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Ramana Ashtottaram

85. ओं विप्राय नमः ॥

Om Viprāya namah.

Prostration to the true *Brahmana*.

Bhagavan was a seer of Reality from early youth. Due to his purity Bhagavan effortlessly realised the true meaning of existence. He was a *brahmana* not just by birth but because he was truly *dvija* (twice-born).

A secondary meaning of *vipra* is priest. Bhagavan intercedes upon our behalf and makes it possible for our prayers to be fulfilled.

86. ओं मुनीन्द्राय नमः ॥

Om Munīndrāya namah.

Prostration to the king of ascetics, first among ascetics.

First and foremost Bhagavan exemplified true renunciation. It was as natural to him as breathing. His *tapas* was not a struggle but a joy. He showed us that if we lived in the moment we need very little materially for our well-being.

All Bhagavan 'possessed' was a *kaupina* (loincloth), *kamandalam* (water pot) and *danda* (walking stick) and yet by natural right, he was the king of all that he surveyed.

Electronic Ramana

Yes, the Internet is a wonderful device that gives us instant access to the latest news and knowledge. At the tap of a key we can gain information that previously took hours, days or years to locate. Yes, it enriches and helps us understand each other and widens our range of perception. Yes, it can assist us to become better human beings. No, it is not the answer to the fundamental problem as to who we are. At best it is a marvellous tool, at worst it is a toy that can waste our time and fill our mind with chaos.

We are on the verge of a major leap in the development of humanity, which concomitantly makes it crucial that we should not confuse technological advancement with self-understanding. Let us not forget that the *Bhagavad Gita* was written on parchment with homemade ink. We are in conflict with science as we know it today with its materialist ideology that believes in the name of progress, the human being is also a device which is being refined and adapted to new conditions. We are more than a machine.

MOUNTAIN PATH

As followers of Sri Ramana we believe that within the core of our being there is an immortal spirit whose journey on this earth has meaning both on the personal level and on the grand scale of the universe. We believe in unity. The spirit that animates this instrument is perfect in itself and our passage through life is meant to make us conscious of the I AM which hums throughout all existence. All our communication with others, all our thoughts and feelings are a manifestation of this I AM.

Whether we are aware of it or not we are all in search of meaning. Like any institution today the ashram has a website that makes Bhagavan's teachings and commentaries on them available. We can read and download much that is of assistance but it would be a mistake to think we now have the definitive answer. The quest requires more from us than words.

Though so much is available it does not necessarily follow that it is all true. On a more familiar plane we face the question of whether what we hear or read of the knowledge that Bhagavan imparted to us is what was meant by the original source. In general, the further away in time or place the original source, the more likely the knowledge received is corrupted in some way, be it gross or subtle. We face this challenge with Bhagavan's teachings now that the impact of this original source is fading. Though we have the original writings translated into many languages, we are also weighed down with the accumulation of second-hand commentaries. More and more books or comments or blogs are written by those who supposedly know what Bhagavan meant. Some do and some don't. It is up to us to know the difference. To employ an old adage, "All that glitters is not gold."

This leads us to another task. Spiritual literature is a vast field and much that was secret or hard to find is now readily available. The ease of access has resulted in information overload. What is information and how are we to gauge if it is vital or will it just muddle our minds with irrelevancies? Like too much food, too much information can warp our judgement and make our minds dull or confused.

The Internet offers us an entirely new approach to knowledge. Previously knowledge was exclusive but today the world of facts

and figures is potentially at our fingertips. The way we approach information has now also changed. The Internet accelerates our learning process. We have a powerful tool and really the question is how to use it wisely. Our attitude has to change. We now do not need to store up information but rather navigate the vast terrain. We should maintain clarity. There is a law called Occam's razor which states that among competing propositions, the one which makes the fewest assumptions should be selected. Or more bluntly, do not cloud our perception with that which is unnecessary. Bhagavan, after all, taught mainly in silence.

We can be free from the restrictions of a material world when we enter the digital domain, yet on another level we have begun to devalue knowledge by making it an easily accessible commodity. In general, we do not value that which comes effortlessly. We may have massive amounts of information, movies, music, photos available on our computers but do we really treasure them the same way as we did our first book given as a gift or bought with hardearned labour?

There is a story: "A Sufi went to the court of a certain king. The scholars who surrounded the throne said, 'Your Majesty, this man must not be allowed to speak until he has satisfied us that he knows in detail the classical books and commentaries, because otherwise he might harbour thoughts which could be harmful to the kingdom.'

But the Sufi could not recite any classics, and his manner of speaking was foreign to the scholars, who called him a charlatan and had turned him away.

Six months later, the Sufi appeared again and presented himself to the master of ceremonies.

'You are not allowed into the court as a learned man, Sufi,' said the master, 'since you have failed the test.'

'But I am not here as a learned man,' said the Sufi. 'I come as one who brings a present for His Majesty.' He indicated a horse which was following him.

When he was admitted into the royal presence, the Sufi said: 'I have dared to bring this horse to Your Majesty because it has characteristics which I think worthy of a sovereign's attention.'

'And what are those?' said the king.

'Cause any volume of the classics to be brought,' said the Sufi.

As soon as the book was produced and put before the horse, it started to turn over the leaves with its hooves. From time to time it paused, looked at the Sufi, and neighed.

'Good heavens!' said the king, 'This horse is reading the book and remarking upon passages from it.'

'Is this not even more wonderful than the capacities of the scholars, who, after all, are human beings and better equipped than a horse to read books?' asked the Sufi.

'Yes, indeed,' said the king. 'But I must know how this wonder came about.'

'If I tell you, Your Majesty may be tempted to dismiss all scholars from positions of importance,' said the Sufi.

'Even at that risk, tell me,' said the king.

'Well, I trained the horse for six months by putting some oats between the pages of books,' said the Sufi, 'and that was his incentive — to earn a little for each piece that he knew. He supplied the neighing part himself.'

'But that is just the way that scholars are themselves trained,' said the king, 'so we can do without them.'

And that is the story behind the happy tale of Sufistan, the history of the future. You may have heard of it, the time and place where real scholars were able to come into being because the horse-like ones and their way of training their successors and sycophants were put to flight by the king who became a Sufi."¹

We are reaching the technological point where we no longer need to laboriously seek the tools necessary for spiritual growth. They are ours for the asking: we just need to know where to look. It is an acquired skill like any other and it brings with it the danger

¹ Shah, Idries, *The Dermis Probe*, New York, Dutton & Co., 1971. pp.76-7.

that we will become so fascinated by the cornucopia on offer that we forget our original purpose and become lost in a maze that confuses rather than illuminates. Who has not surfaced dazed and tired after hours of trawling the Internet? Our knowledge may be greater, but are we any wiser? It does not necessarily follow that the more information we gather the more we understand the subject.

We are in a similar position in respect to Bhagavan's teachings. We will never know everything there is to know. The more we go in depth the deeper we discover the well of wisdom. On the other hand, if we stick to the conventional wisdom without serious consideration and reflection, we will go no further than superficial understanding. We will accumulate facts and statements of supposed wisdom. We may mouth the 'self-evident truths' but it will be hollow mimicry.

It does not matter how many temples we visit, how many gurus we ask, how many rounds of *japa* we do, we continue to seek understanding (*jnana*), which cannot be quantified as if it were a material item. We are concerned with transformation not accumulation. True transformation is like blinding lightning which instantly illuminates the dark. To say it is ours like any other possession is like the fool who tries to catch the lightning in his hands.

In like manner, capturing *jnana* as if it were a bit of information is impossible because here we are discussing an entirely different dimension of reality where time and space are not quantifiable. *Jnana* is not a consistent or predictable constant available for the taking. Each moment is new and though there are similarities with other moments, each is unique. In the same way, we cannot quantify *jnana* because it does not follow the rules or laws of our waking universe. It does not resemble any other moment. How then are we to grasp that which cannot be anticipated or compared?

What we should be looking for in facts and opinions is not accumulation to satisfy our curiosity: rather we should look between the lines and search for the jumps in the logic or argument and ask why. The Internet will not do it for us. The Internet will satiate us

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with impressions, half-leads, thoughts that have neither beginning nor end. They lead us on. It feeds us signals but it takes intelligence (*vijnana*) to turn them into meaningful information. We could say that information is not a goal, but a signpost.

Some may think the world of cyberspace is comforting because we can control it. This is a delusion. It dictates to us what we see and experience. We should use the tool with discrimination for information is now surprisingly cheap. It does not provide the answer to our problems but it does offer clues. There is no instant enlightenment; there is no easy way out. Ultimately there is a limit to the amount of information one requires one step at a time to attain wisdom, beyond that we become victims of a greedy mind. Lord Siva has five aspects, creation, sustenance, dissolution, grace and veiling. Veiling or forgetting is an important and necessary aspect of life. Without it we cannot breathe; we cannot appreciate each unique moment if we are in thrall to a cluttered mind. ▲

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Santi, who are peace,
waters of infinity,
licking at the years;
you are the end of sorrow,
the beginning of the heart.

Radiant *Kanti*,
luciferic, coruscating,
meridian Goddess;
who weave the seasons from
rays of your iridescence.

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

The Concept of *Kaivalya* in Yoga

I.S. MADUGULA

The notion of *kaivalya* (perfection) in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is regarded as being the highest good of the yoga philosophy. The yogi's *kaivalya* is comparable to the advaitin's concept of *mukti* or *moksha* (liberation, self-knowledge, enlightenment) in terms of meaning as well as methodology. These two states of self-realisation only denote a distinction, not a difference.

The *Yoga Sutra* defines *kaivalya* in the last aphorism of the last chapter.¹ It is a spiritual state in which the power of Pure or Universal Consciousness is established in itself (*svarupa pratishtha*). The aspirant, at this point, has cleansed himself or herself of all mental modifications by recognition and detachment from the unconscious identification with the *gunas* (his behavioural attributes). In computer language, we may say that the practitioner returns to his default mode, which is absolute freedom or divine solitude.

¹ *Yogasutra*, IV, 34.

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Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary describes *kaivalya* as 'perfect isolation, soleness, exclusiveness; individuality; detachment of the soul from matter, identification with the supreme spirit; final emancipation or beatitude'.² According to Monier-Williams, the term means, 'absolute unity; abstraction, detachment from all other connections, detachment of the soul from matter or further transmigrations, beatitude'.³ Note that the noun form *kaivalya* derives from the adjective *kevala*, meaning 'alone, mere, sole, only, isolated'.⁴ *Kaivalya* then is absolute or perfect individuality. By practising *kaivalyam*, the yogi transforms his or her mortality into divinity.

Obviously, the yoga implied here is not ordinary loneliness or isolation. It is perfect isolation wherein the human spirit is finally in its own element in a beatific state and where mundane tribulations vanish. The yogi has, with years of practice, sharpened his body and mind and all his intellectual faculties to a fine degree, taking physical and mental discipline to the ultimate level.

The philosophy of *Samkhya Yoga* conceives of an eternal dualism of *Purusha* (Spirit) and *Prakriti* (Matter), and the yogi, through various physical and mental practices, unravels his spirit from the shackles of matter and unites it with God. The premise is that the world is full of sorrow and deprivation to the thinking person, because change, anxiety and desire are inherent in it. The yogi's aim is to improve his human condition, to free himself of all limitations innate to human existence.⁵

"The man when freed from all vehicles remains in his own form called *svarupa*...

"But when man is not in his own form (*svarupa*), he functions naturally in the lower vehicles...whether it be *buddhic*, *ahamkaric* or *manasic* matter.

² V.S. Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2nd ed., 1970)

³ Monier-Williams, M., *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Online Edition, 2008)

⁴ Apte, op. cit. It is interesting to note that Tamils use this adjective to mean 'dire' or 'pitiful', perhaps through semantic extension of the notion of loneliness.

⁵ *Yogasutra*, II, 15.

“The human consciousness, in whatever lower body it may function, is always a dual consciousness — it must be alternately pleasurable or painful. Pleasure and pain are the marks of consciousness functioning in *citta* (mind or mental modifications). The *svarupa* consciousness alone is above all pains.”⁶

The *Yoga Sutra* lays down very strict and detailed instructions on how to go from being an ordinary mortal to an accomplished yogi.

Patanjali’s second aphorism defines yoga as *nirodha* (‘restraint’, ‘control’), a term derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which includes ‘trance’ or samadhi amongst its multiple senses. The popular explanation that yoga is a discipline that ‘yokes’ or unites the human spirit with the Divine is also covered by the root. The main theme of Patanjali’s treatise, as discussed in chapter one (*samadhi pada*), is *nirodha* — ‘restraint of mental modifications’. The entire practice consists of *nirodha* all the way up to the attainment of *kaivalya*.

The student learns what the mental modifications and their components are and how they affect the cognition of objects. He is told that the two major tools he needs to master are *abhyasa* (relentless practice) and *vairagya* (total detachment).⁷ Success is proportionate to the effort. But there may be a shortcut to success “by feeling the omnipresence of God” (*Ishvara pranidhana*),⁸ who is also the teacher of the ancients and whose symbol is the *pranava*, *Om*.

God removes all the obstacles and inculcates an understanding of the Self in the student. The student should continue to practise all

⁶ Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, Translated by Rama Prasada (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal, 2000). p. i-ii.

⁷ “The highest form of *vairagya* will be attained when one will realize his separateness from *Prakritic* vehicles — when he can say “I am not the body, or desire, or mind, or reason or I-ness.” Ibid.

⁸ *Yoga Sutra*, I, 23. *Pranidhana* includes “application; great effort, energy; profound religious meditation; abstract contemplation; respectful behaviour; renunciation of the fruit of actions.” Could the last item refer to surrender? If so, the yogi is borrowing a non-*sankhya* notion. Bhagavan emphasized the principle of surrender as the easiest and readiest approach to Self-Knowledge.

the moral virtues and be steadfastly established in them.⁹ He or she will find breath control also very helpful in steadying the mind and training it in desirelessness. Simpler still, he can just meditate any way that he wishes.¹⁰ Then, with all its distracting modifications removed, the mind becomes clear like a pure crystal and, with further practice, the student progresses through the stages of *savitarka*, *nirvitarka*, *savichara*, *nirvichara* and *sabija* to the ultimate *nirbija* or *samadhi* ('seedless' absorption) With continued and unmitigated attention to union with *Purusha* (Ultimate Reality), the purified individual mind "inclines towards discrimination," (i.e. between *Purusha* and one's own material nature) "and gravitates towards absolute independence (*kaivalya*),"¹¹ after the last lingering layer of residual mental impressions has been obliterated.

It may be noted here that Bhagavan very often referred his audiences to the Tamil work *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, to underscore the significance of the power of consciousness that is established in itself. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* cites some ten references to it.¹²

The actual eight-fold path and its components are enumerated in chapter two (*sadhana pada*), which we will now look at from Adi Sankara's point of view.

In a tacit acknowledgement of the popularity of yoga, Sankara discusses its well-known steps in a re-interpreted fifteen-part programme.¹³ We will briefly summarise the parts here.

Sankara's programme posits Brahman as the ground to be realised with long practice. Patanjali's *yama* is for Sankara the restraining of all the senses with the thought that 'All this is Brahman'. The continuous focus on a single thought is said to be *niyama* — and not as in the case of Patanjali, internal and external purification, contentment and

⁹ Patanjali's favourite technical term for unwavering adherence to a moral practice is *pratishtha*, indicating permanent commitment.

¹⁰ *Yoga Sutra*, I, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 26.

¹² Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1996. For example, Talk §95, p.89.

¹³ *Aparokshanubhuti*, 100. The steps are listed in verses 102-103.



John M. Ward

Vedic study. Then there is *tyaga* or renunciation of the illusory world. Silence is to be pursued next as a means of delving into the Self, where it is a natural concomitant. Since we cannot conclusively define even the phenomenal world (does it exist, really, and in what sense?), it is best we adopt an attitude of silence towards it, as well.

Brahman also is known as space and time, because it can create the whole universe in the blink of an eye. The best *asana* (yogic posture) is one where one is most comfortable in deep meditation. One particular posture, the *mulabandha*, is recommended because it symbolizes the root of everything, Brahman. The limbs, when held in equipoise, help in all spiritual practice. In order to obtain the true vision of wisdom, one should view the world as Brahman, eliminating all distinctions of the seer, the sight and the seen. *Pranayama* (breath control) is really the process of regarding all mental states as nothing but Brahman. For example, exhalation is the negation of the phenomenal world, inhalation is the thought 'I am Brahman', and retention involves the holding of that thought. *Pratyahara* ('withdrawal') is the absorption of the mind in the Supreme Consciousness where one sees the Atman in everything, and which leads one to *dharana* (one pointed concentration of mind) after continuous practice. To continuously dwell on the independence of the Self is *dhyana*. This thought, when it becomes steady and unchanging, results in *samadhi* or pure awareness.¹⁴ He who has gone through these steps as instructed is the king of yogis, even if he does not exactly follow the Patanjali regimen. After all, the goal of yoga is to realize the identity of one's Atman, the individual Self, and Brahman, the Universal Self through the annihilation of the distracted mind.

Even though the word 'yoga' is used in the *Bhagavad Gita* profusely, subsuming the whole gamut of spiritual practices including renunciation, 'yogi' is used somewhat sparingly. Understandably, the

¹⁴ It appears that since the mind is totally annihilated, i.e. *manonasa* has occurred; this state could be the equivalent of *jnana*. Cf. Talks, §275, p.231. Furthermore, the Lord of Yoga in the *Bhagavadgita*, Sri Krishna, is also the embodiment of *jnana*.

maximum usage of the word occurs in chapter six (*atmasamyama yoga*). In S. Radhakrishnan's translation a yogi is:

i) He who does the work which he ought to do without seeking its fruit is the *sannyasin*, he is the yogin...(VI, 1); ii) ...no one becomes a yogin who has not renounced his (selfish) purpose...(VI, 2); iii) The ascetic (yogi) ...who is unchanging and master of his senses, to whom a clod, a stone and a piece of gold are the same... (VI, 8); iv) Let the yogin try constantly to concentrate his mind (on the Supreme Self), remaining in solitude and alone, self-controlled...(VI, 10); v) ...supreme happiness comes to the yogin ...who is stainless and has become one with God. (VI, 27); vi) The yogin is greater than the ascetic; he is considered to be greater than the man of knowledge,¹⁵ greater than the man of ritual works...(VI, 46)

In respect of *kaivalya*, while it is the end-result of successful yoga practice, the advaitin begins his practice with the conviction that all consciousness is Brahman (*prajnanam brahma*)¹⁶ and that his own atman is that Brahman.¹⁷ This seems to be a distinct advantage that the advaitin enjoys over his yogi counterpart.¹⁸

¹⁵ This is only a tentative statement and not the final verdict.

¹⁶ One of the *mahavakyas* (supreme utterances).

¹⁷ Cf. *Aparokshanubhuti*, 134. Swami Vimuktananda in his notes says: "Patanjali has prescribed the control of the body and *Prana* prior to the practice of meditation, whereas the author here (Sankara) emphasizes the meditation of Brahman from the very beginning and thus wants to lead the aspirant straight to the goal."

¹⁸ Bhagavan says in *Talks*: "Concentration of the mind is in a way common to both Knowledge and Yoga. Yoga aims at union of the individual with the universal, the Reality. This Reality cannot be new. It must exist even now, and it does exist." §17, p.11.

But "Yoga implies a prior division and it means later union of one with another. Who is to be united with whom? You are the seeker, seeking union with something. That something is apart from you. Your Self is intimate to you. You are aware of the Self. Seek it and be it. That will expand as the Infinite. Then there will be no question of yoga...§211, p.178.

Although the *Bhagavadgita* is supposed to be a predominantly *Samkhya* work, the ultimate advantage of the *jnani* over other types of seekers is clearly noted, e.g. "Of these the wise one, who is ever in constant union with the Divine, whose devotion is single minded, is the best. For I am supremely dear to him and he is dear to me." VII,17.

This observation should not however be taken to mean that yoga is in any way inferior to other efforts at self-realisation — far from it. In all philosophical systems which share the same ultimate goal, different methods have been devised to meet the needs of a diverse practitioner community with a wide range of abilities.

We indicated above that the desire for total freedom or *kaivalya* is innate in all human beings. We are just not happy with the way life treats us, even when it treats us well. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

“Perfection at the human level is a task to be accomplished by conscious behaviour. The image of God operating in us produces a sense of insufficiency. Man has a haunting sense of the vanity, the transience and the precariousness of all human happiness. Those who live on the surface of life may not feel the distress, the laceration of the spirit, and may not feel any urge to seek their own good. They are *purushapasu* (human animals) ... But those who realize their dignity as human beings are acutely aware of the discord and seek a principle of harmony and peace.”¹⁹

The *Bhagavadgita* addresses this urgent need of humanity through a synthesis of the major approaches to self-realisation, from simple surrender²⁰ to the most complex yogic practice. We hinted above that Sutra I. 23 (*Ishvara pranidhanadva*) may suggest surrender to the Lord, who is also the guru and the Self, the object of our spiritual quest. Until we accomplish this goal, no matter what else we achieve or possess, we have to ask, like Sankara, *tatah kim, tatah kim*, so what?

Again, when you have been there and done it all, what's left? The only logical answer has got to be: You. There are moments of utter solitude — however few and far between — when we are on the verge of the realisation that we are our own selves. That sense of absolute freedom is *kaivalya*, and that state of pure awareness is *moksha*. The trick of course is to learn to persist and remain in that state.

¹⁹ Radhakrishnan S., *The Bhagavadgita* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 51.

²⁰ *Bhagavadgita*, XVIII, 66.

THE CONCEPT OF KAIVALYA IN YOGA

The concept of *kaivalya* is a highly charged one. It's a unique, loaded term denoting the highest stage of evolution which a human being can attain. There is something lofty and noble about it, with myriad connotations of total release, absoluteness, and a fullness of existence “that passeth understanding.” It has an air of exclusivity to it, signifying our final destiny.²¹ ▲

²¹ Sankara in *Vivekachudamani* provides a detailed description of the person who is established in his own *citisakti*, i.e. Atman: “I am *Brahman*, the supreme, all-pervading like the ether, stainless, unbounded, unmoved, unchanging...I alone am. I am one without a second.” Tr. by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, Third ed., 1978). verse 393, p.98.

“To taste, within his own heart and in the external world, the endless bliss of the *Atman*—such is the reward obtained by the yogi who has reached perfection and liberation in this life.” verse 418, p. 103.

“There is continuous consciousness of the unity (yoga) of *Atman* and *Brahman*. There is no longer any identification of the *Atman* with its coverings. All sense of duality is obliterated. There is *nirvikalpa ca cinmatra vrttih prajneti kathyate* (pure, unified consciousness). verse 427, p.104.



John Maynard

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Four

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

31st December 1977

Sadhu Om: Devotion to God or guru as a second or third person can never give knowledge (*jnana*); devotion can only lead to devotion. Knowledge alone can give knowledge. 'I am' is the only true knowledge, so attention to that alone can lead to knowledge. Self-attention is the only true means, the ultimate means.

1st January 1978

Sadhu Om: When we awake from sleep we experience a new clarity of knowledge before we become aware of the body and world. The practice of sadhana is trying to cling to this clarity.

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.

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Sitting in the Old Hall [where Bhagavan lived] is not essential if you are able to be aware of this clarity at other times. However, there is no harm in meditating in the Old Hall. If you should not be doing so, Bhagavan will prevent you from doing so; you need not worry about that. There is something special in the Old Hall that automatically reminds us of our own being, but of course we can be aware of our being anywhere else as well.

Effort is unnecessary for self, because self-attention is natural and effortless. Effort is only needed for the mind. It is the nature of self to attend to self, and it is the nature of the mind to attend to second and third persons. Sadhana is only for the mind, and the effort to attend to the feeling 'I' is only to keep the mind quiet — in its natural state of pure self-awareness.

It is not strictly true to say that self-enquiry begins with effort and ends with effortlessness, but for the sake of the *sadhaka* (practitioner) we may say so. Effort is required so long as the mind needs to be reminded of its true nature, 'I am', but when even awareness of second and third persons automatically reminds one of one's own existence, 'I am' [because what is aware of them is 'I'], then effort is no longer needed. When we can see only waves we must make some effort to notice the ocean underlying them, but when we know that the waves are nothing other than the ocean, effort is not needed.

All thoughts contain an element of the past or future in them. Can you make a thought about the present moment? If you seriously try to do so, all thoughts, including the thought 'I', will cease. This is another clue for self-attention. There are so many clues, you see.

Question: In practice we never actually attend to self. All the time we spend in the Old Hall we are only trying to do so. If we really attended to self for one moment, that would be liberation, would it not?

Sadhu Om: What, do you mean to say that even now you are not liberated? Are you not always attending to self? You know 'I am', and you only know something if you are attending to it. Even when you attend to second and third persons, it is 'I' that is attending, and that 'I' is always aware of itself.

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Such *manana* [cogitation or deep reflection] is essential until you understand thoroughly that self-attention is natural and eternal and that all else shines by the light of that self-awareness. This *manana* will lead you right up to the boundary. *Nididhyasana* [contemplation, the practice of pure self-attention] is actually only for a moment. When you really practise what you have heard and understood, you cross the boundary, and that is *jnana*.

Ignore the mind, it needn't concern us. We are not the mind, so when we lose interest in it, it will die a natural death. This is why Bhagavan is always drawing our attention to self. He never allows us to become interested in the thinking mind or anything other than the feeling 'I'.

'What is this 'I'? What is the source from which it appears?' — All that is required is that our interest in this feeling 'I' should increase. That is *bhakti*.

Enquiry, faith and *bhakti* are not contradictory. They are all necessary. Enquiry begins with faith. Unless we have faith in the guru who tells us that self-attention is the means to true happiness, we would not be interested in attending to the first person. And when we practise self-attention, our experience of inner clarity confirms our faith, and thus our love for the guru increases.

Some people think that they can practise self-enquiry, so they do not need faith or *bhakti*. Such people know neither what *bhakti* nor what enquiry actually is.

The purpose of the outer guru is to make us understand the need for self-attention and to enkindle love for it in our heart. A living person is of course not needed for that. Bhagavan's books serve the same purpose, and he provides us with fellow devotees and other outer aids as and when necessary. The environment or circumstances in which we live are provided by the guru, who knows what the most suitable environment is for maturing us.

When we start trying to attend to the first person, the guru within, who is self, will start working. Whenever we attend to 'I', the guru's work is going on. Once we have been given a taste

for self-attention, our love for it naturally increases and matures, like the momentum of a rubber ball as it bounces down a flight of stairs.

To think of the real greatness of a *jnani* is a good means to quieten the mind. When Arjuna's grandson, King Parikshit, was cursed that he would die in seven days, he went to his guru, Suka Brahmarishi. Suka told him that he was fortunate, because he was assured seven days, and then he started to tell him the story of Krishna. Parikshit was so absorbed in hearing the greatness of Krishna that six days passed by unnoticed, and when Suka reminded him that he would die that day, he replied, 'Who will die, only this body!' Hearing about Krishna had given him *jnana*. Sometimes, when I used to think of Bhagavan and his real greatness, hours would pass without my noticing them. Great *janis* are such that even thinking of them can quieten our mind.

2nd January 1978

Sadhu Om: Once we have wholeheartedly taken Bhagavan to be our guru, we have no need to worry: we are like the child in its mother's lap. Of course, we cannot expect Bhagavan to choose us as his disciples, because in his view there are no others, so it is for us to decide that he is our only guru and protector.

Once we have wholeheartedly decided this, then we are truly having association or *satsanga* with him. This is really the *satsanga* that he refers to in the first five verses of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*. Once we enjoy this *satsanga*, he will be working from within and without. From outside he will shape our physical circumstances suitably, and from inside he will work deep within our *cittam*, where he will root out our *vasanas* by burning, drying, churning out or dealing with them in whatever other way is most appropriate. We may not see any changes, of course, because the mind is not a suitable instrument for gauging its own development.

The influence of his silence is of course dependent upon [the receptivity of] us, the receiver set. As he says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), we must unfailingly follow the path shown by the guru. We must be sincere in our love for him. He says that he is self-shining in each

one of us as 'I', so if we really love him, we will naturally and happily attend to this 'I'. When we are thus in his hands, he will make us do whatever is necessary. When we should attend to self, he will make us do so, and when we need some other experiences, he will provide them also.

If Bhagavan was truly a fit guru (our real self) when he was appearing as a body, then he must also be a fit guru now. But then he was with all his (Brahman's) five aspects, *sat-cit-ananda-nama-rupa* [being-consciousness-bliss and name-and-form], whereas he is now without *nama-rupa*, his false aspects, and hence he shines unimpeded as pure *sat-cit-ananda*. Therefore his power is now infinite. He always used to say that his body was veiling his true nature, and that those that took that body to be guru would be disappointed. Now his body has gone, he has left us with no outward form to cling to, so we have no alternative but to accept that 'I am' alone is the guru. I have found that many disciples who have come to him after the passing of his body are more sincere and have clearer understanding than most of those who came earlier [because they were fixated just on his physical form].

He now saves us from mistaking him to be the body, so what advantage would we gain from going to other bodies who are reputed to be great *mahatmas*? He has said that the greatest *mahatma* is within, so why not forget those other *mahatmas* and abide peacefully as this *mahatma* (our real self)?

Using the yardstick given to us by Bhagavan, we can now see that any would-be guru who conducts classes and flies around the world, thinking that he is guiding others, is not a real guru, because the guru does not see any ignorant *jivas* to guide. Bhagavan never attempted to guide anyone, but just kept quiet, and it was always a great wonder to him when people came to him saying, 'Bhagavan, I do not know myself, so please show the way to self'. What could he reply? He could only counter question: 'Who does not know whose self? Who is this I?'

A mantra is a set of sacred syllables, and the word literally means 'that which protects when meditated on', coming from the same root

as *manas* (mind) and *manana* (meditation or cogitation)'. Who is to be protected? The ego! A name of God will at least lead us to God, but a *mantra* will only protect us (our ego, mind or individuality) from God. There has been so much talk in India about mantras that nowadays people are not satisfied unless they are given a mantra. However, *mantras* are only for worldly things, so Bhagavan and Ramakrishna never initiated anyone with mantras.

Bhagavan's instruction concerning *mantra-japa* was that we should watch the source from which the sound of the mantra rises. What did he mean? Since the sound rises only from oneself, who repeats the mantra, he meant that we should ignore the mantra and instead cling fast to self-attention.

The mind must be made one-pointed so that it will cling to one thing alone, but for that it is not necessary to practise concentration on any second or third person, such as our breathing, a mantra or a form of God. We can just as well start our concentration practice by attending to the first person, 'I'. If we wish to learn to cycle in order to cycle to Tirukoilur, it is not necessary to practise in some open space here. Why not start our practice on the road to Tirukoilur? Likewise, since self is our goal, why not start by attending to self?

Some people may say that attending to 'I' is more difficult than attending to other things, but how can they prove their claim? In part one of *The Path of Sri Ramana* I have explained what is difficult and what is easy. Whatever you try to attend to, whenever your attention wanders, you must draw it back to its target, and this is easy to do whether that target is 'I' or some object. Attending to the first person is the direct means, and attending to anything else is in no way any easier. Indeed, practising concentration on any object will only increase the outgoing tendency of the mind, and will thus hinder us when we turn towards self.

In *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says, '... when the body dies, the mind seizes and takes the *prana* away'. This simply means that when the mind subsides into its source, the tendency or habit of breathing also

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subsides. Then as soon as the mind rises again, projecting a new body, the function of breathing restarts automatically and immediately. Whenever there is body-consciousness, there is breathing. Breathing is an ingrained habit of the mind, and if we try to see how breathing starts, the mind subsides. This is another clue for self-attention [because what breathing starts from is only oneself].

Scientists talk of an involuntary nervous system, but there is no such thing. If they looked to see how these 'involuntary' functions start, they would understand that all physical functions are volition-driven actions of the mind, so they can be controlled if they are scrutinized by a sharp and refined mind.

Bhagavan used to say that dream is the activity of a half-confused mind, and waking is the activity of a fully confused mind. In fact, the mind itself is confusion. We have so many confused beliefs — that we are born, that we have a past and a future, and so on — but if we really consider all such things, we will see that they are known only after we come into existence as this mind. If we carefully scrutinise the mind to see how and when all these thoughts arise, we will find that 'I am' alone is always shining. The past and future are only thoughts existing now, in the present moment.

Therefore I am a *pukka* atheist. I always say: don't believe what you don't know! The only thing we know directly and for certain is 'I am'. We know of our birth only by hearing about it from others, but we know these 'others' only after knowing oneself. Our present knowledge of the past is only ideas obtained from memory or external sources, which are second or third persons, but we know second and third persons only after knowing the first person. Our belief in the future also relies upon a second or third person, namely the inferring faculty of our intellect. Even our experiences of the present moment are known only indirectly through our mind and senses. Hence, all knowledge is merely a reflection of our original knowledge, 'I am'. It is all a flimsy reflection of our own self-awareness, and seems real and substantial only because of our mental confusion, which will disappear if we keenly scrutinise the first person or the present moment.

MOUNTAIN PATH

In *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says that those who earn the gracious glance of the guru will surely be saved, but the guru's glance is not just the glance of his physical eyes. If we wish to know if someone is looking at us, we must look at them, and since self is the guru, we must turn selfward to see if self is looking at us. Indeed the guru is always looking at us, so in order to be saved we only have to attend to him, who shines as 'I'.

Many people say to me, 'This self-enquiry is difficult, so please tell us what self-surrender is', but in *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says that self-attention alone is self-surrender:

Being completely absorbed in *atma-nishtha* [self-abidance], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any thought other than *atma-cintana* [self-contemplation], is giving oneself to God.

When people ask me what meditation Bhagavan taught, I reply that meditation means thinking, but Bhagavan instructed us not to think — to stop meditating. This is what he teaches us in the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

... Since the existing reality exists without thought in the heart, who can [or how to] meditate on [that] existing reality, which is called 'heart'? Being as it is in the heart alone is 'meditating'. Experience [thus].

The aim of all *yogas* is to make the mind one-pointed, so that it has the strength to abide firmly in its source. This is why I always recommend people to stick to one guru and wholeheartedly follow his teaching. Even if the guru is a bogus one, so long as your *guru-bhakti* is sincere, your one-pointedness of mind will soon give you the clarity to see that he is bogus. This is why Bhagavan criticised people going to many *mahatmas*. For example, in verse 121 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* he says:

You who desire to see with wonder that *mahatma* and this *mahatma*! If you investigate and experience the nature of your own *mahatma* [great self] within you, [you will see that] every *mahatma* is only [that] one [your own self].

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If you meet one real *mahatma*, he will teach you that the atma in you is the same as the atma in all *mahatmas*, and that it is therefore futile to go to any other *mahatmas*. One-pointed *guru-bhakti* is essential for the earnest practice of self-attention.

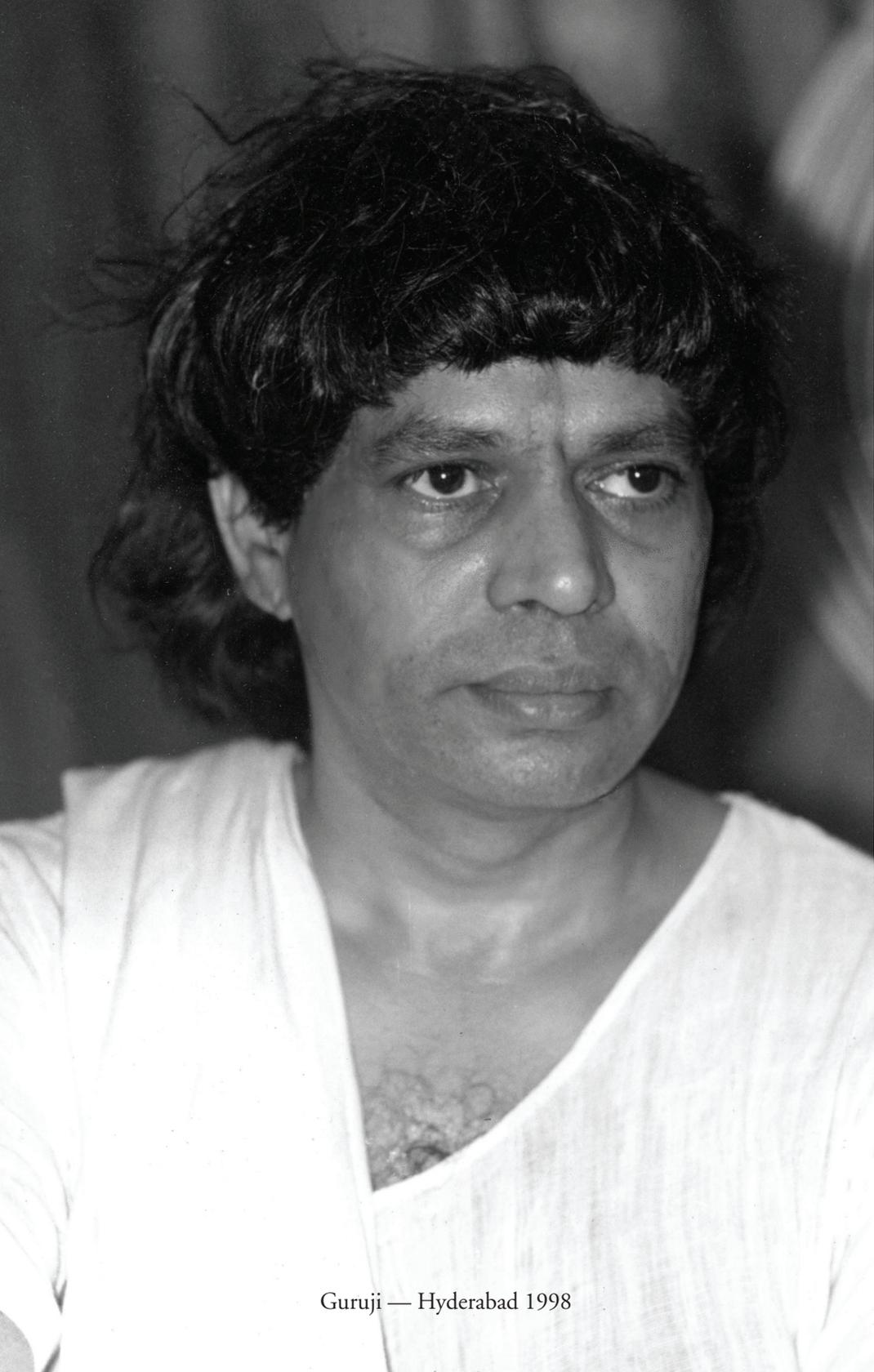
Another clue for self-attention is to try to see exactly when, how and from what thought arises. Such attention will automatically make the mind subside. Thought rises only when there is self-negligence (*pramada*), attention to anything other than self. ▲

(To be continued)

Avasthatraya

D. Samarender Reddy

What are you doing in my dream
Or am I in your dream
Or are we both dreaming each other
Into existence.
And how to tell
What is a dream
What is waking
For they are relative terms
And we could have as well called
The dream as waking
And waking as a dream.
In the transitions between
These two curious states,
What is the self that endures
And partakes of these two states.
And what happens to that self
In dreamless sleep;
Surely dreamless sleep is no death
For how then is memory resurrected
To face another February morn,
Surely there a mystery abides.



Guruji — Hyderabad 1998

A Modern Saint Inspired by Sri Bhagavan

The Life and Satsangs of
Sri Sarath Babuji

RAM BROWN CROWELL

When the charismatic south Indian saint and Satguru, Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, known affectionately as ‘Guruji’, took *mahasamadhi* at the young age of 56 in November, 2010, he was renowned for his peerless devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi, whom he regarded as his beloved *Satgurudeva*. His devotion to Sai Baba was so brilliant and complete in its expression and fulfillment that he became, by the *force majeure* of his own realisation, himself a Satguru to thousands of Indian devotees both in India and abroad, and to a small group of Westerners, of whom I was fortunate enough to be one. His life was an unparalleled example in modern India of the total optimisation of human spiritual potential that is possible when pure, one-pointed devotion is directed to one’s ideal of fulfillment and realised to perfection, which, in Guruji’s case, found its concrete embodiment in the life and teaching of Shirdi Sai Baba (d.1918).

What was not generally so well known was Guruji's deep and abiding love for Sri Bhagavan, whose biography was given him by his guru, Acharya Ekkirala Bharadwaja (1938-1989), himself a renowned Sai Baba devotee.

At the time, Guruji lived in Kota, Andhra Pradesh, near Nellore, where his father was headmaster of a local school. From his childhood, Guruji was spiritually precocious, possessing almost supernatural gifts of mind, heart, and will. Already dissatisfied with life, restless, questioning everything, he had read widely in the scriptures and philosophical schools of Hinduism and the *sutra* literature of Buddhism, and had studied in Sanskrit the intricacies of Advaita Vedanta. But he wanted proof that the fruit which the scriptures promised (*mokshaphala*) could actually be attained in human life: he wanted a concrete example of Self-realisation. Guruji was that rarest grade of aspirant, ready to give his life for the Truth, which the *sastras* liken to gunpowder — one whose longing for freedom (*mumukshutva*) is so intense, it explodes into flame at fire's slightest touch. For Guruji, that match took the form of Narasimha Swami's biography of Ramana. At once, reading the story of Bhagavan's life, Guruji's own search became more real and tangible. As he later recalled, "Up to then, I was not reading the lives of saints at all, I was only reading dry philosophy and the scriptures, Vedas, Vedanta, only these things. Then, when I came into contact with my guru and these discussions began whether liberation was possible, he said, 'Yes, it is humanly possible,' and gave me *Self-Realization*. I read that book. Bhagavan gave me a glimpse that it can be humanly possible. To me, Ramana is someone who transcended everything, who found a solution from within."

For Guruji, this event marked the beginning of intense *sadhana*. From his youth he had felt a mystical attraction to Baba; now focused and inspired by the example of Bhagavan, over the next three years he visited Tiruvannamalai whenever his meagre funds would permit, often staying for long periods. He never slept indoors or ate at stalls, but stayed on the mountain or slept by the roadside or in *mandapams*

on *girivalam* road. He survived on the sambar-rice given in *Narayana seva* at Ramana Ashram to mendicants as Bhagavan's *prasada*, or, when in solitude, on a diet of puffed rice. He kept to himself, avoiding human contact, speaking only when necessary. Rigorous *tapas* came to him naturally, and attracted the attention of old devotees like Sri Krishna Bhikshu, who befriended him and had him visit now and then. Guruji sometimes also passed a night in discussion with Chalam (1894-1979), the famous Telugu author and compiler of *Bhagavan Smirtulu* ('Bhagavan Remembered'), whose honesty and outspokenness Guruji admired. During this time his inner experiences were deepening, and his spiritual powers maturing, until various *siddhis* began to manifest spontaneously. Seeing them as a distraction from the single-minded pursuit of his goal, he prayed, successfully, for their removal.

This period of sadhana culminated in a visit to the famous immobile saint (*ajagarabhin*), Sri Poondi Swami, in nearby Kalasapakkam, for a month in 1974, just before his 20th birthday. On the last day of his stay, in the presence of the great *avadhuta*, Guruji had a profound, transformative experience. He later described it by saying Poondi Swami's mind was so pure, that in it he directly experienced the sight and presence of Sai Baba (*sakshatkar*). This realisation fulfilled him, and inaugurated the next stage of his life, which lasted to the end of it — the total dedication of his love and service to Baba. Much later, when asked to summarize the relationship among the three greatest saints in his life, Guruji said: "Ramana showed me the vessel [of my being], Poondi Swami emptied it, and Sai Baba filled it."

After this, the young saint moved to Tirupati, one of Vaishnavism's holiest shrines, whose sacred temple to Sri Venkateswara had exerted an attraction for him since childhood. Here, instead of leaving the world, Guruji rejoined it: he began working to earn a living and took up post-graduate studies in sociology, receiving a Master's degree in 1976 from Venkateswara University. He also spent long periods of solitude in the sacred hills surrounding the temple, allowing his

experience of realisation to stabilise, while remaining in contact with his guru, Sri Bharadwaja.

Out of his deep love for his master, Guruji remained formally his disciple, and served him with unflinching devotion. During this time, he performed every service asked of him and obeyed every instruction, even acceding to his master's wish that he marry, although Guruji's own wish was to remain unattached. Instead, he embraced householder life with complete dedication, uniting all aspects of it around his devotion to Baba, and weaving them seamlessly into one integrated whole. This holistic, guru-centric approach, which integrated his worldly and spiritual life into a harmonious synergy energized by devotion to his *Satgurudeva* – Sri Sai Baba – became the hallmark of his life and teaching.

Guruji had a concern for the welfare of young people, so his love of service expressed itself naturally in education. After his marriage, he established an English-medium school in Ongole which encouraged a spirit of discovery along with academic excellence; today it is one of the finest in Andhra Pradesh. He also carried out original research on the life of Sai Baba, translating rare texts and memoirs, and recovering rare photographs, in the process becoming one of India's foremost authorities on Baba's life and work.

After his master's *mahasamadhi* in 1989, he moved to Shirdi, to be nearer Sai Baba's *samadhi*. He supported himself and his small family (wife and daughter) by an honorarium from the school he founded in Ongole. Gradually, the magnetism of his realised presence drew people to him, and in response to their needs and questions he would share his love of Baba and give help in solving their problems. His presence was so therapeutic and his help so effective that devotees began calling him 'Guruji', though he himself never claimed or used that form of address. As the fruits of his attainment became more apparent, the demand to see him became so great that to meet this need a satsang hall was constructed nearby where more devotees could come for his darshan. Guruji never allowed advertising or spoke in public, and was averse to publicity of any kind. Even so, his fame grew

exponentially, and by the late 1990's, many thousands were coming from all over India to attend his darshans in Shirdi, or wherever he occasionally travelled. In 1998, over two days of continuous darshan in Hyderabad, at the consecration (*vighraha-pratistha*) of a Baba-murti, I watched, in wonder and disbelief, as more than 10,000 people in an unbroken queue filed past his feet.

In his darshans, he simply sat silent with eyes closed while Baba's *nama* was sung, under a huge portrait of Baba, as thousands gazed at him spellbound, entranced by his supernatural, spiritual power. He never spoke and both opened and closed darshan by doing formal namaskar to the portrait of Baba. It was one of the great sights of modern India, and a beautiful example of perfect devotion to Baba, authenticated by the truth and purity of his own life. 1993, his first foreign devotees came to him, followed by other sincere Western seekers; gradually they formed the nucleus of his Western sangha. When he saw their genuine need and longing for contact, Guruji responded by giving satsangs in English to answer their questions about spiritual life. Eventually, over 140 of his English satsangs were recorded and transcribed, the last given a week before his passing.

When Guruji took *mahasamadhi* in November, 2010, his Western devotees sought a way to pay him tribute and assuage the grief of devotees around the world who mourned his untimely loss. It was decided to bring out selections from his English satsangs in a monthly email called *Rose Petals*, arranged thematically by topic. The transcribed satsangs were coded into extracts by theme, then collated and edited according to the topic chosen for each month, beginning in January, 2011, six weeks after his *mahasamadhi* ceremonies in Shirdi. In January, 2012, while continuing monthly emails of *Rose Petals*, it was decided to publish the previous year's issues in book form, as *Rose Petals 2011*; an excerpt follows this introduction.

Guruji's satsangs show an uncanny ability to clarify spiritual problems and psychological issues in practical terms that are relevant to the needs of earnest seekers, whatever path they may walk. His comprehensive approach to spiritual life is experientially-based and

individually-oriented, rather than prescriptive, theoretical, sectarian or doctrinal. Taken together, his enlightened insights constitute a significant contribution to our understanding of optimum human fulfillment and the process of unfoldment leading to the Self-realised state.

Guruji's satsangs cover a wide range of subjects of interest to seekers since time immemorial: the nature of the guru and the *guru-sishya* relationship, the role of grace versus effort, love and devotion, meditation, the ego's patterns and conditionings, and how to integrate teachings into one's daily life, amongst a host of other topics of concern to seekers the world over. More information about Guruji's views on these subjects may be found in *Rose Petals 2011*, but one aspect of them deserves mention here: his comments on Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Guruji spoke often of Sri Bhagavan, and his deep respect and abiding love for him were very clear. Of his many observations about him, two may be noteworthy here. The first is that, unlike many Westerners, what interested Guruji most about Bhagavan was not his teachings, but his life. He said, "It was Ramanā's life, not his teachings, that first attracted me to him. And even now, it is not his teachings, it is his life: that is real. People can talk Vedānta, high Vedānta, but to live like that... to me, all his teaching is valueless before his life. Ramanā is more important to me than all his teachings, because his life itself is the embodiment of the teaching."

There were two reasons for this. The first is, Guruji said, that "words alone have never changed anyone." When I asked, "What, then, about the evidence of the Upanishads that enlightenment resulted from a *mahavakya* whispered in the disciple's ear by a *Satguru* like Sankara?" Guruji replied, "A *mahavakya* is a *guruvakya*; it is an experience, not a *vak* (word). It was the *maha* of the guru that transformed, not the *vakya*; by words alone no one has ever been changed. That is why they're called *mahavakyas*." Questioned further, Guruji said *maha* was the transformative grace of the Satguru's *sannidhi* (presence), and that this was the primary, operative factor; words were but the vehicle for this. It is apposite

here to recall Bhagavan's own words in this connection: "A *jnani* has no *sankalpas* but his *sannidhi* is the most powerful force... [it] can do wonders: save souls, give peace of mind, even give liberation to ripe souls.... The *jnani* does save the devotees, but not by *sankalpa*, which is non-existent in him, only through his presiding presence, his *sannidhi*."¹

Guruji could never agree or sympathise with the Western view that saw Bhagavan exclusively as a *jnani*, and thought this unbalanced view led to a distortion of the role teachings occupied in spiritual life. Divorced from the enlightened presence of a Master who embodied them, they were dry and sterile to deliver unaided the realisation they promised. It was Bhagavan's *sannidhi* that authenticated and embodied his teaching and gave it its transformative power. Without this, it was impotent to effect the lasting qualitative change required, though no doubt the teachings have an intrinsically curative benefit, even on a purely verbal level, and Bhagavan's moving assurance of their liberating power, given in the latest (11e rev.) edition of his *Collected Works*, pp. 299-300, must be kept in mind, although even here it is said to be given "in the form of Bhagavan's grace." In any case, most of Bhagavan's teaching took place in silence; Dakshinamurti, not Sankara, is its most appropriate symbol.

The second reason Bhagavan's life was important for Guruji was due to *bhakti*'s central place in it, so much so, that for Guruji, Ramana was primarily a *bhakta*, again in sharp contrast to the prevailing Western view. Guruji justified this position by pointing out that most of the works Bhagavan produced on his teaching were done in response to devotees' requests; the only two works he wrote unasked, spontaneously of his own accord, were the *Arunachala Padikam* and *Arunachala Ashtakam* — both love poems of a very high order, dripping with love for the Absolute (*Nirguna Brahman*) in the form of his *Satguru*, Arunachala. Many Westerners found it

¹ *Padamalai: Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Edited by David Godman (Boulder, Colorado, USA: Avadhuta Foundation, 2004), p.8.

hard to accept that Ramana could take an inert mountain as his guru, but this love was that rarest, most sublime form of divine love that arises in great saints after Self-realisation and attainment of *jnana*, termed accordingly, *jnannottara bhakti* (lit. 'higher-than-*jnana*' *bhakti*). Paradoxically, as entailed by Advaita, at this ultimate level love and its object are one, and knowledge merges into unitive experience where both seer and seen are sublated; in this sense *jnana* could well be defined as 'experiential knowledge of absolute truth'; it is *alaukika*, a supernormal, transcendental experience.

This highest love, though very rare, is sanctioned in the scriptures (it is referred to in the *Gita*, at XII.3-4), and mentioned by Bhagavan himself in *Day By Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, *sub die* 10-4-46 morning, where it is described as being inseparable from *Bhakti-uttara jnana*, its transcendental, experiential coefficient. From Guruji's viewpoint, it could be said that this ineffable, supreme love defined Bhagavan — its divine *rasa* was the bliss of his being, the light of peace in his eyes, the compassionate grace in his smile.

Fittingly, this most sublime and rarefied form of spiritual love was symbolised for Bhagavan by its polar opposite in material creation: the holiest of mountains, Arunachala (we may recall that in Sanskrit the term '*guru*' means 'heavy'). Arunachala was his 'father', his beloved guru, who called him to his feet as a boy, whom he worshipped by his *pradakshinas*, poetry, and took darshan of every day of his life, whose precincts he never left, even for a day, and whose verses of praise he had chanted as he lay dying, while gazing at the mountain until his last breath.

Here, in Bhagavan's words:

"Arunachala, Thou form of Grace itself
 Once having claimed me, loveless though I be,
 how canst Thou let me now be lost,
 and fail to fill me so with love that I must pine for Thee,
 unceasingly and melt within like wax over the fire?
 Oh nectar springing up in the heart of devotees!

Haven of my refuge!
Let Thy pleasure be mine, for that way
lies my joy, Lord of my life!"²

All this is overlooked by the Western view that sees only the *jnani*, whereas for Guruji, the beauty, love, and poetry in Bhagavan's life was the juice, the divine *rasa*, that sanctioned the authority of his teachings and gave them their redemptive power. Without this empowering love in some form, trying to become free through the teachings alone, Guruji said, was like cutting off the branch you are sitting on: it is of no use. Probably everyone on the path has felt the futility of unaided effort at some time or another, and the ensuing frustration as the ego tries vainly to dislodge itself. Guruji's *satsang* is an inspiring reminder that there is another way to view this old problem, and that a change of perspective may be all that's required for insight to a new solution.

Guruji's view of Bhagavan is an illuminating corrective that restores a beauty and fullness to his life that enhances even more our appreciation of his unsurpassed realisation. It is therefore especially appropriate that the following selection from Guruji's *satsang* appears, for the first time outside its original publication, in the distinguished journal dedicated to preserving the memory of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great saint whom he loved and whose incomparable realisation and pristine life of devotion and service to humanity inspired Guruji's own attainment and his unique expression of the same, supreme state.



² *Sri Arunachala Padikam*, v.2.



Shirdi, 2006

BOOK EXCERPT

Rose Petals

Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji

Sai Baba's Two Paise:
Nishtha and Saburi

EDITED BY RAM BROWN CROWELL

This selection from Sri Babuji's English satsangs has been excerpted from *Rose Petals: Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji* (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2012), pp.59-65. It is available in book form from Saipatham Publications at: <saipa@saimail.com>; phone: +9193855-93866; Rs120. It is also available as a free download in pdf format from: <http://downloads.saibaba.com/publications/index.html>

Radha Bai Deshmukh came to [Sai] Baba for *upadesh*, got none, and resolved upon *satyagraha*. She started fasting, which should end only with her death or with *upadesh* from Baba, whichever occurred first. After three days of her fruitless fast I interceded with Baba on her behalf and requested him to utter some divine name in her presence. Baba sent for her and addressed her thus, "Mother, why do you think of dying and torture yourself? Take pity on me,

your child. I am a beggar. Look here, my guru was a great saint and highly merciful. I fatigued myself in trying to serve him and yet he did not utter any mantra in my ear. Instead, he first shaved me clean and then begged of me, two *paise*. What he wanted was not metallic coin — he did not care even for gold — but only *nishtha* and *saburi*. I gave these to him at once and he was pleased.”

— *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*
by Narasimha Swami, No. 137.

Guruji: *Nishtha* is one of the *paise* Baba asked for as *dakshina*. It means paying attention, keeping our mind on our purpose, asking ourselves, “What do we want, where are we going, what are we doing?” Remaining steady and devoted to our purpose whatever comes, whether palatable or not, whether happy or unhappy, just persevering in it, that is *nishtha*. It is natural to any beggar, in fact — a real beggar perseveres! If someone doesn't give, or chases him away, he won't go. He'll keep on asking, “Sir, one rupee, one rupee,” but he doesn't go. He sticks to his purpose, he'll keep pursuing it. Learn *nishtha* from him.

The other *paisa* Baba asked for was *saburi*. *Saburi* is happily waiting, not complaining, “Oh, this is too much, I can't take it!” or getting disappointed and easily frustrated, or giving up out of impatience. Waiting cheerfully, with patience and love, that is *saburi*.

Guruji: The story of Siddiq Falke comes in the *Sri Sai Satcharita*. He came to Baba after having done the Hajj pilgrimage and Baba didn't even allow him to step into Dwarkamai. He told him he could take *darshan* from a distance only and that he should not enter Dwarkamai at all. And so Falke waited for nine months in Shirdi.

In fact, it was a shame, wasn't it? For a Hajji not to enter a *masjid* — how he would have felt! Yet this Hajji Falke waited for nine months and his patience was so exemplary that at the end he used to dine with Baba. Very few people were allowed to sit in Dwarkamai and

dine with Baba — only nine or ten — but Siddiq Falke was chosen. This man who was so ill-treated before — *so-called* ill-treatment, of course — was so much honoured later. What was the reason? What gave him that? His patience, his *saburi*. What was the basis for his *saburi*? His love. “What’s the use of my staying in Shirdi? I don’t even get the chance to enter Dwarkamai!” He never thought like that. He knew why Baba was making him wait, and he waited and waited and waited, and he got what he wanted. That is *saburi*.

Guruji: *Nishtha* doesn’t mean ‘faith’. *Nishtha* should actually be translated as “unflinching perseverance”. Why unflinching? Because what ‘flinches’ you are your likes and dislikes, so unflinching means *na-ishtha* (no likes). Everybody has their own likes and dislikes, their own pulls, their own brand of preferences; all these are called *ishtas* in Sanskrit. That is what is meant by *ishtha*: it is your liking, something chosen by you. So ‘*na-ishtha*’ means ‘*no-ishtha*’ — no liking, no choice. So, among all your *ishtas*, one *ishtha* (our object of love) should be there first! Holding onto one *ishtha* amongst all the rest is *nishtha* — this is the unflinching devotion Baba asked for. Love becomes unflinching when the pull towards the object of love becomes stronger than our other pulls — then this pull itself gradually pulls you away from the others, and your love becomes unflinching and steady; that is *nishtha*.

Devotee: Do *nishtha* and *saburi* mean that our relationship to suffering changes, or that we actually experience suffering less because now it has an underlying purpose?

Guruji: It all depends on how you relate to your reason for suffering, and to its object. For example, see the difference between waiting at the airport for your boss or for your Beloved. Suppose your boss is coming and you’ve been sent to receive him. You arrive with a name tag and you’re standing there when an announcer says, “This flight is delayed two hours for technical reasons.” Just see, during

the next two hours, how you suffer! You feel anxious and stressed by the waiting, you're impatient for it to be over. But if your Beloved's flight is delayed by two hours, even though you must also wait, it's a different kind of suffering, you almost enjoy it. With your boss, if you don't wait you will lose your job; there are long-term consequences to not staying. Here, with no consequences and nothing to lose by not waiting, even if the flight is four hours late, still you will stay. Why? Because the longer we wait, once the flight comes in and we glimpse our Beloved, the greater our enjoyment is! We feel the extra two hours was worth it, no problem. We love to stand there, we enjoy the waiting, we enjoy the anticipation of seeing our Beloved! Just the thought of seeing him makes us happy! Even the waiting is so thrilling, we enjoy it! And this actually changes the whole quality of waiting: it ceases to be waiting in fact. Instead, the waiting for becomes waiting upon. You know the difference between these two, hmm? Waiting upon our Beloved. This is true *saburi*.

Guruji: *Na-ishta* means no *ishta*, there's no 'my *ishta*', there's no 'your' choice or liking. Always keeping your focus, keeping your object in view, always mindful of why you've come — that is *nishtha*. Always that attention, that carefulness, that focus — that is *nishtha*.

Guruji: Suppose our Beloved is arriving by train and we want to be at the station to meet him. We arrive already one hour before the scheduled time to ensure we won't be late. We are looking forward so much to seeing him that we are waiting happily — this is *saburi*. And while waiting, in order to be ready to receive him, there are several things that need to be done: we have to enquire about the platform, check the time of arrival, find out the compartment, then stand at the right place and be alert. Our waiting and eagerly looking in the direction of the expected arrival won't make the train come sooner. But when it comes, we are prepared, we are able to glimpse our Beloved as soon as the train comes in, and we are ready to receive

him. All these preparations are what *sadhana* is about — it is the art of ‘happily waiting’, the art of readiness and receptivity.

Devotee: In the *Sri Sai Satcharita* it is written that Baba’s guru first got Baba’s head shaved and then asked him for two *paise*. Does that mean that only after all his thoughts were cleared that he was asked for *nishtha* and *saburi*?

Guruji: If everything else goes, then what remains is *nishtha* and *saburi* — total, loving attention, waiting upon the guru. That is *nishtha – saburi*.

Devotee: That’s what remains?

Guruji: That’s what remains. These were the only two *paise* that actually remained with him — and even these were to be given as *dakshina*! ▲

Cosmic Vision

Alan Jacobs

Imagine a tapestry of precious stones,
 Diamond, topaz, ruby, tourmaline,
 Sapphire, emerald, all cluster in between,
 Ornamenting heaven with their rainbow tones.
 Each reflected lustre each appears to own,
 In harmony from galaxy to gene,
 Inter-related, an ethereal scene
 Enjoyed by Consciousness, One and all alone.
 Uncaused, spontaneous, without an end,
 Infinite jewels arise; gems of dust
 Illuminated, mirroring as they must
 The dance of cosmic music God did send.
 All things dissolving to nothing at all
 Rhythms of the spheres pulsate and fall.



D. Thiagarajan

KEYWORD

Nama and Rupa

JOHN GRIMES

From the ultimate point of view, God has no name, no form: “Words return along with the mind, not attaining it”.¹ And yet, mysteriously, the Upanisad also says that the ‘Name is Brahman’.² Ultimately names and forms may be illusory, but that doesn’t mean they don’t serve a purpose.

Contemplate this: the human body has eyes with rods and cones that are able to perceive certain wave lengths as well as colour. It possesses ears, a mouth, a nose, and skin that are able to perceive a certain fixed range of sensations. Quantum physicists inform us that the physical universe is comprised mainly of empty space and matter is comprised of whirling atoms, protons, neutrons, etc. These

¹ *yato vaco nivartante, aprapya manasa saba, Taïttiriya Upanisad, 2.4.1.*

² *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad, 4.1.2.*

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elements are energy moving at various speeds. It is only because human beings have sense organs that function in certain limited and distinct frequencies that these energy particles appear as rocks, plants, animals, and myriad physical objects. It is our sense organs and mind that translate this energy into forms. It is rather analogous to a computer that is able to translate a string of zeroes and ones into letters and pictures that we can read on the computer screen.

Our eyes are sensitive to a very narrow band of frequencies within the enormous range of frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum. This narrow band of frequencies is referred to as the visible light spectrum. Visible light — that which is detectable by the human eye — consists of wavelengths ranging from approximately 780 nanometer down to 390 nanometer. Specific wavelengths within the spectrum correspond to a specific colour based upon how humans typically perceive light of that wavelength. The long wavelength end of the spectrum corresponds to light that is perceived by humans to be red and the short wavelength end of the spectrum corresponds to light that is perceived to be violet. In a technical sense, it is really not appropriate to refer to light as being coloured. Light is simply a wave with a specific wavelength or a mixture of wavelengths; it has no colour in and of itself. An object that is emitting or reflecting light to our eye appears to have a specific colour as the result of the eye-brain response to the wavelength. Colours can be traced to the physiological and psychological response of the eye-brain system, and not to the light itself.

Thus, we may contemplate whether the names we employ and the forms we perceive are fundamental to Reality or are merely the way in which we empirically perceive sense data through our sense organs. Bhagavan Ramana said, “The One is real, the many are mere names and forms.”³

Somehow mysteriously the image of the Beloved has become 'visible' to humans. The sweetness of Its presence presides over, and permeates, all of one's experiences. The formless Beloved appears as the Master, the friend, the lover, the Saviour. It meets us wherever our

³ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. 11-1-46 afternoon.p.106.

limitations give It a foothold. It discloses Itself in a myriad of names and forms. So, what shall we name It? Naming is a very serious business. It is an important and sacred act. Who are you? What is your true name?

Bhagavan said, “Environment, time and objects are all in me. How can they be independent of me? They may change, but I remain unchanging, always the same. The objects can be differentiated by means of their names and forms, whereas each one’s name is only one and that is ‘I’. So also of a locality. As long as I am identified with the body so long a locality is distinguishable; otherwise not. Am I the body? Does the body announce itself as ‘I’? Clearly all these are in me.”⁴

Bhagavan said, “These names and forms which constitute the world always change and perish. Hence they are called *mithya*. To limit the Self and regard it as these names and form is *mithya*. To regard all as Self is the reality.”⁵

In Sanskrit scripture, to give someone a name is one of the sacred rituals or rites of passage (*samskara*). One’s name is the means whereby which one is able to approach the named. It is a means to reach the goal, for the goal is contained in the means. Consciousness of the name leads to consciousness of the named. As one thinks so one becomes. Like a piece of wood that has been placed in a fire, sooner or later the wood itself will turn into fire. Likewise, a mind that is immersed in God’s name will eventually become Divine. The individual (*jiva*) becomes the Divine (Siva) through the Name. “Meditate on the Name as Brahman.”⁶

Further, can you think of the word ‘tree’ without also thinking of its form? There is an intimate connection between the name and the form it represents. A God has many names and forms: some hint at His/Her/Its physical appearance; some hint at His/Her/Its attributes; some hint at His/Her/Its insignia or mount or banner or function or personality, or temperament or life-history. They are His

⁴ Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 21st.22nd November, 1938. Talk §582.

⁵ Mudaliar, Devaraja, op.cit., 2006. 12-9-46. p.307.

⁶ *Chandogya Upanisad* 7.1.5.

or Her calling cards, so to speak. The manifest universe is nothing but names and forms — the unmanifest Truth manifesting itself so that one may relate to it. Each deity's name invokes the salient features of that particular deity. They are suggestions for contemplation. They are calling cards for kinship. They are vehicles of adoration. They are the Divine appearing in the dress of manifestation.

In school we use maps to help children understand their own country as well as the world. One points to various cities, states, countries, rivers, mountains, and so on to convey knowledge about the physical world. The map is not the country — though it serves as an aid to help convey the names, size, location, topography, and distinctive landmarks of various places. With time and maturity, the glory of one's country, as well as the physical universe in all its details, may be made known. Further, a road map of London is not the actual soil of England, but it will convey to one the knowledge of how to get there.

Names and forms are symbols, a *laksana* or identifying mark. They are the means by which one knows any thing, everything. They are the 'visible/knowable signs' by which the invisible is known. All one's knowledge, one's contact with the external world, even the inner mental world, every aspect of life, is based on symbols. Language is nothing but symbols. Bhagavan Ramana said, "The mind is wont to move externally. It must be checked and turned within. Its habit is to dwell on names and forms, for all external objects possess names and forms. Such names and forms are made symbolic mental conceptions in order to divert the mind from external objects and make it dwell within itself. The idols, mantras, yantras, are all meant to give food to the mind in its introvert state, so that It may later become capable of being concentrated, after which the superb state is reached automatically."⁷

Every object in the world, animate or inanimate, is a manifestation of the One Reality. The realisation and experiencing of this fundamental truth is the true goal of life. Until a person achieves this unitative Consciousness, one may begin by seeking to see Reality at

⁷ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.) op.cit., 19th April, 1937. Talk\$405.

least in one object through concentration upon that particular object as the Divine. Bhagavan Ramana said, “Sankara also said that this world is Brahman or the Self. What he objected to is one’s imagining that the Self is limited by the names and forms that constitute the world. He only said that the world does not exist apart from Brahman.”⁸

Human beings have certain limitations. Not everyone can contemplate the Divine in its transcendent form. For directing the mind towards the Divine and keeping it steady during contemplation thereon, symbols are invaluable aids. The mind must somehow go from the concrete to the abstract. It may be true that God is omnipresent, but for purposes of worship and relationship, God is conceived as localized in a particular form. There is nothing self-contradictory in thinking of the transcendent God as having form, even a multiplicity of forms. When God takes human form, no blemish attaches itself to the Divine as a result of this descent. If, out of love, a mother stoops to pick up her child, she in no way is bowing to the child. It is an act of benediction, not submission. By assuming a name, a form, it is only a mark of God’s compassion for the sake of devotees. Water has no colour of its own or any particular shape. But it assumes the colour and shape of the vessel containing it. Even so, the Absolute may have no form. But the mind that thinks of It is a conditioning medium, it seizes hold and engenders a relationship; it partakes of communion to the best of its ability.

Symbols attempt to bring the Divine within the grasp of the individual. From the formless to the form and back again. There is an oft-quoted Upanisadic passage that says, “Lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality”. The passage is always from the known to the unknown. Spiritual growth is a gradual transformation of the worshipper into the likeness of the worshipped. “As are one’s thought, faith, insight, so one becomes”.⁹

Bhagavan Ramana said, “Whatever state one is in, the perceptions partake of that state. The explanation is that in the waking state

⁸ Mudaliar, Devaraja, op.cit., 29. 5. 46. p.238.

⁹ *Chandogya Upanisad* 3.14.1.

MOUNTAIN PATH

(*jagrat*) the gross body perceives gross names and forms; in *svapna* (the dream state) the mental body perceives the mental creations in their manifold forms and names; in the *sushupti* (deep dreamless sleep), the identification with the body being lost, there are no perceptions; similarly in the Transcendental state identity with Brahman places the man in harmony with everything, and there is nothing apart from his Self.”¹⁰ ▲

¹⁰ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.) op.cit.15th May, 1935. Talk§2.

The Old Hall

Upahar

Today the morning flowers without roots;
the hands of Time are still
The mirror laughs and gives back no reflection.
Seeing is only Being,
and the flower today is love.

In the Old Hall,
an unimaginable jewel shines for its own delight.
The listening falls into itself, a place too deep for rejoicing,
yet all the space is touched with Joy.

You are the Centre, and the infinite field,
simple and pure, most near, yet ever blissfully unknown.
Dear One, having seen You, what could there ever be left of You?

Today the fragrance spreads without a source,
the silence dances and sings.
Seeing is Being, and the flower today is Love,
in this Old Hall,
my heart.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Thirty Seven

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 37: The contention that duality exists when we are in the practice of sadhana, and there is non-duality in the state of *siddhi* (attainment of the goal of Self-realisation), is illogical and untrue. Who else is he but the tenth man, when he himself was diligently searching [for the lost tenth man] and when he found, himself to be the [lost] tenth man? [He has always been there].

Commentary

The separate entities of the guru, the disciple, sadhana and *siddha* (attainment), all are in the empirical world of ignorance. From the point of the supreme Reality, none of them are real. The traditional teachers usually distinguish between the empirical (*vyavakarika*) stand-point and the stand out of absolute Truth (*paramarthika*),

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and posit that the pluralistic world of our day-to-day experience is relatively real, though it ceases to be real when the absolute Truth is realised. All sadhanas occur in the empirical world of plurality. It is only when the *jiva* (individual soul) becomes one with Brahman on Self-realisation that duality disappears.

Some think that until *jnana* dawns, all the differences of duality are real and that only in the experience of Self-realisation, all the differences would vanish. There are others, the 'dvaitis', who maintain that *dvaita* (difference) is ever real and there is an absolute difference between God and the *jiva*. Bhagavan says that all these expositions are wrong. The experience of the *jnanis* disproves the whole *dvaita* doctrine. Bhagavan says that even though the world is experienced as reality, it is erroneous to think of duality as real.

In saying that the differences of the seer and his spectacle and other differences are real when they are seen, and that the *Advaitic* Self is the sole Reality when these differences are extinguished by the practice of sadhana, it is assumed that (by the words 'when they are seen'), time is real. But it is clearly shown, earlier in verses fifteen and sixteen, that time is unreal; hence the whole contention becomes baseless.

If it is conceded that *dvaita* (difference) is real, it would follow — according to the axioms of the Vedanta — that duality is always real, since permanence is the characteristic of reality; that is, it is not affected by time. If it is accepted that *dvaita* will be extinguished at the dawn of true awareness, then it goes against the Vedantic axiom that whatever is real is always real and whatever is liable to extinction is unreal.

Also, if a beginning is to be posited for the *advaitic* state, that is, if it is to be conceded that *advaitic* state comes to existence anew on the extinction of *dvaita* or ignorance, then it too is not eternal. But since the *advaitic* state is the very nature of the Self, that state is eternal and cannot have a beginning nor end. Bhagavan thus states that the *advaitic* nature of the Self is not the effect of sadhana but exists always, being one's inalienable nature.

To illustrate this truth, Bhagavan uses the analogy of the 're-discovery of the missing tenth man'. Ten people once started on a

pilgrimage. On the way, they had to cross a river. After crossing, they wanted to make sure that none was carried away by the river current. So one of them counted their members and found only nine (as he forgot to count himself). Another man counted, with the same result. They were bewildered at the loss of one of them and without finding out who was the missing person, they began wailing loudly.

A wayfarer, on seeing their pitiful crying, enquired as to what was the cause for their sorrow. He could see that all the ten fools were there. He asked them to march past by him one by one. He gave one blow with his stick on the back of each one of them and told them to shout successively 'one', 'two' etc. When the last man who received the blow shouted 'ten', all the ten fools were elated that the 'lost tenth man' had been retrieved. They thanked the wayfarer and went their way.

In this story, when the ten fools were wailing loudly on the loss of the tenth man, were there only nine persons? The period of sadhana refers to the time when they were searching for the tenth man. Even when they were searching for the lost man, he was already there. It is not that they were only nine at the time of search and became ten after receiving the blows. Likewise, even when a sadhaka is doing spiritual practice to find his true Self, he is already the Self; he is not going to become the Self as a result of his sadhana. Self is not to be newly attained. It is already here. As the *Katha Upanishad* declares, *atra brahma samasnute*, (Brahman is realised here and now). Self exists all the time. It is beyond time and space. Hence, *advaita* (non-duality) is the very nature of Self; it does not newly come by the extinction of duality.

Sadhana is bound by time and space. Hence it is under the rule of *maya*. In fact, *maya* itself is unreal; it has no existence. The very word *maya* refers to 'ya ma' — that which never existed. Hence Bhagavan replied to a person who asked about *maya*: "Does *maya* exist? If it is for you, then who are you? To find out whether *maya* is there or not, find out who you are."

In the above story, the tenth man did not appear out of nowhere; he was there all the time, but not recognised as the tenth man. Even

when he forgot to count himself, he was the tenth man. He did not become the tenth man afterwards. Like the tenth man in this parable, the Self is always the *advaitic* Reality. The sadhaka does not become that through sadhana. Sadhana does not bring into existence anything that was previously non-existent. The *advaitic* state is natural to the Self.

As long as the ten fools continued to believe that the tenth man had been carried away by the current, it became necessary for them to launch a quest (sadhana). When they searched outside or elsewhere, they could not find him. The blow received by each of them turned their minds inwards to find out themselves. Each then realised that the tenth man has not been lost; he himself is that and was never lost at all. Likewise, as long as we feel that we have lost our true identity due to ignorance, we have to turn our mind inwards to find out, 'Who is this 'I' who has lost the non-dual experience?' We realise then that the entity which felt that it had lost non-dual experience is only a mirage and we realise that we never lost it. Though the tenth man had never been lost, unless this truth was realised, the sorrow of the ten fools would not leave them. Similarly, unless we understand the continuous and eternal experience of non-duality through Self-enquiry, our problem will never leave us.

Here we should be aware of the inadequacy of words. We have seen in the above that *advaita* is always true and *dvaita* is always untrue. But in so saying the word 'always' is used, which seemingly admits the existence of time. But as we have seen in verse sixteen of *Ulladu Narpadu*, time is wholly unreal. The proper explanation is that the Self, which transcends time, is not in time. Statements which imply the reality of time are not appropriate in respect of the truth of that Self.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Childhood Memories

VIMALA NAYANAR

Fortunately for me my parents were already devotees of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi when I came into this world.

My earliest memories of Ramanasramam were the long car journeys to get there. We would have competitions as to who would spot the sacred mountain Arunachala first. Invariably it was my father who came first, and we would fight amongst my brothers and sisters as to who came second. When we arrived we would go to Niranjanananda Swami first if Bhagavan was resting. Then we would be shown our rooms. I remember it would be across the road from the Ashram, as women were not allowed to stay in the Ashram.

The best part was seeing Bhagavan. We would prostrate ourselves and then my father would be asked by Bhagavan how the journey was, and how we all were. Then Bhagavan would ask after my father's older sister, who was a devotee of Bhagavan. She introduced my parents

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MOUNTAIN PATH

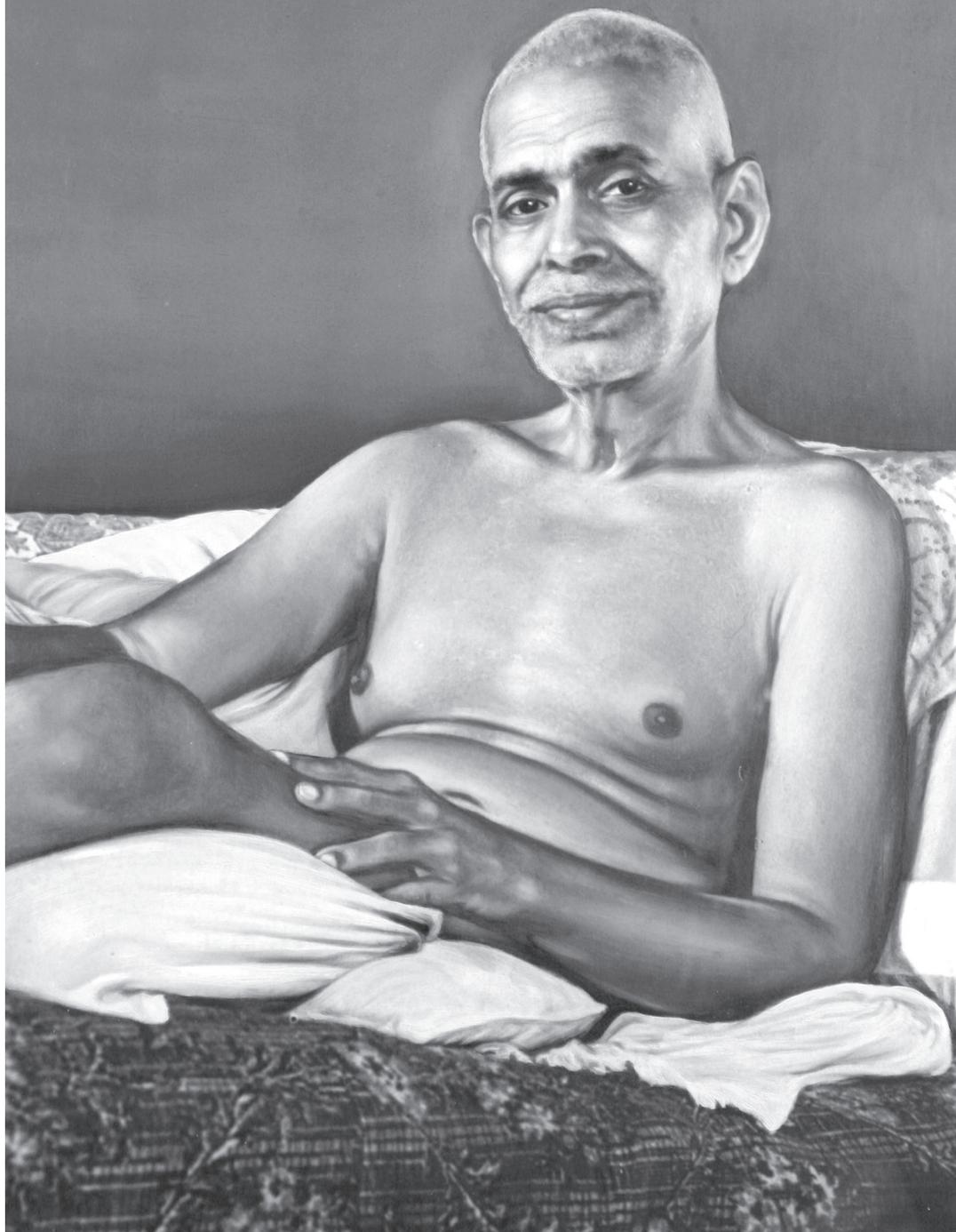
to Bhagavan. We are all very thankful to her for that. After that we would take our seats in the old hall.

I cannot forget to this day, the peace and tranquillity that I felt there, even as a child! It has never left me; I can still feel it now when I sit in the old hall. As a child I would sit quietly for hours, or so it seemed to me! The squirrels would come through the window and climb all over Bhagavan, and He would play with them. The monkeys would hang on the bars of the window. The best part was lunch. Visitors sat next to Bhagavan, and more than once He would ask us to eat more. I can still taste the ghee, made in the Ashram. The idlis at breakfast time were delicious!!

I remember Lakshmi the cow. Bhagavan would make daily visits to Lakshmi; Bhagavan was very fond of her. I still have the picture in my mind's eye how He would lovingly stroke Lakshmi. Many a time we would wait for Bhagavan when He came down from Arunachala with His attendant following behind with the *kamandalam*. My father had an 8mm movie camera which would take silent movies. We would proudly walk behind Bhagavan. I remember posing for the camera! When we prostrated when we left Bhagavan I would be sad to leave. On the journey back, we all would be quiet, turning back to see Arunachala disappear in the distance.

I had two dreams of Bhagavan in my childhood. I was going to a Church of Scotland Mission School at the time, and we had to attend scripture classes. The teacher would read the Bible and tell us parables. I had my first dream of Bhagavan when I was eight or nine years of age. I dreamt of Bhagavan in His loincloth and He had a kind of a rash all over His body. I remember feeling guilty as though I had caused the rash!! After the dream I was very good for a number of days, although it did not last very long!

After that I had another dream of Bhagavan. The scene was at sunset. Bhagavan was wearing a dark red and white small checked shirt and a matching dark red *dhoti* folded in half and tied at the waist. My little one-year old nephew had a shirt like that. Bhagavan's complexion was radiant like the sun! I had obviously been very very good!



We moved to a new house my father built in 1950. It was called 'Ramanalaya' of course! The house is pulled down now, and there are apartments there. All the family insisted they retain the name Ramanalaya! Ramanalaya it is forever!

The *grihapravesam* was on the 13th of April 1950. My father and all the family had visited the Ashram only two days before. Bhagavan was very ill. Many hundreds of people were walking single file past the bedroom where Bhagavan spent his last days. Seeing the crowds filing past the room to catch even a glimpse of Bhagavan, I was filled with dread! I thought, what would I do if Bhagavan passed away? How would I manage without Him?

The inevitable happened two days after our visit to Ramanasramam. As fate would have it, my school had not closed and I was staying with my sister on the day Bhagavan attained *Mahasamadhi*. I heard later, my family was sitting outside in the garden, as was their wont, when my older brother saw a shooting star going slowly across the sky. He pointed it out to the family and my father said at once "Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has passed away..."

He packed his bags at once and left for Tiruvannamalai.

We had a picture of Bhagavan Ramana in our lounge room. Wherever you were in the room Bhagavan's eyes would be looking at you. It was eerie. My parents would have us all sit on the floor before Bhagavan's picture and recite slokas at sunset everyday without fail. We had to recite the *Upadesasaram* as well. If we said we had to finish the game we were playing, that was no excuse. We got into trouble if we giggled or played up at the time of saying prayers!

I sincerely prayed to Bhagavan before every exam and every test. He disappointed me sometimes when I did not get good marks, or so I thought at the time. I did not know the adage "99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration". I thought foolishly if I prayed to Bhagavan, He would get me good marks.

At every stage of my life I have looked to Bhagavan for guidance. I have lived my life holding on to His foot with one hand and doing

my allotted duties with the other. Although I have lived overseas since my early twenties, at every opportunity I get I visit Ramanasramam. Nowhere have I felt the peace and tranquillity that I have felt in the old hall there! When I visit the room where Bhagavan spent his last days tears come to my eyes.

Sadly His living presence is no longer here, but I see Him in everything of beauty, in every newborn child, in every sunset, in every flower. His guiding presence is my staff! As Sri Krishna said in *Bhagavad Gita* in Chapter 6, verse 30, “ He who seeth Me everywhere, and seeth everything in Me, of him will I never lose hold, and he shall never lose hold of Me.” ▲

Surrender

Ana Ramana

The golden glow of Holy Mountain
folds all children into her ample arms,
dried petals and leaves
of our imagined stories all stored
in her boundless bounty, each tender
feeling, each supposed loss, each
bittersweet sensation drop into
the one priceless pearl, leaving
only beauty and the blinding
light of Truth: that we belong
and always have to He Who
Abides in the Heart of All
Beings, our saving grace,
our brilliant star, the moon
that cools the raging fire,
luring us towards surrender,
relieving us until we are
seduced into the lap
of pure and untouched love.



John Maynard

White peacock chicks at Sri Ramanasramam

Bhagavan and Pranayama

J. PUNITHAVATHY

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi says that ultimately there is no body or world. To realise that profound understanding we engage in yoga practices. On the physical level we practise hatha yoga to keep the body fit and to feel good. We should not stop there, but go further.

The word yoga is defined as union with God. According to Patanjali Muni, the father of yoga, there are eight rungs of the yoga ladder of which *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama* are four. The practitioner of yoga gradually climbs to the higher rungs, ending in samadhi. While *yama* and *niyama* refer to observance of rules of physical and mental discipline, the importance of *asana* and *pranayama* can never be over emphasised. However, they are not an end in themselves; they are stepping stones and, if properly observed, they lead to higher spiritual experience.

J. Punithavathy was born at Chidambaram. She is a travelling yogini who has dedicated her life to yoga for the past thirty years.

Bhagavan says that in the cremation ground a flaming stick is used to kindle the wood, enveloping the dead body. When the job is over, the stick is thrown into the fire. Similarly, once we climb up to the highest level, the ladder is no longer needed. Our mind is also like the ladder we climb to attain *jnana* or God-realisation, if one's bent is towards devotion. At that point even the mind will disappear.

Asanas and pranayama are meant to keep the body fit, which is our vehicle for this realisation. In modern times, because of the effectiveness of yoga *asanas*, yoga has gained immense popularity, but very often its role is misunderstood and it is taken as an end in itself. We should understand that it is only a means to attain God, which is the true end.

Caring only for the body by doing *asana* and *pranayama* is like polishing the shell of the coconut but ignoring the tender water inside (meditation) and the kernel (God). The real purpose of *asanas* is to make the body resilient for the strenuous practice of meditation. Bhagavan never recommended any method other than *vichara*, 'Who Am I?'. That is his *Brahmastram*, his *taraka* (reason) helping us cross *samsara mantram*. When someone insistently asked him, he said that *pranayama* helps a little to control the mind. Though there is a vast field of techniques and disciplines which are taught for meditation, Bhagavan insists that the one true efficacious method to still the mind permanently is *vichara*. He said meditation temporarily controls the mind. When you come out of it, even after deep meditation, thoughts will rush in. In a dam, the water is controlled by a shutter. Even if there is a little gap, water leaks through it. Normal meditation is like the gardener who takes out the weeds one by one; we patiently root out the thoughts one after the other. In *vichara* we go right to the heart and dig out the root cause of all thoughts, the I-thought.

Imagine you are bobbing on the surface of the sea. Bhagavan advised us to observe the thoughts and see who the thoughts are coming to, or ask 'Who Am I?'. Go deep, deep, deep inside, as if you are touching the bottom of the sea, your breath in abeyance, searching for precious pearls. Try to find out from where the thoughts arise.

Similarly, thoughts will appear from nowhere like the small crabs that come out of the wet sand on the beach. They scurry here and there and it is difficult to catch them. We need to develop the ability to be still and alert so that when a powerful thought, which normally overpowers us, arises, we are able to capture it and render it ineffective. It is the identification with thoughts which causes us distress and anxiety. They are the origin of our suffering. Like Lord Nataraja we should stamp on the demon of ignorance that creates thoughts and render it useless.

Pranayama means controlling the breath. Throughout the day we are breathing in and out. If we control the breath, thoughts will also be controlled. If we are not able to immediately practise self-enquiry we can use some *hatha yoga* practices to help. In an easy posture, if possible, fold your tongue to the back, close the throat and hold your breath. Contract and tighten the anus and pull it inside. You can do this exercise as much as you can in a day. This makes you calm and your body will be benefitted.

Another technique mentioned in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* would be to exhale, count to eight and think ‘I am not the body’. Next inhale through the nose and question ‘Who am I?’.¹ When controlling the breath, count sixteen and think ‘I am That’. I should emphasise these techniques are a primary aid to help us when thoughts overwhelm us and, at a later time, they should be discarded once you can effortlessly engage in self-enquiry.

Bhagavan was asked whether watching the breath was a prerequisite for ‘Who am I?’. He said, “All depends on a man’s *pakva* (his maturity and fitness).² Those who do not have the mental strength [another translation of ‘mental strength’ is preparedness gained through repeated practice] to concentrate or control their mind and direct it on the quest are advised to watch the breathing, since such watching will

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.) *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §447.

² The word *pakva* comes from the root ‘*pak*’ which means fully cooked. Bhagavan used the derivative *pakwigal* which, by implication, means one who has become mature through the ‘cooking’ process of sadhana (spiritual practice).

naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control. Breath and mind arise from the same place, and when one of them is controlled, the other is also controlled.

“As a matter of fact, in the quest method, which is more correctly ‘Whence am I?’, which is what Bhagavan teaches us when he asks us to look within us for the source of ‘I’, and not merely ‘Who am I?’, we are not simply trying to eliminate thought by saying ‘we are not the body, not the senses, and so on’ to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the ‘I’ thought, the ego within us arises. The method contains within it, though implicitly and not expressly, the watching of the breath. When we watch from where the ‘I’ thought, the root of all thoughts, springs, we are necessarily watching the source of the breath also, as the ‘I’ thought and the breath arise from the same source.”³

In a chess game, the king should be protected from the beginning. A good player should guard the king, the sense of ‘I’, with every move carefully planned. Likewise thoughts should be controlled with care and attention. In worldly life and spiritual life, we must watch our every step carefully. Even though we walk much of the time when awake, when a situation arises we have to be alert and jump to avoid trouble or even a threat to life.

Thayamanavar, a renowned Tamil saint and poet, said that we can measure the ocean, make ropes from sand, and tame the mad elephant; but we cannot control the mind. But Bhagavan says it is easier to attain God than in those earlier days with his tried and true *Brahmastram*. It is easy for the master and difficult for *ajnanis* like us; however, we have no choice but to make the effort and have faith in our guru’s words. We must try!

Devotee: “I do not yet understand how it is to be done.”

Maharshi: “You are practising breath-control. Mechanical breath-control will not lead you to the goal. It is only an aid. While doing it mechanically take care to be alert in mind and remember the ‘I’ thought and seek its source. Then you will find that where breath

³ Mudaliar, D., 1-12.1945, *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, 2002. p. 55-56.

sinks, the 'I-thought' arises. They sink and rise simultaneously. The 'I-thought' must sink along with breath. Then, another luminous and infinite 'I-I' will become manifest, which will be continuous and unbroken. That is the goal. It goes by different names — God, Self, Kundalini Sakti, Consciousness, Yoga, Bhakti, Jnana, etc."⁴

Once a man becomes a doctor he is always a doctor, whether at home or in the hospital. Likewise, one who practises yoga always remains a yogi. Sometimes we have to study for many years before receiving a diploma, but for spirituality we have to practise throughout life. A yogi is not a *jnani* — he has to practise to attain *jnana*.

Here are some examples Bhagavan used to explain our predicament. If a cow is given grass inside its shed it will not go wandering outside in search of forage. A woman wore a necklace on her neck and, unknowingly, was searching for it all over the place. Only when someone pointed it out did she become aware of it. Ten idiots crossed a river and wanted to make sure that all of them had arrived safely. They each counted the group of ten but excluded themselves, and each time they counted, they found only nine and were distraught that one of them was missing. When a stranger came and counted every one of the ten, he pointed out their mistake. Once some musicians came to play before Bhagavan. Afterwards, during a discussion about the merits of the various instruments, Bhagavan said that he himself heard nothing but the harmonium with its steady, monotonous, one-pointed rhythm that was like the steady flow of attention in the Self. In the same way, Jesus Christ said the kingdom of heaven is within each of us.

There is nothing to teach or learn in meditation but to understand the silence in the present moment. To be in the present is meditation, for, if we think of our past or future, we will lose the present. We should always try to be in the present. It is a small effort to sit through a few minutes or hours and meditate. We must be immersed in it always. We can practise dhyana with open eyes. If we practise dhyana with our eyes closed, thoughts will come when we open them. Bhagavan said

⁴Venkataramiah, M.,(compl.), op.cit., Talk§195, 2006. p.166.

that is *sahaja samadhi*. While reading a novel or watching a movie, we are not disturbed by surroundings, for we are fully absorbed. But sitting for meditation and doing puja, our mind wanders. Why? It is because we are not fully involved. If, as Bhagavan says, we are not the body, observe the body from outside and understand what the body is doing.

We don't find fault in ourselves, but in others. When we step back and look from outside, we can observe our faults. There are many atoms in a body, but we can't say each one is a body. When everything is put together it is the body. Likewise, everything in the universe is one, and inseparable. We know this from the scriptures and the teachings of spiritual masters, but it is beyond our limited knowledge and experience.

Let us say that your name is Rama. You have been called Rama when you were five years old, when you were ten, fifteen, twenty-five, fifty, sixty, always you are Rama. If someone calls your name, you answer. In the mind you don't think about your age. You are the same. In whatever way the body changes outwardly, inside you are the same. From this we can understand that we are not the body. From the teachings of scriptures and gurus, we know that there is no body. We do not know how honey tastes until we taste it. It is beyond our knowledge until we deliberately seek it.

We do all we can to decorate the body. We are conscious of how we look, whether the dress matches, and what others think of us; head to toe everything should be perfect according to our taste. But the machine within our body is working non-stop twenty-four hours a day. Do we give it any thought? If we see it, it will stop. If the thief knew he was being watched, he would run away. As a young mother who always keeps constant watch over the newborn, keep a watch over your thoughts. A miser guards his treasure carefully from thieves; likewise, we should guard true knowledge from our thoughts. A woman who walks with a water pot on her head keeps her mind attentive always on the water pot. We should focus on our thoughts like a mother cat circling the newborn kitten. Like a day spent with a charismatic person in whose presence we glow, we should spend a

whole day attending to that which is important, our inner 'I'-thought. All the turmoil will go and the mind will become quiet.

Like small drops that make a huge ocean, all our small thoughts gather and become heavy like a rock. Right from the start we should brush them away. If we have an enemy, a negative thought against him will spontaneously rise up within us. If we give way to it, hundreds more will gather and that person will become our permanent enemy. If we brush away the first thought immediately, that person has the possibility to become our friend.

Love is God; love everyone. In the spiritual path, from Buddha to Bhagavan to Gandhi, love is primary. The arithmetic of love is crazy; if you divide it, it will multiply. We should make friends, not break them, for, if we do, then the word 'ego' echoes constantly and everywhere. Even a street beggar's ego immediately rises up if he gets one cup of rice more than the others. Whenever we hear praise about ourselves, the ego rises at once. It is more dangerous than the cobra. What does the word 'ego' mean? It means edging God out of the equation. Let us not deviate from the straight path of one-pointed devotion into the jungle of thought and delusion. ▲



Mukundaraj Samadhi

Mukundaraj

Paramamrita Essence of the Eternal Elixir

HANS (SAUTAMALI) TURSTIG
AND JOHN GRIMES

Mukundaraj was a Sanskrit scholar, a Sage, endowed with miraculous powers, a follower of Sri Adi Sankaracarya's philosophy of *Advaita*, a yogi of the *Natha Pantha*, and the spiritual preceptor of prince Jaitrapala (Jayantpal). His Guru was Harinath. The honour of being the first Marathi poet to simplify the Vedanta philosophy of Self-knowledge goes to Mukundaraj (c. 1128 - 1200 CE). He composed verses in simple Marathi. Before Mukundaraj, *Advaita* teachings were forbidden to anyone not knowing Sanskrit as well as to non-*brahmins*. Thus, he laid the foundation for a gradual evolution of social justice in Maharashtra as well as making available the Vedantic teachings to everyone.

Mukundaraj was a Deshastha *brahmin* probably born at Pauni in the Bhandara district. His samadhi is in Ambejogai, Maharashtra, though the exact date of his birth is not certain. He is reputed to have

lived during the reign of Prince Jayantpal and eventually became a tutor to the prince. Jayantpal had a strong desire to experience the Self and had asked every ascetic that propounded the theory of Vedanta to teach him. It so happened that Mukundaraj paid a visit to the prince and was, as usual, asked to show the prince the Self. Unlike the many ascetics that preceded him, Mukundaraj succeeded where the others had failed. Tradition has it that he asked the prince to keep staring at a camel and, at the same time, drink a cupful of milk without the least idea of the camel in his mind. The prince tried his best but had to confess that he could not do so. It was impossible, he said, to gaze at the camel and, at the same time, to keep the idea of it out of his mind. Mukundaraj retorted that the mind must be controlled before the Self could be realised. The prince then realised what learning of Vedanta entailed and Mukundaraj lived for a long time at the capital as a tutor to the prince.

Vivekasindhu and *Paramamrita* are the only two works of Mukundaraj that we know of. The former, written in the ovi metre, has eighteen chapters and 1671 verses and is considered the first major book on Vedanta in the Marathi language. Mukundaraj is thought to be the first Maharashtrian to compose verses in the ovi metre. The *Paramamrita* contains fourteen chapters and 303 verses. This work was composed at the request of Prince Jayantpal. Mukundaraj says at the end of the seventh chapter: “Jayantpal, son of Ballal who was the son of Narisimha, had this work prepared. Just as the whole universe has obtained the benefit of bathing in the Ganges, by virtue of the good luck of Bhagiratha, so the whole world is blessed with this work on account of Jayantpal.”

Mukundaraj’s samadhi is located at a distance of two miles from Ambejogai (about 200 miles east of Mumbai in the middle of Maharashtra) on the slopes of the Balaghat range, and the hill adorned by the *samadhi* is known as Mukundaraj Hill. By its side flows the river Banaganga. The tops of the hills are always clad with dense forests and in the rainy season, when streams come trickling down the valley from the hilltops, the view is bewitching. The samadhi, situated inside a tunnel, is approached by a flight of nearly 100 steps. A spring

emanating out of the rocks, close by the samadhi, is considered to be a *tirtha* (place of pilgrimage). In the western side buildings have been provided that are generally used by pilgrims. In the plains below, a huge *sabha mandap* (meeting hall) measuring nearly 4,000 square feet has been erected by his devotees. In this *mandap* a small shrine of Vitthal Rukhumai has also been installed. The samadhi has become a place of assemblage for people on *vadya ekadasi* every month when kirtans and bhajans are arranged. In Margasirsa, a fair attended by over 30,000 persons is held in honour of Mukundaraj.

Paramamrita

Essence of the Eternal Elixir

I shall now tell you how to be able to acquire that basic secret wisdom, without the understanding of which there cannot be anything gained, in which one must keep one's mind concentrated, that wisdom in which the yogi is constantly immersed.

I shall clearly convey to you the very essence of this wisdom like the elixir churned out of the ocean or butter from milk so that you may give up the various spiritual practices that are based on mere concepts and which are, therefore, only an exercise in futility so long as there has not been a clear understanding of the significance of the awesome pronouncements of the Great Sayings of the Upanisads (*mahavakyas*).

Who can understand the extent of the seeker's misery so long as he has not clearly understood and experienced the true nature of the Absolute? Those poor souls who have accepted the shackles of physical penances and mental disciplines have in reality entangled themselves in doubt and indecision. How can they ever hope to cross the ocean of worldly life (*samsara*)? Worship, pilgrimages, charities, sacrifices, mantra and tantra practices can only provide time-bound results. Prayers and penances cannot bring about liberation unless there is Self-knowledge.

Pure wisdom – Reality – cannot shine forth until the basic unity of multiplicity and the non-dual Absolute is clearly assimilated, and there is an unblemished understanding of the nature of illusion (*maya*), which is the cause of the apparent difference between the two. How can there be any question of liberation so long as the identification with the body as a separate entity or doer is not destroyed through a proper comprehension of the terms ‘Thou’ and ‘That’ in the *mahavakya* “That Thou Art”?

How can there be liberation unless there has been a) instruction on Vedanta from the lips of the Guru; b) meditation on the Guru’s words; and c) total absorption in the Guru’s teachings?

Rules of conduct laid down by the shastras (scriptures) are only meant for a smoother working of the social structure. The seeker should seek instruction from the Guru regarding the essence of Vedanta, whereby one would realise that state of liberation, which is prior to thought and word. And when, in that state of liberation, there is the union of the individual (*jiva*) and the Lord (Siva), the state of duality disappears.

When the Absolute with the help of its primordial energy externalises Itself as the multi-faceted manifestation, the aspects of creation, sustention, and dissolution of the manifested universe happen in Consciousness. Whatever has form and shape and is, therefore, perceptible to the senses is to be rejected as being really Real, and that which is unseen and remains as the witness is to be recognized as the Reality. Know That to be the Reality, which is prior to the arising of Consciousness, which is termed the all-knowing, all-controlling Absolute.

That Reality is the witness of everything. It cannot be measured by any criterion, it has no specific place of abidance: it is all-pervading, limitless, unknowable. That Reality is what remains when everything that is illusory is rejected. It is Itself pure wisdom, pure bliss, self-evident. That Reality is all by itself, the original fullness of possibility,

the Plenum, prior to witnessing of all that is created, maintained, and dissolved. The Absolute Reality is totally apart from all aspects of manifestation: Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the maintainer of the universe), and Rudra (the destroyer) and the Primeval Power (*Shakti*). It is pure Brahman. It is only in this perspective that Reality is to be apprehended — it will not be comprehensible by any other means and practices based on ignorance and duality.

The superficial meaning of the term ‘*Tvam*’ (Thou) is conveyed by that which is governed by *maya*. The true meaning of the term ‘*Tat*’ (That) is pure non-dual Brahman, which cannot be experienced except after due discrimination. A clear conscious perception of the true meaning of the term ‘That’ is indeed liberation itself. The same sight in both eyes, the same sound in both ears and the same word on both lips — similarly, when one sees the same meaning in both ‘*Tat*’ (That) and ‘*Tvam*’ (Thou), Brahman is attained, which is beyond duality. Just as the difference between the space in a pot and the space in a house disappears when both are broken, so also the duality disappears when both terms are withdrawn. The apparent difference between the two is only because of the illusion of *maya*. As soon as the false is seen as false, only Reality remains.

The wisdom of the Self is *Advaita*, that is non-duality, but it is obviously to be acquired in apparent duality so that the duality disappears in due course when one remains firmly in that wisdom. Instead of looking ahead as one usually does, one must look back and seek the Source in order to realize one’s true Being.

‘Looking back’ is to be interpreted in the sense that the eye can see the objects in front but it cannot see itself; if one wants to see one’s own eyes, it can be done only by the mind, the mind can be seen only through the intellect, and it is Consciousness that can witness the intellect.

What one sees from this transformed perspective is nothing tangible but an all-pervading Oneness, where there is an absence of

maya and non-wisdom — something immeasurable which one can know only by experiencing it. That wisdom of the Absolute is self-evident, like a solid mass of profound bliss, the realisation of which brings the end of conceptualizing.

I shall tell you how to acquire that wisdom by which you shall have perpetual peace and contentment. But one must first find out precisely who or what it is that is doing the seeking. The only thing you know as a matter of certainty is the fact I AM, I exist. But you do not know who this 'I' is. My friend, why have you forgotten your Self? Who are you, and where have you come from? Indeed, have you really gone anywhere or come from anywhere? You have never even thought of considering this matter on these lines.

Are you the body, or is it you who have the body? You are the subject and the body is your object. It is you who have the knowledge of the body and indeed that you wear this body like a garment. Although you have acquired this body as a covering made of five elements, you have identified yourself with it and you strut about as an individual. Be clearly aware that this body is an object and that you are quite apart from it, and thus give up this mistaken identity with the body.

You are aware of the constitution of your body, that a) the hair, skin, veins, flesh and bones (the solid part of the body) represent the earth; b) saliva, urine, blood, marrow and semen (the five fluid materials) represent water; c) hunger, thirst, laziness, sleep, and sex represent fire; d) moving, running, resisting, relaxing, and contracting (the five kinds of activity) represent air; and e) desire, anger, grief, greed, and fear (the five qualities) represent space. The physical body, with these twenty-five parts, qualities, and activities has six natural changes: it is conceived, born, grows, matures, becomes old, and finally dies. You know the colour and form of this body, and the name it has been given. How then can you identify your Being with the body that is something other than you? You, as Being – Consciousness – are formless, whereas you can see the form of the body. In the waking state it is Consciousness that acts through the body and has various

experiences through the senses. The feeling that you have a particular name and form belongs to the mind, and you, as the knower of the body and the mind are apart from both.

Although you are apparently seen as the manifestation of the internal organ (*antahkarana*) — mind, intellect, discrimination, and ego — nevertheless you exist prior to the manifestation of these five constituents of the subtle body. It is Consciousness that is there first — spontaneous, Self-effulgent. The one who is aware of the rising passions and emotions is the mind, and it is the intellect which discriminates and decides; that which purposefully concentrates on the decisions of the intellect is the operational centre; and the one who accepts the doership of actions is the ego. It is you who are aware of this five-fold analysis of the internal organ because you are the Self-awareness or Witness or Atman. The thread is made out of cotton though it is different in appearance. Similarly, mind, intellect, discrimination, and ego may appear to be different but all arise from the same Source — Being, Consciousness, Reality.

The breeze is the cause of the ripples on the water, and the twist in the cotton is the cause of the thread; similarly, *maya* is the cause of the appearance of the subtle body. When the cause is removed, both the ripples and the thread disappear; similarly, with the arising of Self-wisdom and the removal of ignorance, *maya* becomes exposed and disappears. When the ripples and the water, or the thread and the cotton, unite — the duality disappears. Similarly, when the mind merges into Consciousness, the sense of duality disappears.

The mental or psychological structure of a person is the subtle body and the relevant condition is the dream state that is based on desire. Mind works through the senses, and such desires that remain dormant in the mind manifest themselves in the dream state as objects and desires that have been experienced earlier. The manifestation of the dream world occurs because of that very spark of Consciousness that illuminates the internal organ, just as the heat that heats a metal in sunlight is the quality of the sun. It is this Consciousness that has made

manifestation possible. If Consciousness were to disappear, there would be no manifestation to perceive, and you would be in your original state of the fullness of the Potential, the Absolute. If you are able to reject as illusion without any substance all that you see and experience in your Consciousness, then you will be immersed in what remains as Reality. Consciousness will remain merged within Itself without movement.

The shadow shows the shape, form, and parts of the original body but is really without substance; similarly, the one who says “I do not know” is an illusion. There is the prior one who knows or witnesses the other one who says, “I do not know.” The fact of not-knowing was known not to ignorance but to wisdom. That wisdom to which the non-knowing was known is Atman. Make no mistake about it. Even if one believes that one does not have Self-knowledge, this very fact could not have been known in the absence of knowledge. I know that I do not know. Therefore, ignorance as such is an illusion: if you know that you do not know why do you unnecessarily involve yourself in the concept of ignorance? This ignorance is itself the causal body of which the physical body and the subtle body are the instruments.

Listen now to the symptoms and the quality of deep sleep. Various concepts based on the events in the waking state, arise in the mind and reflect themselves in the dream state. But when Consciousness, which is the substratum for both the waking state and the dream state, suspends its operation, then comes the state of deep sleep — total non-knowledge. This non-knowledge is true knowledge because it is the absence of both knowledge and ignorance, which are both interrelated opposites. When Consciousness re-emerges into movement, the deep-sleep state forgets its true nature and again identifies itself with the individual entity and accepts the world as real. When, however, ignorance gets discarded, Reality shines just as gold remains in its purity when the impurities are destroyed in the fire. After ignorance has been destroyed and Self-knowledge has come about, that which sees the physical, the subtle, and causal bodies as a witness, is the supra-causal body — this is the *turiya* state. When through Self-knowledge the working bodies and the causal body are

demolished, the supra-causal body itself cannot survive: when the effect is destroyed, the cause cannot survive.

That changeless state wherein one is aware of one's Self-existence in *Parabrahman*, is Liberation, Reality. Meditation along these lines results gradually into firm conviction, and then one experiences the hollowness of the world. When both knowledge and non-knowledge disappear, then will dawn that Knowledge which is the Absolute Reality. One must recede into the Source whence springs all knowledge. That source is Reality, the immeasurable Potential, the Absolute into which Consciousness ultimately merges itself.

That Reality which is Self-effulgent cannot have a seer to see it as an object. Reality, therefore, cannot be a void: it is neither Consciousness in movement nor manifestation nor ignorance but the fullness of pure wisdom, the limitless possibility, beyond comprehension. You are that Reality, the Absolute, the fullness of possibility that has gobbled up even the concept of the Void, that Self-effulgent Source of everything. It is this Reality that you should understand yourself to be: independent, pure, the witnessing principle whose clear image it is impossible to visualize.

You are that Reality where all that is illusory has been absorbed, where the duality of a 'Thou' cannot survive; and so the terms 'That' and 'Thou' have become superfluous.

First convince yourself about your true nature as has been expounded so far, and then adopt the regular practice as follows: find a quiet spot, sit quietly, calm and relaxed; check the outward flow of thoughts. With an attitude of renunciation towards all that is manifest, the mind should be turned inwards, away from the sense objects, to the core of the Heart. Then give up gradually your identification first with the gross physical body and then with the subtle body and the causal body, and let your mind be one with space. Release your attention, smoothly and effortlessly, from the gross senses and let it merge with Consciousness. Whenever one's attention strays, it should

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again be brought back into the vacant mind smoothly and gradually, so that with patience the period of concentration becomes longer and longer. Whatever object the mind becomes attracted to, let your discrimination reject it as illusory and worthless. It is only in this manner that the mind will soon give up its flights of fancy and remain in quietude.

Until the mind naturally remains in Consciousness, persistent but gentle persuasion is necessary to make it drop whatever it tends to get involved in, and return to its Source. As you keep watching your mind and discover yourself as the witness, nothing else can appear on the screen of your Consciousness: two things cannot occupy your mind at the same moment.

When you understand that anything with a shape and form is, by its very nature, a hollow shell without substance, and that what is real is formless — the light of Consciousness — you will be immersed in the depth of Reality. When the mind gets absorbed in Consciousness, all objects disappear from the mind.

Do not put yourself in the position of the person who suddenly wakes up in the deepest dark of the night and thinks he has become blind. Do not get yourself enveloped in the darkness of ignorance; see all manifest phenomena as an illusion, and remain peacefully in Reality. Dive within and find out where thoughts arise. Seek the source of all thought — it is this Source, Consciousness, which must seek and acquire Self-knowledge: it can only happen.

Imagine for a moment that everything that is now manifest, including one's own body, has suddenly disappeared. Where precisely is it that the resulting nothingness would be registered? All that remains is 'I'-Consciousness: inside and outside, there is nothing other than the nothingness of the Void, which is the fullness of Being. That on which Consciousness has arisen must surely be prior to Consciousness. Understand beyond any doubt that it is this Source of Consciousness that you are in Reality. It is in Consciousness that everything appears including your sentience — the 'I Am' sense

of presence and the internal organ consisting of mind, intellect, discrimination and the ego. Once this fact is clearly apprehended, nothing can remain other than the Self.

Whenever you think, it is the mind that does the thinking; when the 'me' is involved in the thinking, it is the ego; when you are quiet, the very quietude is in Consciousness itself. Consider this: if you could have remained absolutely quiet, would any mnemonical recollection have ever sprouted? Would there have been any wish, any desire? If you could have remained absorbed in the Consciousness, would you have been troubled by thoughts? Would there have been any cause then to identify yourself with the body as a separate individual? Therefore, my friend, that wherein all ignorance disappears is a totally different dimension. If there were not something called pure knowledge, the Totality of all possibilities, where would the ego have arisen? This pure and perfect knowledge — neither knowledge nor non-knowledge — is not aware of itself. It becomes a witness only when a movement in Consciousness presents some manifestation to witness.

Giving up your identification with the body if you would remain quietly absorbed in the sense of the Totality — in the 'I AM' — without attachment, you will know all that is to be known. When you thus remain immersed in Consciousness, the personal, identified consciousness, having lost the power of *maya*, will itself take you to its Source, which is what you Are — Reality. In that state, there is no duality of any kind, all interrelated opposites have been naturally superimposed into nothingness. All there is, is pure knowledge, pure Being, pure Subjectivity. One cannot hold it, one cannot drop it, one cannot say it is, one cannot say it is not. Indeed, it cannot be something to be felt to BE and to remain in.

Hold on to the sense of 'I AM' to the exclusion of everything else. The mind being thus silent, will shine with a new light and vibrate in the Totality. When you keep 'I AM' feeling in the focus of awareness and watch yourself ceaselessly — when there is continuous witnessing of all movements in Consciousness — the conscious and

the unconscious will for a time play the game of hide-and-seek until finally the two become one and the one becomes the Totality. The individual then merges in the witness, the witness in pure Being — who is there then to take a measure of that ecstasy? ▲

Pearl Beyond Price

Ana Ramana

Tell me, my dearest one,
who were you before the stories,
before you fell into form?
Who are you now?
What worry is it shrouds you
from your truth?
Lure me into your deepest heart
for that is surely where I'll meet you.
Hold up your imagined wounds
to the light.
Let love seep through.
Let it drench you
in the sheer, unsullied beauty
that bore and blossomed you.
Immerse yourself in its golden glow.
Absolve yourself of any darkness.
Unleash the radiant grace
that is your birthright.
Stop at nothing, my loveliest child.
Let your passion for your true self
unfurl the perfect pearl
that is you.
Why keep on roaming,
my sweetest creature,
in the dream world?
Take my hand.
Let true love carry you home.

Non-dual Meditation and Self-enquiry

How does Non-dual Meditation or Self-enquiry produce experiences such as ‘All is One’ and ‘Living only in the present’ ?

GARY WEBER

Sri Ramana’s powerful and beloved *Upadesa Saram* has three critical verses highlighting the reason that non-dual meditation or Self-enquiry/*vichara* works the way it does and why it is so effective:

‘Thoughts alone constitute the mind, and they are all dependent on the ‘I-thought’. Hence know that the ‘I-thought’ itself constitutes the mind.

On inquiring from where this ‘I-thought’ takes its birth, lo! that very ‘I-thought’ collapses. This is Self-enquiry.

When the individual ‘I’ is annihilated through such inquiry, there shines forth the Self by itself as the ‘I-I’. It is the supreme infinite Being.’

¹ *Upadesa Saram*, V. 18-20

Gary Weber, Ph.D, had self-referential thoughts stop after 20,000 hours of self-inquiry meditation and yoga. He is a collaborator in neuroscience studies, and wrote *Happiness Beyond Thought: A Practical Guide to Awakening*. He has a blog — happinessbeyondthought.blogspot.com

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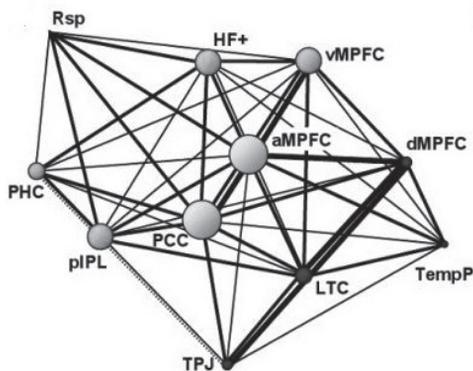
As a result of this non-dual meditation/*vichara*/Self-enquiry, many spiritual practitioners report two common experiences:

- a) 'All is One', or everything is one thing.
- b) One is 'living only in the present' with no sense of there being a past or a present.

Just how do these practices produce these results? Does contemporary cognitive neuroscience provide any insights?

If one looks at the current scientific research, the best insight comes from a paper published in 2010 by Andrews-Hannah.² This paper focused on defining the 'default mode network' (DMN), or the network in the brain that is responsible for all of the self-talk, self-referential narrative of thoughts that goes on when we aren't doing some specific task. Over the course of the last ten years or so, this network has been extensively studied.

As we know from *Upadesa Saram* and Sri Ramana's other teachings, if one looks closely at our ongoing thoughts, we see that they all contain the 'self', the I/me, my, either explicitly or implicitly. This is the 'default model network' at work. If we persist



The default mode network brain centers.

² Functional-Anatomic Fractionation of the Brain's Default Network Jessica R. Andrews-Hannah, Jay S. Reidler, Jorge Sepulcre, Renee Poulin, and Randy L. Buckner, Harvard University, *Neuron*. 2010 February 25; 65(4): 550–562.

in the inquiry into where this 'I' arises, it eventually falls away, and a 'self-less' awareness is there, which has been there all along, but obscured by the 'I-thought'.

Andrews-Hannah, et. al. demonstrated that there were eleven brain centres principally involved in this process. These are shown in the figure on the previous page.

These centres have some unfamiliar names. The most important of them are the posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) and the anterior medial prefrontal cortex (aMPFC). These lie deep in the centre of the brain along the midline. The PCC is a little behind your ears, and the aMPFC is just above your eyes. The importance of these centres to the operation of the DMN is determined by how strong the line is between them; if the lines are thick, those centres often operate together when we aren't tasking. If they are thin, they don't always work together.

Andrews-Hannah found that the PCC and aMPFC work together virtually all of the time that we aren't doing some task; they are the core of this default mode network. The other nine centres were found to belong to two distinct subgroups, the four in the right hand side of the diagram (TPJ, TempP, LTC and dMPTC) (all defined in the reference) operate together and with the two core centres. This group is responsible for generating the feeling of 'self and not self', or 'self and other'. The five in the left hand side of the diagram (PHC, Rsp, HF+, vMPFC, and pIPL) are responsible for generating the feeling of 'self in time', or 'present self and future self' operating together with the two core centres.

The beauty of *vichara*/Self-enquiry is that if one inquires into the nature of the 'I-thought' by investigating deeply into 'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', 'When am I?', 'What is this?', etc., these centres are amazingly deactivated. The longer this inquiry process continues and the more diligent one is in pursuing this elusive 'I-thought', the weaker their activity becomes.

If we do functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies on meditators doing even simple mindfulness meditations for only 45 minutes/day for two months, we find that the PCC and aMPFC are

in fact deactivated when they are meditating.³ If we look at fMRIs of experienced meditators who have done 10,000 hours of mindfulness meditation, we find that the PCC and aMPFC are deactivated during meditation and even for a short time when they aren't meditating, but eventually it reactivates and they return to having 'self-referential narrative'.⁴ In my experience, after 20,000 hours of enquiry meditation and yoga, the PCC and aMPFC are deactivated and the self-referential narrative does not occur, even when there is no meditation or tasking being done – it has become the natural (*sahaja*) state. The self-referential narrative thoughts are replaced with deep stillness. The only exceptions are first minutes in the morning and when blood sugar is very low or the body is very tired.⁵

So with the de-energisation of the default mode network either during meditation, or if one practises for a sufficient period, even after meditation, one loses the sense of 'self and other' and 'self in time' and the self-referential narrative is reduced or eliminated. This results in the frequently reported 'all is One' and 'there is no past or future, there is only now' experiences. Is there any research that has been done to quantify these clearly subjective experiences?

A doctoral thesis was done to evaluate just that question.⁶ Out of a population of over 500 people who reported 'persistent non-duality, non-symbolic consciousness, nondual awareness, enlightenment, mystical experiences, peak experiences, transcendental experience, the

³ Attending to the present: mindfulness meditation reveals distinct neural modes of self-reference, Norman A. S. Farb, Zindel V. Segal, Helen Mayberg, Jim Bean, Deborah McKeon, Zainab Fatima, and Adam K. Anderson, University of Toronto, SCAN (2007) 2, 313–322.

⁴ Meditation experience is associated with differences in default mode network activity and connectivity, Judson A. Brewer, 1, Patrick D. Worhunskya, Jeremy R. Grayb, Yi-Yuan Tangc, Jochen Weberd, and Hedy Kobera, Yale University, PNAS, (2011).

⁵ No Thoughts, No Time, Gary Weber, Science and NonDuality Conference, San Rafael, CA, October, 2011.

⁶ Ego Development State Does Not Predict Persistent Non-Symbolic Experience, Jeffery A. Martin, California Institute of Integral Studies, Ph. D. Thesis, 2010.

peace that passeth understanding, unity consciousness, union with God, etc.’, thirty-six of us were chosen and participated in a study. A key component of this study was the Hood Mysticism Scale, the generally-accepted scale for determining just how ‘mystical’ someone’s experiences are. Many of the individual questions deal with either a loss of a sense of self and other or with the loss of a sense of time.

Typical statements/questions are:

- a) I have had an experience in which I felt everything in the world to be part of the same whole;
- b) I have had an experience in which I felt that all was perfection at that time;
- c) I have had an experience in which I realised the oneness of myself with all things.

The Hood Mysticism Scale goes from 36 to 160 (the highest). Of these 36, nine of us scored a 160; the average for the group was 152.4. A comparable study done on users of ‘psychedelics’ with a similar demographic had an average Hood Mystical score of 150.1. The clear conclusion is that folk who experience ‘persistent nondual experiences and awareness’ are at least as mystical, as measured by the accepted scale, and perhaps more so, than the users of psychedelics.

And as far as the seemingly never-ending ‘blah, blah’ of self-narration, Sri Ramana stated, “If the thinker is sought, the thoughts will disappear.”⁷ “(In *samadhi*)... there will only be the feeling ‘I am’ and no other thoughts... The experience of ‘I am’ is to Be Still.”⁸ And “Silence is never-ending speech...silence is so potent.”⁹ ▲

⁷ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2009. p.207. Talk §244.

⁸ Ibid, Talk §226. p.207.

⁹ Ibid, Talk §68. p. 76.



S. Gopalakrishnan

Gift of a Lifetime

M.S. SUBRAMANIAN

I had my first and last darshan of Bhagavan when I was aged seven. It was in early 1950 my father and I travelled from our native place forty miles from Tiruvannamalai to Sri Ramanasramam. At the Asramam, a serpentine queue of devotees through barricades erected with wooden poles filed past and when my turn came I caught the glimpse of a frail figure on the bed reclining on propped-up pillows. Being only a seven-year-old, there was no action or reaction on my part except that I kept my two palms together as one does when he stands before a deity in a temple.

The scene, in spite of passing of years, is still fresh in my memory. But, now I view it with great wonder. What priceless gift my father bestowed on me when he took me to have the darshan of Bhagavan.

MS Subramanian is an advocate who works and lives in Chennai. Having physically seen Bhagavan when he was a lad, he experiences Bhagavan each day.

Whenever I recall it, it appears as fresh as it was when it happened, except that now there is reverence, utmost peace and a sense of timeless time. The beauty of it, I always remain a seven-year-old boy in that imagery like Markendaya who was always sixteen.

It is said that a realised sage need not give special advice or instructions and every word of his is a 'saying' for every devotee, though not addressed to him or her. Whenever I am troubled in mind or feel out of sorts, I always take out any one of the eight volumes in Tamil published by Sri Ramanasramam under the title *Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Bhagavan*, open a page at random and start reading. I always read only a few pages at a time and try to assimilate it into my mind. Every time its newness, relevance and appeal are amazing. I almost always get my answer.

Folklore says that a king wanted a formula which should always be true, valid and give mental equilibrium either in pain or pleasure, defeat or success, poverty or riches. Nobody had an answer. A sage came and gave him a rolled piece of palm leaf and said the king should open it only when the situation causing a dilemma should present itself. One day a calamity happened and the king remembered the palm leaf and read it. It had the message 'Even this will pass'. Whether pleasant or unpleasant it will pass away. He mentally saluted the sage and overcame his despondency.

Recently when I was in one of my intractable moods, I took one of the eight volumes published by Sri Ramanasramam and was reading a particular passage at random. I came across one incident which happened during Bhagavan's time. A devotee came to Sri Bhagavan and started complaining about what he considered as an affront to him in the *bhojanasala* (dining hall). Sri Bhagavan, usually mild, was somewhat severe and said: '*Edarku Vandir, Pome*' (For what purpose did you come, get going). In that particular context, it would mean, "Did you come here only to eat food or for spiritual upliftment? Go away in peace." But is not our Bhagavan a sage par excellence and how can the words uttered by him lose their relevance once the disgruntled person (it would be wrong to call him a devotee) slunk away? The words struck me as a blow (though on earlier occasions

also I had read them but did not see their potential) and I almost felt that a seven-year-old boy is before Bhagavan and he tells the boy “whatever happens in the world good or bad, do not attach any importance. That is not the purpose for which you have come into the world. The real purpose is to know who you are. Get going on your real mission.”

When I place side by side the formula which the sage gave the king in the folklore and the words Bhagavan uttered ‘*Edarku Vandir, Pome*’, I find the following striking differences between them. The former is a passive acceptance of a situation while the latter is for advancement from a situation. The former is static and the latter is dynamic.

May Bhagavan’s grace continue to guide me and make me grasp the real import of every one of his words and utterances.

Am I not right when I said that my father gave me the gift of a life time when he made me have the darshan of the sage of Arunachala? ▲

ASHRAM WEBSITE

We request website visitors to discriminate between the official website of the ashram and third-party websites. There are many websites on Sri Ramana Maharshi which solicit online donations. If they see a ‘Donate’ button on a website that appears to be connected with Sri Ramanasramam, they have mistaken a private website on Sri Ramana Maharshi for the official website of the ashram.

The official website never solicits donations nor has it authorised any private website to solicit donations on its behalf.

The address of the official website is:
<http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org>



S. Gopalakrishnan

FROM THE ASHRAM ARCHIVES

A Study

SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

The following article from the ashram archives was written by Swami Siddheswarananda and possibly translated by him from the French. It was first published in 1940 at Paris as a Preface to Etudes sur Ramana Maharshi, Volume One, with an Introduction by Jean Herbert. It has been slightly edited.

Swami Siddheswarananda was in charge of the Ramakrishna Mission activities in France from the late 1930s and founded the Ramakrishna Ashrama (Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna) at Gertz near Paris in 1947. He died in 1957.

Sri Ramana Maharshi expounds a system of thought and philosophy of life which incarnates the essence of Vedantic teachings. In Indian philosophy life can have absolutely no influence except when it is reflected in the life of the one who expounds it. We ought also to say that it is the life of an individual and his 'realisations' which give opportunity for the construction of a philosophical system, when this life brings an understanding and opens an horizon which affect society as a whole and improves the relationship amongst men. When

the prophets of ancient India had attained the ultimate truths which they expressed forth with in Vedic hymns and the teaching of the Upanisads, they were looked upon as the salt of the earth, because they became lighthouses which guide the hesitating humanity on its path. The truths which these great beings discovered are hidden in their soul. And what they teach mankind is only the means of penetrating into themselves to bring forth into the day the secret treasures which all possess.

It is this aspect of the right of each one to make his own introspector which confers dignity on man's efforts, because truth is our legitimate inheritance. The Upanisads address themselves in these terms to all those who aspire after the Truth: "O you inheritors of immortal bliss!" Can anything more encouraging exist than these words of hope? It is not in original sin that man finds the basis of his existence, it is in the golden flame of the Light of Atman.

The Maharshi has discovered this. He found it of his own accord, without any exterior help. A very young scholar, he was overtaken by a fear of death. Each child thinks about this problem one day or other, but few have the courage of Nacheketas to go up to the very gates of death themselves to find the solution. Maharshi did it. He threw away books, which veil more often than they reveal the truth; he extended himself on the ground close to the large village field, closed his eyes and imitated all the symptoms of death. Then he told himself: "Now death has come, what does it mean? What is it that has died? The material body dies.' I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid. I held my breath. 'Very well,' I told myself, 'this body is dead, they will come and take it to the cremation ground and reduce it to ashes. But when the body is dead am I dead, I? This body, is it I? It is inert and moreover I feel all the force of my personality independent of it. I am then the eternal spirit, transcending body, which alone lives and dies.' All this rose before me intensely without having to be expressed, like a living truth perceived immediately and almost without argument. The fear of death disappeared entirely and definitely. This conscious

and immediate presence of I, altogether independent of the physical body, has continued ever since.”

This direct experience of ‘I’ is called *aparokshanubhuti*; it is distinct from all knowledge obtained by intellectual effort, which always implies a connection between subject and object and consequently is limited by space-time and without any transcendental value. He who has had this direct experience of ‘I’ is considered to be liberated even while he is still alive; one calls such a *jivan-mukta*. The existence of such individuals who are living incarnations of the Truth, render this Truth demonstrable. The Vedantic realisation of these great beings promises the possibility of a practical application, and their realisations raise the level of the human consciousness. It is this aspect of Vedanta which has attracted the attention of savants towards its teachings. Vedantic research goes much deeper than all objective analysis of matter; it goes to the fundamental basis of perception and as such gives us a synopsis of the Truth rather than a curtailed view. The interest that the West takes in the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi proves the universal attraction of Vedanta, which one can see materialized in the Sage of Tiruvannamalai.

It is not long since the outside world learnt of the existence of the Sage, but thanks to the popular work of Mr. Paul Brunton and the new section created by M. Jean Herbert in his collection of Hindu philosophy, people are now greatly interested in the philosophy of life that the Maharshi applies and teaches. In an article on Indian yoga M. Lacombe of Paris University has written about the Maharshi: “His person sheds a force consisting of intelligence and mastery of the self. A flashing eye intense and fixed without hardness, Olympian softness of gesture, slender and delicate in an immobile body. He is taken by excellent judges to be a very authentic Yogi and to have reached the highest realisations.” I cite this passage only to show the impression produced by a visit to Maharshi by one who appreciates the atmosphere that surrounds the Sage. It is however very difficult for a European formed in the traditions of theology and Western philosophy to come to grips with the Maharshi’s conception of life.

In another part of his study M. Lacombe observes: "Like many spiritual Indians he has, if I may say so, exalted the experience of the individual self in the experience of the universal Self." I would respectfully observe to the learned professor that the Maharshi is much rather a *tattva-jnanin* (one who apprehends the real) than a Yogi; his conception of life embraces all life, which for an Indian embraces the three states of *jagrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti*. The Yogic is the experience of 'I' as cosmic identification which takes the *jagrat* as the essential field of experience. If one would find example of this cosmic and universal experience of the 'I', as M. Lacombe calls it, there is no lack of mystics in India who have reached sufficient realisation on this basis of experience. But the Maharshi is before all a *tattva-jnanin*. And the field of his search and experience is much greater than that of a mystic. The Sage transcends the limits of the three states which I have already indicated; it is not exact to say that his experience is like that of those who magnify that which realizes the individual 'I'. The Maharshi in effect goes to the root of the individual 'I' and touches there even the basis of the ego and all the perceptions and sensations which result from it, reaching their origin.

Nor can I agree with M. Lacombe when he writes, "It was only necessary to provoke in himself a psychological shock (by some hypnotic procedure for the artificial example) which would be equivalent of what for him was a sudden fear of death by which he was completely and literally turned back, introverted." In fact the Maharshi did not provoke any psychological shock because he had no preconceived idea of the result of what he did. He did not worry himself in the least about philosophic or psychological problems; he was hardly sixteen years old. The illumination which he attained was the indirect result of what he did in analysing his fear of death. When I asked him, Maharshi often told me that at that time he did not even know the most common Vedantic terms, such as Brahman or Atman. He had had no religious education. He had passed no examination of catechism on the Hindu conception of life. His understanding was practically a blank page as concerns religious instruction and philosophical terms, which he started to use after people, attracted by his life, flocked round him.

When the young Venkataraman grew up and his experience was transformed into a instantaneous and permanent realisation, he could see, thanks to a very lively intelligence, how others had given a literary form to the expression of this same experience. Differing from J. Krishnamurti who perhaps expresses (although with an entirely different vocabulary) the same way of approach towards the analysis of the self and the understanding of what he calls the process of the 'I', the Maharshi accepts the terminology sanctified by tradition and always employed by sages of India since the time of the Upanisads.

Whoever has the opportunity to know the Maharshi at first hand will know full well that he is neither an 'extravert' nor an 'introvert'. He is the most normal man that one could ever find. He is in effect *sthitiprajna*, a man whose intelligence is solidly founded. I have seen him apparently plunged in himself, when everybody believed him to be absorbed in his own Self but when at any moment someone at the end of the hall made a mistake in the repetition of certain Tamil verses the Maharshi opened his eyes, corrected the mistake, then again closed his eyes and returned to his former state. I have already stated that one cannot say that the exterior world does not interest him. He has reached an extraordinary degree of concentration and as that concentration perpetually rests on an habitual state of life in Jnana, or as the Sage calls it, *sahaja-sthiti*, he is neither an introvert nor an extravert. Just simply he is. And by his knowledge of the ultimate reality he is one with it in every expression of multiplicity in its manifestation, he is one with the universe as a whole.

When I saw him I found in him a perfect example of the description which Sri Sankaracharya gives in his *Vivekachudamani*, when he explains what characterizes a *jivan-mukta*. In verse 429 we read: "He who, even when his thought is merged in Brahman, is nevertheless entirely awake, but at the same time free from the characteristics of the waking state, and whose realisation is free from all desire, should be considered as a man liberated while still alive." The notions of introversion and extraversion cannot be applied to one whose philosophy of life reposes uniquely on the experience of the waking state. To say that someone has gone beyond the ego does

not signify that he is dead to all feeling. In the process of realisation one is not content with denying the false relative ideas of reality; the positive element is the most important, and this is to recognise the place of the ego with respect to the All.

This discovery of Vedanta is expressed in the formula *Aham Brahmasmi*, 'I am Brahman'. The 'I' considered as separate is the source of all ignorance. In the *Panchadashi*, which is an authoritative work on Advaita, we find in verse thirteen of chapter six a statement which is extremely important on this point. The author Vidyanaraya there says: "The destruction of the world and of the *jiva* does not signify that they should become unperceived by the senses but knowledge of their real nature should appear. If such is not the case people would be able to find emancipation without making any personal effort, as in dreamless sleep or in a swoon (when all perception disappears completely)."

As the *Gita* says, Atman, forgetting its real nature, believes that it is the ego and the author of all actions, which is the cause of all misunderstanding. A man like the Maharshi, who has gone beyond the ego, or who, in other words, has understood the process of the ego in reaching its origin, has 'touched', as the Maharshi says, the basis of Reality, from which all experiences spring. The Upanisads consider such a man to be the 'I' of All.

To understand the experience of the Maharshi from the philosophical point of view one must read and meditate on the *Mandukya Upanisad* and the *Karikas* of Gaudapada with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya. In this way one can better understand intellectually what the Maharshi represents. A simple visit to the ashram where the sage lives does not enable one to understand. One can see during such a visit his mystic aspect, because the silence in which he is plunged often exercises a profound influence on the visitor, even if he only remains a very short time. But this mysticism of the Maharshi has its effect on a profound and intelligent understanding of life and its problems. And to understand that one must place the Maharshi in his philosophical and cultural 'milieu'. ▲

The Quest

Chapter Fourteen

Sadhana

LUCIA OSBORNE

Sadhana has become easier and simpler in this age of dissolution and darkness, the Kali Yuga, particularly so after Ramana Maharshi shed his body. People young and old keep on coming. The place is vibrating with His Presence. Ramana-Arunachala-Siva are one. The Biblical saying “Blessed are those who have seen and believe but more blessed are those who have not seen and believe” applies here. Those who are not advanced or simple enough to be awakened to the presence of the living inner Guru Ramana turn to Arunachala, the physical form of Siva, the holy mountain and centre from which emanates the Grace and guidance of Ramana invisible and all-permeating.

The power of Arunachala is so great and yet so subtle that people are drawn to it without compulsion from near and far as if by some invisible magnet. It is HOME. In our embodied existence we have forgotten our divine origin. Arunachala is a mighty signpost to shake us up and

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arouse us from our delusion and self-complacency, from the enticement of comfort and pleasure-hunting, a sign-post that points beyond our earthly entanglements towards Infinity which is our origin. Not many are there whom the call has reached and even fewer who have awakened to the living inner Guru in their own heart, always present, the surest of guides, their own Self, and so some turn to devious ways. Perhaps in this age people are reached through their imperfections. Those who are sincere and steady will ultimately find the right path and true Guru.

Ramana Maharshi's teaching is direct and simple. His greatest impact is in Silence now as before, even more so now if we turn to Him and invoke His guidance and help. "I am not this body," He kept on reminding us. "I am in the innermost heart of all beings" always with us waiting....

Question: Does my realisation help others?

Bhagavan: Yes, certainly. It is the best help possible. But really there are no others to help, for a Realised Being sees only the Self, just as a goldsmith, estimating the gold in various jewels, sees only the gold. Separate forms and beings exist only so long as you identify yourself with the body. When you transcend this identification others disappear along with your body-consciousness.¹

Question: Isn't it necessary that saints should mix with people and be helpful to them?

Bhagavan: The Self alone is the Reality; the world and the rest of it are not. The Realised Man does not see the world as different from himself.

Question: Then does a man's realisation lead to the uplift of mankind without their being aware of it?

Bhagavan: Yes. The help is imperceptible but is still there. A Realised Man helps the whole of mankind although they do not know it.

Question: Wouldn't it be better if he mixed with others?

Bhagavan: There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality.²

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §13.

² *Ibid.*, Talk §20.

“The sage attends to the inner and not to the outer; he puts away the objective and holds to the subjective. The sage conveys instruction without words. Who is there that can make muddy water clear? But if allowed to remain still it will gradually become clear of itself. All things in nature work silently. Tao is eternally inactive, and yet it leaves nothing undone....” Lao-Tzu.

“In the beginning was Allah and nothingness beside Him and now He is as He was.” (*The Koran* or Ibn-Arabi).

“I know that I exist, then who am I?” It struck like lightning.

One may hear the same words repeatedly and understand them intellectually and suddenly they strike one, I repeat, like a lightning flash of living Truth. So now sadhana has become as simple as that: the limited, vulnerable, insecure ‘I am’ reaches out to its own perfect, infinite, sublime Self I AM - I AM to realise ultimately that there was never any separation. This cannot be repeated too often. The wonder of it. ▲



Back gate for path to Skandasramam

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Four

Tulasidas' Attachment to His Wife

NABAJI SIDDHA

We have received some comments that the life of Tulasidas is not entirely in conformity with the latest historical research into his life. Tulasidas himself gave only a few facts about his life in his considerable number of works. The two traditional sources on his life are Maha Bhakta Vijayam by 'Nabaji Siddha' or as it is known in north India, Bhaktamal composed by 'Nabhadas'. This was between 1583 and 1639. Nabaji Siddha was said to be a contemporary of Tulasidas. The second was a commentary on Bhaktamal titled Bhaktirasbodhini (ca.1712) by Priyadas.

A further three manuscripts were rediscovered in the first half of the 20th Century. Mula Gosain Charit (ca.1630) by Veni Madhav Das, which is accepted by scholars as the most authentic; Gosain Charit (ca.1770) by Dasanidas; and the Gautam Chandrika (ca.1624) by Krishnadatta Misra. These five works are the basis on modern research.

At some future date we hope to publish an article on Tulasidas giving a more realistic picture of the poet-saint. However, this should not detract from the enjoyment of this wonderful, and at times, embellished story of Tulasidas as given in Maha Bhakta Vijayam.

After Atma Ram left for Naimisaranya, his wife sent for Mamata Devi to come and live in Rajapur with them. She handed over the responsibility of Mamata to her husband Tulasidas and advised him not to think of other women even in dream, but lead a happy life with his wife. She spent her days in contemplating on the lotus feet of the Lord. Tulasidas spent his time happily with his wife. By the will of the Lord, he was completely captivated by Mamata's youth and beauty. He could not bear to be separated from her even for a short while. He became once again a slave to sensual life, considering it as the ultimate bliss. Day and night, he was not able to think of anything else.

Meanwhile, the emperor Akbar, having heard about the events in Tulasidas' life, wished to meet him. He sent his messengers to Rajapur to bring Tulasidas to the palace. When the messenger conveyed the emperor's wish, Tulasidas thought that once he reached the palace it would take some time to return. It was unbearable for him even to think of leaving his wife's company, so he declined the emperor's invitation. After an interval, the emperor dispatched another messenger to fetch Tulasidas to the palace. Once again, Tulasidas refused to accompany the messenger. In spite of repeated invitations, Tulasidas did not oblige.

The emperor was very surprised, "While people yearn for royal favours or are scared to spurn the emperor's wish, Tulasidas is indifferent to repeated summons. People hasten to my court either out of desire for material things or out of fear of royal summons. It is very strange. O courtiers, what is the reason for this strange behaviour of Tulasidas? He is not influenced either by royal favours or intimidated by punishment. Is he proud of wealth, or feels anguish at separation from parents, or is it his immaturity or childishness which makes him blind to the consequences? Is it because of his erudition or ignorance, or any public slander? Or is he upset with our treatment? Have you discontinued, without my knowledge, the monthly gold coins being given to him? Is he annoyed with us for that? Have you antagonized him for anything?"

“O Royal Highness!” said the courtiers, “Though he is learned, he shows no signs of maturity. Learning without wisdom is like worship without earnestness. The reason for his flouting your wishes is his lust. He is wallowing in abject sense-pleasures. He was earlier spending his days and nights in prostitutes’ quarters without bothering about social stigma or his father’s anger. Later by his father’s intervention, he was taken to a secluded place and was made to engage in Vedic studies along with other *brahmacharis*. There, he came across a celestial woman. Once again he was infatuated with the fair sex. Then the anguished father, by means of his mystical power, freed him from the ignominy and took him to their native place and entrusted him to his wife and mother. His son’s notorious behaviour drove him to extreme dispassion and he left for Naimisaranyam to spend his life in meditation. This cleared the way for the son to continue with his indulgence. Now, he is afraid that if he comes to the emperor’s court, he will not be able to continue with his sensual pursuits.”

This incredible story amazed the emperor. He wondered if it was possible for a person to be so drowned in sensuality. He wanted to verify it.

When Atma Ram’s wife came to know of her son’s lack of response to the emperor’s invitation, she became very disturbed. She spoke to him about this, “My dear child! You are incomparable in learning, yet you show no wisdom in spurning the emperor’s repeated wishes to see you. He has sent the messengers and palanquin quite a number of times. Don’t you feel at least a sense of gratitude towards the emperor who has been honouring you by sending one thousand gold coins regularly every month? We should be grateful, till our last breath, to the hand that feeds us. Your conduct is abominable. In spite of high learning, you don’t know how to control your senses. Spending your days and nights in seeking carnal pleasures, you have become an object of contempt and ridicule in our society. You have brought dishonour to the family. The relationship between husband and wife should remain a private affair and not to be brought to the knowledge

of others even within the household. Yet, in your case, it is a topic of discussion in the market place. What a shame!

“You have hurt the sentiments of the emperor by your callous and improper behaviour. The wicked are like crows and the wise are like swans; evildoers are like braying donkeys and righteous are like high bred stallions. With which do you wish to identify yourself? My mind cringes at your appalling and ungrateful conduct.”

Now turning to her daughter-in-law, she gave vent to her pent-up feelings, “You are the culprit who has reduced my son to this wretched condition and brought infamy on him. This instant, I want you to leave for your parents’ home.”

To Mamata Devi, who had been yearning to visit her parents for a long time, this chastisement of her mother-in-law came as a blessing in disguise. She bowed to her husband and informed him of her imminent departure.

Tulasidas was agitated and cried out, “O my dearest, I can’t let you go. I can’t remain alive if you leave me even for a day. I have not let you out of my sight ever since you entered my house as my wife. I did not take any notice of even the emperor’s importunate invitations. Knowing my state of mind, how can you leave me? Your very presence in the house brings joy to my heart. You are the most precious treasure to me. Please don’t take to heart my mother’s reproach.”

The poor girl, who could not disobey her husband, had to forego the joy of meeting her parents and stayed back. Once again, Tulasidas relapsed into his shameless lifestyle, becoming oblivious of propriety and duty.

One fine day, Akbar set out with his retinue of guards and other paraphernalia to meet Tulasidas. He pitched camp in a grove near the town and sent his minister to fetch Tulasidas. It evoked the same indifferent response from Tulasidas. Wallowing in sense-gratification, he didn’t want to jeopardize his present life by responding to the royal summons. Fearing that the emperor would take him back to Delhi and he would not be able to get back to his wife soon, he declined the emperor’s invitation. The minister became furious at this. Hurling abuses at Tulasidas, he quickly returned to the emperor and reported,

"We tried to talk sense into him in many ways, but he is dead to all decency. Your Highness should not bother with the wretch anymore."

On the contrary, the emperor said, "One should condemn only an infidel, but Tulasidas has not committed adultery. It is alright for me to go and meet him."

Seated on the royal elephant, the emperor started towards Tulasidas' home along with the retinue. He mused, "It is indeed strange that one is so much stricken with lust! I hear that the son excels his father in learning. Furthermore, the father was a man of detachment, a repository of wisdom and had a gracious disposition. Born to such a noble being, Tulasidas cannot be anything less. Can a lion beget a puny kitten? When the crop is harvested, we come to know if the land owner is meritorious or not. Perhaps, Tulasidas is annoyed that I have not shown him due respect. Let me find out today."

Reaching his home, the emperor asked, "O Tulasidas! Why have you been indifferent to me? Have I offended you in any way? Are you worried about anything? Can I not help you to get rid of your affliction? Your father used to be very fond of me. We had mutual love and regard for each other." The emperor spoke to him with great affection.

Tulasidas was alarmed at the arrival of the emperor at his doorstep. He did not respond to the emperor's call. Dreading the prospect of being away from his wife if he was made to leave with the emperor, Tulasidas hid himself in the interior of the house.

When his mother learnt about it, she was enraged. She hurried to him and screamed at him, "O rascal, are you blind with lust? The emperor of the country has condescended to call on you. He has been appealing to you a while and you are keeping quiet."

Turning her wrath upon Mamata, she said, "You, vile creature! You have ruined my son. Why don't you prevail on him to obey the summons of the emperor?"

Unable to bear her mother-in-law's taunts, Mamata approached her husband with tearful eyes and told him firmly, "If you do not go to the emperor, I will give up my life this very moment."

Tulasidas was bewildered on hearing these words, “Oh God, if she dies what shall I do? I cannot seek another woman’s company, as I have sworn to my father to that effect.” Though he was in turmoil, he was left with no choice but to accept the emperor’s invitation and accompany him to the court.

Assailed by the pangs of separation, he sat brooding all the way without bothering to make any conversation with the emperor. At home, his mother ordered Mamata Devi to go back to her parents. She was only too pleased to obey her mother-in-law, as she too had been longing to see her parents. This was her first visit to her parents after she got married, as Tulasidas had refused to let her out of his sight. Her parents were happy to see their daughter. All her friends and neighbours came to see her. Since they had known about her husband’s proclivity and the reason for her long absence, some friends ridiculed her.

They said mockingly, “Oh, Oh! It is a wonder that you have come here leaving your husband behind! Are you sure he can survive this separation from you? Won’t you languish without your husband’s company? We know of husbands and wives who dote on each other. But we have never heard of such obsession with sensual life. Should you live your life like a dog and become a laughing stock in the society?”

Being friends, they look liberties with her to rile her in this way. With unbearable anguish, Mamata replied, “When a girl is given in marriage, the scriptures say that the husband is her only God. Her redemption lies in obeying him. O friends, you talk to me as if I am an adulteress corrupting a young man.”

Listening to this, her friends laughed louder and taunted her more, “Ha..ha..! Do the scriptures teach you to spend all your days and nights in each other’s company? The scriptures enjoin that husband and wife should get together only at appropriate times. Even animals do not behave so indiscriminately. You are being censured by the whole society. Even if the husband is indiscriminate, a chaste wife’s duty is to instill good sense in him. She should counsel him with scriptural

words and bring him to the right path. There have been many women who have brought about a positive change in their husbands. Are you not an exception?"

Hurt by their callous comments, Mamata Devi cried to the Lord, "O God, You have made me an object of mockery and condemnation. Alas! I have not seen my husband ever engage in righteous acts like *japa, tapas, yajna* or any religious practices. Why have You given him such an ignoble mindset? O God, let him not waste his precious life. Are there really such people in the world so obsessed with carnal pleasures? Scriptures proclaim that a man's salvation lies in conforming to Vedic norms and that of a woman in conforming to her husband's wishes. The moment an act is condemned by society, it is sure to lead to hell. It is because of his attachment to my body that he is loathed and ridiculed by people." Shedding tears of grief and shame, she resolved to find some way of curing his infatuation.

While Mamata Devi was thus pondering over some method to change his ways, Tulasidas sat in the palanquin pining for his wife. Unable to control himself any more, he got off and pleaded and begged before the emperor with some excuse to return home. Having convinced the emperor, he also got some money for expenses and sprinted homeward.

On reaching the house, unable to find his wife in their quarters, he made a frantic search here and there and enquired from his mother of her whereabouts. She retorted, "Why do you get so agitated? She has gone to her parents' house. She will return tomorrow."

Just as a ship coming ashore to anchor is thrown back into the deep waters by the high waves, the time to be cured of his passion and to be plunged into eternal bliss was drawing near for Tulasidas. He left the house with a restless mind. He was powerless in the grip of desire and started racing to Mamata Devi's village like a deer darting from the hunter's net, or like one who leaps to safety after stepping on fire. Driven by infatuation, he strode fast half way, ran half way. Since this was to be the last day of his sensual life and this was to be the day of separation from his wife for ever, the gods in heaven sent down

torrents of rain to purify him. It was a terrifying scene with crashing thunder, blinding lightning and a heavy downpour. Unmindful of nature's wild play, Tulasidas continued to run fast across the slush and swamp. People running for shelter were surprised at Tulasidas dashing away in the rains and vainly tried to stop him. The love-god, being afraid of losing his game soon, aimed powerful arrows at Tulasidas, intensifying his desire. Impelled by frenzy, he cast away all shame. He took off like the wind; his mouth became dry, his upper garment slipped from his shoulder and trailed behind in the slush and his pearl necklace slipped away from his neck. Like Garuda, he seemed to pierce through the wind. He came across the river Yamuna which was in full spate. It was a dark moonless night, thick and black clouds hung above like a canopy casting dark shadows. Furious wind and rain portended doom and an inundating flood swept away the banks.

Even an intrepid hero would beat a hasty retreat from such a situation, but Tulasidas' speed was arrested only for a moment. Looking here and there, he espied a corpse floating on the swelling water. Mistaking it for a raft of wood and holding on to the corpse tightly, he started swimming against the force of the flooded river. The rushing water tossed him hither and thither trying to suck him into its depths. However, the force of his longing imparted to him an astonishing vigour and will to swim fast through the current and reach the other shore.

From there, he set out at a brisk pace towards the house. Alas, upon reaching the house he found that all windows were closed to keep out the lashing rain. He couldn't bear the thought of spending the night alone on the streets. He called out his wife's name loudly, but his voice was drowned in the din of falling rain.

He lamented aloud, "If only she knew I am here in the rain, she will feel miserable. What am I to do now?" He went round and round the house like a madman, looking for an opening. He noticed a window on the top storey slightly ajar. His heart skipped with joy. He forgot all weariness and dejection. While he was wondering how to reach the top, he noticed, by the will of God, a long rope connecting the window and a nearby tree making a convenient bridge. In fact, it was

a snake swinging between the house and the tree. The Lord himself used this ruse to bring the drama of Tulasidas' passionate life to a fitting finale. Although the moment of decision would appear sudden, outer events were laying the groundwork for his transformation. Mistaking the snake for a rope in the dark, he climbed up the tree and catching hold of the snake he heaved himself into the room through the open window.

Breathless with anticipation, he blindly trampled on people who were sleeping in that room and excitedly cried, "O Mamata, my dear, my precious, where are you? You are like a fragrant flower! My beloved, life of my life, paragon of beauty! Where are you?"

People in the room were startled to hear these words. Looking bedraggled, his hair disheveled, his golden-coloured body smeared with thick coating of slush, Tulasidas presented a terrible sight to the eyes of his in-laws. All were frightened to see an apparition in the middle of the night and bolted away.

However, Mamata Devi recognized her husband in the midst of all the confusion and was appalled. She blushed with embarrassment. Realizing that if she remained mute with shame, the situation would get worse, causing her further mortification, she came forward, prostrated to him and spoke courteous words. Oblivious to her plight, he pulled her close to him in the presence of relatives who were crouching in different corners in panic and said to her, "My beloved, my good fortune has come to me in your form! You are the sweetest person in all creation. How could you bear my separation? Please assuage the fire in my heart."

The gathering was disgusted to hear these shameless utterances and left the place hurriedly.

Mamata Devi's discomfiture was intense. To salvage the situation, she diverted his attention by asking, "Swami, how did you manage to reach this room?"

Tulasidas launched into explanation, "O lamp of my lineage! Lustre of my life! I waited outside for quite a while, finding no means of entering the house; then I found a long rope hanging from the side window. Now let us put an end to this talk."

Mamata Devi puzzled by his explanation, pulled him towards the window and said, "How strange! I can't believe that there is such a long rope hanging from the window. Let me take a look at it." Looking down, she was stunned to find a long and thick snake swinging between the window and the branch of a nearby tree.

In great fright she asked her husband, "O Swami, what have you done out of your madness for me? O Lord of my life, your passion for my company has driven you to unimaginable feats. In this terrible wind and lashing rains, you have waded through the flooded rivers, paying no attention to your safety and casting all safety to the wind, you have come up here taking hold of a snake. In your agitation, you strode on the sleeping people and shamelessly gave vent to your ardour."

The invisible hand weaves the fabric of destiny with the thread of outer events. Unaware of the consequences that her words were to produce, she continued, "If you could transfer even a fraction of your infatuation for this bag of flesh and bones to Lord Narayana and shift this affection from me and focus it on the Lord of the universe, He would be highly pleased. He will purify your sullied mind, blow apart your worldliness and bestow on you eternal bliss and an immortal status. He will save you from drowning in the transient joys of the world. Ignoring the fount of perennial joy and disregarding scriptures, why are you enamoured by this foul smelling and filthy body? You have become a laughing stock in the society. Should you not honour the moral precepts and embrace a modicum of dispassion?"

"Our scriptures glorify the illustrious examples of great men like Bhishma and Arjuna. Bhishmacharya was extolled by the great gods in heaven for his vow of life-long celibacy; the gallant warrior Arjuna remained impervious to the charms and temptations of the celestial Ramba, thereby incurring her curse to become a eunuch for a year when the Pandavas lived incognito. Can we even imagine the state of self-restraint of Lord Vigneshwara, who remains without a trace of carnality or the firm detachment of Sri Hanuman? Beware of the intriguing play of the Lord who deludes even the great ascetics and foils their penances through the god of love. Is it possible to speak of the glory of the Lord Siva who reduced the love-god to ashes in a trice?"

“It is indeed difficult to slay the mad elephant of lust. How does one learn the trick to control the turbulent mind stricken with passion? The demons lost their share of celestial nectar by their desire for a woman. Our epics are replete with examples of losers like Yayati and Pandu in the game of sensory cravings. There is no doubt that lack of mind control is the cause of bondage, misery, disease, sorrow and death. The mighty elephant falls into the trap lured by the she-elephant and becomes a slave in the service of human beings. In history, we have never heard of a person lost in sense-pleasures getting uplifted.” ▲

Joy Ride

Alan Jacobs

Joyful jubilation is the jester's song,
Sweet tonic to right all doleful wrong.
From the heart it rings a cheerful chime,
And rescues mind from dull depressive time.
So roar from the roof tops with all one's might,
God shines from His heaven and all is right!
Bury sad melancholy in a deep black hole,
And much sooner save poor suffering soul.
Laughter makes us loose all worry and care,
So unbutton one's coat and let down one's hair!
The world's not a place for shame or for woe,
That's a very quick route to hell as we know.
'Row, row, row, the boat gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily for life is but a dream'!

108 Sonnets for Awakening – and Selected Poems by Alan Jacobs is available from Mantra Books (www.mantra-books.net) John Hunt Publishing Ltd.



D. Thyagarajan

TRANSLATION

Arunachala Purana

Chapter Four

In Which Parvati Devi Masked the Divine Eyes

SAIVA ELLAPPA NAVALAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Many crores there were of followers of the path of *kriya* with their devotees, performing pujas, the first of which is to the sun, according to the prescribed rules laid down by the Saiva Agamas, and chanting with joyful heart the Holy Five Syllables of [Lord Siva], first among [all] the gods. (310)

Many crores there were also of yogis, true experts in the practice of *yama* and *niyama*, the various kinds of *asanas*, lofty *pranayama* and *pratyahara*, *dharana*, dhyana and samadhi. (311)

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>.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Having observed the various practices of those great *tapasvins*, She was delighted to see a small tank set in a grove of mango trees and fed by cool streams, and made her way to the dwelling of the [sage] Gautama. (312)

Upon her arrival, Ahalya and her son [Sadananda], came forward to greet and praise Lady Uma. Returning their greetings, She asked, “Where is Gautama, learned in the Vedas, and foremost of rishis?” to which Sadananda replied, “Father has gone to gather *darbha* grass and flowers.” (313)

He went on to say, “[You who are like] nectar from the sugarcane, if You will deign to remain just a little while in the humble hut of a simple soul such as I, I will bring him here.” With these words, Sadananda paid homage to Her feet, and went off to (find) the one who had fathered him. (314)

Meanwhile, whilst Sadananda was on his way, Gautama had gathered *darbha* grass, and was returning, surrounded by eminent sages; looking at the grove of trees, and seeing that it was quite glorious with all the trees in full flower, as if they were the flowering trees of heaven itself, he even began to doubt if it was his own grove at all. (315)

“What [great] person can have come to this place?” he enquired of Parasara,¹ Atri² and [Bhrigu],³ he who cursed Vishnu to be born ten times on earth. Even as he questioned them about this strange happening, he saw his son and asked, “What has just happened? Tell me!” (316)

“Father, listen: She who is the great Light that gave birth to the gods themselves has come!” he said, prostrating before his father.

¹ *Parasara* was the grandson of *Vasistha* and the father of *Vyasa*.

² *Atri* and *Bhrigu* are two of the *prajapatis*, fathered from the mind of Brahma to help him with the work of creation. See v. 85.

³ According to one of the Puranic accounts, Visnu was cursed by *Bhrigu* to undergo ten incarnations on earth after cutting off the head of his wife. See v.100.

“What *tapas* could have brought to our poor hut Her whom even the Vedas seek, [whose form is that of the primordial sound] *nada*? What *tapas*? What *tapas*?” exclaimed Gautama. (317)

Gautama rushed to his son and embraced him, sniffing the crown of his head (affectionately). He danced up and down and sang out loud, bathing in a deep ocean of joy. Throwing the *kusa* grass he had gathered to the ground he cried out, “All our karma has been destroyed, roots and all!” (318)

Atri and all the rishis joined their palms above their heads, dancing for joy. Reaching the place where She was, whose form is *jnana*, and seeing Her before their very eyes, they threw themselves down at those feet that are caught in the net of devotion. (319)

“From that (first) day to this, the Vedas all have ever proclaimed that You are a virgin, and that the Lord is a *brahmacari*. [Yet] all the living beings of the world have their origin in You and call You Mother. Who could ever comprehend your greatness? (320)

“In the beginning You beget the Eternal One himself. Yet as Sakti it is You who proceed from Him. Taking on the nature of Siva-Sakti, You engender all living things. Who could have the power to know You in your non-dual nature? (321)

“Since the Supreme Reality manifests as Mahesvara, Hara, Brahma and Vishnu, you in turn manifest as dark[-eyed] Mahesvari, Uma, Sarasvati and Lakshmi, and not only these. Whatever form He assumes, You assume your form accordingly. Who could ever aspire to know you?” (322)

Thus did the great rishis stand praising with melting heart Her whose waist is like a *vanci* creeper. Then, as Gautama approached, She started to raise her hands in worshipful greeting, but before She could do so, he prostrated himself at her two feet, which resemble lotus blossoms. (323)

Gautama, whose devotion was great, made obeisance to Mother [Parvati] and joyfully enquired, “What virtuous act might I have

performed, that your two feet, which even Brahma and the Guardians of the Eight Directions would find impossible to have placed upon their heads, should step within my lowly hut this day?” (324)

To this She who is like a young creeper replied, “My son, spear-bearing Murugan, and elephant(-headed) Ganesha are my recourse [in times of need]; should that fail, I can always come to you, whose thoughts dwell lovingly upon me, to ease my trouble.” (325)

Then She spoke again, explaining, as if [reading from] a written account, all that had come to pass in accordance with Lord Siva’s instructions. When She who is the mother of all had finished speaking, the rishi who once cursed Indra⁴ with a thousand eyes⁵ replied: (326)

“This holy place is the foremost of all holy places. Its name is *Sthaleswara*.⁶ It is the most exalted (of all). Here a single virtuous act will become many. If You perform true *tapas* here, the Lord will manifest (in the sky) above you mounted upon a white bull and graciously grant You the left half of Himself. (327)

“Vishnu, Brahma the [eight] Vasus, Indra and countless sages have set up a hermitage and completed their matchless *tapas* here. The time and place is propitious. Performance [of *tapas* here] will surely come to fruition.” Thus did he speak. The young maiden who is the root and first cause [of all things] replied, “Then it is here I shall complete [my *tapas*].” (328)

Speaking with affection and dismissing Gautama and all the other rishis, She had a hut of palmyra leaves built on the eastern slopes of the Red Mountain, and with joyful heart set the Seven Mothers⁷ to

⁴ *Catamakan*, Sanskrit *Satamakha* refers to Indra as the performer of a hundred horse sacrifices. See v. 215, note 30.

⁵ See v. 216, note 32 for *Gautama*’s curse upon Indra.

⁶ *Taleccaram*, Sanskrit, *Sthaleswara*, literally the *Supreme god of sthalas*.

⁷ The seven mothers are *Brahmani*, *Vaisnavi*, *Mahesvari*, *Indrani*, *Kaumari*, *Varahi*, and *Camunti*. As their names show, they are each related to a specific male deity, *Brahmani* to *Brahma* and so on, except for *Camunti* who represents a fearsome aspect of *Devi* herself.

guard the rear, lovingly stationed the Eight Bhairavas⁸ to willingly guard the entrances in the four directions and placed her two sons on guard at either side, with Durga on watch within. (329)

Forming her hair into the matted locks of an ascetic and spreading them out; wearing strings of *rudraksha* beads on her fair arms, at her ears and around her neck; taking off her silk dress, which was like the sloughed skin of a rearing serpent, and dressing herself in bark stripped from a tree; smearing her whole body with the holy ash that grants victory; placing one toe upon a bright spike, heated upon the fire, and fixing her mind upon the holy feet of the Lord day and night, She who gave birth to the world performed great and arduous *tapas*. (330)

Seeing her slender, creeper-like waist bent over as She performed blissful *tapas* amidst the [five] fires, Saraswati covered her eyes and trembled, growing weak and faint; her mind in confusion, she stood by in floods of tears. Lakshmi, who sits upon the lotus, fell to the ground weeping, suffering and mentally distressed. All living beings were deeply moved, their hearts melting and melting (in compassion). But what need is there to go over it again and again? If the mother feels pain, will not all the offspring in her womb feel pain too? (331)

In the season of early dew She remained immersed in the chilly tank with just her head above water, like a lotus blossom not scorched [by the sun's heat]. In the season of late dew She would seek out very cold places. Even in the heavy rains She remained unmoved, enduring it as if She were a fish, performing the arduous *tapas* that was essential until She might attain the [left] side of Her Beloved. To that place

⁸ *Vairavar*, Sanskrit *Bhairava*, is a wrathful incarnation of Lord Siva, who manifested originally to punish *Brahma* for boasting that he was himself the supreme creator. Here he is cited in the plural form, since he has eight manifestations, the names of which are given in v. 345. In Tamil Nadu he is often presented as a *grama devata* — village deity who safeguards the devotees in all eight directions.

MOUNTAIN PATH

came Brahma, tall Mal who sleeps upon the serpent, and the rest of the gods, approaching the hermitage which was the abode of the Vedas themselves. (332)

When Parvati had respectfully greeted Vishnu and the rest of the gods, saying, "Please tell me the reason for your coming here," they explained in detail how they had suffered and become helpless due to [the *asura*] Mahisa. Parvati then said to Durga, "You must go at once and slay Mahisa on the battlefield with your bright sword, destroying his power!" to which Durga, making obeisance, replied, "That shall I do!" Having heard the reply of Mother Parvati, the gods took their leave. (333)

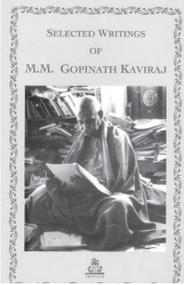
I have told how She who wears beautiful bangles performed faultless *tapas* in the hermitage of Gautama. Now I shall tell how [Mahisa], he with the great buffalo head, was slain, and [Parvati] gained the left side of the Supreme Effulgence who rides the white bull.' (334)



ASHRAM CALENDER 2013

Pongal	Monday	14th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Sunday	27th January
Sundaram Iyer Day	Saturday	2nd March
Maha Sivaratri	Sunday	10th March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	15th March
Sri Rama Navami	Thursday	21st March
Telugu New Year Day	Thursday	11th April
Tamil New Year Day	Sunday	14th April
Sri Bhagavan's 63rd Aradhana	Tuesday	7th May
Maha Puja	Sunday	2nd June
Cow Lakshmi Day	Thursday	20th June
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Monday	22nd July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Sunday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Saturday	5th October
Saraswati Puja	Sunday	13th October
Vijayadasami	Monday	14th October
Deepavali	Sunday	3rd November
Karthigai Festival Commences	Friday	8th November
Karthigai Deepam	Sunday	17th November
Sri Bhagavan's 134th Jayanti	Thursday	19th December

BOOK REVIEWS



SELECTED WRITINGS OF M.M. GOPINATH KAVIRAJ. Indica Books, D40/18, Godowlia, Varanasi 221001. 2006. Rs250, pp205. ISBN: 81-86569-57-X www.indicabooks.com

All scholars and lovers of Indian Philosophy will welcome again the appearance in English of the selected articles of Gopinath Kaviraj (1887-1976); had Indica Books included the dates and places of their original publication, congratulations would have been unreserved. Kaviraj was universally acclaimed during his lifetime for his scholarly command of every field of Indian philosophy; he was conferred *Mahamahopadhyaya* in 1934, India's highest accolade for Sanskrit scholarship, and awarded the *Padmavibhusana* in 1964, among numerous honours.

What distinguished Kaviraj was not only his scholarship; he combined unequalled depth of knowledge and breadth of field with spiritual insight (*pratibha*) based on his own high attainments, which made him unique among scholars and gave his work the superb critical clarity, synoptic view, and balance of judgment that made his works landmarks in the field. His presentation of ideas was cogent and logical, his English style graceful and clear; this made him a pleasure to read, a trait rarely encountered in scholars. His work places him in that handful of native scholars, like Mysore Hiriyanna, S.B. Dasgupta, S.K. De, Ganaganatha Jha and T.R.V. Murti, who are in the very forefront of Indian philosophical scholarship.

Kaviraj had a brilliant academic career, obtaining his M.A. degree in 1913 from the University of Allahabad, with record marks in the First Division, an extraordinary achievement when a First in Sanskrit from Allahabad was unthinkable. In 1914 he was appointed head of the Saraswati Bhavan Library, India's richest repository of Sanskrit manuscripts, and undertook publication of its rare Mss., along with critical studies of them. These priceless texts, comprising some of the foundational works of Indian philosophy, were published in the famous 'twin' series of *The Princess of Wales Saraswati Bhavan Texts* and *Studies* between the years 1922 and 1945. Their publication helped lay the textual foundation for modern Indian

philosophical scholarship, especially in *Samkhya*, *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, *Nathism*, and *Sakta Tantra*.

Like Plato, Kaviraj saw scholarship not as an end in itself but as a guide toward spiritual fulfillment, and he held that Indian philosophy was ultimately valourised by the goal of *moksha* common to all schools. He believed the evolution of Indian thought owed its origin to the intuitive insight (*pratibha*) of its greatest *rishis* and seers (*kavis*), who actually saw and realized the Truth or Reality. His overall view of Indian philosophy rested on his belief in the fundamental importance of spiritual intuition (*prajna* or *pratibha*), as incorporated in the various *darshanas*, and described in the *Yogasutras* as illuminating simultaneously every aspect of life and thought (*Yogasutras*, III.54). Kaviraj's article on *The Doctrine of Pratibha in Indian Philosophy*, included here, examines the role of *pratibha* in the various schools and is considered the finest presentation of this subject ever written.

Kaviraj's fame rests on the twin pillars of Yoga and Tantra, in both of which he was considered India's foremost authority. He thought that yoga constituted the distinctive bedrock of Indian spirituality, and hence of philosophy, and that its basic principles and practices formed the matrix of praxes underlying all orthodox (*astika*) schools. On the heterodox (*nastika*) side, Buddhism also showed evidence of being a *yoga marga*; the Buddha repeatedly emphasised meditation, and the last three steps of his eightfold path (*astangika-marga*) concern cultivation of *samyaka samadhi*, and generation of the four trance states that eventually lead to nirvana. Also, the transformational, intuitive knowledge (*prajna*, *pratibha*) arising from meditation is described similarly in Buddhist and Yoga texts: there is a noticeable correspondence between some *Sarvastivada* texts and the *Yoga-bhasya* of Vyasa. Kaviraj even thought it likely that *anapana-sati* (Pali, mindfulness of the breath), one of Buddhism's oldest practices, was originally done with a *bija*.

Kaviraj's brilliant, synoptic view of yoga was informed by his contact with great saints, especially his guru, Sri Paramahansa Vishuddhananda of Benares, an *ishvarakoti siddha* of enormous powers. He made Kaviraj see yoga as the science of consciousness (or mind) in the broadest terms, extending from the biomechanical level of vital energy in the body, to the luminous essence of pure intelligence (*visuddha sattva*) that was the locus and medium of enlightenment, and that consciousness at each level is correlated with a specific reality, as described in the yoga shastra. Thus the yoga darshana was not only a comprehensive theoretical construct for inducing the soterial transformation of consciousness (*siddhanta*), but also a practical method of achieving this (*sadhana*).

Kaviraj was a peerless master of *Tantra*, classified as *Agama* (lit., ‘the flow, that which has come down’), that body of sacred scripture, considered canonical, which has been passed down from guru to disciple, apart from the Vedas and Upanishads (*Nigama*); it is divided into *Vaishnava* texts, called *Samhitas*, and *Saiva* and *Sakti* texts, called *tantras*; the *Agama* and *Nigama* are the twin sources of all Indian philosophy. Kaviraj considered that *tantra*, like yoga, was the common property of all Indian schools, and that its defining principles of guru, mantra and *upasana* were present in each, while in *Vajrayana Buddhism* their prominent role is unarguable.

In the *Agama*, Kaviraj was particularly renowned for his pioneering work on *Kasmiri Saivism* and *Saktadvaita*, that school of *Advaita* that emphasises, in contrast to Sankara, the dynamic nature of *Brahman*, and is identified with Mother worship and *Sri Vidya upasana* (sometimes termed *Advaita bhakti*). His masterful article on *Sakta Philosophy* included here, appeared previously in *Aspects of Indian Thought*, an anthology of Kaviraj’s articles published by the University of Burdwan in 1966, as a tribute to him. (It is a great pity that Indica has not given the original dates and sources of the articles it has reprinted; it has even edited one and deleted a footnote from another without acknowledgement, a breach of internationally-accepted canons of scholarship).

After the *mahasamadhi* of his guru in 1937, Kaviraj retired from professional life to devote himself increasingly to spiritual practice. A group of devoted scholars and seekers gathered around him, while he continued to publish some of his best work. He also deepened his connection with Sri Anandamayi Ma, who returned his devotion with equal respect for his scholarship. To her great credit, she supported Kaviraj during the closing years of his life, providing him a place to stay at her ashram in Benares, where Kaviraj ended his days. Theirs is a touching story of mutual appreciation between a great saint and a great scholar, whose interests converged in spiritual life as lived, which it is after all the final purpose of great scholarship to enhance. Alas, of how many saints and scholars in modern India could such a relationship be predicated today, or be thought even possible?

Kaviraj’s appreciation of Ma, included here, is one of the finest treatments in English of grace and divine embodiment, and originally appeared in the collection of articles devoted to her, called *Mother As Seen By Her Devotees*. Kaviraj’s magisterial account of her ineffable mystical stature is a moving tribute to them both, and fittingly closes this

selection of his studies published by Indica. (In preparation of this review the following booklet has been consulted: *Gopinath Kaviraj* by G.C. Pande New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1989). — Ram Brown Crowell

THE I AM PRINCIPLE The Christ Within by Rev. Father Charles Ogada. Pbk. O Books 2011. 152p.£10.99, \$19.95. ISBN:

The Christ Within is the subtitle of this important book by Fr. Charles Ogada. For the very first time, since Father Henri Le Saux (Abhishektananda) and Dom Bede Griffiths, an active Roman Catholic Priest has written an easily readable and most powerful book proving beyond any doubt, by scriptural chapter, verse, insights and commentary, that Jesus was essentially a non-dual teacher. Father Ogada is well versed in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, and the spiritual teachings of great *jnanis* in this tradition, so he is well equipped to bring a trained, well-furnished theological mind to bear upon this question. He has spent considerable time researching Hinduism in India including a stay at Arunachala.

He describes his own profound non-dual experience in the African jungle at the age of seventeen. He eventually became a Spiritan, receiving his final training for the priesthood at their theological college, and this book represents the fruit of his twenty years of spiritual research. He himself had realised the central I AM Principle deep in his heart and was convinced that was the true meaning of the Christ Within. In several well-ordered Parts and Chapters he expands this revelation by many references to Christ's words, life and teachings. He also points the way to an experiential understanding of this thesis through his own practice of Silence.

I recommend this book as essential reading for those sincere Christians who find difficulty in fully reconciling the teachings of the orthodox Christian churches with the teachings of non-dualism. This book will solve that problem for them in a learned and most convincing way. — Alan Jacobs

A SIMPLE AND EASY WAY TO SEE GOD Rs.175. ISBN: 978-81-207-6006-6; MANTRAS FOR PEACE OF MIND price not given. ISBN: 978-93-80743-23-3; LESSONS LIFE HAS TAUGHT ME price not given. ISBN: 978-93-80743-21-9; THE GOAL OF LIFE AND HOW TO ATTAIN IT price not given. ISBN: 978-93-80743-17-2. All titles by J.P. Vaswani. Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411001 gph@sadhuvaswani.org

Sadhu J.P. Vaswani is well-known and revered in spiritual circles. A person of great sincerity and integrity, he oversees and inspires The Sadhu Vaswani Mission, an organization that helps others and propagates the sanatana dharma. For more than four decades he has actively spread the universal message of love and peace. His joy and faith is palpable to all who come into his presence.

He is a fervent believer in vegetarianism, and at last count, has authored over seventy books and counting on practical spirituality, happiness and non-violent living. He is a living exemplar of love and service in the world. Though his books may seem a lot too simple they have a depth and practicality patently lacking in many an erudite treatise.

For Sadhu Vaswani the training of the heart is the most important practice a sadhaka undertakes. One of his best known statements which he tirelessly repeats is: "If you want to be happy, make others happy!"

For purposes of this review I intend to focus on just one of the above books, *Mantras for Peace of Mind*. For those who think that a mantra is the best way forward to cultivate peace of mind and purity of heart, Dadaji lays out a clear and simple way to approach and understand mantras. He says the main benefits of a mantra are: first, it confers peace of mind, calmness and freedom from needless tension and anxiety; second, it creates the safe feeling of connecting with a higher power. Third, it gives the power to conquer negative thinking and lower sense-desires. Fourth, it generates a new spiritual energy that defuses past *samskaras* and clears the mind of accrued *vasanas*. Fifth, the constant chanting or remembrance takes us closer to our guru or *isthadevata* and sixth, the mantra assists us to achieve the four goals of human life, namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

Dadaji then proceeds to examine and explain the benefits of all the major mantras which are commonly used to help *sadhaks*. Guru mantra, Ganapati mantra, Gayatri mantra, Ram Nam, Pranava mantra, the Panchakshara mantra, Abhyaroha mantra from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad*, Shanti mantra are all discussed and valuable tips and the rationale of each particular mantra are succinctly given.

Of *Om Nama Sivaya*, Dadaji writes, "[It] is not only a powerful mantra that can help us realise the goal; it is a mantra that can be chanted for cleansing the inner *kosas*, and to connect with the innermost self within us. It is said that reciting this mantra can free us from the necessity to perform rites and rituals; when this mantra begins to vibrate in our consciousness, we effortlessly attain oneness with the divine within us." — T.V. Ramamurthy ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

S. Gopalakrishnan



Karthigai Deepam

The annual 10-day Karthigai Deepam festival began with the hoisting of flag at Sri Arunachaleswarar Temple on Sunday the 18th November. Amid chanting of devotional slogans, Vedic hymns and reverberating music of traditional instruments, the *kodi* (flag) was hoisted atop the golden mast in front of the main shrine dedicated to Lord Arunachaleswarar. The police made elaborate security arrangements for all the main events.

The festival underscores how all the five elements, earth, water, air, space and fire, combined to make a light that symbolises eternal, pure awareness. The first day of the festival began with the lighting of five earthen lamps within the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Arunachaleswarar temple. The priests joined the five lamps into one to symbolise the union of the elements.

The principal festival event in the town was the large chariot procession which took place on the seventh day of the festival. It required a full day for the huge car pulled by devotees with heft ropes and large chains to circumambulate the main temple complex.

The *Maha Deepam* was celebrated on November 27 and attracted thousands of devotees to the main temple and inner courtyard. On the final day there was the ritual of lighting the *Bharani Deepam* (morning flame) which took place in the *garbhagriha* (inner sanctum) of the Sri Arunachaleswarar temple at about four am. Inside the temple, the *akhandam deepam* (eternal flame) was lit to the accompaniment of *nadaswaram* and drums. The air was saturated with the rendition of *Thevaram* verses by *oduvars* (temple singers). A priest carried the lamp around the precincts and to the shrine of Sri Apitakuchambal. Numerous devotees who rose early in the morning to have darshan of the *Bharani Deepam*, hailed '*Annamalaiyanukku Aroharu*'. These events preceded the lighting of the *Maha Deepam* atop the hill in the evening.

Light, symbolic of knowledge and enlightenment, carries special significance during the Tamil month of Karthigai in November-December. Small earthen lamps are placed on door-steps and balconies of family homes every evening.

Tamils across India celebrate the holy festival of Karthigai Deepam. Many believe Karthigai Deepam is the most ancient festival in the history of Tamil Nadu. Numerous references about it can be found in *Sangam* literature. The lighting of the humble *agal* (flame) has a spiritual significance. The lamp oil symbolises the three *gunas* on which the wick (*ahankara* or ego) thrives. The flame stands for the fire of knowledge which burns up our *karma*. The tiny lamps stand for harmony and prosperity. Arunachala is fittingly hailed as the *agni kshetram*, or the holy place of fire, where Lord Siva is worshipped as an infinite column of light that has no beginning or end, *lingodbhava*.

After the flag raising ceremony on the first day of the festival, the brass cauldron is slowly taken to the top of Arunachala. The vessel, ten feet in height and five feet in diameter, was carried on poles by temple staff. Once set in place on top the hill, the cauldron was filled with tins of ghee and butter brought up by devotees. The cauldron is believed to have the capacity to hold some three tons of ghee. The special cloth wick, strands of twisted fibre, measures about three hundred metres and is designed to burn for ten days, and is visible throughout a radius of about twenty km. The wick was constructed by members of a clan called *Deepa Nattars* who hail from fishermen communities. The clan is also responsible for lighting and maintaining the *Maha Deepam* wick. This is one occasion, when the entire town population takes its cue from the temple. When the beacon light appears on the hill top at sunset, at the time the moon rises and the sun sets round 6pm, the residents follow suit and the entire town bursts into a flood of light. Lamps are lit in the temple and across the town and surrounding villages. Devotees who were circumambulating Arunachala turned towards the flame and folded their hands above their heads and hailed '*Annamalaiyanukku Arohara*'.

It was reported that approximately one and half million people performed *giripradakshina* or *girivalam* on *Maha Deepam* day.

Arunachaleswara performs *girivalam* only twice annually, once at Pongal and the other, just after Kartigai Deepam. On Thursday, 29th November, Arunachaleswara left the temple in the early morning and reached the Ashram at 9am. Ashram devotees gathered at the front

gate for special darshan, as the Lord graciously stopped in front of the ashram for traditional worship.

Vedic Chanting

For each of the ten days of the Deepam festival, Ashram devotees had the opportunity to hear the fourth *kanda* of the Krishna Yajur Veda in *ghanam* mode chanted by twenty-two ghanapaatis from Trichy, Coimbatore, Chennai and Tiruvannamalai. *Ghanaparayanam* is the most elevated and advanced of the Vedic chanting modes. Few pundits are well-versed with its knotty sequences. The programme, organised by the Ashram Veda Patasala teacher, Sri Senthil Natha Ganapaatigal, also included talks by Sri Nochur Venkataraman and chanting programmes of Sama Veda and Rig Veda *Ghanaparayana*.

Obituary

Smt. Vinaya S Shanbhag, President Sri Ramana Seva Sangha of Kumta expired on the 24th August after a brief illness. She worked as a teacher in the Gibb High School at Kumta and retired as its Head Mistress. She earned a state award for her service in the cause of education. She started the construction of Sri Ramana Mandir in Kumta and donated generously for the purpose. May she attain the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan.



Helga Kaldorf was absorbed in Arunachala on the early afternoon, of the 23rd October, during Saraswathi Puja day of the Navaratri celebrations. Originally from Germany, she settled in Palakothu,



behind Sri Ramanasramam in 1974 at Paul Brunton's former residence. She became the custodian of the Agastya Ganapati temple adjacent to the Palakothu tank, where the very first *bhiksha* was performed after the samadhi of Bhagavan's mother. She organized the temple renovation and maintained the temple with daily pujas and regular feeding of sadhus. ▲