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Ramana Ashtottaram

87. ओ पावकोज्ज्वलाय नमः

oṁ pāvakojjvalāya namaḥ
Prostration to the brilliant flame of jnana.

Bhagavan, well settled in his last earthly abode, burns steadily like a flame in a windless place and never swerves from Self-knowledge. Bhagavan is a flame which burns steadily, purifies whatever it touches and transforms it into fuel. Approaching this fire, one is caught up in it and becomes a part of this continuous process of burning. In true living, awareness is a steady fire and action only feeds and becomes awareness, as fuel turns to heat and light.

88. ओ दर्शनादयसंहारिणे नमः

oṁ darśanādaghasaṁhāriṇe namaḥ
Prostration to the one whose very sight destroys impurity.

By his very presence, Bhagavan’s exemplary state of lucid sattvic energy would destroy and transform the dark impurities in the minds and hearts of those who came with the right spirit of humility into His holy presence for darshan. Even today at His samadhi at the ashram it is clear there is a palpable presence (sannidhi) which purifies all who seek guidance and consolation.
Loss

Just as morning follows night, gain inevitably follows loss. At each important stage of our lifespan we leave behind a part of us who we identified with and step into a new sense of identity. Life is a series of alternations between expansion and contraction. Though we may desire just the positive and dread the negative, the impersonal current of our existence inexorably moves by laws over which we have little or no control. Our destiny is already pre-ordained according to Bhagavan, it is just a question of whether we identify with the prarabdha of our body-mind complex or not.

In Advaita there are three basic viewpoints. The vyavaharika in which we see the world and presume there is a creator. There is a sense of duality and isolation and we learn of the existence of something greater that gives us immortality. The phenomenon of existence is due to the play of maya, which is the sakti of Isvara or God. The pratibhasika says the world, the soul and God are all established by
the seer or jiva and do not have any independent existence. The third is the \textit{paramarthika}, also known as \textit{ajatavada} which means that there was no existence in the first place. There is no seeking something new, there is no bondage or liberation.

When we address loss and gain it is from the first viewpoint, \textit{vyavaharika}, the relative or empirical, that we speak. In the other two views the question does not arise. For most of us the world can be nothing but implacably real however we spin our story. But why are we involved with the physical, emotional and mental worlds that come with being a human being? Why then do we suffer excruciating hurt on whatever physical, emotional or mental level that we identify with when it may seem that we are not in any way at fault ourselves? There are various explanations of karma but in our immediate agony they are of little consolation. Ordinarily it is time that heals more than anything. Grace too, if we are so blessed, plays its part in soothing the ravages of searing pain.

The greatest emotional and mental pain we can endure is the loss of a loved one: be it a mother, a father, a daughter or a son, a brother or a sister, a husband or a wife, or a dear friend. There is no avoiding that even if we have not already done so, one day we will face a wall of fire. We can neither avoid the fact nor can we prepare for it in any way that may alleviate the harshest aspects of the ordeal.

Many people came to Bhagavan for solace and an explanation as to why they had to suffer. Sometimes Bhagavan would offer the consolation of philosophy, sometimes he would listen to their story and enquire of the details and sometimes he would say nothing as if he did not hear. But sometimes he would respond with such irresistible compassion it would break the shackles of ache that twists the heart and then he could overwhelm the bereaved with waves of grace that scour clean the trauma. Bhagavan is just as inscrutable as is Life.

It is often asked why. Why has someone been taken before their time; why has someone gone who had so much to give; why has someone been taken from us who gave our life meaning. There is no answer as we normally know it. We cannot see the larger picture and we cannot understand the complexity of Life and its unfolding.
Arthur Osborne once described life in terms of an analogy of sitting in a boat going down a stream without any idea of its course and without knowing what bends or falls loom ahead. The only one who could know all that he said, was one who was sitting on a hill overlooking the stream and seeing exactly where the travellers were going. We live with approximations and our understanding is fragmentary. Though we have religious, scientific, social and personal explanations but none of them are ultimately satisfactory because death is implacable. It is final; it is unresponsive to our pleas, fantasies and demands. It is unique to our cultivated consciousness of that moment.

It is said that when the Vedic gods had to choose one who would be responsible for the proceedings of death they chose Yama because he was the most righteous of the gods and for that sense of justice he was also called Dharma. Yama is portrayed as a teacher and in the Katha Upanisad teaches Nachiketas the secrets of reality. Though Yama can be overruled by Siva or Visnu, as say in the story of Markandeya, the exception proves the rule. Thus one can say, no one can stop the time of our departure from this world.

If we bear this in mind we realise that when a soul leaves this world, it is their time for whatever higher purpose it may serve for them and their evolution. Though we would dearly wish it otherwise the best we can do is wish them well on their journey, after all it is their life and though we can be heart-broken, it is our heart that has the lesson to learn: nothing belongs to us; naked we came into the world and naked we will leave it.

There is the profound prayer in the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad: om asato ma sad gamaya / tamaso ma jyotir gamaya / mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya / om santi santi santih. Lead us from the unreal to the real; / Lead us from darkness to light; / Lead us from death to immortality; / Let there be peace peace peace.

What we do repeatedly is to confuse the real with the unreal; light with darkness and immortality with death. There is no peace in confusion and misunderstanding and to ask the rules of the universe to
be bent for us is absurd. It is we who have to change and not the laws which govern existence. We can learn and adapt or we are doomed to repeat the same pattern to no great purpose: banging our head against the wall gives us a headache. Nothing more.

One of the great changes in our lives now is how we seek information. More and more we turn to the Internet and punch in relevant words and wait for a jungle of alternatives to appear. Knowledge once so hard to obtain is now at our finger tips. The velocity of our thought and communication increases rapidly with each succeeding year. The day is not far coming when we will have a chip implanted into either our brain or body in general, that can respond to our questions. The whole question of knowledge is changing radically. No longer will the search for understanding be driven by the inaccessibility of facts and the time taken to acquire it. We no longer have to wander the world in a quest for satisfactory answers. The overriding question then is what is knowledge? What makes us human and not machines?

Even science today has moved so far from its original premise of hard cold facts being the basis of reality, that it is now seeking for answers in areas where answers have already been provided to spiritual seekers. The old creed of science and its philosophy of utility would tell us we are but nothing more than billiard-balls randomly bouncing off each other. How else would it survive unless it feeds on our incredulity that this material existence is all there is? We intuitively know there is more; we do know there is a transcendental principle.

Death is a prerequisite of that knowledge which defines us not as machines but essential living entities who are consciously interlinked in ways we cannot even begin to fathom and who are transformed from time to time. It is not for nothing that Yama the lord of Death is also called Kala, time. Death is both a catalyst and a reassurance that transformation is a natural and essential aspect of life. Without it, life would be meaningless. It would be a frozen wasteland of repetition. In short, it would be mechanical.
What we need to do is not acquire more and more facts as if that leads to wisdom but to develop our understanding of consciousness. Bhagavan gives us a key and it is up to us to use it. His grace and the power of Arunachala are freely available; in truth, we are swimming in it if we but knew.

One of the mysteries of 20th century Western classical music is the thirty year silence of Jean Sibelius, the great Finnish composer. He was at the height of his powers and then he stopped. Though he worked for over a decade on an eagerly anticipated Eighth Symphony he never allowed the public to see it. In the mid-forties he collected all his papers and burned them in the fireplace of his isolated forest home, called Ainola. After the conflagration, his wife who helplessly stood by said he became calmer as if a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders, heavy with the expectation of others. He died some fifteen years later, at the age of ninety-one.

When he was writing one of his best known works, the Fifth Symphony, and in particular the second movement, he wrote in his diary, “Every day I have seen the cranes. Flying south in full cry with their music. Have been yet again their most assiduous pupil. Their cries echo throughout my being.” He called it one of his greatest experiences: their beauty as they circled over him and vanished into the sun “like a gleaming, silver ribbon.”

One September morning in 1957, he went for his usual walk in the fields and the surreal quiet of the uninhabited forest around Ainola, scanning the skies for the white cranes flying south on their annual migration. It was part of his autumn ritual. The cranes fittingly appeared, and he told his wife, “There they come, the birds of my youth!” It is said that one of them broke from the flock, circled the house, cried out, and flew away to join the others on their long journey south. Two days later he left this world.

For those who are now gone from this world we do not wish them to stay but rather we actively wish them well on their journey as we would wish others to pray for us and not hold us back on our journey with tears of regret.
Saivism, which believes in the supremacy of Lord Siva, is one of the cults of Hinduism from days of yore and continues to be practised in Modern Hinduism. It is one of the Shanmathas (six schools of worship).¹

The Svetasvatara Upanishad considers Siva as the paramount deity. Over a period of time, different schools of Saivism took form such as the Pashupathas, Dasnamisannyasins, Kapalikas, Veerasaivas, Naths and a host of other variants. Though each school glorifies Siva in its own inimitable style, all these schools believe in the same ultimate aim of attaining ‘Sivahood’ or oneness with Siva by severing the bond confining the individual soul with the material world. In the Southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Saivism was at its peak, so to say, between the 6th century and 12th century AD. If the sixty

¹ Shanmathas includes worship of Ganapati, Subrahmanya, Siva, Sakti, Vishnu and Surya.

Savitthri Krishnan is a devotee of Bhagavan and resides in Bangalore.
three Tamil saints, the Nayanmars, instituted a highly philosophical Saiva-Siddhantam sect in Tamil Nadu, the Lingayats or Siva Saranas established the socially distinctive sect Veerashaivism in Karnataka.

While the profound devotion filled expressions of the Nayanmars are available in *Tirumurai* (comprising the *Thevaram*, *Tiruvachagam*, *Tirukovayar*, *Tirumandiram* and the *Periyapuranam*) in Tamil, that of the Siva Saranas are found in vachanas. Vachanas literally mean ‘sayings’ or the sacred hymns in Kannada which are the outpourings, mostly in simple words of mystical experiences. Brevity maybe said to be the soul of vachanas! Metaphysical experiences of the highest order are described lucidly in a style that appeals to the ordinary mortals in as much as it does to the pedants.

Veerasaivism or Lingayatism is said to have been founded by Sri Basavanna in the 12th century in Karnataka, though some believe that it already existed and that Basavanna only formalised it. Lingayats worship Siva in the form of Siva Linga as their only deity. Basavanna, widely regarded as the incarnation of Nandi, the bull of Lord Siva, was a *brahmin* by birth and a great saint, philosopher, social reformer and an astute minister. He strongly revolted against the then prevalent caste system. Legend has it that Lord Siva appeared in his dream and initiated him to create a casteless society of Siva followers.

The credit of shaping the Lingayat sect and enriching it with their rich vachanas also goes to other visionaries like Allamaprabhu, Akkamahadevi, Channabasavanna (nephew of Basavanna and a stalwart Veerasaiva) and a host of other Siva Saranas. However Allama, Basavanna and Akkamahadevi are normally referred to as the ‘Trinity of Veerasaivism’.

Allamaprabhu is one of the greatest mystics of all times, a spiritual giant, a great yogi and a vachana-poet extraordinary. In Veerasaiva literary works, he is described as *maya kolahala* meaning the conqueror of Illusion and an incarnation of Lord Siva. He is the void or

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2 *Thevarams* are by Appar, Jnanasambandhar and Sundaramurti; *Tiruvachagam* and *Tirukovayar* by Manikavachagar; *Tirumandiram* by Tirumoolar; and *Periyapuranam* by Sekkilar.
parabrahman incarnate. He being a skilful speaker could effectively convey his subtle mystic experiences and show people the path of eternal peace. While some of his vachanas are straight-forward and easy to understand, others are esoteric with paradoxes and inversions (called the **Bedagina vachanagalu**). Critics hail his poems as those of a perfect *jnani*. That Bhagavan Ramana holds Allama in high esteem and considers him a *jnani* can be judged when he quotes the incident from the book *Prabhu Linga Leela*, where Marula Sankara (living near a mutt where used plantain leaves were thrown away) taken to be a madman by locals, prostrates with great reverence to Allama when he happens to pass by, and Allama in turn wholeheartedly embraces Marula. Referring to this incident Bhagavan remarked that each knew other’s worth as only a *jnani* can recognize another *jnani*!

Akkamahadevi was a prominent woman Veerasaiva mystic and was married to a king. She rejected her life of opulence and lived a life of wandering poet-saint, staying in dilapidated buildings, singing praises on Lord Siva as Channamallikarjuna of Srisaila. Hers is *madhura bhakthi* as she is said to have accepted Channamallikarjuna as her husband akin to Andal and Meera who considered themselves married to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna respectively. Allama, awestruck at her achievement in metaphysical experience and spiritual knowledge directs her to seek communion with the Lord at Kadali in Srisaila. Though she wrote relatively fewer and simpler vachanas (about 400 as compared to Basavanna and Allama who wrote more than 1,000 each), they are of the highest order marked by originality in expression and speak about the path of enlightenment, annihilation of ‘I’, conquering desires and senses.

As a minister, Basavanna established a spiritual parliament known as ‘Anubhava Mantapa’ at Kalyan which was the cradle of Lingayatism, and perhaps the first of its kind, presided over by Allamaprabhu. This was a place of discussion for various aspects of Lingayatism among...

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4 Srisaila is in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh.
5 Now known as Basava. Kalyan is a city in northern Karnataka.
others, and also the source of Veerasaiva Vachana literature. The core texts which form the scripture of Veerasaivism are Basavanna’s vachanas, AllamaPrabhu’s *Mantra Gopya*, Channabasavanna’s *Karana Hasuge*, and the collected work called *Shunya Sampadane*. The vachanas are timeless as they deal with the various issues of society such as social, economical, philosophical, religious etc, all with a subtle message. The principles enshrined in the vachanas reach out to all owing to the simplicity of language and the similes that ordinary people can effortlessly relate to.

Some of the well known Lingayats of Karnataka who settled in Tiruvannamalai are Guhai Namah Sivaya, Guru Namah Sivaya and Virupaksha Deva (after whom is the Virupaksha cave named where Bhagavan Ramana stayed from 1899-1916). A temple on the south-east slopes of Arunachala is dedicated to Guhai Namah Sivaya.

Presented below is a selection of vachanas. The sobriquets or *mudras* of Allama, Basavanna and Akkamahadevi are *Guheshwara, Kudalasangama* and *Channamallikarjuna* respectively, all referring to Lord Siva.

**Vachana One**

Arithevu Arithevu yembiri Aridha pariyenthu helire?/
Aridthavaru aridhevembare?/Ariyabaaradha ghanavanu/
Aridhavaru Ariyadhanthipparu noda/Guheshwara!

**Literal Translation**

Look at those claiming “We know”, “We know”
Will the ones who ‘know’ ever claim so?
On ‘knowing’ the unknowable Great
The ‘knowers’ remain as if they do not ‘know’, O Guheshwara!

**Comment**

This vachana of Allama is similar to verses 21 and 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu* of Bhagavan Ramana which say that scriptures speak of ‘seeing’ the Self or ‘Seeing’ God. As the Self or God is one without a second, it’s impossible to ‘see’ or ‘know’ it. To ‘see’ or ‘know’ the Self is to abide as the Self. Likewise, to say ‘I know myself’ or ‘I do not know myself’ is a cause for laughter since there are no two selves so that one can be known by the other. There is but One Self, the truth.
Vachana Two
Nimmalli neevu thilidhu nodire, anyavilla kaaniranna./
Arivu nimmalliyae thadhgathavaagiyadhe./Anyabhaavava
neneydhetthannolage thaanechcharavagi ballade,/Thannalliye
thanyayavu Guheshwaralingavu.

Literal Translation
You seek within yourself; it’s not elsewhere O brother,
Consciousness is within yourself
Without meditating on something else,
if one could be aware within oneself,
The awareness within oneself is Guheshwara Linga.

Comment
The message in this Allama’s vachana is comparable to the 44th
verse of Bhagavan’s Aksharamanamalai the meaning of which
runs thus: “Look within, ever-seeking the Self with the inner
eye. Only then will (it) be found.’ Thus did thou direct me,
O beloved Arunachala!”

Vachana Three
Ella ellavanaridhu phalavenayya?/Thanna thananariya bekalladhe?
Thannalli arivu swayavaagiralu anyara kelalunte?/
Chennamallikarjuna, nee arivaagi mundhoridha kaarana/
Nimmindha nimmanaridhenayya prabhuve.

Literal Translation
What is the use of knowing everything?
Unless one knows oneself!
When knowledge is within oneself, why ask others?
Chennamallikarjuna, since you shone as Knowledge,
I had the knowledge of You through You, O Lord!

Comment
Reflecting on this vachana of Akkamahadevi, one is reminded of
Bhagavan Ramana’s untiring instructions to the devotees on the
importance of Self realisation. In his reply to Paul Brunton’s question,
Bhagavan says, “What is the use of knowing about everything else
when you do not yet know who you are? Men avoid this enquiry into the true Self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken?”

Vachana Four
Thanna vichaarisalolladhu idhira vichaarisalohudhee manavu/
Enu maaduvenee manavanu enthu maaduvenee manavanu/
Kudalasangana sharanara/Nechchadhaa, mechchadha manavanu kichchinolagikku.

Literal Translation
The mind does not bother to enquire about itself, but is in pursuit of knowing about others!
What shall I do with this fickle mind? How do I handle it?
The mind which does not love and like Kudalasangama’s saranas
Control it!

Comment
This is a vachana of Basavanna. Bhagavan Ramana would often admonish his devotees ‘Vandhavelayaipaar’ (i.e., attend to the work for which you have come). The purpose of human birth is to attain salvation. One should constantly strive towards the goal rather than unnecessarily wasting time over being critical or judgmental of others.

There’s this humorous incident where a devotee would promptly come to the old hall every day at eight am and start dozing off irrespective of any conversations taking place. An attendant annoyed at this would wake him up only to find him doze off again a few minutes later. The attendant would again wake him up. Observing this Bhagavan tells the attendant, “Oye, he has been attending to the work for which he has come. You attend to the work for which you have come. Why are you troubling him?”

Below is another beautiful vachana echoing similar message.

Vachana Five
Lokadha donka neeveke thiddhuviri?/Nimma, nimma thanuva santhaisi kolli/Nimma, nimma manava santhaisi kolli/Neramaneya dhukkakke aluvavara mechcha,/NammaKudalasangama deva.

**Literal Translation**

Why do you correct the wrongs of the world?
Control and correct your body and mind
Our Lord Kudalasangama
Does not like those wailing for their neighbours’ ills.

**Vachana Six**

Andhu indhu maththondhenabeda/dhinavindhe siva
sharanembavange/dhinavindhe hara sharanembavange/
dhinavindhe namma kudalasangana/maanadhe nenevange.

**Literal Translation**

Don’t say today, tomorrow or some other day (don’t defer)
Today is the day for the worshipper of Siva
Today is the day for the worshipper of Hara
Today is the day for those who think of Kudalasangama without fail.

**Comment**

Basavanna in this vachana asks one not to dilly dally worshipping Siva and commands that it should be done right away. It is the tendency of the people to keep citing various excuses to defer their pursuit of spiritual sadhana.

Bhagavan Ramana gives the example of a man who has never seen an ocean before wishing to take a bath in it, patiently waiting for the waves to subside so that he could bathe when it becomes as calm as the pond back home. Either he should realise on his own or someone should educate him that the nature of the ocean is restlessness, and has been so ever since its creation and would continue to be so till pralaya (dissolution). He will then learn to duck under the wave and take bath. Likewise, in this spiritual journey, one should in parallel handle the worldly commitments and continue with sadhana without postponing it. Bhagavan assures T.K.Sundaresa Iyer that Divinity within oneself can be realised ‘here and now’ the moment one surrenders or when ‘I’ dies. He gives the example of a thirsty man wanting to drink water while all the time standing neck deep in Ganga!
The next vachana of Akkamahadevi too echoes similar sentiment in that it talks about the nature of the ways of world, and that says there is no use complaining about the same. One should just go on with one’s sadhana without expecting the circumstances to change to one’s liking.

**Vachana Seven**
Bettada melondhu maneya maadi/mrugagalige anjidhode enthaya?/samudhra dhatadiyalondhu maneya maadi/ noretheregalige anjidhode enthaya?/santheyolagondhu maneya maadi/shabhakke naachidhode enthaya?/
Chennamallikarjunadhe kelayya/lokadholage huttidha balika/ sthuthi-nindhegalu bandhare/manadhalli kopava thaaladhe samaadhaaniyaagirabeku.

**Literal Translation**
Having built a house atop a mountain
How can one say that one is scared of wild animals?
Having built a house on the seashore
How can one say that one dreads the waves and froth?
Having built a house in a market place
How can one shy away from noise?
Listen O Lord Chennamallikarjuna!
Having been born on earth,
When praise and criticism come by, without resentment in the mind, one must be calm and composed.

**Vachana Eight**
chala beku saranange paradhanavanu ollenu emba/chala beku saranange parasathiyavanu ollenu emba/chala beku saranange paradhaivavanu ollenu emba/chala beku saranange linga jangama ondhe emba/chala beku saranange prasaadha dhitavemba/chalavilladhavara mecha kudalasangama deva.

**Literal Translation**
A sarana (staunch follower of Siva) must have the resolve not to eye other’s wealth
A sarana must have the resolve not to covet another’s wife
A sarana must have the resolve not to worship other’s God,
A sarana must have the resolve to see the LingaJangama (Saiva wandering mendicant) as One and the Only
A sarana must have the resolve to seek the Lord’s blessings only (should have a challenging and unflinching mind)
Lord Kudalasangama does not like those without resolve.

Comment
It must be noted that Basavanna uses the medium of vachana not only for spiritual instructions but also to bring about social awareness among the masses by inculcating ethical values as may be observed in this vachana.

The strong emphasis that Basavanna lays on ‘chala’ or ‘determination’ is akin to verse twenty eight of Ulladu Narpadu where Bhagavan says that one should with a ‘keen intellect’ and ‘determination’ look for the source of the Self as a pearl diver would dive into water with a one-pointed mind.

Vachana Nine
Hasivaadhare oorolage bhikshaannagaluntu/thrusheyaadhare kere-bhaavi-hallangaluntu/shayanakke haalu degulavuntu/ Chennamallikarjunaiah atma sanghaathakke nee enaguntu.

Literal Translation
If hungry, begged rice is available
If thirsty, tanks and wells are available
For sleep, dilapidated temples are available
For the company of the soul, I have You,
Lord Chennamallikarjuna.

Comment
This is the vachana of Akkamahadevi. Bhagavan Ramana literally lived this vachana! During the initial days of his stay at Tiruvannamalai, he spent most of his time in the dilapidated Patala lingam, Vahanamantapam, Gurumurtham, Pachaiamman Koil, always absorbed in samadhi, with hardly any concern for food or his physical well-being. He later used to beg for food in the town. In the later years, he recounts to his devotees that sometimes he has received stale gruel
without any salt or flavouring and after consuming it — he would just wipe his hands on his head and pass on supremely happy!

Vachana Ten
Vaaravendhariye, dhinavendhariye, yenedhariyenaiyya/irulu yendhariyenaiyya, hagalu yendhariyenaiyya/nimmuva poojisi ellava maredhe/Kudalasanghama deva.

Literal Translation
I do not know which day or week it is
I do not know if it is day or night
Worshiping You, I have forgotten everything [else],
Lord Kudalasangama deva.

Comment
This vachana of Basaveshwara aptly applies to Bhagavan. He would recount to his devotees in the later years about his condition when he arrived at Tiruvannamalai in 1896. He had spent his earlier days, in different locations such as Patala lingam, Subrahmanya temple, the adjoining flower garden and the Vahanamantapam totally in oblivion to the surroundings, that he hardly knew whether it was day or night.

To quote him: “When I closed my eyes, deeply absorbed in meditation I hardly knew whether it was day or night. If at any time I opened my eyes I used to wonder whether it was night or day”. At times he would sit down under one tree only to find himself, when he later opened his eyes, sitting under another tree. Likewise, while in Vahanamantapam, sometimes he found himself under a different vahana (vehicle) from the one he had sat down under, having no clue as to how he got there!

Vachana Eleven
Aridhenembudhu thaa bayalu, /ariyenembudhu thaa bayalu, / aruhina kuruhina marahinolage/Guheshwaranembudhu thaa bayalu.

Literal Translation
The thought of knowing is void
The thought of not knowing is void
When consciousness is forgotten
Guheshwara himself is void.
Vachana Twelve
Bayalu bayalane bhiththi, bayalu bayalane beledhu/bayalu bayalaagi bayalaayiththayya/bayala jeevana, bayala bhavane,/ bayalu bayalaagi bayalaayiththayya/nimma poojisidhavaru munnave bayalaadharu/naa nimma nambi bayalaadhe Guheshwara.

Literal Translation
The void sowing the void,
Becomes a crop of void,
The void crop becomes void again,
Life is void, feelings are void,
Void becomes void again
Those who worshipped you became void in the past,
And believing in you, I attained the state of void, O Guheshwara!

Comment
Devikalottaram,7 the chanting of which Bhagavan very strongly recommended and rendered the Sanskrit verses into exquisite Tamil, speaks at length about the great Void. The unparalleled Void is said to be the seed of liberation and that only the valorous with the arrow of sunyabhava (thought-free state) are considered knowers of the Void. It avers that if one controls the monkey like restless mind and establishes it in sarvasunya (state devoid of all sense objects), one will attain liberation directly. On the contrary, one who fails to meditate on the great all-pervading void gets entangled in samsara like the silkworm caught in its own cocoon. Thus in order to avoid suffering and sorrow, one should meditate on the great VOID!

Vachana Thirteen
Dhayavilladha dhharmavu adhaavudhaiyya?/dhayave beku sakala praanigalellaralliyoo/dhayave dhharmadha moolavaiyya/Kudalasangaiyyananthalladhollanaiyya.

7 One of the upa-agamas which explains the supreme wisdom as expounded by Lord Siva to Parvati. The comments on the Void are based on verses 14,23,24,26 and 27.
Literal Translation
What is a religion without Compassion?
Kindness should be shown towards all the living creatures.
Compassion is the foundation of all Faiths.
Our Lord Kudalasangama won’t accept anything without Compassion.

Comment
This vachana is similar to Bhagavan’s proclamation in the Ramana Gita (chapter ten, verses ten and eleven) that brotherhood based on a sense of equality is the supreme goal to be attained by human society and that through brotherhood, supreme Peace will prevail among mankind and the entire planet would flourish like a single household.

Vachana Fourteen
Naanembudhu Pramaana, Neenembudhu Pramaana./
Swayavembudu Pramaana, Paravembudu Pramaana./
Pramaanavembudu Pramaana./Guheshwaranembudhu Apramaana.

Literal Translation
‘I’ is a limitation; ‘You’ is a limitation.
‘Oneself’ is a limitation; ‘The other’ limits.
Limitation is a limitation.
Guheshwara is limitless.

Comment
This vachana of Allama is akin to Bhagavan vouching a devotee who questions if Guru’s grace is limitless like an ocean. Bhagavan says, “Ocean? Ocean (sagara) has a limit, a boundary (or coast line), but the krupa of Bhagavan has no such limit. It is limitless. It knows no bounds”.

The message of all great seers since time immemorial has been the same; to strive relentlessly to achieve the supreme purpose of human birth. There may be a multitude of paths but the goal is always the same. In this section, parallels have been drawn between vachanas and Bhagavan Ramana’s teachings. These are but a few vachanas from the rich and vast repertoire of Vachana-Sahithya.
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Five

3rd January 1978

Question: Is attention to the present moment the same as self-attention?

Sadhu Om: Yes, or rather it is a clue leading to self-attention. Attention to any second or third person is not possible in the precise present moment, because thoughts, which are attention paid to second or third persons, are always moving. Such wavering attention can never result in knowledge of what is real, because to know what is real attention must stand still [since stillness is the nature of reality].

If you look for the present moment among second and third persons, you will find no such thing, but will find only a constant

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movement from past to future. However, if you attend to the first person, attention will stand still, and when attention is still it subsides into its source. You will then know that self is always present in the ‘now’, and that all else is non-existent.

When people are told to pay attention to the ‘now’, they find they cannot do so, because they are only attending to second and third persons. The clue of self-attention is essential, because then only can we understand what the present moment actually is.

In the first sentence of the first mangalam verse of Ulladu Narpadu Bhagavan asks: “Without [or except as] that which is, can there be consciousness of being?” That is, if there were not that which is, namely ‘I’, could there be the awareness ‘am’? This awareness ‘am’, which is self-shining, shows clearly that something real does exist, and that real something cannot be other than this awareness [because the awareness ‘am’ is a first-person awareness – an awareness only of itself, not of anything else]. This sentence is clearly referring to the existence and awareness of ‘I’, and not to that of any object, because to be known objects depend upon ‘I’.

Since this reality ‘I’ exists beyond thought, in the heart, and is therefore called ‘heart’, how to meditate upon it? This clearly shows the absurdity of meditation. All religions teach that we should think of or meditate upon the reality or God, but since it exists beyond thought, how can we think of or meditate upon it? Bhagavan therefore teaches us that subsiding in the heart as it is – that is, as ‘I am’ – is alone ‘meditating’ upon it correctly. That is, the only way we can truly ‘meditate’ upon what is real is to remain as we are, without thought. Since what is real is beyond thought, thought can never take us to it. To attain it, we must give up all thought [including the first thought, the ‘I’ that thinks] and just be as it is.

4th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Now, in the waking state, we say so many things about the [deep] sleep state, because we have no clear idea of what sleep is. If we make proper research into sleep, we will discover that there is no difference between sleep and jnana. We can now take sleep as
an example of the happiness that is enjoyed in the absence of the ‘I’, world and God. Our love of sleep proves our love of egolessness, as Bhagavan implies in verse three of *Ulladu Narpadu*: ‘[…] that state devoid of ‘I’ is agreeable to everyone’. What we now call sleep appears to be limited because on waking we rise again as ‘I’, but *jnana* has no such limitation, so the happiness of *jnana* is unlimited.

Nowadays people try to glorify Bhagavan by saying that he is great because he said something that Buddha said, something else that Christ said, and so on, as if his greatness could not stand by itself. Christ, Buddha, Sankara, Ramakrishna and others were all great examples of *jnani*, but outwardly they roamed about arguing, teaching and founding religions, whereas Bhagavan is *jnana* itself, so he just kept quiet. It is absurd to try to show his greatness in the light of these *jnani*s, because his greatness is the self-shining source of all light. Doing so is like propping a bamboo at the foot of Arunachala and saying that we are helping the hill to stand, whereas in fact many such bamboos can grow on it.

We are told that we project the world, but this does not mean that the seer is the projector. We, the seer (the mind or ego), are part of the projection, as Bhagavan says in verse 160 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

> The false person [or soul] who behaves as ‘I’ occurs as one among the shadow pictures [in this world picture, which is like a cinema show].

Who is this ‘I’ we say is the projector? By our investigating ‘who am I?’ the non-existence of both the projector and its projection will be exposed.

Arguments about world and God are futile, as Bhagavan teaches us in verses two and three of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The manyness of the world allows for dualities such as real or unreal, conscious or non-conscious, and happy or miserable. Where there is duality there will be doubt. Self is one, devoid of duality, so self-knowledge will allow no room for dualities or doubts. Therefore, we should avoid doing research on God or the world, and should instead do research only on ‘I’. ‘I’ will then disappear along with both God and the world.
The resulting ‘state of egolessness is agreeable to everyone’ (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse three), as shown by our experience of sleep.

**5th January 1978**

**Sadhu Om:** If ‘I’ is taken to be a form, the world and God will also be experienced as forms (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse four). Even the conception of a ‘formless’ God is a mental form or image. *Nirguna dhyana* or formless worship of God is a futile effort, like a person chasing the horizon in order to touch the all-pervading space (*Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* verse three).

Reality cannot be found by meditation, which is attending to the mind and its images. It can only be found by non-meditation, which is self-attention. However, Bhagavan said we should not think that *saguna* worship [worship of God as a form] is useless. We should practise either *saguna* worship or self-attention.

In verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan asks: “Can what is seen be otherwise than the eye [that sees it]?” That is, the nature of what is experienced cannot be different to the nature of what experiences it. Therefore, the appearance of the world and God depends upon the appearance of the seer, ‘I’, and their forms depend upon the seer’s form.

‘Eye’ is also used in Tamil to mean *jnana* [knowledge or consciousness], so the ‘endless [limitless or infinite] eye’ is self, which – being limitless and formless – can see only limitless and formlessness. Therefore, self can never see any name or form, nor anything other than itself. It experiences only formless self-awareness, ‘I am’.

This is expressed by Bhagavan in verse twenty seven of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*: ‘O Arunachala, sun of bright rays that swallows everything [the entire appearance of the universe] ...’ (see also *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* verse 1). That is, in the light of pure self-awareness, which is Arunachala, the ego-‘I’, the world and God will all disappear.

When there is body-consciousness there is world-consciousness. If none of the five sheaths were experienced as ‘I’, neither the world nor
God could be seen (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse five). The world and God are therefore created by our misidentifying a body to be ‘I’. Hence the creator of both the world and God is only the ‘I’ that mistakes itself to be a body, so we should investigate ‘who is this I?’ From this we can infer that the world and God are only as real as the idea ‘I am this body’, and since this body-identification is unreal, so too are this world and God.

How are *vasanas* [mental propensities or dispositions] to be erased? Now we take these vasanas to be ‘I’ or ‘mine’. This gross body is itself an expansion of them. In sleep we do not experience any of them, so we assume that they remain then in seed form, and in order to explain the seeming ignorance of sleep (which exists only in the view of our waking mind), we postulate a causal body, whose form is conceived to be the sum total of all vasanas. This causal body seems to veil or obscure our pure self-awareness, and hence it is conscious only of a state of dark ignorance.

However, by practising self-attention in the waking state we will become more clearly conscious of our self-awareness in spite of the play of our vasanas, and thus we will be conscious of it even during sleep. The vasanas will then be seen as shadows created by the dim light of our mind, which is a reflection of the bright light of self-awareness.

So long as we attend to vasanas and their products (our thoughts and desires and the objects of the world), we will continue to take them to be ‘I’ or ‘mine’ and thus to be bound by them. However, if we ignore our vasanas and instead attend only to ‘I’, we will destroy them – that is, we will expose their non-existence.

We should not be put off by the strength of our vasanas and by their seemingly endless play. We should remember that they appear because I am, but they do not come to trouble us during sleep, even though we continue to exist then. Therefore I am real, and vasanas are unreal. With this strong conviction we should be courageous and remain disinterested in our vasanas, and thus we should carry on self-attention undisturbed.

Bhagavan gave us the following definition of reality: only that which is everlasting, unchanging and self-knowing is real. [Hence
nothing other than ‘I’ is real, because everything else is transient, mutable and known not by itself but only by ‘I’.

When we accept the existence of the world we see, we should accept the existence of a power – which we may call God – that is responsible for it and for ordaining our prarabdha, which is whatever we are to experience in this world. As Bhagavan says in verse one of Upadesa Undiyar:

Karma giving fruit is by the ordainment of God. Can karma be God, since karma is jada [devoid of consciousness]?

However, because God does not appear as an object perceived through the five senses, we say we do not believe in him. This is like saying that we see the pictures on the cinema screen, but do not see the light that illumines them. The world is those pictures, and God is the self-knowing light, ‘I am’, which makes the appearance of the world and the functioning of karma possible.

The world does not exist apart from the body or the mind, as Bhagavan says in verses five and six of Ulladu Narpadu. The world is merely an expansion of the mind projected through the five senses of the body. The world-picture is projected on the screen that is the mind; it is illuminated by the mind; and it is seen by the mind. Therefore, since this mind is nothing other than self, in verse one of Ulladu Narpadu Bhagavan says:

[...] The picture of names and forms [the world], the one who sees [it], the screen on which [it] depends, and the pervading light [of consciousness that illumines it] – all these are he [the ‘first thing’ or base], which is self.

To mistake a body, which is one of the pictures, to be ‘I’, and thus to feel that the world, which is all the other pictures, is other than and outside of ‘I’, is a delusion (maya). Without this delusion, ‘I am this body’, no world-picture would be seen. Because we thus limit ‘I’, thinking it to be within a body, the concepts of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ arise.

So long as the delusion ‘I am this body’ is experienced as real, the world will also be experienced as real. Therefore the only way to
experience the unreality and non-existence of the world is to investigate this feeling ‘I am the body’. When we do so, it will disappear, and then we shall no longer be troubled by the false appearance of this world.

6th January 1978

Swami Natanananda: What is meditation? Who can meditate? Can the body meditate? Can self meditate? Meditation is just a means of feeding the non-existent ‘I’. The true sadhana is to be vigilant, at all times, against the rising of this ‘I’.

One way to prevent the rising of ‘I’ is to try to behave [inwardly as well as outwardly] in every situation as you think Bhagavan would behave. If you practise this, there will be less and less of ‘I’ and more and more of Bhagavan, until finally you will be swallowed by him.

Whenever peace is disturbed, it is due to the rising of ‘I’. Peace cannot be enjoyed while ‘I’ is active. Therefore the only means to hold on to peace is to be self-vigilant, thus guarding against the intrusion of disturbing thoughts. Self-attention is not an activity, but a calm state of being vigilant, keenly watching ‘I’ and thereby preventing the intrusion of mental activity.

Meditation, which is a mental activity, is unreal, so it can never reveal what is real. Non-meditation, which is avoiding mental activity, alone can reveal the reality. In the first mangalam verse of Ulladu Narpadu Bhagavan says:

[...] Since the reality (‘I am’) exists without thought in the heart, how to meditate upon that reality, which is called ‘heart’? Being in the heart as it is [that is, as ‘I am’] is alone meditating [correctly upon the reality].

Since thought is paying attention to second or third persons, the only effective means to avoid thought is self-attention. The rising of ‘I’ is attention to second and third persons, so attention to the first person alone can make ‘I’ subside.

The reason why Bhagavan emphasises that the appearance of the world is dependent upon the delusion ‘I am this body’ is to kindle vairagya [desirelessness] by making us understand that ‘I am the body’ is the root of all misery, and that it must therefore be eradicated.
Cutting the branches or even the trunk of the tree of delusion is futile, because its root, ‘I am the body’, must be destroyed. It is destroyed only by self-attention. This is why Bhagavan says in verse twenty six of Ulladu Narpadu:

If the ego, which is the embryo [or root], comes into existence, everything comes into existence. If the ego does not exist, everything does not exist. The ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating ‘what is this [ego]?’ is alone giving up everything.

We must fly on the two wings of viveka [discrimination] and vairagya [desirelessness].

Sadhu Om: We all have a clear knowledge of our own existence, ‘I am’. If we give importance only to that, and try to remain as it, that is self-attention, guarding against the rising of ‘I’, avoiding attention to second and third persons, and vigilance against the intrusion of thoughts.

In everything we do there is ‘am’-ness: I am walking, I am thinking, and so on. If we attend to this ‘am’-ness and try to abide as it that is sufficient. There is no need to be concerned about thoughts: let them come or go. Thoughts are only thoughts because we attend to them. If we ignore them, they do not exist. Our sense of ‘am’-ness (asmitva) signifies our self-awareness or mere being. Mere being is the final goal. That is why Natananandar was saying that one day we will laugh at our present efforts.

(To be continued)
With the world in endless turmoil, it is always encouraging to meet a bearer of good news. It is even better if one is able to deliver that hopeful message oneself, and while it is often sensible to keep quiet about positive signs of increase in our own understanding, forthright candour can be refreshing. Furthermore if previously one has held back from expressing oneself, it may be no bad thing to make a clean break with the past howsoever hard it might have been – and resolutely declare that now one’s outlook has changed altogether for the better.

Philip Pegler first encountered Bhagavan’s teachings in England in 1966. Three years later he visited the ashram for the first time and was resident there until 1974. He now works as an antiquarian bookseller. His last article for the magazine appeared forty years ago.
MOUNTAIN PATH

My own life as a long-time devotee may provide a useful illustration of what I mean by these opening remarks. After many years of following in good faith Ramana Maharshi’s profound path of Self-enquiry, I am finally glad to be able to confirm from my own hard-won experience that his potent method of dispelling the illusions of ignorance really does work – and the claims made for its supreme efficacy are not exaggerated.

Anybody who honestly cares to ask the fundamental question ‘Who am I?’ with tenacity and courage will surely undergo an unutterable transformation of outlook such as never could have been envisaged in the ordinary way. Without knowing quite how or why, it is as if one has been set free to live – and the world has been made totally new in the light of a wholesome attitude.

When you finally discover who you truly are in essence, the unimaginable burden of self-imposed suffering falls away as if it had never existed – and you are set free at last to live fully in service to the deeper life that brought you into existence and has always sustained you. You have once and for all consciously recognised the source of being, from which you have never been separate – yet you needed to know and acknowledge that for it to become real in your own experience. It is the sole reason why you needed to follow the path, but it would be a mistake to believe that this is the conclusion of your journey; it is but a new beginning of a deeper exploration into Truth, which is endless and immeasurable. To honour the noble task now set before you becomes your central resolve. It is a summons to Life.

Deep understanding regarding our true spiritual identity and proper appreciation of the nature of the greater Life to which we belong is everyone’s birthright and is definitely not a distant attainment. As Bhagavan always stressed, our true nature is immediate and in plain view, but easily overlooked for all that and there are no short cuts to spiritual maturity. Truth is nowhere else but here and now, yet this direct understanding still needs to be claimed with care and diligence and nobody can predict when the realisation of essential Being may dawn for anyone.
Such an irrevocable turning-point in my own life came unexpectedly some six years ago, after I had already been earnestly committed to the spiritual quest for a period fully five times as long. One morning, quite unaccountably, I was vouchsafed a profound insight into the truly non-dual nature of my own being as conscious awareness. It was a clear view of Reality, which has never since deserted me and it has dispelled a dark shadow that had dogged my footsteps for almost as long as I could remember.

The sense of relief was huge. It was as if the tight knot of ignorance had been severed in a single stroke, but the full implications of what had happened to me took a considerable time to sink in.

This process of profound integration was still continuing when I began work on my first proper book—*Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace*: A nature mystic’s reflections upon the full meaning of freedom—which is to be reviewed at a later date in *The Mountain Path*. I have devoted several years since that pivotal moment of insight to the creative task of composing this careful study of the life and work of my old friend and mentor, Clare Cameron, who had been a remarkable mystical poet at the peak of her creative powers in the 1960s while I was growing up in England, and whose writings I had first discovered in India—in the ashram library during an extended stay at Sri Ramanasramam in 1970.

It was not a project I could have attempted earlier, because I was simply not ready to sift the immensely rich but sometimes sad and painful memories of a lifetime. First the doors of perception needed to be cleansed and only then could the clarity of fresh understanding be applied to the task.

Born in London’s East End in 1896 towards the close of the Victorian era, Clare had emerged from humble origins to become by 1958 the respected Editor of *The Science of Thought Review*—a small but influential Christian magazine, which encouraged inter-faith dialogue by publishing thoughtful articles on comparative religion in much the same manner as *The Mountain Path* did under Arthur Osborne’s skilled direction.
But before that, while showing considerable fortitude during turbulent wartime years spent in bomb-ravaged London, Clare had already gained invaluable experience by editing in the very midst of that chaos, *The Middle Way* – England’s leading Buddhist journal. Yet poetry was her first love and it was the lyrical sensitivity of her delicate verse that had strongly attracted me to her work initially.

Something is waiting to be said
But not in the language of our time.
That is too harsh, staccato, brittle,
Discordant, disruptive, arrogant.
There is another language
That falls like dew on fever,
Or some other time can break the heart,
And it comes like a thief in the night.

The gentleness of Clare’s poetry expressed in poignant lines like these had touched my heart, but it was the sturdy common-sense of her magazine editorials that awakened my sense of spiritual discernment. At a crucial time in my life, when I was endeavouring to clarify my own spiritual path, her keen observations about the profound implications of inner freedom intrigued me and encouraged my further deep exploration.

Oddly enough, the real path to freedom means ultimately the relinquishing of all paths… our consciousness is expanding into the very universe itself, and the universe shares with us its secret laws, gifts and riches. There are no earthly riches like unto these, for our own personal rhythm has tuned into the Divine Rhythm and our little loves are growing into Love itself. This is always a great wonder to us.

Diminutive with a keen, quizzical gaze and elderly, although still energetic by the time I met her, what always struck me was the manner in which Clare viewed the events of her long and hard life, not only with remarkable equanimity and compassion, but also without a trace of bitterness or judgement. She was the sort of rare person you
could always turn to when in trouble, for she was kind and patient with a good listening ear.

The main focus of her writing was ever the sanctity of life and she always emphasised the prime importance of the silent background to experience – the ground of being. She saw clearly, just as Bhagavan did, how many of mankind’s problems arise simply from the loss of contact with the Source that sustains everything and provides all true guidance.

She was like the grandmother I had never known, who provided much needed affection after I had lost my own mother in my early twenties – and she soon became not only a friend but a substitute parent also. It was only in later life, years after she herself died in 1983, that I fully understood how much I loved her and how profoundly she had communicated to me the unchanging principles of spiritual living. This she did in a most natural way, often more by her tranquil presence and unspoken example than by what she said.

Day ends as it begun
A ripple on Time’s stream
Or slow continuing dream.
The ripple has no meaning
But only the flowing stream.

Learn from the brief day
Whence it comes and goes
Through snowflake and the rose.
Through time and out of time
Eternity flows.

Clare once wrote memorably that when Life is lit by love and shaped by wisdom, it becomes an art open to all. The tender beauty of her words is such that they hardly ever fail to evoke a creative mood within me. Once I had seriously begun writing a tribute in her memory, I soon saw that the challenge of composing the spiritual
biography of someone I greatly respected was helping me immensely to articulate my own spiritual philosophy – enabling me to sort out the wheat from the chaff of my recollections and make sense of the sometimes extreme and difficult experiences I had undergone. But since the book has been completed, it has also become clear to me that something more is needed than merely writing about freedom and reflecting about its true meaning.

I had definitely run out of excuses by the time I had finished what had definitely been the most satisfying but challenging literary undertaking of my life. I had been set free from the burden of the past and had relinquished a good measure of previous self-concern, but now I was required to live fully in accordance with my deepest convictions on a practical day-to-day level.

I could no longer justify anything approaching prevarication or live merely in the realm of ideals. My good intentions had often been questioned before of course, but now my integrity would be put to the test in a still more searching way – I felt sure about that. It is not that any great sacrifice would necessarily be demanded, it is just that living in accordance with Truth requires one to remain faithful to the demands of conscience in all respects, great or small.

We used to believe that it was our own life that had to be lived by the determined exercise of a resolute will. Stepping out in freedom, in a spirit of openness and courage, shows us that, on the contrary, we are lived by the greater Life within us – and we only need to cooperate with the movement and flow of the totality to remain at peace in the midst of whatever befalls us.

That is surrender and an expression of the highest intelligence. It is also what is truly meant by Self-enquiry, thus completing a sacred circle in spiritual practice. What is this mysterious aliveness that dwells within me? Who am I really? Only when I know more of this higher power, to which I may surrender in trust, can I set forth safely and be a light unto myself – and others for whom I am responsible.

Clare Cameron considered love, gratitude and acceptance cardinal virtues and stressed their importance time and time again. Much of
what I am suggesting here, I have learnt from her unassuming example, and the enduring inner link, which somehow became naturally forged between us, demonstrates how neatly things can slot together in the mysterious interweaving of Life’s tapestry.

One of the things I find so amazing is that Clare lived and worked near my father’s home in the south of England – yet it took my visit to far-away India for me to discover this was so and then make contact with her upon my return. Ramana Maharshi’s potent teachings had already played a crucial part in my spiritual development – now it would be Clare Cameron’s turn to communicate the good news that all spiritual power lay within me.

It is the steadiness of devotion that provides a firm foundation for the deep inquiry into the reality of one’s true being, beyond the personal sense of self. Clare nurtured this spirit of devotion in me, and in her quiet way taught me how to say Yes to Life. There is no method in that – and I say as much in the final chapter of Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace.

When Clare eventually died, she did not leave me entirely without inner resources. It took me quite a while to realise it, but she had shown me in no uncertain manner that there is always hope. No matter what has happened ‘hope springs eternal’ and we can always begin again, because life only exists in the present moment and the past is always behind us. Clare stressed time and time again how it is quite possible to find a sense of acceptance when it seems absolutely impossible to do any such thing. This is a kind of paradox, because deep acceptance is not something that can ever be accomplished by anyone. For me personally, it took Clare’s quiet presence to underline the inescapable fact that acceptance was never going to be something I could learn to do as such, because it is a quality which already exists within my own being; it can never be grasped but only allowed to have its gentle way with us. Once I got the point, the rest was plain sailing – but the going was still not exactly easy, and I imagine that it will never be so.
Once there was neither Being nor Nonbeing. There was neither Form nor Formlessness. Then . . . That which was hidden within Itself, That One, stirring, emerging, coming to be. From Itself to the Formless to the Form. Immutable, changeless, everywhere, pervading all, yet not physically such is the mystery.

Who is this first born, the one called Ganapati? There are those who lovingly sing his praises. There are those who worship and adore him. There are those who represent him in art and literature. There are those who tell stories about him. There are those who chant his glory. There are those who seek his darsana. There are those who invoke and invite his blessings. The thinkers think, the scholars scholasticise, the devotees worship. But what is Ganapati’s hidden meaning?

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
Seemingly incongruous facts simultaneously coincide. Ganapati embodies an enormous popularity that transcends sectarian and territorial limits; a seemingly rather late, yet dramatic, full-blown appearance into a religious pantheon; a confusing, conflicting, yet interesting and intriguing mythology; and an elephant’s head atop a plump human body! O Ganapati, who are you? Tell the others what you want, tell them anything, but between you and me, who are you really?

That each individual human being is a child of immortality, a manifestation of the divine, an embodiment of the immortal Self, is a fundamental tenet of Bhagavan Ramana and most Hindu scriptures and systems.

Myriad are the ways in which Ganapati has been, and may be, conceived. A God is worshipped in a particular form, at particular times, in particular places, for particular purposes, addressed by particular names. There are functions to perform as well as petitions to grant. The One Self may appear in many forms. Different aspects of this one great reality are personified as deities, each with its own significant legends and symbols.

An individual, thinking they are possessed of name and form, finite, mortal, limited, must be rescued from this ignorance. In actuality, one is a pure diamond, a precious jewel, not different from the Divine that they seek. Kabir said, “It makes me laugh to hear of a fish in water, athirst.” Tukaram said, “I went in search of God and could not find him. Then, at last, I discovered that I, the seeker was the sought, I was God, that which I was seeking.”

According to Bhagavan Ramana, the Self (Atman) is one and non-dual. The pluralistic universe of an individual’s day to day experience, which appears to one as real, is an illusory superimposition which is neither real nor unreal. This appearance is rooted in ignorance that conceals the real (sat) and projects the unreal (asat). One’s entire experience of life seems to involve differentiations like, “I am male, I am old, I am hungry, I am meditating, I am seeking liberation, I am having a vision” and so on. These differentiations are based on
the superimposition of one thing on another or the attributes of one thing on another due to ignorance.

This Reality that exists within each and every person is Pure Consciousness, Pure Awareness, the Self. The name does not matter. It is what the various names are pointing towards that is of paramount importance. No person can even say that they do not know it. In the very act of denying its existence, one must presuppose it to deny it! No one can say, “I do not exist.” Who is the I who is saying that they do not exist? Of nothing else in the universe, or beyond the universe, can this be said of. This is the uniqueness and speciality of this consciousness, though until it is experienced it might as well be said to not exist at all. Nearer than the nearest and yet seemingly farther than the farthest. “It is only when you search for It, that you lose It. You cannot take hold of It, but then you cannot get rid of It.”

A Great Saying (mahavakya) is an identity statement that reveals the non-duality of the Absolute (Brahman) and the individual (Atman). How can there be any understanding of this statement so long as the identification with the body as a separate entity does not cease? Or the understanding that others are not different from oneself?

The statement ‘tat tvam asi’ – ‘that thou art’, appears nine times in the Chandogya Upanisad. Advaita contends that the individual soul is nothing but pure consciousness that appears not by itself but in association with the psycho-physical apparatus. This association is but an illusory appearance due to ignorance. In the statement, ‘That thou art’, ‘That’ refers to Pure Consciousness.

Ganapati lore in particular and the Mudgala Purana specifically, affirms that Ganapati is a physical embodiment of two seemingly incongruous parts. Somehow Ganapati, who has the head of an elephant and the body of a human being, is the unifier of these disparate parts. He is the unifier, not in the sense of adding parts together and obtaining a whole, but he is what he is. He is a symbol, it is true, but a symbol of that which has not separate parts. The concept of ‘monism’ can posit a single entity with internal distinctions, i.e., a single tree with leaves, branches, flowers, fruits, etc. or a single God
with internal distinctions, but the absolute non-duality that ‘tat tvam asi’ or Ganapati points to is a non-duality or radical monism in which there are no internal distinctions either. The insight this non-duality implies is that the ‘non’ of non-duality categorically and universally says “not-this, not-this” (neti-neti) to every type of concept, inclusive.

Thus whether ‘tat’ refers to the elephant head and ‘tvam’ refers to the human body or whether “tat” refers to the nirguna transcendent Absolute and ‘tvam’ refers to saguna anthropomorphic Ganapati or ‘tat’ refers to the Self and ‘tvam’ refers to a jiva, That and thou are non-different. In the realm of non-duality, everything is complete, its own proof, meaning and purpose. Where all is one, no supports are needed. Two from one, this is the root of suffering. Perceive all is one without two. pure consciousness, pure bliss.

He who realizes the Truth is liberated from bondage. What is the Truth? It is that there is nothing other than the Self. Ganapati is not something and the individual is another. God dwells within you as you. That thou art. If one is not the body, then neither is God or anyone else the body. The Self is not in some remote region, unknown and unrealized.

Some interpreters declare that Ganapati is an embodiment of tat tvam asi and delineate that his elephant’s head represents the animal kingdom and his two legs represent the human kingdom and his four arms represent the kingdom of the gods (devas). This illustration reinforces the all-pervasive nature of That. It indicates an aspect of the Truth and therefore should not be pressed too far. The various parts of Ganapati are all held together by his life-force. If the life-force leaves a certain part, that part withers away. Although it is not visible, it is from that invisible force that the universe has arisen, even as from a minute seed the great banyan tree grows. Reality is omnipresent, even as salt is present everywhere in salt-water. It is not experienceable through the sense-organs, yet it can be realised.
Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s Commentary

Verse Thirty Eight

S. Ram Mohan

In verse 37 it is said the jivanmukta (liberated soul) is not bound by any duty to do any type of karma. But it may be asked whether he would have to be born again to extinguish the karma already accumulated. It may also be asked that, even if he is free from future births, there is still the unspent remnant of the prarabdha, which gave him his present body. Will that be of any consequence and will he reap its fruit? To clarify these doubts, Bhagavan sets forth the truth that by the light of right awareness, all three sets of karma are simultaneously destroyed and the jivanmukta is not bound by any type of karma.

Verse 38: If we are really the performers of actions, then we would experience their fruits. If by the question ‘Who is the doer?’ the Real Self is known, then doership will cease and with it will drop away all the three sets of action. This state of deliverance is timeless.

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Commentary

Bhagavan in verse 19 discussed fate and free-will from the spiritual angle. Now he discusses the triad of karmas — sancita, prarabdha and the agami. Sancita is the accumulated effect of our past actions that have a trace in the present life in the form of vasanas or memory traces. Prarabdha is what we experience in the present life as a result of our past actions. Agami is the seed we sow for future actions by the desires and actions of the present.

‘Doership’ and ‘enjoyership’ are two sides of the same coin. As long as we attribute the doership (kartrutva) of actions to our psychophysical personality, it follows that the enjoyership is also attributable to it and as long as we feel that we are doing certain actions out of our own volition, we will also think that we enjoy or suffer the effects of such actions. Thus the seeds of future births are sown. The actions done by us have two-fold effect: i) the cause and effect paradigm of actions bearing fruit; ii) The forming of vasanas or memory traces, which are innate tendencies. These are held in store for us to be enjoyed or suffered in future births. It is the ego which arrogates to itself the sense of doership and enjoyership.

The sense of being a doer of an action, the feeling “I have done actions before, I am doing actions now, and I shall be doing actions in the future” arises in the mind. When by the quest of the Self, the ego dies, along with it will die its consequence, namely the mind and all attachments. The ego is the root of all the actions of being an actor. All karmas derive their life from the attachment to karma by the actor. So it is clear that karma can live and have an effect only so long as the ego lives. Here Bhagavan says that, if and when the ego dies, all karmas, which live because of the ego, will also be extinguished.

Bhagavan elucidates the same truth in verse thirty three of the Supplement by an analogy. He says that just as when a man having three wives dies, all the three necessarily become widows, likewise, when the ego, the doer of actions gets extinguished, all those actions of karma also must come to an end. There are only three sets of karmas seen above, and all these cease. It follows that what is called prarabdha karma, the present karma which has brought the present body into
existence and which determines the conditions of his life — does not affect the *jivanmukta* though it may, apparently, seem to be so to the unliberated jiva who observes the jivanmukta physically suffer. Because of the perceived appearance of his being so affected, the Vedas say that the prarabdha comes to an end as a result of being experienced. The meaning conveyed here is that from the viewpoint of the jivanmukta, the karma does not exist and therefore does not affect him.

Enjoyership is also another kind of thought or *vritti*. Both doership and enjoyership are *vrittis*, thoughts or ripples of the mind, *citta*. It follows that they can exist and develop as long as ego remains. When we enquire, “I have enjoyership because I have doership, who is the doer in me?”, we can, by *vichara*, transcend the ego and be beyond doership and enjoyership.

With the dawn of *jnana* (spiritual knowledge) the ego, which is ignorance, dies. This ignorance is the causal body (*karana-sarira*); and hence if it dies, the subtle body (*suksma-sarira*) which is the *prana* (vital airs), *manas* (mind), and *vijnana* (knowledge) that came into existence because of the causal body will die along with the gross body (*sthula-sarira*). These bodies will cease to exist for the jnani.

In the eyes of the common man, the *jnani* would seem to persist as a gross entity and therefore they wrongly think that there is a remnant of the prarabdha that it is creating, generating consequences on the jivanmukta. In verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu*, it has been said that the real Self is the endless Eye. We are to understand that he is the sat-chit in its entirety. It is the causal body, the ignorance, which is the cause of the habitual *adhyasa* (false identification) between the Self and the subtle/gross bodies. In the absence of the causal body, there is no adhyasa and therefore there can be no real experience of the fruits of action. Since it is also said that the Self is unrelated (*asanga*) there is no real bondage through actions even for the ignorant, the bondage being itself, only assumed by the mind. What then is the status of the jivanmukta?

The *jnani* undergoes no change due to prarabdha. But in the eyes of the common man (be it the gross or subtle bodies which seem to
survive and last for some time), the uninitiated with an unripe mind, even for the jnani, the prarabdha remains and will yield the fruits of the past actions until the body’s death.

The category of future actions will be ineffective since the jnani has no sense of doership and according to the reason posited in the beginning of this verse, the actions do not bear any fruit.

The remaining category, sancita (stored up as reserve for future samsara), being declared here as extinguished, the jnani has no more births. Whatever the jnani does after his Self-realisation may be considered as actions of the Divine Will. An ordinary person, identifying himself with his psycho-physical personality deludes himself and is affected by prarabdha but a jivanmukta identifying himself with Atman allows the prarabdha to freely play on his physical person without being inwardly affected by the bodily activities, and is as blissful as ever by being unattached to his mind, body or intellect. The Divine Will acts through his body and mind free of doership and he is equally free from enjoyership. Happiness and sorrow touch him not. His actions do not bind him to future events as he only looks on the actions of the body and mind as a witness and is unaffected.

There is no distinction between God and jnani. He is God Himself or ‘It’. That is the state of deliverance. It is erroneous to think that it comes into existence after the death of the body. It is erroneous even to say that it comes into existence when the ego is extinguished as we have seen in verse thirty seven. Here, verse thirty eight includes with the assertion that this state is timeless.

There may be a doubt. It is said that a jnani has no more births, yet it is also said in the sacred lore that some jnanis take rebirth in the world and fulfill certain services to mankind. These are called adhikarika purushas, persons who have a mission to perform. These births and their activities did not affect their experience of the Truth in any way. In fact, from this standpoint even Isvara (personal God) is an adhikarika purusha. He too by virtue of His jnana is free from ego and therefore He carries out His functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution as unattached (asanga).
Life, the Most Precious of Gifts

Douglas Halebi

By no means do I wish to disparage or undervalue any spiritual quest of man, whether I understand it in a profound and intimate manner or not. There are as many ways to partake of such a quest as there are souls in the world. No two are alike, nor can they be. Nor can every culture, every civilization be nourished and instructed, oriented and illuminated in the same way. The world is an intricately patterned tapestry, woven of countless threads and saturated in an ever varying perception of life, God, destiny, history and meta-history.

Douglas Halebi was born and educated in the United States, with paternal relatives of Gypsy origin in the Near East and maternal relatives of Anglo-American descent in North America. His uncle Noah, instilled in him and his brothers a thirst for ever deeper, purer, richer understanding of life. All his literary ventures have been an attempt to dip into the well of knowledge his uncle extended to them.
As for the Juki or as they are commonly known, ‘Gypsies’, I think it can be said with confidence that they are far less preoccupied by what happens when we die than they are by what we do with life, here and now, before it fades away. That if you see a lustrous rose coming into flower, then pause, linger over it now, drink in its beauty in this unrepeatable moment of time. Because tomorrow it may be gone. And so might we.

If there is a ‘spiritual methodology’ among Gypsies, it consists in loving life, considering it a divine gift beyond compare with any other, serenading it with wine, music, poetry and strong brandy. And in being eternally grateful for the tenderness and marvel of the world. To consider life the most precious of gifts, however, is to open yourself to its sorrow, pain and loss, its recurring tragedies, to be capable of being wounded by it, even as it also means being instructed by its joy and astonished by the lessons this passing existence imparts.

And it means to love, with all your heart, the children who are victims of the world’s most grotesque and monstrous humans, such as the girl Maalala from Pakistan and the martyred boy, Hamza Ali al Khateeb, in Syria who was horribly tortured and murdered. If it is ‘political’ to grieve for the suffering of children, then are we not all ‘political’, without having to embrace a partisan movement or take up arms on a battlefield? To love life means that what happened to the boy will break your heart. And that the girl, as she was called recently in a leading news magazine, is perhaps “the bravest girl in the world.” I consider it as instructive as an ancient parable that the people of Pakistan felt revulsion, regret, disgust and pain at the attempted murder of Maalala by al-Qaeda.

Man cannot live forever only to hate and destroy, to be consumed by a pitiless, blind rage. The ‘message’ of the haters, the blind ones, is insufficient to serve as the basis of any enduring philosophy or any great venture in history. At the same time, politics and materialism have not consumed me. My field is not social action. But I draw strength from the courage of Maalala and the tragedy that befell the innocent boy. Life transcends politics and cannot be limited by it.
But it sometimes happens that even ‘politics’ is laden with lessons that could sometimes be called ‘spiritual’.

Sooner or later, every man becomes like a withered tree, thirsting for a spring that may never come again. And some may say that when the tree no longer bears rich and succulent fruit every year, it isn’t necessary to waste any water on it. But I think you may find, in the passing years that man is a creature whose thirst for knowledge can never be slaked, one who is constantly engaged in a process of growth and discovery that only ends when he dies. And that experience of life, so greatly undervalued by the young, has an inestimable worth on our journey through this world.

In this life, almost before the wedding cake is consumed, the funeral procession is at hand. So live well, take pleasure in the quality of your aspiration, the grandeur of your gestures, the extent of your hospitality and compassion. And before they have vanished from this world, allow yourself to benefit from the rich and varied experience of the old, the intricacy and subtlety of their knowledge, their passion for life and their bittersweet, instructive remembrance. The old are soaked in memories, sorrows and joys that extend from the first moment when a child gazes on the trees and the stars to the last lingering taste of life’s grandeur and mystery. The old come bearing lessons.

We do not need to fixate on the minor flaws of our neighbours or relate to them through petty gossip. It would be far better to partake of spirited dialogue, passionate discourse, unconstrained and far ranging discussion. There is no one who does not have something to tell us, if we understand how to listen. And those who rely on ugly caricatures and dehumanising parodies of a stranger are only bearing witness to their own impoverished perception of man, life and the world.

Debate, a pleasure and an end in itself, is always an engagement of those who disagree. But it is also an opportunity to surpass the limits of our own understanding, surpass the narrow frame of reference which precludes the discovery of other insights and a greater, more comprehensive awareness. And every generation is soaked in
impression from the events that rose up within it, the struggles, dreams and desires that defined it, the aspirations that it deemed worthy of abiding concern. And no one can bear witness to the marvel or terror of an hour of history so deeply and intimately as those who lived through it. Before they are gone, it well behoves the scholars and even the merely curious to tap into that intimate knowledge, that full and rich picture of what transpired in the world set before our grandparents and great grandparents. No one else will ever again see the world exactly as they did.

It also sometimes happens that knowledge deemed to be passé, no longer relevant, surpassed ‘once and for all’, is set aside or forgotten. And that later we find, to our regret, that what seemed decisively out-dated has a new and urgent relevance, after all. That what was squandered turns out to be precious and that our own children berate us for not listening to our fathers. So even as man constantly acquires new knowledge, he also fails to preserve the old. There is enough ‘lost knowledge’ to fill many libraries. And sometimes, if we are fortunate, we stumble across some part of it, astonished and gratified by the treasures we have been permitted to discover anew.

It has been said that in ancient Greece there was the incendiary critic, Socrates, the metaphysician, Plato, and the polymath and encyclopaedist, Aristotle. Two thousand years passed and then the world was given a new gift, the critic Descartes, the metaphysician Spinoza and the polymath, Leibniz. And perhaps, among the rivers that run through paradise, there is a place of rest where the ancient Greeks may meet up with their 17th century European counterparts? If so, then they would have much to say to one another, engaging anew in the endless quest for knowledge and wisdom, pursuing the themes latent in all the grand ventures of philosophy, partaking of a shared pool of ideas and expanding, enriching themselves with every new hour of dialogue.

No doubt they would still be distinct and different, and yet they would be bound together by the universality of their concerns and their passionate desire to ponder the timeless essence of the human
condition. And none of them would be blind to the gifts lavished upon them by the others. None would be so foolish as to say that life had passed them by, for life and the thirst to divine its meaning would regenerate them and constantly elevate their attention. And they would know with a surety that the days of impetuous, ever aspiring youth, the ripe and balanced time of middle age, the full plenitude and then the weariness of our last years all have something to give us. The sun can be valued when it rises, when it reaches the meridian and when it begins to set. There is no hour of the day when the sun is lacking in beauty. And none when man himself has been emptied of inner content, like a glass drained of every drop of wine. On the contrary, even when the glass of life appears empty, more wine can be poured into it, instructing us, permitting us to discern deeper, richer, purer meaning in all things.

Everything around us bears witness to the value of all life and beckons man to ‘pursue his calling’, seeking out meaning and direction in everything he sees. In this sense, according to the Juki, the trees in a forest could be called man’s ‘teachers’. And so, too, the diminutive song-birds that greet the rising sun with their singing. Or the tall green grass that rose out of the soil in the lowlands, as ripe and rich as the heart of a watermelon. Life was always changing and yet always the same, like water flowing in a stream. We didn’t know, in those peaceful days, how fortunate we were.

“Why would God place man on the Earth if it were not a fitting home for him,” my teacher, Uncle Noah used to thunder. “Why are we here, if it is not the healing medicine for what ails us? And if it is so instructive, so illuminating, then life must be a great gift, and not just a misfortune to endure.”

“If you learn to love your life, to be intoxicated by its beauty and instructed by its sorrow and joy, gratified for the lessons it teaches, then you will be worthy of your existence in this world. So treat life as a deep fountain you were meant to drink from. But also know that you will be privileged to consume the water of this fountain only for a brief time. And then we’re gone.
“If two men were sentenced to death and one bade farewell to this world by gazing out, for the last time, on its beauty and its tragedy, its bitterness and its array of marvels and catastrophes, and hailed it in song, would he be wise or foolish? Would wisdom reside in the second man, who shrank back to a corner of his cell and concluded that life is utter vanity and that it would be better never to have been born? Who is wise man and who is vain and foolish in such a case?”

“You can reject many things and you can find bitterness where you hoped to taste only sweetness,” another mentor, Nuratin added. “But whatever may happen to you, and wherever you may journey, don't reject life itself. We are guests here, privileged like no other creature on Earth. A noble horse is a thing of rare beauty, precious like a finely-cut jewel. So, too, the golden birch tree and the blossoming rose are, for some, sublime and wondrous: but man is privileged far more than all other life in this world.

“As for the Juki, we are among the last free men who still partake of life on the Earth. Our fathers have ‘gone on to the Land of the Shades’, crossed the frozen river that never thaws, entered the celestial forest and embarked on the new road. We are among the last ones still journeying through this terrestrial abode.

“So let us journey well, savour our wine, and refine our appreciation of the trees and the meadows that loom before us, here and now. And let us combine the highest flowerings of the mind with a passionate thirst to travel to the ends of the Earth. Let us understand well that every material journey is but a foretaste and a preparation for a transcendent quest, a higher, richer, more illuminating spiritual journey.

“Let us remember that man is composed of two dimensions, the celestial and the terrestrial, and that they cannot be separated into two halves: instead, they are both woven into the fabric of our own being, connected to every atom of man and every breath he draws. Man is always a whole, never a part. So we should nourish the whole and not mere parts.”
The ashram has decided to reprint *Conscious Immortality* after a hiatus of sixteen years. The title *Conscious Immortality* originates from a phrase in the manuscript of Paul Brunton which was presented to *The Mountain Path* editor at the time by his son, Kenneth Hurst sometime after the death of his father in July 1981. The ashram at the time decided to publish the notebook immediately with the intention to present the first copy to Mr. Hurst during his ashram visit in 1983. Due to pressure of a deadline, the work was hastily edited and contained a number of typing errors. A second improved edition was printed a few years later with some additional material from another source. A third edition was published in 1996 in a new format based on the subject material rather than a sequence of pages in the original manuscript. After that, for various reasons, it was decided that *Conscious Immortality* should not be republished.
Recently, the ashram reversed that decision. A new edition of *Conscious Immortality* is expected to be available in 2013. Since Brunton’s manuscript is a historical document it was determined to reprint the manuscript adhering as closely as possible to its original format and style. The editing has therefore been minimal. For example, sentences awkward in style or structure have not been edited if the meaning is clear. Original sentences that are cryptic or missing essential grammar have been slightly edited for clarity. We have included nearly all the exchanges and observations that were excluded from the earlier editions. There is a wealth of instruction in the manuscript and the ashram felt devotees could gain greatly from this new edition.

Brunton did not intend to publish this manuscript in its original form and many of the notes were noticeably written in haste. One explanation is that Brunton was compiling quotations from Bhagavan to later publish in a book; hence the chapter titles ‘Characteristics of Philosophic Discipline’, ‘Doctrine of Mentalism’ etc. He may have abandoned the idea in favour of writing an entirely new series of books which may have contained valuable material from the original notes.

The manuscript mostly contains conversations written around 1935-36 during Paul Brunton’s second visit to the ashram. During this period, Munagala Venkataramiah was recording in a large ledger the interchanges between Sri Bhagavan and devotees and visitors that took place generally mainly in the Old Hall. This handwritten compendium of dialogue was eventually published under the title *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

After an analysis of Brunton’s notebook, it was discovered that nearly 62% of the material corresponds to text in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The other 38% of Brunton’s notebook could not be associated with any content from *Talks*. Of the 62% of Brunton’s notes that correspond to material in *Talks*, 67% of that text matches word-for-word the text in *Talks*, and 33% of the text expresses the same incident or conversation in a different manner.

Considering the data just mentioned, the question of attribution arises regarding the original author of the recorded dialogue.
contained in *Conscious Immortality*. One line of argument contends that Brunton borrowed much of the material directly from the handwritten ledgers of Venkataramiah and one could contend that his familiar written style is evident in the ledger entries. From what we understand, the ledgers were kept in the Old Hall and devotees had ready access to them. However, this hypothesis does not provide any explanation for the 38% of Brunton’s notes that cannot be attributed to any content found in Venkataramiah’s *Talks*. Brunton was a journalist by profession, an inquisitive intellectual and inveterate note taker. Why would Brunton borrow from the ledgers when he was present for many of the conversations? There is another line of argument which says that some of the *Talks* excerpts in fact borrowed from questions and actions initiated by Brunton in collaboration with Venkataramiah.

It may be argued that during his second visit, Brunton collaborated closely with Venkataramiah. This would not be surprising as Venkataramiah was then the principal interpreter and Brunton would have had frequent interactions with him. Both were highly intelligent and dedicated men who may have found in their common quest a friendship of kindred souls. Venkataramiah was a congenial, gifted scholar who would have found in Brunton, whose book *Search in Secret India* earned worldwide success, a bright intellect and engaging personality. Brunton was himself taking notes of dialogue in the Old Hall. Their common note-taking pursuit and reverence for the words of Sri Bhagavan may have generated some mutual attraction. The two could have shared their notes, but this is only an estimation based on the limited information available.

Even if Brunton did borrow much material from the handwritten ledgers of Venkataramiah, the value of Brunton’s notebook still lies in its arrangement of themes and unique presentation of dialogue. The beginning chapters of Brunton’s notebook have a ring of urgency, consistency and resolve that is singular, while the latter portions have a wider focus, incorporating a broader range of style and content.
Whether this material was initiated by Brunton in his questioning Bhagavan and was jotted down by either Venkataramiah or Brunton, or merely copied from Venkataramiah’s ledgers based on conversations with others who questioned Bhagavan, is beyond the scope of certainty. At minimum, Brunton presents the common material in a centralised, sophisticated manner that can be appreciated by anyone interested in creative thinking or higher philosophy. The remaining portion of Brunton’s notes contains unique content that cannot be found anywhere else. That should be sufficient justification for republication.

We should also keep in mind that this manuscript was not necessarily the only record Brunton kept of his conversations with Bhagavan. We know he was a prolific recorder of observations and conversations and his books after 1936 demonstrate the influence of Bhagavan’s teachings.

Several chapters have already been reproduced, in part, in *The Mountain Path*: i) Chapter Sixteen: April 1983, pp. 72 to 74; ii) Chapter One: October 1983, pp. 229 to 231; and iii) Chapter Fourteen: January 1984, pp.3 to 9.

The following excerpt is Chapter Six, ‘Characteristics of Philosophic Discipline’.

Q. Why is it sometimes I find concentration on the Self so easy, and at other times hopelessly difficult?

A. Because of *vasanas*. But really it is easy, since we are the Self. All we have to do is to remember that. We keep on forgetting it, and thus think we are this body, or this ego. If the will and desire to remember Self are strong enough, they will eventually overcome *vasanas*. There must be a great battle going on inwardly all the time until Self is realised. This battle is symbolically spoken of in scriptural writings as the fight between God and Satan. In our *sruti* [revealed scripture] it is a Mahabharata war, where the *asuras* represent our bad thoughts and the *devas* our elevating ones.
Q. How can one quicken this coming of realisation?
A. As one strives to know the true ‘I’ the attachment to objects, the bad and degrading thoughts gradually drop off. The more one does not forget the Self, the more do elevating qualities become ours. Realisation will come eventually.

Q. Why does an Upanishad say, “He whom the Atman chooses, to him alone does It reveal Itself, not to others?” Does not this seem arbitrary?
A. No. It is correct. It chooses those only who devote themselves to It, who become Its devotees. Such It draws them inwards to Itself. One must turn inward to find the Atman. He who thinks of It, It will draw to Itself.

All such thoughts as ‘Attainment is hard’ or ‘Self realisation is far from me’, or ‘I have got many difficulties to overcome to know the Reality’, should be given up, as they are obstacles; they are created by this false self, ego. They are untrue. Do not doubt that you are the Reality; live in that understanding. Never question it by referring your realisation of it to some future time. It is because people are victimised and hypnotised by such false thoughts that the Gita says that few out of millions realise the Self.

The order of asramas [four stages of life] was established as a general principle, i.e. to regulate the gradual development of the ordinary run of humanity. But in the case of one highly mature and fully ripe for Atma vichara there is no graduated development. In this case jnana vichara, i.e. the Self enquiry and the blooming of jnana, are immediate and quick.

Q. Am I worthy to be a devotee?
A. Everyone can be a devotee. Spiritual food is common to all and never denied to anyone.

To a despondent devotee: The quest must be made: ‘Who is despondent?’ It is the phantom of the ego which falls a prey to such thoughts. In sleep the person is not afflicted. Sleep state is the normal one. Quest and find out. Does one not find some kind of peace in meditation? That is the sign of progress, that peace will
be deeper and more prolonged with continued practice, it will also lead to the goal.¹

In as much as you say that you are ignorant, you are wise and it makes your way easier for the removal of ignorance. Is he a mad man who says that he is mad?² Control of desire and meditation are interdependent. They must go on side by side. Abhyas and vairagya bring about the result. Vairagya is to check the mind being projected out; abhyas is to keep it turned inward. There is the struggle between control and meditation. It is going on constantly within. Meditation will in due course be successful.³

If you seek God with your whole heart, then you may be assured that Grace of God is also seeking you.

Q. When we fall from the path what is to be done?
A. It will come all right in the end. There is the steady determination that gets you on your feet again after a downfall or break. Gradually the obstacles get weaker and your current stronger. Everything comes right in the end. Steady determination is the thing required.⁴

Q. The tendencies distract me. Can they be cast off?
A. Yes. Others have done so. Therefore believe it. They did so because they believed they could. It can be done by concentration on That which is free from predispositions, and yet is their core.⁵ If the longing is there, realisation will be forced even if you do not want it.⁶

Q. Is it necessary to develop qualities?
A. It is only for beginners that they are told to develop different qualities. For the advanced it is enough to look into their nature. This is the direct method. In the other paths there is the ego involved. This alone answers the question of what the ego is. Yoga Vasistha says that

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¹ Venkataramiah, M., Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 73.
² Ibid., Talk 398.
³ Ibid., Talk 220.
⁴ Ibid., Talk 29.
⁵ Ibid., Talk 28.
⁶ Ibid., Talk 265.
the quest ‘Who Am I’ is the axe which laid to the roots of the ego, destroys it.

Q. I fear that it is no easy thing to reach that ultimate goal.
A. Why stultify yourself by fear or concern for the success or failure of your course. Push on.

Give yourself up to deep meditation. Throw away all other considerations of life. The calculative life will not be crowned with spiritual success.

Yes, complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for all; in course of time that will lead to complete surrender. Well, if partial surrender be impossible what can be done? There is then no peace of mind. You are helpless to bring it about. It can be done only by surrender.7

In fact there may not be found any single individual in the world possessing all the qualities in perfection necessary for a mumukshu [mature soul] as mentioned in the Yoga Sutras etc. Still pursuit of Atmajnana should not be abandoned. Everyone is the Self by aparoksha [immediate or direct knowledge], although he is not aware, but identifies the Self with the body and feels miserable.8

Whenever you get that thought of difficulty, dispose of it altogether by trying to find out whence it arises.

Q. Can I realise the Self? It looks so difficult.
A. You are already the Self. Therefore realisation is for everyone. Realisation knows no difference in the aspirants. This very doubt if I can realise or the feeling I have not realised, are the obstacles. Be free from these also.

Q. Nevertheless unless I have the experience, how can I be free from these conflicting thoughts?
A. These are also in the mind. They are there because you have identified yourself with the body. If this false identity drops away, ignorance will vanish and truth be revealed.9

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7 Ibid., Talk 224.
8 Ibid., Talk 192.
9 Ibid., Talk 251.
Q. Do you accept the parable of Jesus where the woman seeks for the lost coin till it is found?

A. Why not? In that parable we know God seeks after souls. His Grace is always available for human soul. Only man must accept It. You know the sun shines. If you shut your eyes and say there is no sun, that is your fault, not the sun’s. If Grace of God is not realised by you, it does not mean that God is unwilling but that you have not surrendered yourself completely to Him. God is Grace.

According to your pakkuvam [state of development, preparedness, ripeness] you will realise Grace.

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Nandini, you own
the ecstasy of always,
for ever rapture;
find us beyond twilight, burn
our sorrows in the sunset.

A clean string of skulls
she wears around her neck,
of souls that are hers;
or a garland, Malini,
of nebulae on your breasts.

You are subtle as
silver paths of fish, rainbows,
sleep at dawn, starlight;
as dreams, Sukshmarupini,
and blind imagination.

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.
All men carry in their innermost core the reminiscence, however faint, of their true state of happiness which at Source is more than happiness; and freedom which is more than freedom. Hence everybody seeks happiness and freedom in one way or another. This is man’s eternal quest — this search for happiness, which is his birthright, meaning the discovery of the reality of his being. Only true knowledge can set him free and liberate him from the trammels of his finite consciousness. Such knowledge, as is stressed again and again, sets one free not by grasping, seeing or having it but by being It — a direct instrument-free intuitive knowledge which floods and overwhelms and washes away all illusory otherness; the drop merging in the shining sea, becoming the sea, or the sea slipping into the drop.

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of *The Mountain Path*. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.
Rationally and intellectually it is evident that happiness and peace of mind are bound up with stilling the mind. Why does one take drugs or drink, read detective tales, watch films, seek all sorts of diversions? It helps to lull the mind, to forget thoughts that trouble, although this state is fragmentary, unsteady. For the same reason one courts sleep in which there are no thoughts, no diversity, unless dreaming, and the happy remembrance on waking of an untroubled state albeit without consciousness. How much more so the bliss experienced in Oneness of Being, which is pure awareness also called ‘awakened sleep’. Similarly one forgets oneself, that is one’s thoughts, when concentrating on some absorbing work or pastime or listening to beautiful music, anything to divert the mind from oneself. When we say ‘breathtaking’ we mean really thought-taking because the source of breath is the same as that of thought.

Similarly when a desire is fulfilled the contented mind is quiescent for that moment till agitated again by another desire or thought. So, as Sri Ramana Maharshi says, happiness is not derived from objects or conditions but from a quiet mind. The same objects or conditions which seem to make one man happy may cause distress to another depending on their previous conditioning. For instance a prince used to palaces will not be happy in a flat, the acquisition of which might be the cause of joy to another.

Empirical knowledge, preconditioned as it is by the limitations and uncertainty of human faculties cannot reveal the true nature of Reality as it is. According to the Upanisads, only with his metaphysical intuitive insight is man able to transcend these limitations and know ultimate Reality which is the core and substratum of his being and the one life of all beings. Brahmavidya means Self-knowledge which one realises without the aid of the intellect or the senses — a direct instrument-free knowledge of being it through stilling the mind.

In Yoga Vasishtha the sage explains to Rama that direct cognition or intuition (pratyakshanubhava) is the only and ultimate source of all our knowledge be it empirical or metaphysical. “There is no other source through which new knowledge comes to us.” If anything is
not directly experienced, it cannot be made known to one by any description of it by others. The taste of sugar, for example, cannot be made known to one who has never himself tasted it. Others can give us only a hint or partial knowledge of things unknown to us by way of analogy or illustration.

Intellect is regarded as man’s highest quality. It can lead us only to the point still conditioned by the mind, to its outermost periphery. It cannot transcend the mind. It has to wait for intuition which in Hindu mysticism would be called Grace, a faculty which moves on the plane of direct experience, which knows spontaneously. Intuition knows, intellect understands not always reliably. Our senses deceive us and reveal only the appearances relative to the experiencer, according to the latest findings of modern science as explained by the Indian scientist I. Taimini. A blue sky is not really blue above the clouds, vast expanses of water appear blue or green or grey but a handful of it looks transparent. Stars which we perceive now, may have ceased to exist long ago, may be millions of years earlier and so on.

Empirical knowledge is mediate, changeable and instrument-conditioned, hence unreliable. “We have no real insight into the ultimate nature of physical reality through astrophysics or nuclear physics because, as modern scientists have discovered, the observational horizon becomes elusive at a certain point. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics makes this clear. Scientific research is based ante a priori on the validity of past experimental conclusions based on our fleeting sense-perceptions. So far no scientist has seen a proton or an electron or a meson.”

If one can accept as valid whatever goes in the name of science based on the past testimony of scientific enquiry and often discarded in favour of newer discoveries, so logically the collective testimony of seers, those scientists of the spirit, should not be brushed aside but given a fair trial. The modern scientific theory that this so solid-looking matter is only a form of energy is after all contrary to our sense perception and yet is believed.

Einstein humbly acknowledged that with all the tremendous achievements of modern science, not even the fringe of that
greatest of mysteries, the mystery of existence, had been touched so far.

There have always been God-enlightened men in the world. Their experience of the ultimate Truth has been confirmed by many mystics and seers ancient and modern everywhere. It has stood the test of time.

Their knowledge is not instrument-conditioned but a direct intuitive knowledge of seeing-being, knowing-being. We do not become something else, nobody can, we only cease to be deluded that we are finite when our true state is Infinity, eternal, immortal. We realise what we have always been with absolute Certainty. That is the experience of the Ultimate Truth, as testified by all those who have realised it or glimpsed it. The high degree of unanimity and striking similarity so obvious in the attempts to describe mystical experience in various ages and cultures should induce even purely rational minds to test it for themselves and see whether it works.

Ling You, a Chinese sage warns us that false thinking is so deep-rooted that it cannot be dissipated in an instant. For this reason expedient methods are used to strip the mind.

With one accord mystics denounce the limitations of reason in the quest of the Absolute. When the mind is still, clear of thoughts — the basis of all disturbance — pure Consciousness, the very source of thought, the Oneness of life reveals itself as it is ever-present. Those who strive in all earnestness and follow the teaching of genuine gurus leading ultimately to the discovery of the one living inner Guru in one’s own heart, find that it does work commensurate with our dedication and sincerity. The inner living Guru who is one in all hearts can be followed from the start. When there is not enough dedication or faith, one can pray for it. A sincere prayer from the depth of even an unbelieving heart will not be in vain. The One inner Guru, the surest of guides, is always present watching over us.

When we have reached the limit of our effort, the inner Guru or Grace takes over, as if lying in wait, like a flood to wash away our life-long illusion of finitude, conditioning and limitations. Effort is also in the realm of illusion — and the one who seeks ‘a fancied being’ — but we have to start from where we are, so long as we have...
not realised this as living truth, not only intellectually, and so long as “unreal echoes produce relative results.”

We are imprisoned by our breath, a wise man said. Our original true state is such blessed equilibrium and harmony that even ‘ecstasy’ does not describe it. The scriptures and seers declare that ‘words turn away baffled’ when one tries to convey by the mind what transcends the mind. In such a state activity will be always spontaneously performed. Replies to questions are spontaneous, ready and not the product of discrimination.

The question arises whether a jnani, who has transcended his mind, uses it to think. Bhagavan replied that a realised man uses his mind like any other faculty. However in his case thoughts are not discriminative but arise spontaneously always dealing perfectly and effortlessly with a given situation — and leave no trace on the mind; they are like a flight of wild geese leaving no trace in the sky, whereas ordinary men are affected by their thoughts which leave grooves on their minds and change their metabolism. A jnani is the master of his mind, his thoughts, and can shut them off like any other instrument remaining always in his true state, whereas in the case of an unenlightened man it is the mind which is the master.

It was a matter of sheer delight and wonder to listen to Bhagavan’s replies always spontaneously ready on his lips — perfect, witty and always to the point. Once a rather arrogant young man told him about his so far unsuccessful search for a guru and asked where he should go. Pat came the reply: “Go the way you have come.” This was at the same time putting him in his place for his arrogance and giving him a profound spiritual teaching: to return to the Source.

A visitor asked Bhagavan why there should be illusion if the individual soul is identical with the Supreme and why the ego should not be cut down at one stroke and destroyed so as to gain Supreme Bliss. Bhagavan asked him to hold out his ego so that he could strike it down. The reply caused general laughter.

Another time a devotee complained about the inequality in humans and why are they not equal. “Let them all go to sleep” was Bhagavan’s reply.
One devotee was preoccupied with the question of life after death and asked Bhagavan about it. The reply was: “You have lived before. Now is your life after death.”

To the question “Where does the soul go when the body dies?” Jacob Boehme answered: “There is no necessity for it to go anywhere.”

Before passing away Master Liang Chiai suddenly opened his eyes and said: “Leavers of homes (the weeping monks) should be mindless of externals: this is true practice. What is the use of being anxious for life and death?”

A wise man compared the world (life) to a fabric of dream illusions upon which men fix their gaze and become fascinated as though in a hypnotic trance.

In *The Cloud of Unknowing* the stilling of the mind rejects the wording of special deeds or any new thought or stirring of any sin which presses the mind betwixt thee and God. “Thou shalt stalwartly step above them and tread them down under thy feet and try to cover them with a thick cloud of forgetting... And if they rise oft put them down oft and shortly to say as oft as they rise as oft put them down.”

All major religions teach the same esoterically in different terms adapted to circumstances. They meet at the top from different mountain paths. St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme and others say that God became man that man might become God or that God forgets himself in man and man remembers himself in God. “God is a fountain flowing into itself,” says Meister Eckhart.

“Even if we desire no greater benefit from this forgetting and emptiness of memory than our deliverance from pain and trouble that of itself is a great gain and blessing,” says St. John of the Cross.

Self-nature requires practice only when it is screened by delusion and takes the form of a human being which without self-cultivation cannot know it. Someone asked the master: “Is there anyone practising self-cultivation?” The master replied: “He waits until you become a man to practise self-cultivation.”

“Though its aim (esoteric dharma) lies beyond words, it is responsive to enquiring seekers.” — Master Liang Chai of Tuang Shan.
In the state of a finite human being one reaches out to a state of Infinity which is realised in true awakening. Stilling the mind simply means withdrawing into the Self. It means all-embracing consciousness, all-knowing spontaneously without being tied down to particulars. The thought-machinery is being used like any other instrument, having mastered thoughts instead of being slaves to them. It is liberation from all finitude in a state too marvellous to describe when it has steadied itself. In the beginning stages it may be a seeming stillness with thoughts lurking to jump up at the slightest provocation. Even so it brings some peace but one has to persevere to steady this stillness so as to experience the Ultimate State.

Every impediment can be surmounted by perseverance, one-pointed-ness and concentration as the pilgrimage and Goal. A stick used to stir the funeral pyre also gets burnt up in the end.

A still mind is the opposite of inertia. Dogen expresses it as no-mind (Wu-hsin) which is not like clay, wood or stone that is utterly devoid of consciousness, nor does this term imply that the mind stands still without any reaction when it contacts objects or circumstances in the world. It does not adhere to anything but is natural and spontaneous at all times and under all circumstances. He who observes his body and mind sees them as magic shadows or as a dream.

According to Hui Neng, Wu hsین is not unconsciousness but to see and to know things with the mind free from attachments, “It pervades all but sticks nowhere.” This knowing of the essential nature of objects must not be tainted by the mind but will not exclude the mental seeing of the mind-qualities (Mu-thought meditation means really knowing the essential nature of things without being tied down to anything in particular and thus be limited to it.)

A still mind is omniscient in a state of absolute equilibrium where nothing can hurt or disturb or worry it in any way anymore. It is all-embracing I-AM-ness. The whole universe, all Existence is I AM. The pure I Am without being limited to any state, without being this or that is the same in all, the Oneness of Being.
Trimurti on Elephanta Island, Mumbai
Listen to a story if you have the marrow of intellect to appreciate the allegory.

Once there lived an affluent merchant. He loved his trade and was diligent. He took his merchandise from one city to another. He had servants to look after his flock of animal viz. horses, hounds, cows etc.

Once a servant went to the forest and spotted a lion cub. He brought it home, took the cub and presented as a gift to his master. On seeing the lion cub the merchant said: surely it is not advisable to rear such a cub in a household. One of his hounds has recently given birth to puppies. The merchant said to the servant: take this cub to the mother hound and if the cub suckles her udder, leave the cub with her pups so that it gets its nourishment.

The servant took the cub to the hound and it allowed suckling. Thus the cub suckled the milk of the dog and was living in the grace of the Master.

Grace of the Master

Qadre Alam
Translated by Nawazuddin

Nawazuddin devotes his time to the study of Sufism to which he was initiated by his father, Syed Rafiudin Ahmed. For those who are interested, the translator can be contacted at nawazuddin@hotmail.com
company of dogs. He strayed away from his lineage, lost his pride and original disposition and forgot his nobility. The milk of the hound eventually influenced the cub and he lost his individuality and became dull. It is pitiable and painful that a lion should forget his noble birth and behave like a dog.

One day the merchant asked his herd of hounds to be brought before him. He saw the young pups now grown up. He prepared his hounds and went for hunting. While they were in the forest they heard a roar.

The roar is the proof of a lion even as the proof of the Sun is in its rising. Uproar occurred in the forest by the roar of the lion and one and all started running helter-skelter. The lion cub lost his way and companions stood alone sadly in the forest. The king of forest swiftly approached the cub and on seeing it, it wondered how it came to this forest and from where?

On the other hand the lion cub was panic-stricken and was trembling out of terror. The lion asked the cub, who are you where do you live and whence do you come? The cub replied that he was a dog and since he could not flee got struck by panic. My mother is a dog and my siblings are dogs.

The lion was intrigued to hear this from the cub and wondered why on earth the cub claimed to be a dog. Determined to know the truth and guide the misguided cub the lion said, fear not, tell me the truth, who are you? The cub again replied, I am not lying, I speak the truth. I am but a dog.

The lion thought that the cub was either speaking out of ignorance or out of fear. He said O you ignorant, listen to me carefully and reflect on my words. First establish your mind fixedly on one thing. As motionless water body is like a mirror so also a fixed mind without a trace of thoughts. Open your eyes and behold me fully by fixing your eyes on my eyes. Look at my countenance, my features and manners and then contemplate on yourself decisively.

With the eye of certainty the cub reflected upon the counsel of the lion and found his mark. He realized that he was a cub of lion. However he enquired the lion, O Sir tell me the truth who am I? The lion replied O brave one you are a lion. As you beheld my features
and know that I am a lion, with the same insight look at you and behold your body and soul.

The cub started contemplating on his arms, legs, colour, complexion, actions and attributes. Undoubtedly he realized his being. He was astonished at this sudden awakening of knowledge. At the same time he was confused as to why he imagined himself to be a dog.

The lion called out to the cub, have you understood or not? The cub put his head between his paws out of humiliation and humbly said yes. The lion asked the cub to remove the sense of self-reproach and tell him what he had realised. The cub could not speak as if his mouth was sealed and every pore in his body was dissolved out of indignity. However the cub said meekly I am also a lion. The lion said, previously you were telling that you are a dog. Have you now understood the difference between a lion and a dog? The cub replied, verily I now know that I am a lion too when I looked into the eyes of a lion.

Why then did you tell me that you are a dog? Now unfold the secret of dog nature. The cub narrated its history from the time he was picked by the servant until he was confronted by the lion in the forest. I was a pup in the company of dogs and I totally forgot my noble birth. I have found my real nature with your grace. I was a pup and when the lion cast his gaze on me, with the grace of the lion’s gaze I found my identity.

O wise man, now listen to allegory of the tale. The servant who took the cub from the forest is the mother and the merchant is the father. The dog, which nurtured with her milk, is the world. The puppies with whom he was reared are the companions of imperfect wisdom. He that trained with the art of hunting is the master of worldly knowledge. And he that removed the veil between the dog and lion, know him as the Perfect Master and Spiritual Guide.

Rarely it happens. Whoever is destined to gain this inspired knowledge, to him every trivial means are adopted to cast away his ignorance. How nobly it was said, so long as the attention of the perfect Master is unavailable, the road to salvation is not obtained.

Lion hearted brave men are those who never adopt the nature of dogs though being in their company. O friend forgetting your noble
self you speak a different language and behave differently. Certainly you are noble and divine as evident from the manifestation of inherent qualities. Whoever is deficient of this insight is devoid of sight. One day he will repent and be disgraced. Before you are disgraced and become repentant go and seek the Perfect Master.

Resoluteness is the requisite of this path, otherwise a man is worthless.

Under whose care I found the light of moon? None other than the brilliance of Qadre Alam.

Who?

Ana Ramana

Time has become the mountain,
Steady, unmoving, wise
And the world a kaleidoscope of image,
A constant flow of light
And the body, what is that
But habitual sensation,
A kernel of contraction
Rising up and crying
Like a child.
Yet diving into this dream of me,
There is nothing to be found
Only a ground-up corpse
So distant, it is a pinpoint
Of dust.
Then who am I really
If not this wad of thought
That cannot touch the silence?
I am that mountain no mountain,
That flood of dazzling light.
I am the heart that resides
In the One True Heart –
Pure and timeless Love.
One of the great gifts of Mother India is the open invitation it offers to those who are impelled to explore the outer reaches of the mind free of restraint and obligation. The land of Bharat thrives on diversity and a wide range of often contradictory schools of thought are accepted; some more actively than others it is true, but those who follow a different way are left alone and usually not castigated as deranged. There is the tacit recognition and respect for those who dare to be other, and while they may not always get positive support, on the other hand there is usually no effort made to impede the path of those who challenge the present way of thinking and offer a higher vision, however idiosyncratic it may appear at first sight.

One such individual who dedicated his life to a higher calling free of social approval was R. Vaidyanathan or Remaji, as he wished to

Christopher Quilkey is a member of the editorial board.
be called later in life.\(^1\) He was born in Madras in 1913. As a child he
did not go to school but because of his precocious musical talent his
father had him learn the violin from a master in the *gurukulavasam*
style, that is, he stayed in the house of his music master for five years
from the age of six in Karur. It was during this period that he read
the *Ramayana, Mahabharata* and *Bhagavata Purana* in Tamil.

The stories of tapas or penance impressed him most. The
ancient people did tapas for everything from the successful
fulfillment of a desire to the restoration of their pride when honour
was impugned. They took life as it was without what today we
called the scientific spirit. They sought to propitiate nature and
the gods, which ruled it by invoking the respective god to satisfy
their wants by granting a boon. “The heart of the Hindu religion is
penance. It is also called meditation. The lower aims of meditation
are various boons, this and that. The highest aim of meditation is
oneness with the worshipped. Why do I say all this? It is to point
out that karma yoga (the spiritual way of performing actions) is
a great worship of God.”\(^2\)

By the age of eleven he returned to Madras and after a year at
home entered a regular school. Musically gifted Remaji quickly learnt
the piano and practice made his mind sharp. He had by nature an
enquiring mind and a scientific attitude towards phenomena. A
brilliant student he received several awards upon attaining his BA and
later, his thesis on the acoustics of musical instruments was shown
to C.V. Raman, the Nobel Prize winner whose recommendation
enabled him in 1934 to enter Cambridge University as a research
student under Lord Rutherford. From 1934 to 1938 he did research
in nuclear physics. The astrophysicist, S. Chandrasekhar and H.J.
Bhabha, the father of modern Indian nuclear energy, were colleagues
at the Cavendish Institute.

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1 He coined a new name for himself ‘Rema’ which means according to him, the
ray of God.

2 Grimes, Meera, *Swami R. Vaidyanathan (Remaji): A Man with a Message to
In the same year an event happened which abruptly changed the course of his life in five minutes. In the course of a conversation about a photograph of his younger sister back in India the word ‘young’ struck a deep chord. He then looked at a photo of himself as a small child on his mother’s hip as she stood behind his father and his older brother. “Always, from my childhood, three things will be going on automatically in my mind. A reporting like a radio commentary: I am going out. I am tired now, and rain is falling and so on. I did not do it with any effort; it just came by itself. Occasionally there will be a dialogue in my mind with my alter ego. The next one is music; Carnatic or Western classical will be going on by itself, and the other one is rhythm; my teeth will be playing mrdangam (classical drum). When I saw the photo in my mind, I said, ‘This is me.’ As if talking to someone (my alter ego) who is standing there in my mind. There was nobody, but that was the attitude I had.”

He began asking what was the same now as that of the baby in his mother’s arms and by degrees he regressed back to the moment when he was in his mother’s womb, and then further observing the development of the foetus till he arrived at the size of a mustard seed. “What, that small thing like a mustard seed has become this?”, I cried. Why do you wonder? There was a time before you were in mother’s tummy when you were not. When I wondered about a time when this world was, the sun and the moon, and all the trees, and I was not, everything disappeared. When I returned to normal consciousness, I cried, ‘What! Everything has come from nothing?’ All this took place in less than a span of two minutes.”

All this time his breathing had altered and was stentorian like a bellows pumping. Disgusted by these noises Remaji became angry from shame at the ugly sounds his body made and he tried to stop breathing and get out of the body but it would not cooperate and eventually he gave up. “My mind was restless and asking questions. I wanted to know why I was hooked to this body, and why the world

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3 Ibid., p.48.
4 Ibid., p.48-49.
is here, and what is going on in it. I looked at my body, I was acutely ashamed of my body and its limbs, which appeared to me to be those of an animal. All these years I was thinking that it was me and I was proud of it.”

From there he began to question “Who am I? If I am not the body where am I? Wherever there is pain, am I there? But if I pinch my hair I do not feel pain, so am I not there? Maybe whenever the pain is more am I there?” From this point his investigation developed further, recognising that his studies, the hopes of his father, the anticipated adulation of success all meant nothing if he were to die. Alongside this stream of thought he saw the pathetic condition of the world and suffered with it. He was critical of God and thought it monstrous there was so much pain in the world. “If only I could understand why this (the known/world) should be so, I would be free from suffering. I do not require practical satisfaction to be free from suffering. It is enough for me to understand why the world came to be so, to be free of suffering.”

After this event he was unable to focus on his experiments at the laboratory and finally he left the research institute. “It appeared to me ludicrous that I should be investigating the structure of the nuclei. It is like investigating the constitution of bricks when one does not know what the building is for. That was the end of physics.”

He returned to India just prior to the outbreak of World War Two and faced the disappointment of his family that he did not continue

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5 Ibid., p.49.
6 Ibid., p.49.
7 Ibid., p.53.
8 Ibid., p.55. Later he wrote, “God's relation to the world is identical to that of the foundation of a structure. Without the foundation the structure will not stand. We see the world but not the Foundation. The world is a mode of God who is Pure Fundamental Consciousness. Sense objects are gross modes and the thoughts are subtle modes. The ‘i-consciousness’ is the first mode. The first mode is now minus the consciousness of its Fundamental and is bemused in the way it is apprehending and experiencing the gross and the subtle modes. The first mode must gain a consciousness of its Fundamental.”
his studies. They thought he had had a love affair and was jilted which resulted in him becoming mad. All this was untrue but he could not explain what had happened to him and the radical change that he had undergone. He felt the heavy burden of responsibility because it was expected that he would earn for the family and pay for his sister’s wedding. His father though bitter resigned himself to his son’s fate and appointed him to run one of the family’s musical instrument shops. Soon after he abruptly left without informing the family and took a train north to Hoshangabad, in Madhya Pradesh, on the banks of the Narmada river. He thought that if he gave up everything and wandered starving for three months he would be liberated, but nothing happened except the indescribable suffering of starvation. He returned to Madras to his family who thought he was cracked.

“I always had a peculiar ache in me, which disappeared in periods of pleasure and excitement but reappeared later, and was more or less constant. I also realized that even if I achieved all my ambitions that would have no effect in allaying this peculiar suffering. I also understood that this ache was connected to a feeling of vague estrangement from a previously attained state of ALL-ness. I also understood that isolation from ALL-ness was the diagnosis of this ache. I was always delighted in All and I wanted ALL or nothing and nothing in between. That is my nature.”

He realised that although he had done all he could in order to achieve liberation it was not enough. He then turned to religious books and specifically Advaita Vedanta but after an argument with the leading authority on the subject in Madras over a statement that the scholar implicitly believed that “The world is flat and is protected by eight elephants” Remaji discounted his authority and the lessons in Vedanta stopped. He regretted this decision later in life and said, “The Vedanta contains great truths. It is a treasure. But it is not scientific. My desire is to present it scientifically.”

9 Ibid., p.63.
10 Ibid., p.64.
After the sojourn in the forest he stopped working for his personal moksha (liberation) and took a sankalpa (conscious decision) to work for the welfare of others and reduce the suffering of the world. The second part of his life began from that moment because, paradoxically, by not wanting his own moksha, he was liberated from the concerns and anxieties about his own private world; his ego no longer an issue. “My principle is, ‘Whatever you want, seek it for ‘all’. You will get what you want as a by-product of your seeking it for ‘all’.’ In short, I desired to reduce the world suffering. I felt that I could live for this.”

He finally left home and eventually had a room with a piano in Gemini Studios and he worked for the legendary owner S.S. Vasan in the field of music from 1947 to 1958. He had the gift of absolute pitch and composed music for many films. He taught bhajans to M.S. Subbulakshmi and D.K. Pattammal. He also composed the music for the Mirabhai bhajan Hari tumaharo so that MS could sing it for Mahatma Gandhi.

Why I have gone into some detail about Remaji’s early life is the instructive nature of his experiences. For we all, to some degree, go through a rite of passage in childhood and youth. We all are challenged by questions as to who we are and what does life mean. According to our prarabdha and level of maturity we can either resolve them to our satisfaction or avoid them with placebos. For those who are not satisfied it is like an itch or a thorn pressing in one’s consciousness until we decided that for the sake of inner peace we should make an effort to resolve them. The more painful our personal circumstance the more we question. The difference for people such as Remaji is that the questions became a lifelong obsession or quest and that nothing else mattered.

As a trained scientist Remaji’s answer to the suffering he saw in the world and himself was in his writing. He wanted to see people serve the world in harmony and cooperation with each other. He declared that human beings are Masked-God and are players in God’s sport.

11 Ibid., p.65.
or Masque (pronounced mask). Human beings should consciously play their parts.

We hear echoes of the Bhagavad Gita and Vedanta in Remaji’s writing. He felt that he had found the way for human beings to reorganise their mental and physical lives in the light of truth and march towards a better order of things. He truly believed that human beings should walk the new Way of Life and if need be, should sacrifice their personal lives for the benefit of future generations…. “I was happy that my thinking and findings were also aligned with the thinking of great people in the world. At the same time, I understood that my personal life is going to be used by God as a sacrifice for human welfare.”12

The tragedy of Remaji was that his discoveries were unheeded. For the most part, people listened with indifference. It would be easy to conclude that he was deluded and that he had nothing new to say. It is true that he remained obscure and did not succeed in gathering a substantial following but if one takes the trouble to read some of his extensive, detailed writings there is a subtle mind at work. He had done more than parrot scriptures; he had integrated them into his consciousness and perception of the world. This is indeed remarkable.

The problem is that his writings require a discipline and perseverance, an allowance for his personal quirks and a suspension of our normal suspicious nature when someone has a new theory to save the world. People are impatient. There are many out there in the world who have an idea that is meant to save the world and they are easy targets for ridicule. But each of us in our own way is doing exactly what Remaji wrote about. Whether we are aware of it or not, we each have a role to play in our world and whether we surrender to it or go kicking and screaming, it will happen. This world is not one of random chaos, it does contain meaning. If it did not how do we account for the sense of harmony, the recognition of beauty and the acknowledgement of intelligence? We know ignorance when we see it; we understand and deplore cruelty when it is perpetrated; by either the negative or the positive we instinctively know what is right and wrong.

12 Ibid., p.96.
Remaji gives an interesting insight into the ego, that so-called feared demon and obstacle to our spiritual development. He writes: “According to Masquism, the ego is the most significant device of Nature in the evolution of the individual consciousness. It is a mode, or an ‘i-thought’ of consciousness, which claims the present body and mind and the past life as its attributes and identity. The entranced consciousness is the ego. The ego need not be considered an evil to be eradicated, but as an idea to be rightly understood. What should be eradicated is egoism. It is not wrong to be an ego, which means an ego without trance. It is only wrong to be egoistic which means the ego with trance. Along with the dissolution of egoism the trance also will be gone.”

By trance Remaji means identification with delusion.

Eventually he created two versions of Masquism and for both of them he has given the formats and hundreds of explanations. The first one is called the Aphorisms of Masquism. The second version he called Isvara Putra Isvara Lila Siddhanta.

Like Tolkien who in his epic The Lord of the Rings created a new language and cosmology, Remaji created a new way of perception and with it a vocabulary to describe his discoveries. He saw the world and people differently and in this sense he was a revolutionary. “I was called an impractical lunatic for toying with these ideas by so many so-called important people, some of whom are living, and one especially that is now deceased. I am still of the same opinion. But so long as human nature is in the way as it is now, the problems of humanity will continue in varied forms, though here and there small groups might achieve a measure of superficial cooperation and present a surface life of concord; that is all.”

Meera Grimes, the biographer and compiler of Remaji’s writings, knew him from her childhood days in the late 1950s and relates many stories of his humour, his love of children, his ability as a magician and ability as a musical composer. It would be better to read her book if you are interested. My wish in writing this account

13 Ibid., p.113.
of a very unusual man is to provoke the reader into realising that Remaji was, to use Mahayana Buddhist terminology, a bodhisattva, someone who came into this world to help others. And with this knowledge to realise that there are in this world not only recognised gurus but also seemingly inconspicuous souls who help us on our journey. What I most admire about Remaji is his courage in the face of disappointment that others do not see what he has realised and, for a sensitive person, the innate dignity he displayed when he would recognise that others, less receptive, would regard him as a crank and an amusement.

Remaji never planned his life after the Awakening in the mid-1930s. He would communicate if people asked about his work and its importance but he did not deliberately set out to create conditions for an environment where he could specifically teach. Whichever door opened he would take it and used whatever means were available.

In the mid-1970s, when he was in the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari teaching Vedanta, one of the students from Punjab took an interest in his teachings, and invited him to the Punjab. He left Tamil Nadu and was to spend his last years in Punjab. Why a Tamilian would live at the other end of the country away from the comforts and familiarity of his own people is another irony life threw up in Remaji’s adventure. We can only wonder, not at his external lack of success for which he did not care but at the numerous people who were profoundly touched by his integrity however baffled they were by its expression.

By normal standards Remaji’s life was a disappointment. Apparently he threw away a promising career as a scientist and he dawdled at the piano at Gemini Studios composing music for films when his musical talent could have taken him into the sophisticated circles of Carnatic music and the respect of his peers. But for him, he felt that he was made to leave these opportunities behind because of a higher calling. He had said that Nature or God demands from human beings to think and live from a global loyalty and one’s personal life should be lived subservient to it. “Then who am I?
I am a conscious democratic factor consciously trying to advance world Evolution… When an individual accepts one’s factor-hood and acts up to the truth of one’s factorhood for all, one is fulfilling one’s spiritual and natural or material obligations simultaneously.”  

He wrote endless reams on his new philosophy, which interested few; he talked, he wrote, to no apparent purpose but who are we to judge what is success and what is failure and by what criteria do we make such judgments. Have we not all encountered someone who by conventional standards was a little odd, but who we vividly remember for something they said or did which touched us in ways we cannot fathom? A pearl was drawn to our attention by their words or action and we cherish it and lovingly linger over it in those fortuitous secret moments when the heart is open.

Here was a person who believed implicitly in a greater life for all and yet from many he faced smiles of superior amusement or worse, covert contempt. In Remaji’s estimation he gave all he had of body, spirit and mind for what he believed in. He was a hidden treasure-house who spread the wealth of his wisdom far and wide. He left his physical body on the 2nd February 1990 at Amritsar, Punjab. 

15 Ibid., p.117.

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A Green Leaf

Nileen Putatunda

Outside my window,  
I see green leaves,  
A green  
That I am much too poor to describe,  
And I think of the blind flautist  
Who enchanted me some days ago,  
Ma,  
How long must he wait  
Before You show him  
The beauty of a green leaf?
The practice of zazen is the practice of being present in the here and now. ‘Just sitting’ or *shikantaza*, means non-dual awareness. When we sit, we are not trying to achieve some particular state of consciousness, not trying to achieve *anything*, and not trying *not* to achieve anything. No goals, no comparisons, no judgments, no achievements, just being-here, present and grounded in awareness. In the words of the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen Master Dogen, it is the ‘total exertion’ of being oneself and being *with* oneself.

In a deeper sense, zazen is consciousness becoming conscious of itself, awareness resting on awareness. It is the transformation of the body-mind-universe into non-dual awareness, where the distinction between subject and object dissolves into Oneness and Emptiness.

Ama Samy is a Zen teacher and abbot of Bodhizendo, the Zen meditation centre in Perumalmalai, Kodaikanal District.
We can be in two modes of consciousness. One is that of survival and security, of being somebody as against others, which invariably involves separation, division, analysis, comparison, competition, judgment and struggle. Here the root is mimetic desire and fear. This we can call the ego-self mode.

The other mode we call the Self-mode. It is one of being, unity and openness. This is Self as Emptiness, as openness, as no thing, no object. This Self is beyond dualities, divisions and separations. Here there is no subject and no object, no this against that. There is no fear, no anxiety. There is nothing to lose, for the Self is Emptiness. It is also Fullness. There is in it joy, peace, equanimity, love and compassion. No attachments, no obsessions, no demands, no running away. Letting oneself just be as one is, with all one’s fears, imperfections and vulnerabilities. Zazen is letting oneself enter this Self-mode of being. It is realising that one is Emptiness, openness, Oneness, not so much in total clarity and purity, but in mystery, darkness and unknowing, from where arise transcendental faith, trust and love. This is done by being in touch with the body and breath, in a body-mind-heart act. This is the practice of shikantaza: just sitting, just observing, just being here and now, with no seeking and no goals. It is intimacy with oneself and with the world. When you let-be and be present to bodily sensations and emotions without letting yourself be carried away by fantasy, without acting out and without repression, great energy and power as well as freedom emerge.

‘Sit like Mount Fuji!’ Japanese Zen masters were fond of saying. Clouds swirl around the peak of Mount Fuji, the winds whip it incessantly but it sits majestically unmoving, eternal. So also, sitting unmovingly, in quiet majesty and great dignity, as the storm-clouds of thought, emotion and passion rage through one’s consciousness, we just let them pass on.

One great twelfth century Chinese Chan master Hung-chih Cheng Chueh described it like this: “Your body sits silently; your mind is quiescent, unmoving. This is genuine effort in practice.... In this silent sitting, whatever realms may appear, the mind remains very clear in all details, with everything in its original place.”
MOUNTAIN PATH

Everything in its original place means that things are just as they are without adding interpretations or clinging with the mind. To sit in shikantaza is to let things be just as they are. You do not react to the one thousand things that assail your mind: sound, smell, taste, memory, fantasy, emotions, images, ideas — you do not interpret them, you do not engage with them, you do not try to stop them. You simply let them be.

To Dogen, posture and practice, sitting and Enlightenment are not-two. That is, body and mind, Enlightenment and practice, are not two, they are inseparable. Therefore when you assume the posture of the Buddha, you are no other than the Buddha.

And that is why in the zazen of shikantaza, we experience and express our Buddhahood. This is in fact the whole premise of the Zen school that Dogen founded. Practice is Enlightenment and Enlightenment is practice. When in zazen, we assume the posture of the Buddha — we already are Buddha. So we sit in zazen, not to attain Buddhahood but to express our Buddhahood.

Says Dogen:

“The view that practice and Enlightenment are not one is heretical. In the Buddha-dharma they are one. Inasmuch as practice is based on Enlightenment, the practice of a beginner is entirely that of original Enlightenment. Therefore, in giving the instruction for practice, a Zen teacher advises his/her disciples not to seek Enlightenment beyond practice, for practice itself is original Enlightenment. Because it is already Enlightenment of practice, there is no end to Enlightenment; because it is already practice of Enlightenment, there is no beginning to practice.”

With each breath, we are Realizing our Buddha-nature; with each breath we are expressing our Buddha-nature. Treat every moment and every breath in zazen as a precious jewel, to be watched over and guarded, always attentive, always alert. Hold your mind taut as a bowstring, in a constant state of bare awareness and let yourself enter into the equanimity of non-attachment. As your zazen deepens, your awareness opens and you come to abide in Self as Self. “Body
and mind will of themselves drop away, and your Original Face will manifest”, adds Dogen emphatically.

Our life is mortal and precarious: death, extinction and annihilation hang over us in our every step. At any time we can be swallowed up and disappear into non-existence. All other worries are trivial compared with this great oblivion overshadowing our whole lives. Can we face death and die into it? “Death: just death all through — complete manifestation!” cried Master Dogen.

The practice then of zazen is to die and lose oneself: to die to and lose one’s identification with a particular world of meaning and reality. And thence to rise to Emptiness, which is mystery and graciousness. Dwelling in this undifferentiated Oneness and openness, unknowing and mystery, in the simple practice of body-breath awareness, is healing and liberating. From this ground of Emptiness, you step into daily life with equanimity, compassion and alertness.

New Email address for Accommodation

The ashram has put in place a new procedure to serve the needs of visitors seeking accommodation. Email requests for accommodation/taxi pick-up should be sent to:

stay@gururamana.org

Visitors should seek accommodation at least a month in advance of their proposed stay.

Please note emails to ashram@ or president@ addresses requesting accommodation will not be honoured.

The new system acknowledges emails instantly and a final decision can be expected in less than a week.

The ashram does not provide accommodation to those visiting Tiruvannamalai for private purposes. Accommodation at the ashram is meant solely for those practising the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.
The Empathic Ground

Intersubjectivity and Nonduality in the Psychotherapeutic Process

Judith Blackstone

The Empathic Ground is part of a new direction in psychology and psychotherapy that embraces the new knowledge available in Eastern philosophical traditions, notably Advaita Vedanta, Zen Buddhism and the higher schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The author, a qualified psychotherapist, offers the possibility that psychotherapy can stimulate nondual realisation described in these schools. Her contention is that in the human evolution of consciousness, psychological and spiritual maturity are inseparable prerequisites for the realisation of one’s own nature as pure unbounded consciousness. This view is in accord with the Intersubjectivity Theory of psychotherapy which has similarities with Asian nondual philosophies. These excerpts are reprinted by permission from The Empathic Ground: Intersubjectivity and Nonduality in the Psychotherapeutic Process by Judith Blackstone, the State University of New York Press ©2007, State University of New York. All rights reserved. ISBN: 978-0-7914-7184-5. Readers may wish to check her website at http://www.judithblackstone.com

The following are extracts from various sections to give readers an idea of the book’s scope. Liberties have been taken in not giving the references to the various quotes for reasons of space.
Many different types of nondual realization are described in the Asian spiritual literature. One type, for example, experienced in deep meditative absorption, is a state of pure consciousness, in which one has no perception of any sort of phenomena. In this book, however, nondual realization refers to the experience of pure (or empty) consciousness and phenomena at the same time. It is the realization of one’s own nature as an unbounded expanse of subtle consciousness, pervading one’s internal and external experience as a unity.

My main premise is that as human development progresses, psychological and spiritual maturity become inseparable. They both involve the same accomplishments of deepened contact with oneself and others, emotional resilience, and authenticity. The advanced stages of psychological and spiritual maturity both arrive at a radical openness to experience that is felt as a continuity or oneness between oneself and one’s environment. This sense of continuity is based on the realization (or the laying bare) of nondual consciousness.

This particular type of spiritual experience is described in both Hindu and Buddhist teachings, but, because of its subtlety, it is not yet as well-known in the West as mindfulness or other Asian practices. However, in my work as a psychotherapist and nonduality teacher, I have found that many people can discover nondual consciousness easily. It requires a refinement of one’s sensitivity and a deepening of one’s inward contact with oneself.

Access to this subtle unified dimension of consciousness develops both our individual human capacities, such as perception, understanding, love and physical pleasure, and our relationships with other people.

Nondual consciousness is not a state of attention. It is experienced without effort of any kind. It is the mind completely at rest. In fact, there is not even a sense that the mind is resting, for that is still an activity of sorts. Rather, one experiences a simple lucid openness in which the phenomena of the world appear, and through which experiences such as thoughts, emotions and sensations move without obstruction.
There is also a sense that one’s consciousness is pervading all of the content of one’s experience. Rather than an encounter between one’s own head and the objects outside of one’s head, as experienced in intentional, dualistic consciousness states, nondual consciousness is experienced globally. It pervades and subsumes one’s whole body and everything in one’s environment at the same time.

One of the main characteristics of nondual realization is that it is discovered, rather than created, as rigid subjective organizations are released. Speaking both from my own experience, as well as from traditional accounts, I can attest that nondual realization is a process of gradually letting go of one’s grip on oneself and one’s environment — as if opening a clenched fist. It does require concentrated effort and time to achieve a certain degree of letting go. But the luminous spaciousness, pervading oneself and one’s environment as a unified whole, appears of its own accord as a result of this letting go, and continues to appear, without any effort on one’s own part.

My descriptions of nondual realization, based primarily on my own experience, most closely resemble those found in the Mahamudra and Dzog-chen schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the Hindu schools of Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism. Although these different Asian philosophies disagree in their metaphysical conclusions about nondual consciousness, they all describe it as an innate, all-pervasive dimension of consciousness, more fundamental than one’s cultural or psychological organizations. A Tibetan Buddhist text, for example, says, “This vast expanse, unwavering, indescribable, and equal to space, is timelessly and innately present in all beings.”

Asian nondual philosophy often articulates the freedom from subjective organizations in terms that are easily misinterpreted in the West, such as “egolessness,” or “selflessness.” This leads many practitioners of Asian religion to attempt to efface the experience of their own humanness, causing them to ignore or even suppress, for example, their emotions, desires and preferences. This attempt at
self-eradication supports the common human tendency to diminish those aspects of ourselves that have met with parental or social disapproval. It also supports the common tendency to dissociate from our emotional pain, thus, exacerbating rather than healing the schism between the subject and object of experience. And it obstructs the process of deepening inward attunement, which is necessary for personal and spiritual maturity.

**Realization Process**

This book presents an original theory and method of psychospiritual development, called Realization Process. Realization Process differs from other theories and techniques of nondual realization in several ways. First, it emphasizes the realization of nondual consciousness within the whole body. Many Asian nondual philosophies, in their conceptual deconstruction of the separate self, and also in their emphasis on perception, ignore the body. This gives many practitioners the impression that nondual realization is a kind of suspension in visual and auditory stimuli, cut off from the realms of understanding, emotion and physical sensation. In this book, I present the view that nondual realization is based on the openness and refinement of every aspect of our human experience. I also describe how we enter into the subtle dimension of nondual consciousness by penetrating deeply within our own individual form. Inward contact with our own form is synonymous with openness to the environment. Paradoxically, nondual realization is a process of coming alive within our own skin at the same time as we achieve the radical transparency and openness of self/other unity.

Realization Process includes a series of attunement exercises for realizing and embodying nondual consciousness, for releasing the somatically anchored psychological holding patterns that obstruct nondual realization, and for two people to practise attuning to nondual consciousness together.

References to nondual experience can be found in all of the world’s major religions, but Buddhist and Hindu traditions describe it
most explicitly. As I have said, the type of nondual realization that I am concerned with in this book is expressed most clearly in the Dzog-chen and Mahamudra lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, and the Hindu Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism schools. From a purely phenomenological perspective, there is no difference between the nondual experience described in these Buddhist and Hindu teachings. They all describe nondual realization as the experience of an extremely subtle, luminous expanse of consciousness pervading all of one’s internal and external experience as a whole. Self and object are experienced as a unity, because they are pervaded and encompassed by a single, unobstructed consciousness.

In Tibetan Buddhism, this unobstructed consciousness is usually called nondual (or primordial) awareness. In Hindu traditions, it is called unified consciousness, Brahman, or Self, among other names. In this text, I refer to it as nondual consciousness.

Here is a description of nondual consciousness from Tibetan Buddhism: “Mind itself — that is, the nature of awakened mind — is pure like space, and so is without birth or death…it is unchanging, without transition, spontaneously present, and uncompounded.” Notice how similar it is to this description from Advaita Vedanta by Sankara: “I am the Supreme Brahman which is pure consciousness, always clearly manifest, unborn, one only, imperishable, unattached, and all-pervading and non-dual.”

Tibetan Buddhism describes this experience of pervasive consciousness as “cutting through solidity” because the phenomenal world appears to be transparent, or permeable. All objects appear to be as permeable, luminous and empty as consciousness itself. There is no discernible difference, no duality, between appearances (objects) and the consciousness that perceives them, or between experiences and the one who experiences them.

This produces an immediacy of experience, called ‘direct’ or ‘bare’ perception. All perceptions, cognitions, emotions and sensations seem to arise directly, vividly and spontaneously out of the clear space of nondual consciousness. An early Buddhist text describes this as, “in
the seen there will be just the seen, in the heard, just the heard, in the sensed, just the sensed, in the cognized, just the cognized.”

It also produces a felt sense that neither the experiencer nor the experience exists independently. Buddhist philosophy describes objective reality — the attribution of reality to objects “from their own side” — as illusory. The experience of subject/object dichotomy is considered a mental construction or reification superimposed upon the actual unity of subject and object.

The Experience of Nondual Realization

The literature of Buddhist and Hindu traditions abounds with descriptions of the experience of nondual consciousness. Rabjam Rimpoché writes, “Within the spacious expanse, the spacious expanse, the spacious vast expanse, I Longchen Rabjam, for whom the lucid expanse of being is infinite, experience everything as embraced within a blissful expanse, a single nondual expanse.”

Sankara writes, “I fill all things inside and out, like the ether.”. And “He who has attained the supreme goal…dwell as the embodiment of infinite consciousness and bliss.”

The Siva Sutras states, “The individual mind intently entering into the universal light of foundational consciousness sees the entire universe as saturated with that consciousness.”

Kashmir Shaivism scholar, Muller-Ortega, writes, “No longer do finite objects appear as separate and limited structures; rather, the silent and translucent consciousness out of which all things are composed surfaces and becomes visible as the true reality of perceived objects.”

These descriptions, from diverse and even antagonistic Asian nondual philosophies, all point to the same specific and unusual experience. It is not that a new object of consciousness is being described, but rather a different type of consciousness itself. A different way of knowing, revealing a different view of that which is known.

Although the Western post-modern world is convinced that all consciousness is intentional, always consciousness ‘of’ something, nondual consciousness differs from intentional consciousness in several ways. One of the most important of these is that nondual
consciousness knows itself at the same time as it reflects objects. Zen philosopher, Hisamatsu, writes, “The nature of Awareness beyond conceptual differentiation is that it directly knows Itself in and through Itself. It is not like ordinary consciousness or knowing, which is a conditioned, object-dependent intentional knowing.” Nondual consciousness is described as ‘self-knowing’, ‘self-reflecting’ and ‘self-apprehending’.

Also, nondual consciousness transforms our experience of the objects it reflects. Objects are now ‘saturated’ with translucent radiance. They appear permeable, in that our nondual mind pervades them. And they no longer appear to be ‘out there’ in the world, separate from our own self. Instead, we experience continuity between our internal experience of thoughts, feelings, and sensations and the external world of perceptions. All of this inner and outer experience appears to emerge from the same unified ground of consciousness.

Most importantly, nondual consciousness is not just a mental or cognitive experience. It emerges along with a transformation of our entire organism. Nondual realization is the experience that our own body is saturated with consciousness, just as the objects around us are saturated with consciousness. “When the bliss of cit (nondual consciousness) is attained, consciousness becomes stabilized in cit as one’s only Self. Even the body is experienced as identical with cit.”

When we realize nondual consciousness, we experience our own body, and everything around us, as permeable or transparent. In our body, this is experienced as a clear-through openness. It feels as if we are made of empty, sentient space.

Nondual consciousness, as the openness of our whole body and being, does not just perceive and cognize, it also feels and senses. As Hisamatsu says in the quote above, it has a ‘heart’. The openness that we experience with nondual realization is a deepened availability of our awareness, emotion, and physical sensation to respond to the world around us. The more we experience the stillness of nondual consciousness, the more deeply and fluidly our thoughts, emotions and sensations move through us. This unobstructed fluidity of response is the basis of authenticity and spontaneity.
Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Five

Dispassion Takes Hold of Tulasidas

Nabaji Siddha

O siddhas, you are truly worthy instruments to listen to this fateful event which caused a dramatic change in the life of Tulasidas — how a lascivious youth made a sudden turn around overnight and blossomed into a passionate lover of God!

When Tulasidas heard Mamata Devi’s outburst, he stood transfixed. His dazed condition was like that of an elephant struck with terror on hearing a lion’s roar, or like a snake mesmerized by the snake charmer’s piped music or like the shock of the herd of cows caused by the growl of a tiger. Tulasidas staggered as if he was hit by a thunderbolt. Mamata Devi’s words pierced his heart like a poisonous arrow. Suddenly, his bond with the outer world and attraction to its pleasures snapped.

Her words acted like catharsis. He felt a deep anguish, “Oh, I am being ridiculed by one and all because of my deviant mind and errant behaviour. My depravity has landed me in this condition wherein
everyone takes liberties to give me a piece of his or her mind. I have taken this birth only to bear with all these insults. I ignored my father’s wise counsel. I caused great suffering and heart ache to my mother. I felt no sense of shame or self-respect.

“Earlier, my noble father saved me from my madness for a strange damsels through his mystical powers. Thereafter I didn’t think of her even in dream. He also removed any vestige of desire in me for the company of prostitutes by taking me to the company of saints and satsangs. He dissolved the thick crust of impurities in me by drilling wise words into my mind. Then, restraining his own senses, erasing the mind-stuff, looking upon the body as transient and considering the worldly success as a mere trifle, he left for the solitude of the forest. Subduing the function of vital organs he became absorbed in meditation. How unfortunate that the example of an exalted father like him could not keep me on the right track!”

“On the contrary, I ruined my reputation, lost all self-worth and came to be despised by parents and wife and loathed by one and all. O ignorant mind, why have you subjected me to this ignominy? You made me behave stupidly. There is no point in blaming you. I am responsible for my condition. Whatever carnal desire I nurtured, you made me dwell on that constantly, bringing about my doom.”

“Now, I have turned to the Lord. O mind, you cannot play tricks on me any more. Hereafter, don’t even think of seductive charms of women or try to draw their attention. Your focus will be on uttering the names of Hari and reminding yourself of my father’s advice.”

Tulasidas’ mind dwelt less on the infamous deeds of the past and immersed itself with a vigour in the remembrance of Lord Hari. He bowed to Mamata Devi and said, “You are my Guru. I look upon you hereafter as mother.” With these parting words, he left the house and started walking in the street.

Disconcerted by the unexpected turn of events, Mamata Devi ran after him in the street. Prostrating at his feet again and again, she begged him humbly, “O Swami, I drew your attention to the path of devotion. Does that mean you should reject me outright, calling me mother? Don’t withdraw your affection from me. You are literally
Tulasidas replied, “O Mamata, from this day, the bond between us stands severed. The obsession with sensual pleasures had burnt into my soul, but now it has ultimately left me. God-thought has taken custody of me. O noble woman, while I heaped humiliation on you, you have bestowed a precious gift on me. I brought about downfall, whereas you have conferred salvation. Will I ever forget you? Can I bring myself to despise you? Hereafter you are my mother. Give up your attachment for me, restrain your restless mind and focus it on the Lord alone. Get a hold on the down pulling forces which are weakening you and place your mind at Sri Hari’s feet. I am firmly set on my course.” With unshakable determination, he walked away from home and towards the forest.

The relatives and neighbours, looking upon the scene, were struck with amazement at the transformation of Tulasidas. They started praising Tulasidas for his firm devotion and censuring Mamata Devi. She pursued him and blocking his path pleaded, “O life of my soul! How do you have the heart to forsake me like this? Don’t you recall our days of love and union? Have I wounded your feelings with my harsh words? Please be kind and overlook my faults. I beg you to return home.”

He smiled tolerantly and said, “I will not swerve from my firm resolve.”

Overcome by a terrible sense of desertion, she ran after him, begging him to return home.

He was implacable. Annoyed at her persistence, he replied firmly, “Why do you continue in this futile exercise, even after my rejecting your company? Return to your parents’ home forthwith and turn your attention to God. If you attach any value at all to your husband’s words, prove it by obeying me now.”

Her face blackened with sorrow, Mamata prostrating at his feet lamented, “How can I remain alive if you desert me? My heart will break with grief. Is the bond between us broken for ever? Alas, how
my thoughtless words have brought about this calamity? How can I live without you? Is it possible to forget you? Who will be there to speak loving and comforting words to me? Whom will I address as ‘my Lord’? Who will take care of me through thick and thin? With whom will I spend pleasant and playful evenings? Whom will I please with fragrant unguents? Who will speak endearing words to me? For whose sake I will decorate myself with fineries and flowers? Oh God! When will my grief be assuaged? How can I withstand this bleak prospect of living without you? Will the wound in my heart ever heal?” Sobbing helplessly, she lost consciousness.

Her heartrending cries made no impact on Tulasidas. He remained dispassionate and steadfast and walked ahead with resolute steps. All the worldly love he had cherished for his wife did a volte-face and now his heart pined for the divine love. The carnal love which tormented him day and night was transmuted into an all-consuming love for God, shining brightly in his heart.

Whoever he met on the way, he would ask, “O sadhu, you look joy-permeated. You must have seen Hari! Did you place your head at his feet when He was with you?”

“O brahmin!” he would run behind another and ask, “Have you destroyed your worldly desires? Have you rooting out your ego? Did Hari come to meet you? Did you shower your wholehearted love on Him? Did you melt away in your love for Him? Did He give you His divine vision?”

“Alas! fool that I am,” he would weep with deep remorse, “how I have wasted my life! Knowing about my depraved life, wise ones don’t even cast a glance in my direction. Oh, my misfortune is fathomless!”

Tulasidas wandered around talking like a madman or like one possessed by a ghost. His plight was like that of a man losing his only son or a young faithful wife losing her husband or a cow losing its calf. Unconscious of his body and surroundings, he stumbled on sharp stones and thorns, wailing loudly and calling the name of Hari.

In her hometown, Mamata Devi recovering her senses and remembering the tragic events of the night wept once again with a heavy heart, rolled in the dust and sobbed inconsolably, “Ha…! Ha..! I
have dug my own grave. How will I cross this ocean of desolation and spend the rest of my life drowned in utter misery?” Gloom and grief shook her physical frame which was drenched in tears. Her heart felt the deep pangs of remorse. She tried to follow the trail of Tulasidas. Her parents, equally helpless and unhappy, intervened and tried to comfort her saying that they would search for Tulasidas at the dawn and bring him back. They tried to lead her into the house.

The noble woman said, “Please fetch my mother-in-law. She alone can stop him and bring him back.”

Her brother left immediately on the mission, but intimidated by the rising waters in Yamuna, he had to wait on the bank till morning. Whereas Tulasidas undeterred by the storm, wind and flood crossed the river and entered the forest. Stumbling in muddy water and stepping on thorny bushes, he somehow managed to reach the top of a hill before the hour of dawn. He rested his fatigued body for a brief while and with the rising sun, he started racing in the vales and dales like a madcap muttering, “O Hari, Hari, will I adorn myself with the jewel of bliss of Your divine vision before dusk? Alas, the sun has already reached the top. I have lost one more day. Can I get a glimpse of His lotus feet by evening?”

Mumbling to himself in this vein, he would roam the forest in the scorching heat of the day and reach a temple in a wayside hamlet at nightfall. Standing before the idols, he would sob, “If the idols are god, why don’t they speak to me? Why doesn’t He come forward joyfully to meet me? Why doesn’t He bless me by placing His lotus feet on my head?”

In some temples, he sang adorations and holding the idols close to his bosom asked piteously, “O my Beloved! Don’t You know that I have been wandering like a man out of his senses just to have Your darshan? My legs are aching, my feet are worn out, and the sun has gone down. But You remain a stone without moving a muscle. Forsaking food and sleep I have been crying my heart out calling Your name. I am yearning for You day and night. But you remain deaf and dumb to all my appeals. Is this Your response to Your devotee?
Is there a mystery hidden in Your silence or is it my karma? Perhaps You are the motionless Brahman!"

After sunset, Tulasidas trudged on to a temple and laid himself down with anticipation, “Perhaps He will come in my dream and make me His own. He will unfold His divine vision tonight. I will feast my eyes on His lotus feet and bathe in the sea of bliss. At that moment, will I sing hymns in His praise or fall silent? O Lord, when will I cross this ocean of worldly existence? When will my worries be set at rest?” Absorbed in these thoughts, he lapsed into sleep.

Suddenly he woke up with a start and moaned in anguish, “O God, how did I forget You and lose myself in sleep? When will I see You, talk to You and serve You to my heart’s content? When will You apply the cooling balm to my aching heart? I want to sing before You, dance with You joyfully and lose myself in that state.”

Ceaselessly uttering the name of Hari and singing his glories, Tulasidas wandered in the sun, rain and wind in winter and summer. He walked through towns, villages and hamlets aimlessly. His feet were bruised, his body ached, his heart burnt with fervour and his face became pale. He entered the city of Varanasi, worshipped Lord Viswanatha, and keeping the company of sadhus and glorifying the name of Vishnu, he spent his days immersed in devotion.

Meanwhile, Tulasidas’ mother became fretful when he did not return home in the morning. She looked for him in all corners of the town. Then she reached the bank of Yamuna to go to Mamata Devi’s house on the other side. As the river was inundated, she waited anxiously for some time for the water to recede and then took a boat to the other side. She noticed Mamata Devi’s brother standing there. She asked him whether he had seen Tulasidas. Thereupon, he apprised her of the happenings of the previous night. She felt great distress at this and rushed to Mamata Devi for more details.

Mamata Devi bowed to her and with a tinge of reproach in her voice said, “O mother, had you not sent me here, this catastrophe would not have befallen me.” Her sorrow was all the more poignant.

Tulasidas’ mother also wept copiously, “O handsome boy, why did you desert us like this, forgetting us and renouncing home and
hearth? Where are you wandering? Did you get anything to eat? Are you afflicted by thirst and hunger? Are not your feet hurting? How will you survive without any means to support yourself? Has your passion gone to your head and turned you delirious? Have the harsh words of your wife made you bitter and driven you to the forest? Have you lost your head or got tired of this town? I must have been a worst sinner to be denied of the son’s protection in my old age. When you left, you took my life force also with you. I may breathe, yet I am as good as dead without you.”

With pity welling up in their hearts at her condition, Mamata Devi’s parents spoke to her lovingly, “O mother, we are dispatching our son and servants to search for him. They will bring him back safely. Please calm down and put your mind at rest.”

The search party combed the entire region for signs of Tulasidas. People in the hamlets and towns remembered seeing a man in mad condition, but the searchers could not locate him. Finally, when they arrived in Varanasi, they were baffled to see Tulasidas’ distraught state. They returned home and reported about his mad state. This renewed the unhappiness of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. They set out immediately for Varanasi in a palanquin followed by servants. ▲

*(To be continued)*

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**MOUNTAIN PATH**

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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. 31/03/2013
View from Ashram Old Hall
The serialisation of a translation and commentary by J. Jayaraman of Ozhivil Odukkam by Kannudaiya Vallalar was first begun in the July issue of The Mountain Path, 2004, and continued over the following three issues, ending in April 2005 at verse 38. Readers are recommended to consult these articles, which contain many original and thought-provoking insights. Previously, J. Jayaraman had edited and published in The Mountain Path a selection of 88 verses from the unpublished translation by Munagala S. Venkataramiah (see article below in the section entitled Previous editions and translations). These articles appeared in the four 1988 issues, under the title ‘To Withdraw As Pure Being – Ozhivil Odukkam’. The current translation is an entirely new endeavour in which the text has been translated by Robert Butler with a commentary contributed by S. Ram Mohan.

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

*Ozhivil Odukkam* by Kannudaiya Vallalar is a 15th century Tamil work in 253 venba verses. Its main assertion, which it drives home by means of numerous terse and pithy illustrations, often drawn from everyday life, is that the non-dual reality is unattainable in the mental world of the body-bound consciousness, and that, to attain it, or rather to realise it as our true nature, we must abandon all concepts, whether of Vedanta, Siddhanta or anything else, relying entirely on the inner witness of our own consciousness. The work is clearly written from the perspective of one schooled in the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta, a circumstance which is compounded by the fact that the only available commentary, by Tirupporur Chidamabara Swamigal, an eminent Tamil poet and scholar, leans heavily towards Siddhanta terminology rather than emphasising the advaitic aspect of the verses. However such considerations do not in the final analysis detract from the fact that *Ozhivil Odukkam* is a great work of Advaita, with many parallels to the teachings of Sri Bhagavan himself.

It is a work which advocates the path of Self-knowledge as the means to liberation, very much in the manner of Sri Ramana's *Ulladu Narpadu* (with certain reservations), and there are a number of verses which recall the latter both in style and content. It mercilessly lampoons false gurus with their pedantry and posturing, and warns against the ego which only perpetuates its own existence in its ridiculous and self-defeating attempts to transcend itself. As for the style, the text is terse and vivid, full of striking images which are deliberately designed to jar and shock the consciousness of the reader out of its comfortable ego-based frame of reference.

*Ozhivil Odukkam* is written entirely within the frame of reference of the philosophical school of Saiva Siddhanta. However there can be no doubt that the point of the work, as evidenced in each of its 253 verses, is not to inculcate the principles of Saiva Siddhanta, but rather the opposite; it is to demonstrate that Saiva Siddhanta, Vedanta, or any other belief system for that matter, is powerless to
aid the disciple in taking the final step towards union with the divine, at which point all mind-based constructs must be transcended and abandoned. This endeavour is exemplified in the very title of the work, which can be translated as “Subsiding [into the Self] through the elimination [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego]”, or, taking a slightly different grammatical interpretation, “Ceaseless abidance [in the Self]”. Paradoxically, all those teachings which are in the beginning aids to realisation, in terms of preparing and purifying the consciousness of the disciple, become in the end obstacles and must be left behind, a point which is given much emphasis at several points in the text itself.

The biography of the author gives us clues as to why the influence of Saiva Siddhanta should be so clearly in evidence in his work. According to The Lexicon of Tamil Literature by Kamil Zvelebil, the author’s monastic name was Sambandha Saranalayar (c. 1400-1450?), an eminent Saivite who composed Saiva works such as Tattuvavilakam, before changing his allegiance to aikkiyavada Saivism, and his name to Kannudaiya Vallalar, in which guise he became a great spiritual leader, teacher and poet, and, of course, composed the great work Ozhivil Odukkam in which Vedanta and Siddhanta are reconciled. From the foregoing we might expect that not only would the author tend to speak from the viewpoint of Saiva Siddhanta, but that he would continue to promote, up to a certain point, positive Saivite values, such as the paths to liberation, charya, kriya, and yoga. However, he makes it clear that none of the foregoing has any place in the process of the final merger with the Self, Sivam. In fact he devotes a chapter to the elimination or eradication of each of these in turn. His condemnation of yoga and its associated practices is particularly damning.

Other accounts of the author’s life are numerous and contradictory. The earliest dates for him have been given as 1380-1476. Others give a much later date, the early decades of the 17th century. In one account he is said to have been born into a wealthy family of Sirkali, a town near the east coast of Tamil Nadu, 20 km from Chidambaram.
It is also referred to as Tonipuram, ‘Boat City’, in view of the legend that Lord Siva used it as a boat when a flood engulfed the earth. The city was famously the birthplace of the great saint Jnanasambandhar. It is said that whenever Vallalar’s family visited the temple complex, they paid homage at the shrine of Jnanasambandhar twice, burning camphor and offering praises, once as they entered, and again as they left the temple complex, and that thus it was that a great love for, and devotion to the saint grew up within the young boy, which in the course of time ripened into realisation and union with Lord Siva. No other details appear to be known. One might speculate that, like Sri Ramana Maharshi, he was one of those rare souls who, due to his spiritual maturity, was able to attain realisation at an early age without the aid of an embodied guru.

It seems likely that Kannudaiya Vallalar, from the tenor of his verses, would have belonged to one of the Siddhanta monastic orders, possibly as the head of a math, or at least as a high-ranking spiritual teacher and preceptor. However his allegiance to the saint Jnanasambandhar, whom he claims as his only guru, suggests that he realised that the intellectual and physical rigours of the monastic existence could not bear fruit without the qualities of self-surrender and devotion, exemplified in the lives of the great saints of Tamil Nadu. One version has it that he was the son of Meykanda Sivachariar, an Acharya of the Saiva Siddhanta School, and that he abandoned this path in favour of the path of direct realisation.

On the surface level, Ozhivil Odukkam, after an opening chapter which covers a dazzling array of advaitic topics in no particular order, delineates the path of the mature disciple, as he becomes ready for divine grace, finds his guru, transcends the traditional paths of charya, kriya and yoga, renounces the world inwardly and (optionally) outwardly, and merges finally with Sivam. However, the whole text is so deeply imbued with the aim of conveying some sense of the supra-mental state of union with the Real, and of awakening in the reader a desire and hunger for this state, that any sense of narrative or progression is entirely transcended. Ozhivil Odukkam is like a
many-faceted jewel, each facet reflecting the light of the truth in its own sparkling and original manner.

The text is accompanied by an extensive urai or prose commentary, written by Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal. His guru was Kumara Devar, a Kannada king who famously renounced the world to become the disciple of the renowned Santalinga Swamigal. Both of these wrote works which number amongst the most important advaitic texts ever written in the language of Tamil. Before becoming the disciple of Kumara Devar, Chidambara Swamigal had become an accomplished scholar. The encyclopaedia of Tamil literature, Apitana Cintamani refers to him as Ilakkana Vittuvan – a scholar of language and letters. It is not surprising therefore that he wrote a number of commentaries, including several on the works of his guru's guru, Santalinga Swamigal, and the one on Ozhivil Odukkam, which was written at the behest of Santalinga himself. The commentary is excellent in many respects, but it does occupy itself in some detail with Siddhanta philosophy and metaphysics, somewhat to the detriment of the advaitic content of the work. The difficulty of the text itself, and the complexities of the commentary appear to have led on occasion to the mistaken belief that the work is more concerned with the minutiae of Siddhanta philosophy, rather than the issue of non-dual Self-realisation, which is absolutely not the case.

As can be seen from the foregoing accounts, there are few indisputable facts about the life of Kannudaiya Vallalar. However it seems clear that he possessed a life-long allegiance to Jnanasambandhar as his guru, and that this allegiance caused him at some point to reject the philosophical and scholastic norms of Saiva Siddhanta in favour of a direct gnosis of the nature of the Self, Reality, inspired by his guru.

Previous editions and translations

In 1851 Ozhivil Odukkam was first published in Tamil, along with the urai of Chidambara Swamigal, by the Tamil Siddha Ramalinga Swamigal, author of the hymns which are known collectively as the Tiruvarutpa. The text was next published in the early years of the 20th century. The copy used for this translation was published in Madras in
1908, comprising the text and original commentary only. Subsequent editions have followed this pattern, giving the text and original commentary only. Recently a new Tamil edition has been published, authored by a devotee of Sri Ramana and Muruganar, writing under the name of Mukavai Kanna Murukan Adimai, consisting of the text in Tamil and a commentary in modern Tamil, which incorporates elements from the original commentary, and draws upon the works of Sri Ramana and Muruganar to provide illustrative examples in support of its explanation of the text. This is available from Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot. The only English translation I know of is that by Sri Munagala S. Venkataramiah (later Sri Ramanananda Saraswati), the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The typescript, with a short introductory preface by Sadhu Arunachala (formerly Major A.W. Chadwick), is kept in the Sri Ramanasramam archives. It appears to be in draft form, requiring further editing, and was never published, although, as indicated in the preface, the authors clearly expected it to be published by the ashram, as were other favourites of Sri Ramana, such as *Tripura Rahasyam* and *Advaita Bodha Deepika*, both of which were translated wholly or in part by Swami Ramanananda Saraswati.

**Ramana Maharshi and Ozhivil Odukkam**

References to *Ozhivil Odukkam* are scattered throughout the works which record devotees’ conversations with Sri Bhagavan, and their reminiscences of him. Srimati T. R. Kanakammal, in her recollections, *Ninaivil Niraindhavai*, tells an interesting story which illustrates the regard in which *Ozhivil Odukkam*, as a work of Advaita, was held by both Bhagavan and Sri Muruganar. She tells how one day Muruganar was explaining the meaning of certain verses from *Ozhivil Odukkam* to her in the presence of a visiting swami from Kovilur Math. First he would explain the verse from the point of view of its Siddhanta-based commentary, and then according to the teaching of Bhagavan. At some point the swami interposed, asking whether the latter interpretation was from the point of view of Vedanta or Siddhanta. The question seemed to take Muruganar by surprise, and
he replied, “I do not know Siddhantam, nor do I know Vedantam. All I know is ‘Ramanantam’.”

It is clear also that Bhagavan actively encouraged Muruganar to write his own commentary on Ozhivil Odukkam from the Vedanta standpoint. This work was never started. However the fact that this request was made and tentatively accepted by Muruganar is clear from two prefatory verses to the unwritten urai which are recorded in the eighth volume of Sri Ramana Jnana Botham, the portmanteau collection of Muruganar’s unpublished verses. We quote these two verses, below (Sri Ramana Jnana Botham, vol. 8, vv 1832-1833), for the reader’s interest and as a blessing upon this current endeavour.

Ozhivil Odukkam reveals the ultimate Reality which remains ever attained. In order that this work may achieve the riches [of being adorned by a vedantic commentary], I will, with grace abounding, ascertain the true intention [of its author], Kannudaiya Vallalar, and I will bring out a commentary, penetrating his work with the light of pure consciousness, the state of remaining awake in the Heart.

My Lord, who ruled me in such a way that I should no longer, through delusion, fall into error, commanded me to write a vedantic commentary on the illustrious work, Ozhivil Odukkam. He himself will let me know [its correct meaning], remaining in my heart so that his command is executed.

At times, in translating Ozhivil Odukkam, I had the sense that the six centuries separating Sri Ramana and Kannudaiya Vallalar had telescoped down, and the two were revealed as one in their timeless, transcendent state; it seems that Vallalar is talking about Sri Ramana himself in his final years when in verse 228, describing the jnana guru, he says:

Dwelling detached from a body weakened through its effortless rejection of worldly desires; the last residue of spent karma lingering about him like the scent of faded flowers; his gaze where ever dwells the joyous bliss of freedom from the senses; his divine countenance – these images shall never leave my heart.
New Ashram Website

Sri Ramanasramam has redesigned the website:
http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org

The new design is responsive, meaning the menu adapts to the screen size. The multilingual site includes English, Tamil, Hindi, Japanese, French and Russian languages. We need volunteers to translate into Spanish, German and other languages. Those who wish to help with translations into other languages may write to ashram@gururamana.org

The new website allows free download of all issues of the *Mountain Path* older than 2010. These may be found at:
http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/Mountain-Path/

After the completion of each calendar year the *Mountain Path* issues from the previous year, that is, more than two years back from the present publishing year, will be added to the website for free-download.

English speaking visitors can learn to chant the *Akshara Mana Malai* at:
http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/portfolio-item/chant-arunachala/

The old website can still be accessed at http://archival.sriramanamaharshi.org for any information that is missing in the new website. Because of limited resources, the ashram has only tested the new website in Firefox, IE, Safari and Google Chrome.

Please send suggestions for improvement to:
ashram@gururamana.org
Prefatory Verse

Placing upon his head the mighty lotus feet of Jnanasambandhar, the beneficent king of gurus who defeated [the Jains and Buddhists] in debate, and thus attaining realisation, he [Kannudaiya Vallalar] expounded this work, *Ozhivil Odukkam*, so that all devotees might consume the honey [of bliss] which welled up in his heart upon the destruction [of his ego-self].

This verse affirms that, having lovingly placed on his head the holy lotus feet of the *sadguru*, Jnanasambandhar, the vanquisher of foes, external and internal, the author, rejoicing in the bliss that wells up upon the extinction of the ego, wrote this work *Ozhivil Odukkam*, for all those who are fit to experience that same bliss. Jnanasambandhar, whom the author holds as his *sadguru* (true teacher), had vanquished the Buddhists and Jains in various debates as external foes. Jnanasambandhar famously
reconverted the Pandyan king back to Saivism after he had been converted to the Jaina faith, which was prominent in Tamil Nadu in his time, an incident which is celebrated in patikam 39 of the third volume of Tirumurai, in which he rails at length against the beliefs and practices of the Jains. We may also take it that the internal foes that prevent the personal self, the jiva, from merging with the Self, Sivam, are also meant. The verse further affirms that Kannudaiya Vallalar, having experienced the supreme bliss that welled up within his heart upon the extinction of the ego, composed this work out of his great compassion in order that all devotees might attain that same state.

Text

The raised hand of Him who pours forth His blissful compassion through the destruction of my personal self, is the baton of truth, flourished to call a halt to the dance of the Vedas and Agamas; it is the crown upon the head of the Mountain of the [six] chakras; it is the Sun, rising to dispel the darkness which obscures my consciousness.

Kannudaiya Vallalar starts the work with this obeisance to his sadguru Jnanasambandhar. As a child of three Jnanasambandhar was taken by his father to the Thoniappar temple at Seerkazhi. Leaving the child on the steps of the temple tank, his father went down to bathe. Unable to see his father who was immersed in the water, the child began to cry for him, whereupon the parents of the universe, Lord Siva and his consort Parvati, appeared there. The divine Mother fed him with milk from her breast in a golden dish. Then the divine couple disappeared. When his father rose from the tank and saw the traces of milk around his mouth, he asked the child who gave him the milk. The blessed child pointed with his raised finger to the sky (…pointing with one finger of his divine hand graciously raised up to the heavens…Periya Puranam v.1976) and sang the famous decad beginning todudaiya ceviyan — He who wears earrings at his ears, which extols the grace of Lord Siva.
The raised finger of Jnanasambandhar is then compared to the baton of the dancing master, which he flourishes to call a halt the dancers who circle about him, and to single out for praise the one who is greatest amongst them. In a similar fashion Jnanasambandhar calls a halt to all the myriad conflicting belief systems that swirl about in the minds of disciples, singling out Lord Siva alone as the supreme reality. These belief systems are the numerous philosophical systems that are enshrined in, or are elucidations of the Veda and Agamas, and which must be transcended if the aspirant is to attain final liberation.

Finally the pointing finger is referred to as the crown upon the head of the Mountain of the [six] chakras. The chakras are the six bodily centres, starting with the muladhara at the base of the spine and ending with the sahasrara at the crown of the head. The term mountain is used because it is the practice of yogis to refer to the central pranic channel of the body, the sushumna nadi, as Mount Meru, and the left and right spiraling ida and pingala nadis as the sun and moon revolving about it. The point is that the transcendent state here alluded to as being accessible through the grace of Jnanasambandhar, entirely transcends the physical body and its sphere of objective experience, hence it is alluded to as an abishekam — crown upon the head of the six chakras.

In this verse we meet for the first time the word ozhivu, here translated as destruction. This refers to the removal of the obstacles that obstruct the aspirant’s quest for Self-realisation, the ego and the world of the mind and senses which is founded upon it, and which prevent the sadhaka from subsiding (odukkam) into his true nature as the Self or Sivam.

What course of study might [the mature disciple] adopt to achieve the loss of his personal self, if the sadguru does not cast his glance [of grace upon him]? He is like an elephant in musth, who becomes quite still, without the slightest tremor, when in his dream the enduring great lion that is the sadguru appears before him on his path.
This verse states that the destruction of ego cannot be achieved by the aspirant unless by the grace of the guru. The verse presents us with the image of an elephant dreaming it is in musth, charging wildly through the forest, as we may imagine, until a powerful lion, its traditional nemesis, appears on its path, and it comes to a sudden halt and stands completely motionless, transfixed by the lion’s gaze. In the same way the personal self, the jiva, rushes about wildly in the dreamlike world of the mind and senses until it is brought to stillness by the glance of the guru and comes to rest in its true nature as the Self, the state of kevalam in which the triad of knower, known and knowledge is entirely transcended.

However long and arduous the sadhana, the sadhaka must abandon all his efforts and surrender himself to the guru, who is the embodiment of divine grace. It should be noted, however, that Kannudaiya Vallalar, like Sri Ramana himself, did not, as far as we know, follow any living guru, but attributed his realisation entirely to Jnanasambandhar who lived several hundred years before his time.

The author uses the phrase tan izhappu — the loss of himself, oneself to denote the state of total loss of the ego, the same phrase as that employed by Sri Ramana in v.27 of Ulladu Narpadu, where he says, “Without investigating that place in which the ‘I’ arises, how can the loss of oneself, in which the ‘I’ does not arise, be achieved?” It is significant that the emphasis of this verse is not on gaining oneness with Sivam, the common goal (though variously defined) of all schools of Saiva Siddhanta, but on losing the personal self or ego, upon which that Sivam is gained, as it were, by default.

*Verses 3 to 6 delineate the qualities of the impostor, the false guru, and highlight the inherent dangers of following him.*

Do not associate with those gurus who are impostors, [trying to impress you with their] actions. They are like labourers who work for wages, or merchants who sell and barter goods. As for the true, supreme guru, he is unchanging like time, yet casting
his gaze [upon his disciple] he establishes him [in the non-dual state beyond objective consciousness]. There are no words to praise him. He is beyond the reach of the mind. (3)

This verse warns against association with those false gurus whose actions and motives are no different from those of labourers who work for wages, or merchants who ply a trade for profit. Again the paramount importance of the gaze of the guru, one of the six forms of initiation to be mentioned in later verses, is emphasised. Since the guru, in his state of oneness with the Self, is beyond the reach of the mind, he uses his gaze as a kind of portal, as it were, to admit the light of the Self into the illusory world of the disciple and dissolve away its false appearance of reality.

In order to express the unchanging nature of the guru, the author compares him to time. Time presides over all the divisions of time itself, the movements of the sun, moon and stars, and all the events which transpire in the phenomenal world, yet is untouched by any of these. In the same way the true guru is the embodiment of Self, Sivam, which, though it involves the jiva in maya and the round of birth and death, ultimately eliminating its impurities and leading it to salvation, yet remains transcendent and unaffected by this apparent activity.

The teachings of those who are steeped in the delirium of the three deadly impurities are like the incoherent ravings of a madman; they impart them to the foolish, passing them off as wisdom. We are reminded of the story of the shepherd who jumped into a river, clutching a brood of bears who were being swept along by the flood, and was drowned along with them. (4)

In this verse the teachings of the false gurus are compared to the incoherent ravings of a madman, which are passed off as words of wisdom. Both the false gurus who purvey such half-baked instructions and the ignorant disciples who follow them will ultimately meet with disaster. The author gives the example of the shepherd on the river bank who mistakes a brood of bears, which is being swept along in a flooding river, for sheep, and jumps into the river to save them. The
bears in turn hold on tightly to the shepherd, assuming him to be some kind of boat or raft to keep them afloat, and as a result, both the shepherd and the bears are drowned. Similarly the would-be guru is unable to recognise when disciples are immature and unsuitable, and the disciples, being immature, are unable to recognise that their would-be guru is not qualified to teach them, leading to the ultimate discomfiture of both.

The three deadly impurities referred to are anavam, kanma and mayai. These are the three impurities which in Saiva Siddhanta are held to obscure and delude the jiva, preventing it from attaining union with Sivam. Anavam is the obscuring principle which blinds the jiva to its true nature as Sivam, and thus gives rise to the principle of egoity, the sense that it alone is responsible for, and in control of, its own actions; kanma (Sanskrit karma) consists of the ego-based actions performed by the jiva under the influence of anavam and the experiencing of the consequences of those actions, which in turn gives rise to further actions, a cycle which propagates itself across innumerable births, and mayai (Sanskrit maya) is that which causes the jiva to perceive the undifferentiated oneness of Sivam as a world consisting of myriad discrete phenomena, existing separately from each other and from the individual who witnesses them.

Will a blind sifter of gold be called ‘Kubera’? Can a ram discern and demonstrate the sweetness of sugarcane? Similarly, can we see any likeness between the guru who is the embodiment of grace and one who is incapable of establishing the disciple in mauna, beyond the thirty-six tattvas?

A blind sifter of gold is one who earns his (poor) living by sifting spoil heaps and the like for particles of gold. Being blind, he is only able to identify the gold by touch. Kubera is the god of wealth. The true guru is like Kubera, surrounded by gold beyond measure, and the false guru is like the blind sifter, having to struggle to locate even the tiniest particle of it. The blindness of the sifter means that, rather than seeing the gold with this eyes, he has to feel for it with his hands, just
as the unqualified guru, being unable to perceive the truth directly, has to resort to external means such as those specified on the paths of carya, kriya and yoga, which are discussed in later chapters.

In the second comparison the false guru is compared to a ram leading his flock into a field of sugarcane. The ram, when it enters the field of sugarcane will only graze on its bitter leaves. He neither has the knowledge of the sweet juice in the stem of the sugarcane, nor does he have the ability to bite through and crush the hard stem to obtain the sweet juice inside. Being himself unable to do so, he will not be able to educate the rest of his flock about the sweetness of sugarcane juice or the means of obtaining it. Similarly the imposter-guru is capable of introducing his disciples only to the externalities of spiritual disciple, like the methods of worship and puja, and the practices specified on the path of carya, kriya and yoga, which, as noted above, are discussed in later chapters. He will not be able to make them understand true spirituality, the knowledge of the Self, like the sweet sugarcane juice, as he himself has not tasted it.

Chidamabara Swamigal notes in his commentary that the mention of the ram implies a comparison with the elephant, who, unlike the ram, crushes the sugarcane to extract the sweet juices, and shows his foal how to do likewise, just as the true guru, having experienced the bliss of true knowledge, jnana, is able to impart it to his disciples. He quotes Prabhulinga Leela, Ch. 18., v.7. in illustration, “He who sees with the outer eye is inferior; the realised jnani sees with the inner eye. In the same way the elephant, on seeing a field of sugarcane, takes the sweet juices, whilst the ram eats only the [bitter] leaves.”

The thirty six tattvas are in Siddhanta metaphysics the components that make up the phenomenal universe, being the manifestation of the supreme consciousness, Paramasivam. This supreme reality is only one, but has two aspects, the transcendent and the immanent. In manifestation consciousness first evolves into five universal, unlimited aspects of itself, called the pure tattvas, beginning with the siva and sakti tattvas.
Next to evolve is *maya tattva* which veils this universal consciousness with the illusion of duality. In order to do this it evolves five *pure-impure tattvas*, *kala*, *niyati* and so forth, each of which limits and makes finite one of the universal aspects represented by the five *pure tattvas*. The result of this limitation is a separation of the universal subject-object into subject (*aham, the ‘I’*) and object (*idam – the world*), represented by the *purusa*, the personal self, and *prakriti*, its operative energy, which is the source of the remaining 24 *impure tattvas*, made up of the inner organs of cognition, the organs of sense and action, and the subtle and gross elements.

It should be borne in mind here firstly that, even at the grossest level, the nature of this material universe is ultimately not other than consciousness, and that at the most fundamental level that supreme consciousness remains in essence unchanging and undiminished.

The *tattvas* will be discussed further in later verses. However the reader should be aware that the purpose of this work is to guide the reader towards a direct realisation of the nature of the reality which lies beyond all mental constructs, not to inculcate the principles of any religious or metaphysical system, whether it be that of Siddhanta, Vedanta or any other. For the purposes of understanding this work, the reader need only remember that the *tattvas* represent the illusory world of duality in which the individual self believes itself to be perceiving through the mind and senses, and interacting with, an objective world independent of itself.

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**Errata.**

Please note that the third stanza of the poem ‘Old Hall’ by Upahar on page 50 of the January 2013 issue should read:

You are the Centre, and the infinite field,  
simple and true, most near, yet ever blissfully unknown.  
Dear One, having seen You,  
what could there ever be but You?
THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS OF INDIA: AN APPRAISAL by Raffaele Torella. Indica Press, Varanasi 2011 pp.269 Rs 495. ISBN: 81-86569-96-0 www.indicabooks.com The Philosophical Traditions of India is a concise synopsis of some thirty philosophical systems in India, both astika, nastika, and the Pratyabhijna Saiva tradition. Some of the systems receive a larger treatment (Nyaya and Samkhya) and others receive only a few pages. As well, the author presents in the twenty page first chapter a lengthy analysis of whether there is any such thing as Indian philosophy. Western philosophy seeks pure theory diverse from mundane activities and spiritual experiences. Does that exclude Indian philosophy from being ‘philosophy’? Do the Indian terms darsana or anviksiki equate to the term ‘philosophy’? The book also contains a section of what the author calls ‘excursus’ constituting: The forms of the Texts (sutras, bhashyas, vrttis, other commentaries); Logic; Knowledge and Truth; and Linguistic Speculations (Mimamsa and the Grammarians). Finally the book concludes with an analysis of the oral tradition vis a vis written texts and an analysis of the Pratyabhijna Darsana from the Sarvadarsanasamgraha.

This is a lot of material to cover in a book of 269 pages. In his analysis of the various philosophical traditions, the author has done a reliable job of presenting the main points of each system. There exist numerous books which present a synopsis of the main Indian philosophical systems. This book is a welcome addition to that corpus in that it covers more than the basic systems as well as two sections on the Kashmir Saivite Pratyabhijna tradition. The author’s lengthy analysis of the on-going discussion of whether there is such a thing as Indian philosophy is also a welcome addition to that intriguing discussion.

This book presents reliable information vis a vis the Indian philosophical systems. It will serve as a good general introduction to those who are interested in knowing about the basics of various systems. On the other hand, it contains a few sections that will interest learned scholars who already know the basics. The author has presented us with an interesting mix. In this
type of book, any author must choose what to include and what to exclude (aesthetics and ethics are excluded) as well as what exactly constitutes the basics of a given system. — John Grimes

ANDAL’S TIRUPPAVAI English Rendering with Commentary by M.R. Kodhandram, ‘Bharateeya Samskritika Peetham’, 14 Saravana Street, T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017. Email: bhaaratteeya@gmail.com. It was printed for free distribution and released by Srimad Andavan Swamigal of Andavan Ashram, Srirangam in 2012.

Andal, also called Kodhai, is to Tamil Nadu what Meerabai is to the Hindi-speaking world — the same intense, one-pointed devotion to Krishna, the same unsurpassed poetic talent and identical manner of absorption in Krishna at the end. Unlike Meera, who was rather prolific, Andal has left behind a small corpus of poetry of which Tiruppavai is an important part. In this work, consisting of thirty verses, eight lines each, Andal takes us back to the time when Krishna was present in flesh and blood, and in her imagination she goes round the cowherd hamlet, Gokulam, early every morning waking up her friends in order to proceed to the house of Krishna and receive from him the gift of a sounding drum to awaken them spiritually promised by him.

The author has translated all the thirty verses accurately and elegantly in simple English and besides giving the plain meaning of each verse, has also furnished its inner meaning. It is true that there are other works which also give the inner meaning but what sets author Kodhandram’s book apart is the fact that the author has sought to interpret the exquisitely beautiful devotional verses of Andal, the simple village girl, in the light of Bhagavan Ramana’s teaching of Atmavichara or Self-enquiry. By and large, he sounds convincing and this is not surprising because as Ramana himself has quoted Sri Sankaracharya approvingly to say, ‘Atmaanusandhaana (Self-enquiry) is known as bhakti.’ That is why we see advaitic masters Sri Sankaracharya and Sri Ramana excelling in devotional poetry and the great Kali devotee Sri Ramakrishna gaining advaitic experience within a few days to the utter astonishment of his advaita guru Sri Totapuri.

The plain meaning of Andal’s verses and Meera’s songs can transport us to a world of joy. If you know Tamil, take any of thirty verses of Tiruppavai and recite or sing it. As you go from the first to the last line of the verse, you will increasingly find a great clarity filling your mind and blissful peace filling your heart. Kodhandram shows us why: Andal’s bhakti is Jnanavichara in disguise. — Pipaasu

April - June
The 133rd Jayanti Celebrations of Bhagavan
Each year we celebrate Bhagavan’s Jayanti Day as a day of joy and remembrance of the grace of the guru which is not only alive in our hearts but finds physical expression at Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam and pervades the whole ashram campus. The 133rd occasion was on the 29th December, 2012. It began at 4am with dulcet Mangaladevat Isai by Sri T. R. Pichandi & Party, followed by Dhanurmasa Puja and Vishnu Sahasranam. Devotees then sang a special morning Tamil Parayana in Bhagavan’s shrine while Mahanyasa Ekadasa Rudram was chanted by Purohits and abhishekam and puja to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam began and culminated in Mangala Aarti (Deeparadhana) at 11am.

The Jayanti celebrations included nightly performances in the New Library auditorium, first with sitar concert by Ustad Hafiz Bale Khan on the 27th. The night of the 28th hosted Ramananjali Ramana Music by RMCL led by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan. On the afternoon of the 29th, there were Telugu Bhajans with accompaniments by Chandrasekara, Bhajana Mandali (Amalapuram), and later in the evening, ‘Ramana Music’ by Amritavarshini led by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore.

Opening of Morvi Guesthouse
After nearly two years of construction, the Morvi Guesthouse is completed and numerous rooms were opened for guest use on the 26th December, just in time to host the many devotees eager to attend Bhagavan’s Jayanti celebrations. Fifty nine rooms in the two-storey compound are now in operation which means that more than one hundred additional guests may stay in the Ashram. Guests were pleased to find their rooms equipped with hot water and large windows opening onto the garden. Space has been provided for some 20 cars. An additional nine rooms in the old library building were finished recently. Many bamboo clumps and bushes have been planted in the new guest area to help beautify the compound and reduce the traffic noise and dust from the adjacent main road. None of the original trees were cut during construction work.
Samadhi Days, 27th Jan and 31st December
Niranjanananda Swami (Chinnaswami), Bhagavan’s younger brother, was the first Sarvadhikari of the Ashram and devoted his life to building up the Ashram and propagating Bhagavan’s message. His son, TN Venkataraman, later Swami Ramanananda, was instrumental in preserving the independence of the Ashram during quite tough times. Following the death of Chinnawami, in 1953 which came soon after Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana in April 1950, the mantle fell on ‘Venkatoo’ as he was affectionately known, who worked tenaciously to make the Ashram what it is today.

Pongal Celebrations 14-16th January
Makara Sankranti, Pongal for Tamils (14th January) falls on the first of Thai, the tenth month in the Tamil calendar, and is traditionally said to coincide with the winter solstice. The Ashram was washed and decorated with banana and mango leaves. Kolam patterns were drawn using rice flour to decorate the floors and sidewalks in and around the New Hall, Mother’s Shrine, before Bhagavan’s shrine and at the gosala. Mattu Pongal, the festival dedicated to cattle, followed on the 15th with special pujas to Nandi, Cow Lakshmi and the cows in the Ashram gosala. Early on the third day, Lord Arunachaleswarar stopped at the Ashram front gate on his circuit of the Hill.

Obituaries
Sethu Ramaswamy grew up in Sri Lanka. She returned to India around 1940 after her marriage and went for Bhagavan’s darshan before leaving for war-torn Delhi which was soon to witness the partition riots. The young bride wept copiously before Bhagavan, seeking his blessings for overcoming what would be their most difficult years—war, rationing and unemployment. When her husband came back one night after yet another futile search for a job to support his young wife and children, he had a dream: Bhagavan Ramana gently stroked his head and gave him a mantropadesha—a dream initiation. This mantra he chanted till his last days.

In more recent years Sethu Ramaswamy was able to come to the Ashram for Bhagavan’s darshan. Her nephew, Captain Narayanan,
who passed away in 2009, was a permanent resident at the ashram. In
2010 she published the Ramana Ashtottara Shatha Namavali, Ramana’s
life in blank verse with 108 names. Young in mind and heart, she
studied and obtained her M.A. degree in history at the age of 80. She
also wrote her autobiography, ‘Bride at 10, Mother at 15’, which was
published by Roli Books International in 2003. Her last years saw an
outpouring of poetry on Arunachala Ramana. On her last full day,
30th Nov 2012 she wrote the sacred mantra, ‘Om Namo Bhagavate
Sri Ramanaya’, in her long register. The next day 1st December 2012,
she had merged in Bhagavan’s Grace.

N. Ramasubramanyan, affectionately
known to Bhagavan’s devotees as
‘Ramamani’, peacefully attained the
Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan while seated
before the Master’s photo at 9:25 pm on
5th Jan, 2013 in Bangalore.

Survived by his brother, Ramana
Vijayan, Ramamani was the son of
the staunch Bhagavan devotee, Sri N.
Natarajan (N.N. Rajan). Born in March
1932, he and his siblings had the good
fortune to be frequently in Bhagavan’s
presence on a regular basis. As a boy he was blessed to recite Sanskrit
slokas before Bhagavan and had more than once been corrected by
him. He also received his instruction to chant daily selected verses
from Adi Sankara’s Vivekachudamani. Later, he served in the Central
Government Postal Audit Department, lived as a bachelor, and
after retirement, took up editorship of The Mountain Path (from
the early 1990s up till 2003). Known for his remarkable memory
and familiarity with Bhagavan’s works, he quoted freely from the
Ashram literature. His voice would often choke with emotion when
speaking about Bhagavan. In his final days, he was mostly silent,
sitting throughout the day with folded hands and bowed head before
the photo of Sri Bhagavan.