man.

We need the language of differentiation. Otherwise, we cannot lovingly participate in our world of individual manifestations. We need to be mindful of both nitya (in this sense, ultimate truth) and lila (in this sense, relative truth, which Sri Ramana radically described as a dream-world). Tiruvannamalai gave me this impression: pilgrims born in India tend to get the balance right, whereas pilgrims born in the West can tend to lay personal claim, perhaps too readily, to claims of absolute-truth. If we can step aside, as it were, and witness what our brains are doing, we may find that we’re merely collecting a set of notions. Perhaps Sri Ramana wants us to see and to surrender to what is going on, right now and here, rather than being controlled by ideas and concepts.

8. A fundamentalist is someone who prefers to overlook the history, the context and the intention of his or her favourite scriptures. The result is an exaggerated focus on absolute-truth claims. Fortunately, most of us sense that we need the grace of discernment. We try to locate a balance between ultimate truth and conventional truth. In the West, Meister Eckhart is important for articulating such a balance. He opposes the ‘Christian ego,’ with its insistence on being ‘right’ or in presuming to ‘possess’ the truth. He desires that our true identity (which he treats as an ultimate truth) should emerge from a false identity (which he treats as a conventional truth). Boldly, Eckhart attempts to write from the point of view of ultimate truth, as part of his theological strategy. He implies that the so-called false identity does not possess inherent existence. He seems to be in agreement here with Advaita Vedanta. Nonetheless, Eckhart maintains that each particular manifestation is an individual centre
of consciousness within the embrace of the universal consciousness. Both sides of the paradox need to be kept in view.

9. A friend sends me a greeting card. It says: ‘A busy mind is a sick mind; a slow mind is a healthy mind; a still mind is a divine mind.’ Tiruvannamalai is a town in which the dimensions of ‘form’ and ‘formlessness’ are still permitted to cavort in harmony. Therefore a kind of stillness can exist, even behind much outward noise. This is scarcely the case in bland Australia, a nation now rather smug in its misunderstanding of all religion. For the most part, Australia has lost any semblance of balance between ‘form’ and ‘the formless’.

10. From an Advaitin perspective, it could be said that Ramana is the I AM (ahamasmi) of ‘Brahman.’ From the perspective of the Gospel of John, it could be said that Jesus is the I AM (ego eimiin Greek) of ‘the Father.’ Can I say that Jesus and Ramana (in their bodies) were nama-rupa, or the external name and form of that which is unnameable and formless? This does not deny their individual, particular uniqueness.

An awareness of the I AM arose in the West from two main sources. First, there was the early understanding of the Hebrew people that the divine identity could be articulated as the I AM. Second, there was the Christian understanding that our human identity is inseparably linked to participation in the divine identity. Eckhart was one of many Christian thinkers who expressed in non-dual terms our participation in the divine.

Eckhart followed a traditional view that the realization of ‘oneness’ involves the integration of each facet of personality. Neither Jesus nor Eckhart would have used the words ‘psychologically whole’. But perhaps that’s what they meant, in part. Without ‘wholeness’ it’s not possible to extend genuine, unconditional love to other people. There’s a passage in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 7:21 NRSV) in which Jesus is represented as saying: “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” An extended interpretation of this passage might include the idea that I cannot surrender to the life of
MOUNTAIN PATH

love without transcending the fears (for example) that hold me back from full participation in what I regard as the non-dual Consciousness (or the Unconditional).

11. Grey-water; fresh water.
   Sour land; sweet.
   Each sings I AM,
   Sings a prayer of identification,
   not of request.

12. In the mansions of the sacred, there are differing perspectives that serve to create and decorate different rooms. Yet the rooms are interactive; they are linked by open entrances and exits. If, at one stage in history, some rooms over-emphasized what they took to be absolute truths, today they recognize that truth is perspectival. Westerners (in particular) once forgot that they are not the objective observers of a separate world which they experience. Even today, perhaps a minority of us share the intuition that we have an outward form that is based upon a formless but inseparable dimension.

13. On its own, a desire to be ‘spiritual’ is not necessarily a mature desire. Are there unresolved issues from my younger years? If so, I’ll need to combine a desire to be ‘spiritual’ with a desire to reach emotional integration. In Australia there are scandals in the Christian church: a number of priests have by-passed their own deep-seated emotional issues. In consequence, they have mistreated children. The phrase ‘spiritual by-passing’ has entered the language. It describes a situation in which a spiritual life is pursued to avoid issues of emotional immaturity.

14. To face the ‘knot’ of anxiety … to experience the integration of my fears within the light of Ramana, Eckhart, Jesus! It is said that each of us has three bodies, in a manner of speaking: our emotional body, our mental body and our physical body. Each of these bodies tends to have three clinging ‘knots’ that obscure the true identity of
the ‘I.’ Potential ‘knots’ that hinder the emotional body are anger, fear and grief. In Tiruvannamalai, I met an American couple, who emphasized that the emotional body cannot be approached in a purely intellectual way. In order to move beyond the anxieties that have harmed me since childhood, I need to name and to accept the relevant emotions. I need to be aware of the on-going effects on my body of these emotions. For example, there will be tension in specific parts of my body when I’m fearful of displeasing a key person in my life.

15. When particular fears in my mind are blended with their specific bodily manifestations, I reach what is called ‘a felt perception’. In other words, I’m gradually integrating my understanding with my lived-experience.

When I was a child, I tried to make use of prayer to manipulate an outcome. But now that I’m supposedly ‘more spiritual’ I can make another kind of mistake. I can desire ‘deep experiences’ by reason of my latent egocentricity. Experience can then be over-emphasized at the expense of understanding. Through divine grace, the knowledge of my true identity is still being established. In this respect, I remember these American friends saying: ‘Enlightenment is the gradual integration of knowledge and experience.’

16. On the way to being lost in the Silence, it’s not appropriate for me to continually assert such absolute truths as ‘I am Brahman’ or ‘I am the Self’. It could be more important that I ‘do the truth’ in conventional, individual terms (even though I’m not the ultimate ‘doer’). Along the way, my mind will be transformed: I’ll begin to see into my true nature. I won’t need to repeat formulaic phrases.

There is perpetual paradox. I participate in both individuation and community; I am part of the Many within the One. And if my prayers are to be ‘true,’ they will not be ‘individualistic,’ although they might be personal. Master, we come with open hands.
Devotees at the Ashram during the period of Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi
Ramana Maharshi developed a small tumor on his arm. They called it a sarcoma after it had been surgically removed and it grew again much bigger. From a homeopathic point of view it should never have been operated upon. A French doctor from Sorbonne was of the same view. We were very concerned. There were several eminent doctors in attendance.

Having watched several such operations with successively worse results I wrote a letter to Bhagavan in my distress. There was no more free access to him after the operations except for those in attendance. We had daily darshan from the open door. He told one of the attendants: “They take this body for Bhagavan. What a pity.” It was meant to reach me. Next day He did not even look at me. His displeasure at my attitude was obvious. It was hard to bear.

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of The Mountain Path. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.
Much later someone told me that a woman devotee came to Him with a similar tumor on her neck and Bhagavan told her what to do (He knew a lot about herbs and ayurveda). The tumor disappeared. He was indifferent to his own sarcoma, letting people do what they liked out of devotion though in the beginning he did tell them to let it alone, that it was not doing any harm.

Well, a few days later actually the day before He gave up his body I went on a giripradakshina to be exact, two giripradakshinas one after another so that I walked the whole night till dawn in a spirit of surrender, ‘Thy will be done, you know best’. I could not pray for Him not to leave us though Arunachala is said to be wish-fulfilling. That morning at darshan I saw Him sitting on the couch radiant with no sign of illness. He gave me a look of such Grace that I was rooted to the spot, a good-bye look which I will remember for the rest of my life on earth. He was pleased; He knew what had happened during my two giripradakshinas. The next person behind me in the queue said to me after coming out: “Have you seen? Bhagavan is already in agony.” So at the same time when I saw Him radiant smiling with Grace she saw his body in agony.

The end came that evening to the sound of chanting of Arunachala-Siva, Arunachala-Siva by the devotees. The chanting was spontaneous. At the precise moment a brilliant light appeared in the sky which people saw in many other towns and places. It slowly disappeared behind the peak of Arunachala. Bhagavan and Arunachala are One, the Hill being an embodiment of Siva-Ramana-Arunachala.

A devotee, Y.N. Bhaurao Atharvale had an immediate confirmation of it the same night. To put it in his own words:

“....On receiving a telegram I came to the Ashram on the day of his Mahasamadhi. My emotions and feelings were checked somehow during the day he left the body. But at night when everybody was asleep, I began weeping bitterly feeling very unhappy that I shall never henceforth see Bhagavan in an embodied form and enjoy the bliss of his presence. All of a sudden in the dead of night some footsteps were heard and lo! there came Bhagavan in an embodied form with a lantern in his hand. He straightaway approached me, removed the
curtain and said to me in a soft, gentle, loving voice: ‘Oh! Why do you weep? Did I not tell you that I am here?’ I controlled myself and bowed down to Him. By the time I raised my head, he had disappeared leaving me in utter surprise and desolation. My thousand homages to Bhagavan Ramana.”

A villager who used to supply milk when Bhagavan and devotees were staying at Skandashram was astonished to find Bhagavan sitting on a rock on the Hill after his Mahasamadhi. “But Bhagavan, we buried you” he managed to ask after prostrating. “What of it?” was the reply. “Who will teach all those devotees?” “They will find the teaching in the books.” The villager rushed down, greatly excited and told Professor Sayed about it in great secrecy. Professor Hafiz Syed told his wife and she told me.

DeLancy Kapleau, the wife of the author of the modern Zen classic Three Pillars of Zen, came several times with her little daughter to Arunachala after Bhagavan’s Mahasamadhi from Kamakura in Japan where she was practising Zen. One day she brought to my attention a strange occurrence. She fell ill at Kamakura, so ill that she could do nothing for herself. The little girl, about 8 years old, began nursing her and doing all she could to help. One morning she came out of the next room skipping happily and told her mother that Bhagavan was there, and seeing the look of disbelief or surprise on her mother’s face she added: “He was there, I touched his face.”

Bhagavan continues guiding as before. He said that the Guru-disciple relationship will continue after his physical death the same. He is the living inner Guru always present in the heart. All one has to do is to turn to Him and remember Him and with time He reveals Himself as a living Presence and Guide. It is up to the seeker.

Miraculous happenings occurred during Bhagavan’s lifetime on earth also but so unobtrusively, naturally that they did not gain much prominence. For instance a Brahmin woman died. The body has to be cremated within twenty-four hours. The cremation ground is in the open. For the past two days it had been raining heavily; how to light a funeral pyre of wood? The bereaved husband came to Bhagavan to ask what to do under the circumstances. Bhagavan looked at the
skied through the window and said: “It looks as if it is going to stop.”
The Brahmin did not wait for more confirmation. He rushed home
to arrange things. It stopped raining long enough for the body to be cremated.

A professor from Australia got lost on the Hill. Devotees were
getting anxious for his safety on account of the snakes and cheetahs roaming the Hill at that time. Night was approaching. At last he turned up and explained that fortunately he had met Bhagavan who showed him the right way or else he would have had to spend the night on the Hill. Bhagavan had remained all this time in the hall.

In the first year or so of my stay at Arunachala I wanted to go to
the top not by any established winding paths but straight from the path below from rock to rock as the crow flies. I presumed it would be simpler and quicker. About half way up I saw Bhagavan below on the path returning with his attendant from his daily walk. He saw me. The climb was beginning to be difficult, what with bigger boulders and thorns interspersed with mountain grass between them, perfect hiding places for cobras. After scaling a few more intervening peaks I got stuck. The boulders became so big I did not know where to put my foot next. I was getting hot and I was exhausted. Suddenly I perceived at my side what looked like a smooth beautiful green lawn with a large tree growing from it, its branches spread out like an umbrella to give perfect shade. I got there somehow and lay down under the tree. It was sheer heaven, far, far more than just rest. How long I stayed like that I do not remember. At last very reluctantly I forced myself to get up to return home to the children. On the way I stepped into the hall where Bhagavan was reclining on the couch. He gave me one look and I knew without a shadow of doubt that he knew what happened on the Hill. I never found this lawn again nor did anyone else though we looked for it at about the same place. Nothing but boulders and rocks there.
Chapter Two

The Lord Entraps Tulasidas in Sense Enjoyments

Initially, Tulasidas was carrying out his tasks admirably. However, by God’s will, he fell into evil company gradually, forsaking his duties and good upbringing. Giving up the moral ways and drawn by the passion of youth, he started seeking the company of prostitutes. He stopped attending the court and going home. On learning about his immoral behaviour, Atma Ram’s wife became disturbed. When she went looking for him to bring him home, she found him in the midst of prostitutes. She was shocked at his conduct.

She admonished him, “You father holds a high reputation in this city. How can you throw away the prestige of the family and run after women of loose morals? Don’t you know that they are only after money? These women are attached to money and not to you. You have ruined the reputation of our family line. Listen to the words of your mother who holds your interest close to her heart. These women will give you up as good as dead when you run out of money. They will throw you out if you don’t keep supplying them with money...
and valuable gifts. Women who had lusted after several men in their previous lives or betrayed their husbands and carried on clandestine affairs with other men are born as prostitutes now. They have no scruples or shame. They are like daylight thieves who divest you of your possessions brazenly. They have no respect in the society. Honourable people shun them like poison. Even a forest fire can be quenched with water. But the fire of lust which has afflicted you is voracious. Have you bid farewell to all your religious training and morality?”

Alas! these words fell on deaf ears! This infuriated the grief-stricken mother. Hurling abuses at him, she said, “If your father happens to hear about your lifestyle, he will rush back and cut you into pieces. Before the rumour about your infamous conduct leaks out, return home and salvage whatever is left of your reputation. Forsaking all propriety, I have taken the trouble to step inside this defiled area, yet you have shown no sensitivity. You must be the most wicked son that a mother ever begot in this town.”

She stormed back home affronted. However, being a mother, she could not rest in peace while the son’s life was being reduced to shambles. She returned to him day after day, hoping to rescue him by threats and cajoling, but to no avail. Anxiety about her son ate into her vitals.

Deluded by the play of Maya, Tulasidas was completely under the spell of unbridled passion and lost to all decency and humaneness. Lured by the charms of young women, he became oblivious of his duties at home and to the king.

Meanwhile, Atma Ram who had gone on a yatra returned home. On hearing about his son’s present state of infamous conduct, he rushed to the prostitutes’ quarters in great rage. His body perspired with agitation on beholding his son’s state.

He shouted at him, “O rogue given to ways of vice! Have you taken leave of your senses to lead such a depraved life?”

Ashamed to enter the city with his son, Atma Ram selected a corner in the emperor’s garden and arranged for his son and some brahmin lads of his age to stay there and take to Vedic studies. Guards were posted at the gates to stop any woman from entering the precincts.
THE LORD ENTRAPS TULASIDAS

He engaged the boys in a rigorous schedule of religious practices while immersing himself in the contemplation of Brahman.

While things seemed to be getting under control for Atma Ram, the gods got busy with a stratagem to foil his efforts. The Lord intended to put Tulasidas through an ordeal. He summoned a celestial beauty and said, “You must reach the city of Delhi forthwith and meet Tulasidas who is engaged in Vedic learning. You must divert his attention with your charm. When he approaches you in an intoxicated mood, treat him to a lecture on morals.”

Delighted with her good fortune, she reached the beautiful palace garden. Selecting a secluded spot from where she could draw the attention of Tulasidas she waited there for him unnoticed by others. On seeing him approach the garden with his friends, she assumed a captivating pose under a tree where he could not fail to espy her. As soon as Tulasidas entered the garden, his eyes fell on the beautiful damsels under the tree. Immediately, Tulasidas was bewitched by her beauty and pose. He exclaimed with unfeigned joy, “Aha…! Ah…! What a wonder! My dear friends! Do you behold the scene! What a beauty she is! She has already captured my heart, enslaved me. She is so fresh and elegant like a flower-creeper. She looks like an exquisite statue sculpted by a perfect hand. O what bliss sweeps over me!”

When he approached her in this inebriated mood, she moved away from the vicinity of Atma Ram’s hermitage, pretending to be offended. She half-concealed herself behind dense trees. He followed her like a dog after the master and turned to address his friends, “Don’t you see the magnificence of colourful feathers of a peacock in her dazzling beauty? Doesn’t her excellence daze you? She is beyond compare! What a rare loveliness! The beauty of entire creation has taken this form, I think. She is a paragon of all charm. Even the Trinity will be lured by her, nay, even those who revel in the bliss of Brahman will lose their heart if they glance at her once. She is none other than the celestial beauty, Ramba who is extolled in the puranas. Have you also lost yourselves in her beauty, my friends?”

He was swept off his feet on beholding her attractive form. In an excess of frenzy, he swooned for a while and then recovered lamenting.
The woman also exercised her charms to inflame his desire on the one hand and gave a short discourse on moral conduct on the other hand alternately.

She said, “I have come here to have the holy darshan of your father to be purified of my blemishes. Don’t you know of the ill-fated events in the lives of Tara and Renuka for desiring other men and the immortal fame of Sita who would not even cast a cursory glance at another man? I thought that living in a hermitage, you would show me the way to redemption. On the contrary, you blabber like a fool, succumbing to carnal desire.”

Tulasidas persisted in his amorous advances. He glorified her and zealously declaring his love begged her to accept him. As if disgusted with his behaviour, the celestial woman berated him and said, “Even Siva and Vishnu cannot impart good sense to a mule like you. I should not tarry here a moment longer.” Soon after, she disappeared from sight.

Tulasidas became desperate. He behaved like a madman, wandering here and there, pining for her. His friends reproached him for his dishonourable and shameful conduct. They remonstrated with him that in the face of his status as a Vedic scholar and his father’s hopes on him, he should not lose control and demean himself in that way. But none of their words could cure his obsession. He could not put his mind on anything else. Getting burnt in the fire of passion, he lost all sense of decency.

Finding no way out of the predicament, the friends decided to apprise his father of the situation. In a trice, they reached Atma Ram who was absorbed in deep contemplation. They told him, “Swami, your son has fallen for the charms of a celestial woman who had taken shelter under a tree. She tried to check his advances with moral injunctions, but Tulasidas is obsessed with her. When her advice made no impact on him, she rose up in the sky and disappeared. But your son is distraught. He is acting crazy, lamenting and crying for her. You must hasten to him and help him recover from the pitiable state.”

Mortified and shocked at these events, Atma Ram hurried to the garden and was stunned to see Tulasidas’ condition in which he had worked himself into a contemptible state.
The Arunachala Puranam Text

Part Two

The Tamil Sthala Purana of Tiruvannamalai by Ellappa Navalar with special reference to the Sanskrit Arunachala Mahatmya

Robert Butler

The following article is the second part of an edited extract from the Introduction to the first full English translation of the Arunachala Puranam, which is scheduled for publication by Sri Ramanasramam during the course of the forthcoming year.

The Arunachala Puranam and Arunachala Mahatmya compared

[In the first of these two articles it was stated that the major source for the majority of the material in the Puranam was the Sanskrit Arunachala Mahatmyam – the Greatness of Arunachala, which itself consists of two sections, called the Purvardha and Uttarardha, each of which broadly relates the same material, but with significant variation between the two accounts.]

Sri Ramana Maharshi teaches us that the world is simply the illusory play of mind, projected upon the unmoving screen of consciousness. The bizarre and wonderful world of the Hindu Puranas is in its own way no less an illustration of this truth. Here the laws
of the so-called physical universe are suspended; the laws of time, space and matter do not apply here. An infinity of time can pass in a second, and a second can endure for an infinity. Myths within the Puranas are multi-faceted and contradictory across their multiple sources, the various strands intertwining and ramifying like thought itself. It is as if the authors are warning the reader to beware of the ephemeral realm of the mind where nothing is as it seems, and nothing endures, apart from the underlying Self, the Atman. Within this maze the one Ariadne’s thread is the pursuit of dharma, which requires the abandonment of the ego and surrender to the law of the universe, an endeavour that will surely, in the fullness of time, lead us back out of the maze and to union with that supreme Self. Should anyone be in any doubt about the higher aims of these Puranas, let them study the following slokas from the Mahatmya:

\begin{quote}
Obeisance to Siva, the Supreme Soul, 
the maker of the entire universe, 
You who have assumed separate forms 
in the nature of saktis through maya! 
Mahadeva is one and only one. 
O Lord, without you, none else exists!\footnote{Arunachala Mahatmya, Pur. Ch.3, sl. 35 & 37b.}
\end{quote}

The Manifestation of the Fiery Lingam

In the Mahatmya, the story of the quarrel between Brahma and Vishnu and the subsequent manifestation of Siva in the form of a fiery lingam is very much like the account in the Puranam, except that in the Purvardha there is no mention of the screwpine flower and its bearing false witness on behalf of Brahma, and hence no mention of any sanction against Brahma, forbidding his worship in temples. In that account Brahma, as he becomes more and more tired and dispirited is addressed by some siddhas, described as being born of parts of his (Lord Siva’s) splendour, (Purvardha 1, 55b), who point out the error of his ways, wondering how Brahma, who has himself issued forth from the Atman, along with crores of other suras, could
possibly hope to perceive any limit to that from which he himself was born. Brahma then comes to his senses and gives up his quest.

In both sections of the Mahatmya, Siva’s appearance, as he bursts open the column of fire and appears before Brahma and Vishnu, is described in greater detail than in the Puranam. The following is the account given in the Uttarardha:

Bursting asunder the column of refulgence, 
like the moon wandering [out of the clouds] in the evening sky, 
mounted upon a lordly bull, dazzling white, like the peak of Kailasa, 
the hair upon his head matted and braided, 
with the crescent moon as the crest, 
wearing, as prescribed, a necklace of skulls of demons, 
and a garland of cassia fistula [Indian laburnum], 
with five bright faces, each with serpents for earrings, 
an eye shining in its broad forehead 
as a throat marked by the stain of poison, 
holding in his hands a trident, a skull, a damaru drum, 
a deer, an axe, a bow, a flawless khatvanga (skull-topped club), 
a sword and a serpent, 
his body sprinkled all over with ash, wearing an elephant hide 
as an upper garment, adorned with all ornaments, 
praised by all the gods, 
and wearing a tiger’s skin as his wearing cloth, 
he was seen by them thus.¹

Regarding the incident described above, Bhagavan made some handwritten notes which corrected a note which appears in the early editions. The note is to verse 118 of the modern edition. In that verse it is stated that Siva appeared as a column of fire to settle the quarrel between Brahma and Vishnu. The erroneous note says:

In the month of Maci, in the second half of the lunar month, on the 14th day at midnight (i.e. Sivaratri) he appeared as a bright effulgence.

¹ Arunachala Mahatmya, Utt. Ch. 16, sl. 1-6a.
However Bhagavan knew this to be incorrect from his study of the Sanskrit texts, which say that Siva’s first appearance as a column of fire was in the month of Markali (mid-December to mid-January) in the nakshatra of Ardra (i.e. when the moon was in the Ardra nakshatra - region of the sky, near Betelgeuse), and that the date he emerged from the column of fire to be worshipped by Brahma and Vishnu was that mentioned in the note, i.e. on the day of the new moon in the month of Maci, (mid-February to mid-March).

Bhagavan accordingly made the following corrections: below verse 118 (40 in his edition) he wrote:

*In the month of Markali on the day of [the] Ardra [nakshatra]*

thus establishing the correct date for Lord Siva’s initial manifestation, and he amended the footnote as follows:

*In the month of Maci, in the second half of the lunar month, on the 14th day at midnight (i.e. Sivaratri) he appeared with form within that bright effulgence, so that Hari, Ayan and the rest might perform puja [to Him].*

thus confirming the date of Siva’s emergence from the column of fire. The modern edition of the Puranam, published by Sri Ramanasramam, has replaced that footnote with one which quotes Bhagavan’s translation of a Sanskrit verse which confirms these dates. In The Collected Works it is the second verse in the section of Bhagavan’s translations from the Arunachala Mahatmya:

*That day on which the ancient and wonderful linga of Arunachala took shape is the nakshatra of Ardra in the month of Markali. And the day on which Vishnu and the other gods worshipped the Lord who appeared within that bright effulgence is the day of Maha Sivaratri.*

However we have been unable to find the original Sanskrit verse in the Mahatmya itself. Possibly it comes from some other part of the Skanda Purana, some other recension of the Mahatmya, or some other Purana altogether. Neither the Puranam nor the Mahatmya gives any date other than that of Siva’s appearance to Parvati on the Krittika nakshatra in the month of Karttikai.
The Masking of the Divine Eyes

In the account of the sports of Siva and Parvati after their marriage in *Uttarardha* there is no mention of the masking of Lord Siva’s eyes. The marriage goes well at first, until Parvati sees the Lord performing the *sandhya* rite with joined palms and closed eyes. The thought occurs to her that he is thinking about some other woman, not her, and her jealousy begins to grow out of control:

"Certainly some fortunate woman is now being meditated upon [by him]. His love for me, I think, is a great fraud."

"Heaving with the internal tremor, her breasts quivered, like a pair of lotus buds, oscillated by the bees caught within them."

She decides to go and perform penance in order to win her husband, leaving whilst Lord Siva is still in meditation, lest he talk her out of her decision. Accompanied by some of her handmaidens, who follow her despite being forbidden, she wanders with no particular destination in mind, until she sees, not far away, a red mountain with eight peaks, Arunachala.

In the *Purvardha*, the story of the masking of the eyes occurs in the same way as in the *Puranam*, but in the latter, there is no mention of Siva’s reaction to the incident, and of the ensuing conversation with Parvati regarding the *tapas* she is to perform, an incident which occupies 22 *slokas* in the *Mahatmya*. In this account Siva is gracious and indulgent towards Parvati, ascribing her conduct to youthful simplicity, and addressing her as *mugdhe* – *O sweet innocent one!* Siva is pleased with Parvati’s genuinely repentant attitude, but, since the destruction of the worlds has been improperly brought about, at the wrong time and through the wrong agency, *tapas* must be performed to restore the universal order. As Siva and Parvati are in essence of the same non-dual nature, determining the correct course of action requires some consideration:

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3 *Arunachala Mahatmya Utt.* Ch.18, sl.3.
4 *Arunachala Mahatmya Utt.* Ch.18, sl.13.
What expiation might be suggested here for you, who are of the same form as myself?\(^5\)

His final decision is that Parvati shall go and perform *tapas* on the earth, while he himself replicates that *tapas* in his own formless form:

*I myself shall perform the entire penance, stationed in the Atman. The entire earth shall be fruitful through your penance.

I, becoming undivided and free of attributes, will be present in the lotus of your mind. My lady, do not become distressed due to separation from myself.\(^6\)*

**Parvati becomes the left half of the Lord**

In verse 278 of the *Puranam*, Siva appears to Parvati after her penance in Kancipuram and asks her what boon she desires, to which she replies *piritu onrum illai; ida-p-puram taruti!* – *There is nothing other than this: grant me the left half [of yourself]!* In the *Puranam* there is no repetition of this request by Parvati prior to the final merger with Lord Siva in chapter Five. In the *Mahatmya* however Parvati does make this request in an impassioned plea to Lord Siva, just prior to their final union in Tiruvannamalai. The following three *slokas* are taken from that plea for the granting of the boon of non-separation from the Lord:

*Then Gauri, the Mother of the universe, being of that sort (as described previously), worshipping the Destroyer of the cities, begged Lord Sambhu for non-separation from Himself. This form of yours which is very charming should not be abandoned. I should never be abandoned, even if I am guilty of offence. This fascinating form of yours is conducive to the auspiciousness of all the worlds. Lord, through your favour let our union be highly fragrant, and the promoter of welfare, and be seen as the bestower of all wealth and prosperity.*\(^7\)

\(^5\) *Arunachala Mahatmya Pur.* Ch.3, sl. 50.
\(^6\) *Arunachala Mahatmya Pur.* Ch.3, sl. 55 & 65.
\(^7\) *Arunachala Mahatmya Pur.* Ch.13, sl. 1, 3 & 8.
Initiation at Arunachalam

On page 115 of this magazine issue there is an inset giving a translation of a sloka from the Mahatmya, followed by a translation into Tamil of that sloka, composed by Sri Bhagavan. Several books record Ramana’s fascinating account of the origin of this translation.8 The following is the account given by Suri Nagamma:9

A devotee who had heard about the meetings of the Head of the Sivaganga Mutt and the discussions about Narasimha Bharathi asked Bhagavan, “It seems a long time ago someone from the Sringeri Mutt requested Bhagavan to accept Diksha (formal initiation).”

Bhagavan: “Yes. That is so. That was during the early days of my stay at the Virupaksha cave. A Sastri residing in the Sringeri Mutt came to see me one morning. He saw me, spoke to me for a long time, and before going to the town for meals, drew near me and with folded arms and great respect said, ‘Swami! I have a request to make. Please hear me.’ When I asked him what it was, he said, ‘Swami, as you are born a Brahmin, should you not take Sanyasa in the regular way? It is an ancient practice. You know all that. What is there for me to tell you? I am anxious to include you in the line of our Gurus. Hence, if you give me the permission, I will come here with all the requisite articles from my Mutt and give you the initiation. If you do not care to wear the full ochre-coloured robes (Akhanda Kashayam) I respectfully submit that it is enough if your loin cloth at least is of ochre colour. You may think over this well and give me a reply. I am going down the hill to take my meals and will come back by 3 p.m. All the members of our Mutt have heard

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8 In A Sadhu’s Reminiscences A. W. Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala) records the story as told to him by Devaraja Mudaliar, who had forgotten to include it in any of his books; Kunju Swami recalls the same story in his Living with the Master (‘Enadu Ninaivugal’), and Suri Nagamma records it in Letters. In these cases the visiting monk is a sannyasin or sastrī from Sringeri Mutt. Substantially the same story is also recorded by T. K. Sundaresa Iyer in At the Feet of Bhagavan, although in this case the visiting sadhu is a Vaisnavite.

of your greatness and I have come here to see you at their request. Please do this favour.’

“A little while after he left, an old Brahmin came there with a bundle. His face appeared familiar. It could be seen from the outside of the bundle that there were some books in it. As soon as he came, he placed the bundle opposite to me and like an old acquaintance said, ‘Swami, I have just come. I have not had a bath. There is no one to look after this bundle. I am therefore leaving it with you.’ So saying he left the place. As soon as he went away, why, I do not know, but I felt like opening that bundle and seeing the books. As soon as I opened it, I saw a Sanskrit book in Nagari characters with the title ‘Arunachala Mahatmyam’. I did not know before that the Arunachala Mahatmyam is in Sanskrit also. I was therefore surprised and as I opened the book I found the Sloka describing the greatness of this place in the words of Iswara:

Those who live within 24 miles of this place, i.e. this Arunachala Hill, will get My Sayujyam, i.e. absorption into Me, freed from all bonds, even if they do not take any Diksha. This is my order.⁹

“As soon as I saw that Sloka, I felt I could give a fitting reply to that Sastri by quoting that Sloka and so hastily copied it out, for the Brahmin might come back at any moment, and then tied up the bundle as before after replacing the book. I showed this Sloka to the Sastri as soon as he came in the evening. As he was a learned man, he did not say anything further but with great reverence and trepidity saluted me, went away and, it seems, reported everything to Narasimha Bharathi. Narasimha Bharathi felt very sorry for what his disciples had done, and told them to stop all further efforts in that direction. I subsequently translated that Sloka and wrote it in a verse in Tamil, ‘Yojanai Munra Mittala Vasarku’. It has now been added at the beginning of the five verses in praise of Arunachala (Arunachala Sthuthi Panchakam). In the same way, many people tried to convert me to their path. So long as

⁹ Arunachala Mahatmiyam v.6 in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, a translation of ch. 16, sloka 24 of the Uttarardha of the Arunachala Mahatmya.
nivasatām nṛṇām – for men dwelling, asmin kṣetre – in this holy place (kṣetra), yojana-traya-mātre – to a distance of three yojanas, astu – let there be, mama ājñayā – at my command, mat sāyujyam – union with myself (sāyujyam), dikṣādikam vinā api – even without the requisite initiation.

With regard to those men staying in this holy place, to the distance of three yojanas (thirty miles), let them, at my command, have union with myself without the requisite initiation.

Aruṇācala Māhātmya, Uttarārdha, Ch. 16, sl. 24.

en tan ānaiyinān – by the command of myself, icaṇ ām – who am the Lord, en pācam il cāyuccciyam – union with myself, free of worldly bondage, payakkum – will result, i tala vācarkku – for those dwelling in this sthala, yōcanai mūnru ām – to a distance of three yojanas, ācū aru tikkai iniyum – even without flawless initiation.

By the command of myself, who am the Lord, union with me, free of worldly bondage, will result for those dwelling in this sthala, to a distance of three yojanas, even in the absence of flawless initiation.

Aruṇācala Māhātmiyam, v. 6 in the Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi.
it was mere talk, I used to say, ‘Yes, yes,’ but never agreed to take any initiation. I always used to find some ruse to escape. Even the writing of verses too, is about the same. I never wrote any of my own accord. Somebody used to ask me on some pretext or other. And I used to write on some urge from within. That is all.”

Conclusion
Thus we see how Sri Ramana himself acknowledges the holy Mountain Arunachala, the living presence of Lord Siva himself, as the purveyor of diksha, initiation, to all devotees who are minded to walk the path of enlightenment, and surrender at its rocky feet. And for those who are unable to make the journey to the actual physical presence of the mountain in Tiruvannamalai, southern India, the Arunachala Mahatmya and Arunachala Puranam assure us that the sthala of Arunachala, unlike other holy sthalas, will bestow liberation even upon those who merely hold it reverently in their thoughts:

The true knowledge of Vedanta which may not be gained without great difficulty, will arise in all who come within sight [of this mountain] or simply dwell upon it in their thoughts.10

10 Arunachala Mahatmiyam v.5 in The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, a translation of ch. 16, sloka 26 of the Uttarardha of the Arunachala Mahatmya.

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Leaving behind the rice fields where there are jackfruit trees, over whose tall canopies the clouds crawl, and magara plantains, whose fruits burst open, so that their fresh honey(-like juices), spreading out, flood through the irrigation channels, She arrived in holy Kancipuram’s city, in whose groves the young peacocks dance, as they see the girls dancing, their dancing eyes swivelling as far as their earrings. (268)

The jewelled terraces of that great city, which girls with large (and beautiful) eyes — capable of destroying the good sense of men, and awakening sense in trees and stones — ascended, their anklet-clad, lotus-like feet growing red, and their thread-like waists swaying, were like mountains where celestial maidens play. And the long banners on

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has recently published a grammatical commentary on Ulladu Narpadu, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666.
the [temple] gopuram were like the kamavalli creeper [on the tree of heaven], [spreading] over its stout branches. (269)

Like peacocks performing bharata natyam, like puppets controlled by strings, maidens with waists (narrow like) the udukkaï drum, performed the sport of love, and when they rolled on the ground with their lovers, so that emeralds and other jewels dug into them, they scooped them up angrily and threw them down from those bejewelled terraces [into the ocean]. This is why, from that day to this, that ocean has been known as the Repository of Jewels.1 (270)

Leaving there, [Parvati, whose waist is like the] vanci [creeper], worshipped Lord Siva beneath a matchless mango tree. In order to shake off the karma that burned like fire, She went to the holy Kampa river which flowed nearby; piling up sand in a decorative manner, She shaped it into the form of a lingam and performed puja. Then it was that [Lord Siva], He who owns me [as his servant], thinking [to test] the strength of her tapas, sent forth the incomparable river Ganges [in spate]. (271)

[People wondered], “Is it the Kaveri2 river that spilled down upon the earth from Agastya’s water pot?3 Or is it the billowy ocean that in the beginning time that same rishi used to perform acamanam and then spat out?4 Or is it the river Ganges which, on account of

1 The popular name for the part of the Bay of Bengal north of Dhanuskoti near Ramesvaram is Aratanikaram or Irattinikaram — Repository of Jewels. Here the author gives a fanciful explanation of how it came to get this name.

2 The Kaveri river is here referred to as the Ponni, as having golden sands. It waters the regions of Mysore, Coimbatore and Tanjore. The river was said to have been started when Ganesha, in the form of a crow, spilled the sage Agastya’s water pot.

3 Agastya is here referred to as kuru muni — the short rishi.

4 Acamanam is a Hindu purification ritual in which one sips water three times from the Brahma-grantha — base of the right thumb while reciting different mantras. This may be a reference to the incident when Agastya drank the cosmic ocean to expose the troublesome Kalakeyas who were hiding there.
Bhagiratha’s flawless tapas, and through the compassion of rishi Jahnu,⁵ who released her through his ear, is rising in flood?” (272)

In order to keep the sand lingam from being destroyed by that deathless river, Uma, daughter of the Himalaya, ruler of all the mountains, embraced it with her bangle clad arms, holding it ever tighter against her breasts, as if She held a lover in a passionate embrace, and even as She did so, the chest of the Lord, perfumed with sandalwood paste, melted, becoming softer and softer. (273)

To ease the deep sorrow in her mind over her separation from her husband, and over the thought [that her tapas would be ruined], She embraced (that lingam), even as in those first days She had embraced Him, crushing her breasts against Him and burying her face. At once the Kampa river, bright with white swans, drew back and divided in two, just as the good and evil karmas of those who place their thoughts, even once, upon [the mountain] Arunachala recede. (274)

Parvati withdrew her arms. Adorning the lingam with sandalwood paste and with a flower garland, which, gathering round, her richly bejewelled handmaidens had woven, She made obeisance before it. On that lingam the marks (of her nipples) could be seen, which were like signs (to all other women), forbidding them for shame ever to touch the chest of the husband of the Maiden with eyes like tender young mangoes. (275)

⁵ Rishi Jahnu appears in the story of the Ganges and Bhagiratha, who performed tapas to bring the river Ganges to the earth. When the Ganges came to the earth after being released from Lord Siva’s locks, her torrential waters wreaked havoc with Jahnu’s fields and penance. Angered by this, the great sage drank up all of the Ganges’ waters to punish her. Seeing this, the gods prayed to the sage to release the Ganges, so that she could proceed on her mission to release the souls of the ancestors of Bhagiratha. Jahnu relented and released the Ganges from his ear. For this reason the Ganges river is also known as Jahnavi meaning daughter of Jahnu.
Just then Lord Siva appeared, mounted upon the bull, his body resplendent with holy ash; on his shoulders was the scar made by the Pandiyan King, who struck Him [with his golden cane];⁶ on his feet were the marks made by the crowns of the gods, who worship Him morning, noon and night; and on his chest were the impressions made by the breasts and bracelets of Her whose hair is black as jet, when She embraced Him.

As all the gods of heaven poured down a rain of blossoms, the Vedas thundered forth to the rattle of large kettle drums; Indra, Vishnu and the gods stood worshipping the Queen (of heaven), whilst Parvati herself, She whose mouth is (red) like a beautiful, ripe fruit, stood worshipping Lord Siva.

Parvati, She of the bright forehead, approached the bull bowing reverentially, performing puja with melting heart, making obeisance, and praising and worshipping (the Lord). Turning to her, He who bears an eye on His forehead asked, “What boon do you desire? Speak!” “Grant me the left half of yourself. I have no other thought than this!” She replied.

And Lord Siva replied, “The sin incurred [by yourself] in masking my eyes has been absolved by your performance of a puja most agreeable [to me] in this holy place. To the south of this true holy sthala, a matchless holy city stands illustrious; that venerable place will confer liberation on those who [merely] think of it.

There I stand, pervading all the worlds, above as below, as the infinite effulgence of jnana, whose head and foot remained hidden

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⁶ The reference is to an incident in the life of Manikkavacakar, recounted in the Madurai Sthala Purana, and the Tiruvadavur Adigal Purana. Whilst posing as a feckless labourer, Siva was beaten as a punishment. When the blow struck, the whole world felt it, including the Pandiyan king who had beaten Him. See Manikkavacakar’s Tiru ammanai, v. 8: Let us sing of the gold-like boy that carried earth for wages in tumultuous Madurai, was beaten by that Pandiyan king and bore the wound.
from Brahma and Vishnu even as they searched. To the inhabitants of the world I endure there in the form of a mountain. You whose breasts are adorned by a bodice, come, for it is there that I shall confer upon you the half [of myself]!” Thus did he speak. (280)

In reply Parvati spoke as follows, “You first declared that Kancipuram was more delightful than sweet Kailash, or Kaci. Now you say that Sonai, the city of the Red Mountain, is greater even than this fair place. Is there then some other great city that is the equal of that one?” (281)

Dismissing Parvati’s words, our Lord graciously replied, “There is no god who is my equal; no mantra that matches the holy Five Syllables; no religion that equals Saivism, and no holy place which banishes deadly karma, like Arunachala.” Speaking thus, He departed [to Mount Kailash]. (282)

Joining her hands together and worshipping the Lord, She who is like a [blossoming] branch said, “May you pardon these words of mine!” Then, leaving the Kampa river, She journeyed in state on her palanquin, with the fair Lakshmi waving a yak-tail fan, and accompanied by Murugan, the great elephant-headed Ganesha, celestial maidens, bhairavas and Lord Siva’s heavenly hosts. (283)

As She travelled on for two leagues, dead trees sprang to life and flowered, pouring down nectar and blossoms and delighting the goddess Earth; stones and mountains softened and melted, and Saraswati, who dwells on a white lotus, sang praises. (At length) She whose face resembles the heaven-dwelling moon reached and area of open ground. (284)

7 In this and some of the following verses, Murukan is addressed using a different one of his names in each verse; these are Velan (282), Kumaravel (285), Kukan (Guha) (286), Kantan (287) and Kantavel (288). This translation uses the name Murugan in each instance to avoid confusion.

8 kivatam, a distance of about ten miles.
(Mindful of Her) on account of Her asking who he was,\(^9\) and realising that She whose hands were like blue lotuses, whose form was dark as emerald, and whose palms and foot soles were red, was suffering [from his heat], the sun slid gently down into the ocean, as if life itself were slipping from him. Lord Murugan constructed a shelter. \((285)\)

Mother Parvati turned to Murugan and complimented him, saying, “In building this shelter of plantain trees, you must have made all your twelve arms sore! However, one more task remains. In order to complete my evening devotions, cast the spear which you hold in your hand, and bring good, sweet water here without delay.” \((286)\)

Bowing to Her with deep affection, Murugan threw the spear he held in his hand. That spear cut down the seven whose names were Podavan, Puttirandan, noble Puruhutan, Podan, Pandarangan, Soman and Vaman,\(^10\) burrowing through the mountains on which they dwelt, and bringing the ocean’s flood to that place. \((287)\)

Having completed all the prescribed rites in the river which Murugan had brought, She remained within that shelter. Then Murugan prostrated himself at her feet, and asked the reason why the waters of that river ran red. Then She whose body is like the vanci creeper spoke as follows, explaining to Him who possesses six divine visages why it was so: \((288)\)

\((To\ be\ continued\ )\)

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\(^9\) The reference is to Parvati’s enquiry in v. 259 as to who the sun and moon were.

\(^10\) These are the seven Brahmans referred to in the following verses. \textit{Puruhuta} is a name of Indra, as being one frequently invoked in sacrifices. \textit{Pantarankan} is a name of Siva as dancing the \textit{pantarankam} dance when he destroyed the three cities of the \textit{asuras}; \textit{Potan} is a name of Brahma as possessing knowledge; \textit{Coman} is a name of the moon, and \textit{Vaman} is a name of Siva. The river is identified as the \textit{Ceyyaru} — the river brought by \textit{Cey} (Murugan).

This book on Sannyasins most aptly carries on its cover page the pictures of Adi Sankara, the supreme exponent of the Advaita philosophy and the founder of the Dasanami sannyasi order and of Swami Vivekananda who, in the words of Swami Ranganathananda, the late President of the Sri Ramakrishna Order, ‘combined the intellect of Sankara and the heart of the Buddha’ and whose life inspired hundreds to embrace sannyasa.

The word ‘sannyasa’ means 1) Leaving, abandonment; 2) Complete renunciation of the world and its possessions and attachments; abandonment of temporal concerns; 3) A deposit. A sannyasi can therefore be defined as one who has shown his back once and for all to the world and things worldly, as one who deposits his mind and heart in the hands of God, that is, totally surrenders himself to the Divine Will. How many of the myriads of sannyasis in India would answer to these descriptions? There is no way of knowing. The author of this very well-planned and well-written book herself says in her Introduction that “While some have looked upon the samnyasin as a person in whom the highest value of moksa (liberation) has been achieved, there are others who have vilified the samnyasin as a parasite in society living off the labour of other people. These are two extreme views and it is surely possible to have sannyasins who are representatives of both these viewpoints.” However, she points out that this book begins with the assumption that the samnyasin is a vital part of the Hindu society and is also a much respected part of the tradition.

Dr. Rukmini, the learned author, succeeds in proving this assumption correct in her very objective study, supported by the reports of her interviews with a few lay scholars and thirty one sannyasins of different traditions, all of whom come across as worthy representatives of their traditions and exemplars of the sannyasa order.
Tracing the roots of the *sannyasa* concept to the Vedas (2000 – 500 B.C.), the author feels that “the later *sanyasin*” may have “evolved from within the tradition but got a life of its own when it came in contact with other religions like Buddhism, for instance, where there is polarization of life of one who renounces the world called a *bhiksu* with the one who is still in the world.” She finds the first specific evidence of the *sannyasa* concept in the *Brhadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya Upanishads* which advocate a complete withdrawal from the world coupled with a life of reflection and meditation while the other Upanishads like *Isavasya*, *Prasna* and *Mundaka* approved of both the paths of ritual and withdrawal. In *Bhagavad Gita*, she says, “there is a happy reconciliation of both the paths which continues till today.”

All the swamis (*sanyasins*) who have been interviewed for this book seem to be fully committed to the ideal of renunciation and the goal of *moksha*. The idea of a *sadhu* who possesses a cowrie not being worth a cowrie is evidently obsolete today. The shift is from non-possession to non-possessiveness. All these swamis are active in meditation, teaching of the scriptures, propagation of the Hindu Dharma, counselling devotees, social work through hospitals, schools, organising relief during periods of crisis, social and some in even political activism, and so on. They all agree that the essence of *sannyasa* is selflessness.

But there are tens of thousands of *sannyasis*, swamis, *sadhus*, fakirs in India, most of them in ochre robes. Of these, it is likely that a few are *vidvat sannyasis* (those who have attained *vidvat* or *jnana*, quite a few being *vividisha sannyasis*, that is, those who strive for Self-knowledge with varying degrees of intensity; *Sannyasa* is a bold, laudable experiment. There may be black sheep among them, but are not such sheep ubiquitous? *Sannyasa* and others can benefit by reading this book. — Jijnasu

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Advaita Vedanta as a great burgeoning spiritual movement, following its relatively recent Renaissance, principally inaugurated by Sri Ramana Maharshi, was bound sooner or later to wish to present the Advaitic Truth in an art form. R.Subramony’s superb book has now arrived to uniquely express this great teaching in the form of a modern Novel.

The Narrator comes under the benevolent and wise guidance of a true Jnani Guru, who gradually and gracefully unveils to his pupil the teachings...
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of Non Dual Truth, drawing on the sage wisdom and living examples of Sankara, Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi and Abhinavagupta amongst others. As well as unveiling the Teachings of these great Sages in a gradual progressive way to his pupil, the Guru also criticises the current condition of Indian spiritual life, where western modernist materialism is gradually undermining her historic spiritual traditions.

The book is a delight to read and is a welcome and refreshing change from the very many didactic conceptual books on the Teaching. The author Ramaswami Subramony is an Assistant Professor in English, at the Madura College in Madurai, and is thus well qualified to attempt and succeed in such a creative task. There is a useful Bibliography giving the authors many sources, and a valuable index.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this refreshing Novel and was delighted by its ingenious originality, being both scholarly and literary, without being scholastic. I strongly recommend it for those who wish to enjoy learning about Advaita Vedanta in a highly enthralling and entertaining way without tears.

— Alan Jacobs


To say Remaji was an unusual lover of truth would be stating the obvious. A brilliant mathematician and child musical prodigy, he carved a life that was exceptional for its depth, and strange for the way he listened not to the conventional cultural and religious milieu in which he could have easily become an influential and respected guru, but to the calling of his own heart. He had few ‘disciples’ and none of his writings were published in his lifetime. He created a new philosophy Masquism, the world as God’s masque. God is masked and we are invited to play our part to further God’s expression in the world. Remaji (Rema meaning the Ray of God) was born in Chennai in 1913 and was called at birth R.Vaidyanathan. He departed this world, almost unknown in 1990 at Amritsar. He left behind a collection of over 20,000 pages of writings on his philosophy that are as yet to be made available to the public.

There is an abundance of cranks more than willing to share their insights but it would be foolish to regard Remaji as one. He was remarkable for he pursued Truth with the utmost intelligence and integrity. Who of us can say the same?

— Christopher Quilkey
The 62nd Aradhana of Sri Ramana Maharshi

One of the four principal events in the ashram calendar is the annual Aradhana marking the anniversary of Bhagavan’s Maha Nirvana. The 62nd Aradhana was observed in his shrine on Wednesday, 18th April, 2012. The early morning began with Mangala Isai by Sri T. R. Pichandi & Party (Nadhaswaram) followed by recitation of Arunachala Stuti Panchakam, Upadesa Undiyar and Ulladu Narpadu simultaneous with Mahanyasa japa in the Mother’s Shrine. There were elaborate flower decorations for the event and kalasa abhishekam and the aratis that followed were elevating. All guests were invited for meals throughout the day.

Lectures on Brihat Yoga Vasishta

The noted speaker Nochur Venkataraman has in recent years given a series of lectures on Bhagavan’s teachings in the early part of the year at the ashram. This year’s programme of ten days between the 2nd and 11th of April dwelt for the first time on the Brihat Yoga Vasishta, a work of 32,000 Sanskrit verses attributed to Valmiki in which the dialogue between Sage Vasishta and Sri Rama is focused on advaitic teaching. Bhagavan often quoted Yoga Vasishta and included 12 of its verses in his Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham (see v2-3, 21-30).

Salem Ramana Maiyam

After the success of the Ratha Yatra in 2004, numerous kendras sprung up in Tamil Nadu, among them the Salem Ramana Maiyam. After the centre began celebrating Jayanti and Aradhana and the conducting of daily meditation and chanting, the number of devotees attending grew year by year and available space became inadequate. The members decided to expand the facility and constructed a Ramana Mandiram at Salem Ponnammapet. The President of the Salem Ramana Maiyam purchased land and donated it to the Maiyam. The Bhoomi puja was performed on Punarvasu Day, 14th July, 2007. Two years later the
Salem *Ramana Thirukovil* was completed and on 8th March, 2009, the *kumbhabhishekam* was performed. By Bhagavan's grace, the *Salem Ramana Maiyam* continues to thrive.

**14th April Brahma Nirvana Observed**

Sri Bhagavan’s *Brahma Nirvana* is also observed according to the Gregorian calendar on the evening of 14th April each year when devotees gather at 8pm for silent meditation in front of the Nirvana room. Devotees began chanting *Aksharamamalai* around 8.15pm which was timed to conclude at the moment of Bhagavan’s *Mahanirvana* at 8.47pm on that day in 1950.

**Muruganar’s Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai**

The complete chanting (*muttrodal*) of any specific religious text work is a powerful spiritual practice that can purify the mind. *Tiruvachakam Muttrodal* (the chanting of Manikkavachakar’s *Tiruvachakam*) is a common practice in Tamil Nadu and the chanting is completed in eight hours either in temples by group of devotees or individually at private homes.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi requested the chanting of *Tiruvachakam* on the night of the 19th May 1922, when His mother Alagammal left her body in Skandasramam. Kunju Swami records that he and Arunachala Swami with others chanted it that evening while Bhagavan provided them the correct pronunciation wherever it was needed.

It is also common practice to chant the complete or parts of *Thevarams* of Jnanasambhandar, Appar and Sundarar on their respective (annual) *Aradhana* days, which run to thousands of verses. G.V.Subbaramaiah in his reminiscences mentions that Bhagavan spoke of these *muttrodals* with appreciation.

*Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* of Muruganar is a spiritual compendium of many poetic styles in Tamil literature. While covering the grace and teaching aspects of Bhagavan, in style it encompasses *Tiruvachakam, Thevaram*, the writings of Tayumanavar, Nammalvar, the famous Vaishnavite saint and many others.
The odhuvar of the Kapaliswara temple at Mylapore in Chennai, Sri Sadgurunathan taught the method of chanting of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai in pann metre to a few devotees of Bhagavan who have organized a Ramana Sachidananda Sabha in Chennai. The group comes to Ramanasramam periodically and chants the Muttroodal which extends over three days each time. The dates of Muttroodal are around the Jayanti and Aradhana of Bhagavan and Muruganar’s Aradhana (Dec-Jan, April-May & Aug-Sep). In the recent past, temple odhuvars were specially brought in for the occasion of Muruganar’s Aradhana.

It is also proposed to perform the Muttroodal of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai in Madurai at the Ramana Mandiram, Tiruchuzhi at the Sundara Mandiram and at Ramanathapuram.

Obituaries

We regret to inform readers that Smt. Lalitha Venkataraman, the wife of our printer, Sri T.V. Venkataraman, was absorbed in Arunachala on the 12th December 2011 at the age of 77. She was regarded with much affection in the Ashram. Even though the Ashram frequently rang the family house in Chennai on business she, generally being the one who picked up the phone first, invariably answered with tact and humour.

Sri M.R. Venkataraman, aged 86, passed away peacefully and was absorbed in Arunachala on 27th January, 2012. He had been hospitalised ten days earlier, having suffered a stroke, but whenever Bhagavan’s name was chanted in his presence, he would make every effort to open his eyes and raise his hands in adoration.

In the 1970s he came to Sri Ramanasramam and met Muruganar, after which he began regular visits. In 2002 he came once for all and settled permanently near the Ashram.

Our Ashram’s senior advocate Sri.V. Gopalsamy Rao, aged 84, attained Sri Bhagavan’s feet on Wednesday, 30th May 2012, after a brief illness. Sri.V.G. Rao and his family represented Ashram in legal cases for several decades. Given the complex issues it was always a labour of love. His straightforward, simple approach and the invaluable services that he rendered were recognized and highly appreciated by the Ashram. His son Sri Ravichandran, Advocate has taken on the responsibility and is now the Ashram’s legal consultant.

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