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Ramana Ashtottaram

89. ओं मौनेन स्वात्मबोधकाय नमः

om maunena svātmabodhakāya namaḥ

Prostration to the One who through Silence reveals the Self.

The ultimate Truth transcends thought and speech and cannot be 'taught'. Bhagavan manifested the power of Lord Siva in the form of Dakshinamurti. Like the mythical sons of Brahma, we too seek refuge at the feet of Bhagavan who reveals the ineffable Truth in silence to all whose hearts are open and whose minds are perfectly still, free of all desire.

90. ओं हृच्छान्तिकरसान्निध्याय नमः

om hr̥cchāntikarasānnidhyāya namaḥ

Prostration to the one whose very presence brings about inner peace.

When the mind is still, the awareness which is our eternal being is felt in the heart as blissful peace profound. Common people, children, birds and animals all spontaneously felt this peace in their inmost heart in Bhagavan's presence. His very presence automatically spread this supreme peace to all around Him.

Love

Love is a dangerous word. It means so many things. It has been overused, misused, and cheapened to cover a variety of delusions and half-truths. In the course of misrepresentation its worth has stretched to cover the most unrealistic expectations. We all want to be loved but do we realise that to receive it we must be capable of love ourselves? The well-known karma yogi JP Vaswani's saying, "If you want to be happy make someone else happy," can equally be applied to love.

Mostly people experience instinctive and emotional love; rarely do they encounter intelligent or conscious love. Love in its purest form is impersonal. It cannot be bought nor is it a presumed right. It is a knack like any other skill and requires effort, patience and perseverance. It is not something we are naturally well-endowed with though the potential is there. It is not an object we can consume or own, in other words, it is not a material but a living principle that cannot be 'gained' except by the surrender of our own selfish interests. We do not possess it, it possesses us. We can enter the zone of love but we cannot manipulate it, for that is anathema to the principle of that which is freely given is also freely received.

On a physical level, love is confused with chemistry. Our physical bodies are composed of certain elements which uniquely combined create 'me', the physical body we are so attached to and by which we measure our happiness, which more often than not is confused with pleasure. We are attracted or repulsed by others because of the electromagnetic elements which give life to these bodily elements of ours. It is impersonal though we can take it oh so personally if we are liked or more noticeable, disliked for no apparent rational reason. Ultimately it has nothing to do with our conscious preferences. There are some who are immediate friends spontaneously and there are others who will be our adversaries no matter what we say or do. Love and hate at this level are two sides of the same coin and one can easily flip over into the other. Instinctive love is guided by the law of affinity, nothing more. It does however govern most marriages and relationships both personal and public. Hence the perpetual insecurity and anxiety we tolerate hoping that all is well while all the time there is the wild ricochet of uncertainty. Nevertheless there are admirable examples of instinctive love such as a mother's unconditional love for her baby where the baby's well-being transcends all other considerations.

Today we have loaded love with so many expectations that it is absurd and cannot but cause unnecessary suffering through ignorance both of our own motives and those of the recipient. In more traditional societies a person is defined by his or her duties and relationship to other members of the extended family. Increasingly today a person defines himself by his own dreams, desires and expectations. Unless the motive is consciously altruistic, narcissism dominates our impulses. It is a self-love that has its own agenda and cannot see beyond the walls of its own creation. Ultimately it is petty. It is like thinking the whole world is encased in one trifling space while outside it the magnificent unbounded stars stretch beyond all horizons. In simple terms, we want others to love us because we want to be loved and not because we warrant it.

The second form of love we experience is concerned with ideals and aspirations. It is the power which generates aims and fosters ambition. The emotional energy we generate finds its fulfilment specifically

in beauty, wealth, fame, power and in general, the satiation of our desires in whatever form they may take. National pride and self-esteem, identification with a sports team or a movie star are but some examples that characterise the craving to express the surge of energy which courses through our nerves. It is heroic and inspirational but more often than not it can be blind. Our fantasies are for the most part doomed as they have little relationship to the hard rock of our normal reality. However not all our dreams are necessarily delusions but can sometimes be the blueprints of a higher and nobler existence. We may dream of being at one with Arunachala and this tenuous thread can guide us to its actuality. Dreams are a beginning; their certainty is an entirely different matter.

The third force at work we can call conscious love. It is the love we hold for truth, it is the power that drives us to sacrifice ourselves for others whom we cherish, and it is the sense of at-oneness with all creation. "The conscious love motive, in its developed state, is the wish that the object should arrive at its own native perfection, regardless of the consequences to the lover."¹ Our attitude of unreserved giving without expectation of reciprocation paradoxically elicits the same attitude in the beloved. The final step in this conscious aspect of love is that we love to love. Loving itself is sufficient and entirely appropriate. Whatever the circumstance we may face, however awkward, when the heart is in the right place love can do no wrong.

Though it is generally thought that Bhagavan was a pure *jnani* (self-realised) free of any spiritual, emotional or personal attachment, we see in his poems to Arunachala that he was just as much a *bhakta* (devotee). There is no contradiction in this. Those who think that one must be devoid of all human qualities to qualify as a *jnani* do not understand the profound integral harmony which exists in a truly self-realised being. Bhagavan was a friend to all who came to him with an open heart. He loved to laugh and was amused by the

¹ Orage, A. R., On Love, first published in 1924, and thereafter frequently reprinted and anthologised. It is easily available on the internet at www.holybooks.com/on-love-adapted-tibetan-orage/

foibles of human behaviour. He listened intently to the stories of the saints, so much so that he wept for all the suffering they endured. He was a supreme listener and rarely interrupted. He cried with those who came to him in search of solace at the loss of a dear one. His compassion was as broad as the sky.

There are innumerable reports by those who were fortunate enough to receive that inimitable glance of grace from Bhagavan by which their lives were transformed instantly. He was no cold statue observing from on high the troubles of others but one who easily shifted from one level to another to offer comfort and guidance.

All this may be interesting as historical fact and we could perhaps say so what, how does it help us? It is difficult to argue unless one has intimate direct experience of his grace. All one can say is that that entity we call Ramana Maharshi is still very much present. How or why is beyond us, but the indubitable fact is that 'he' does exist and does intervene in our lives to our benefit and undying gratitude.

Love as we know requires two separate entities: the lover and the beloved. What we are asking for is that two become one. Mathematically that is impossible. However if we realise there is no difference between us, the lover and the beloved merge into one. Again, that is impossible physically and it seems even more impossible between a supposed hill of stone and a human being. The one way it can occur is if we give up our sense of identification with who we think we are and dissolve the sense of separation by holding onto Bhagavan through love in the heart. "Better than viewing Him as other than oneself is to hold Him as 'I' within."² At this point jnana and bhakti yoga meet.

Bhagavan has expressed pure love in *Sri Arunachala Akshara Manamalai* (The Marital Garland of Verses) which is an ecstatic hymn of praise, entreaty, prayer and gratitude. It is also an exposition of undiluted *jnana yoga* (yoga of knowledge). How then can we possibly emulate him? We can by turning to his poetry and seeing the power and passion which drives his adoration. We learn through observation

² *Upadesa Undiyar*, verse 8.

and imitation, and the dynamics of spirituality is no different. To those who say they feel no love in their hearts the apparently cynical advice, “If you can’t make it, then fake it”, has a surprising efficacy. If when all else fails and if one persists in the appearance of spirituality, it is amazing how often true spirituality results because here appearance is reality.

How is it with Bhagavan that it seems effortless? Bhagavan does not see the same way as us. He is like us but yet he isn’t in a most fundamental way and we should be very careful not to confuse the two. Just as with discrimination we can see behind the façade of others, so Bhagavan with the eye of devotion sees beyond the stony surface that covers the hill of fire. And in just the same way he sees behind our crippling sense of limitation the same glory of divinity in all of us.

Bhagavan is an intimate, caring, tender friend but he is also a lion who is implacable in the face of deceit. Make no mistake — it would be foolish of us to take him for granted or to confuse him with a historical personage. We will not find Bhagavan external to our self. Bhagavan is not in a statue or a *lingam* or a photo. These are aids to help us focus, nothing more. Once he was a historical figure but not now — he isn’t bound by any concepts we may cultivate. He is a force, a stream of consciousness and much like the measured tides of the ocean his authority is impersonal as it washes over us with benign intent or cool refusal to be deceived by our false pretences. We approach him with a receptive mind and a trusting heart. If we don’t it is impossible for us to receive that unmistakable flow of grace that heals and enlightens. Bhagavan by definition does not withhold grace, it is we who waver on the banks of a perennial river of grace.

“He lays no great burden upon us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time; a little adoration; sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him our sorrows, and sometimes to offer Him thanks for the benefits He has given us and still gives us, in the midst of our troubles....the least remembrance will always be acceptable to Him. You need not cry very loud; He is nearer than you think.”³

³ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Chapter Seven. Oxford: Mowbray, 1914. ▲



S. Gopalakrishnan

How We Create Our Own Reality

AMIT GOSWAMI

In the East, Indian Vedanta statements like *Aham Brahmasmi*, a Sanskrit phrase that means ‘I am consciousness’ — the one and only, can be very confusing to the beginner, be it scientist or nonscientist. We begin to get the idea of omniscience, omnipotence, and all that. But as we try to flex our muscles, or try to verify the idea in the laboratory, usually it does not quite work that way. Well?

Similarly, when the mathematician John von Neumann first introduced the idea that consciousness ‘collapses’ or transforms the quantum wave of possibility by choosing one of its facets that becomes actualised, it prompted in the nineteen seventies the physicist Fred Alan Wolf to create the evocative phrase ‘we create our own reality’.

Amit Goswami is a theoretical nuclear physicist and has been a member of the University of Oregon Institute for Theoretical Physics since 1968. He is the author of among other books, *The Self-Aware Universe*, *Quantum Doctor*, and *God is Not Dead*.

The images the phrase evoked led, however, to many disappointments. Some people tried to manifest fancy automobiles, others vegetable gardens in desert environments, and still others at least parking spaces for their cars in busy downtown areas. Many people were inspired by the idea of quantum creation of reality, no doubt, but the attempts of creation produced a mixed bag of results because the would-be-creators were unaware of a subtlety.

We create our own reality, but there is a subtlety in consciousness. We do not create reality in our ordinary state of consciousness, but in a non-ordinary state of consciousness. This becomes clear when you ponder the paradox of Wigner's friend. Eugene Wigner was the Nobel laureate physicist who first thought of the paradox.

Imagine that Wigner is approaching a quantum traffic light with two possibilities, red and green; at the same time his friend is approaching the same light from the perpendicular road. Being busy modern people, they both choose green. Unfortunately, their choices are contradictory; if both choices materialise at the same time, there would be pandemonium. Obviously, only one of them get to choose, but who?

There is the apocryphal story told in endless variation about the self-obsessed person. In this version, the story goes of a Hollywood woman who meets her long-lost friend on the Sunset Boulevard, becomes very excited and takes her friend to a coffee house 'to catch up.' At the table, she talks and talks; after about half an hour, her awareness returns and she says, "Oh, I am talking about myself all this time. Let's talk about you. What do you think of me."

This woman's solipsism is one answer to Wigner's paradox, but who would go along with the idea that only one person in the world is sentient and the rest of us are this person's imagination?

After many decades, three physicists at different places and times, Ludwig Bass in Australia, myself at Oregon, and Casey Blood at Rutgers, New Jersey, independently discovered the solution of the paradox: consciousness is one, nonlocal and cosmic, behind the two people's local individuality. Wigner and his friend both choose but only figuratively speaking, the one consciousness chooses for both of

them avoiding any contradiction. The one consciousness chooses in such a way that in the case of many such crossings of a two-valued traffic light, the result dictated by quantum probability calculations is validated; Wigner and his friend each gets green fifty percent of the time; yet for any individual crossing, a creative opportunity for getting green is left open for each.

The oneness of choosing consciousness is an outcome of the question we pose: what is the nature of consciousness that enables it to be the free agent of downward causation without any paradox? The answer comes: Well, for one thing consciousness has to be unitive, one and only for all of us. This oneness of consciousness is then a prediction of the theory.

When my paper proclaiming this was published back in 1989 in a physics journal, a university of Mexico neurophysiologist Jacobo Grinberg somehow noticed it. Jacobo has been doing some experiments with pairs of human subjects and strange transfers of electrical brain-activity between them. He intuited that my theory may have something important to say for the interpretation of his experiments. So I got an excited call from him. To make a long story short, I flew out to the University of Mexico to his laboratory, checked out his experimental set up, checked out the data, and helped him interpret it. And in a short while Jacobo and collaborators wrote the first paper proclaiming a modern scientific verification of the idea of oneness of consciousness.

The Good News Experiment: We Are One

The good news is that not one, but four separate experiments are now showing that quantum consciousness, the author of downward causation is nonlocal, is unitive. As mentioned above, the first such experiment proving it unequivocally (that is, with objective machines and not through subjective experiences of people) was performed by the neurophysiologist Jacobo Grinberg and his collaborators at the University of Mexico. Let's go into some details.

Quantum physics from almost the get-go has given us an amazing principle to operate with — nonlocality. The principle of locality says

that all communication must proceed through local signals that have a speed limit. Einstein established this speed limit as the speed of light (the enormous but finite speed of 300,000 km/s). So this locality principle, a limitation imposed by Einsteinian thinking precludes instantaneous communication via signals. And yet, quantum objects are able to influence one another instantly, once they interact and become correlated through quantum nonlocality. This was demonstrated by the physicist Alain Aspect and his collaborators in 1982 for a pair of photons (quanta of light). The data does not have to be seen as a contradiction to Einsteinian thinking once we recognise quantum nonlocality for what it is — a signal-less interconnectedness outside space and time.

Grinberg, in 1993, was trying to demonstrate quantum nonlocality for two correlated brains. Two people meditate together with the intention of direct (signalless, nonlocal) communication. After twenty minutes, they are separated (while still continuing their unifying intention), placed in individual Faraday cages (electromagnetically impervious chambers), and each brain is wired up to an electroencephalogram (EEG) machine. One subject is shown a series of light flashes producing in his or her brain an electrical activity that is recorded in the EEG machine from which an 'evoked potential' is extracted with the help of a computer upon subtracting the brain noise. The evoked potential is somehow found to be transferred to the other subject's brain onto the EEG of this subject that gives (upon subtraction of noise) a transferred potential (similar to the evoked potential in phase and strength). The control subjects who do not meditate together or are unable to hold the intention for signal-less communication during the duration of the experiment, do not show any transferred potential.

The experiment demonstrates the nonlocality of brain responses to be sure, but something even more important — nonlocality of quantum consciousness. How else to explain how the forced choice of the evoked response in one subject's brain can lead to the free choice of an (almost) identical response in the correlated partner's brain? As

stated above, the experiment, since then has been replicated several times. First, by the neuropsychiatrist Peter Fenwick and collaborators in 1998 in London. Second, by Jiri Wackermann et al in 2003. And yet again by the Bastyr university researcher Leana Standish and her collaborators in 2004.

The conclusion of these experiments is radical and can integrate science and spirituality, Vedanta style. Quantum consciousness, the precipitator of the downward causation of choice from quantum possibilities is what esoteric spiritual traditions call God (in Sanskrit, *Ishvara*) and also in the style of the esoteric traditions of all religions so scientists who denigrate the popular image of God of popular Christianity need not worry. In a sense, we have rediscovered God within science. However it is within a new paradigm of science, based not on the primacy of matter as the old science, but on the primacy of consciousness. Consciousness is the ground of all being which we now can recognise as what the spiritual tradition of Vedanta calls *Brahman* and what esoteric Christianity calls Godhead.

The Power of Intention

I hope you did not miss one of the most important aspects of the experiment of Grinberg — the power of our intention. The parapsychologist Dean Radin in 1999 has done some more experiments demonstrating the power of intention.

One of his experiments took advantage of the O. J. Simpson trial a few years back. At the time, lots of people were watching TV, and Radin correctly hypothesised that people's intention (generated in connection with the TV watching of the trial) would fluctuate widely depending on whether the courtroom drama was intense or ho-hum. So, on the one hand, he let a bunch of psychologists make a plot of the intensity of the courtroom drama (and hence the intensity of people's intentions) as a function of real time. On the other hand, in the laboratory he measured the deviation from randomness of what are called random number generators (which translate random quantum events of radioactivity into random sequences of zeroes and ones). He

found that the random number generators deviated from randomness maximally precisely at those times when the courtroom drama was high. What does this mean? The philosopher Gregory Bateson said, “the opposite of randomness is choice.” So the correlation proves the creative power of intention.

In another series of experiments, Radin found that random number generators deviate from randomness in meditation halls when people meditate together (showing high intention), but not at a corporate board meeting!

The inquisitive reader is bound to ask about how to develop the power of intention. The fact is we all try to manifest things through our intentions, sometimes they work, but less often than not. Now we see that this is because we are in our ego when we intend. But how do we change that?

This is a very good question. An intention must start with the ego; that is where we ordinarily are, local, selfish. At the second stage, we intend for everyone to go beyond selfishness. We don't need to worry, we haven't lost anything, when we say everyone that includes us, too. In the third stage, we allow our intentions to become a prayer: if my intention resonates with the intention of the whole, of quantum consciousness, then let it come to fruition. At the fourth stage, the prayer must pass into silence, become a meditation.

You may have seen a recent movie, ‘The Secret’ or have read a book by the same name. The movie talks about the secret of manifestation through our intention. The main message is good. To manifest, the book and the movie teach us, not only do we have to actively intend, but also have to learn to passively wait. Maybe the intended object will come to us. In the practice above this is why we end in silence, we wait.

If we wait too long, however, we will forget what we were intending. So we cut short the waiting and be active again in our search. In this way the real secret of manifestation is an alternation between doing and being. I sometimes call this a do-be-do-be-do lifestyle. In India, we are in a be-be-be lifestyle, haven't you noticed? In America and the

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West, of course, it is do-do-do. The connoisseur of manifestation via intention-making takes the middle path, do-be-do-be-do.

There is one final secret: how do we know what the intention of consciousness is so we can align our intention with it? The answer is creative evolution — the intention of consciousness is to evolve us toward greater good — greater meaning and purposive pursuit of creativity — for everyone. And consciousness does it through creative evolution with some dedicated help from us to persistently pursue new meaning through our creativity. ▲

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Red as blood that spurts
from the shocked lips of the wound
on the hero's face;
crimson, *Araktavarna*,
as light from a dying sun.

You drink at the blind
cup till blood leaks down your chin;
Kalikalmasa-
nasini, who swallow the
sins of this age of frenzy.

You put out the suns,
you are the twilight of ages,
constellations' end;
Kaalahantri, who withdraw
the foaming tides of time.

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.



Dakshinamurti Statue at Sri Ramana Granthalaya

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Six

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

7th January 1978

Sadhu Om: When waves of passion such as desire, lust or fear arise, either try to duck beneath them by self-attention, or else reflect on their uselessness and avoid them by *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairagya* (dispassion). If the waves continue to come more strongly and none of these methods help, pray to Bhagavan. Prayer coming from an agonised heart has its own power. Whenever we feel helpless, prayer is our best weapon. He is always ready to help the helpless if their prayer is sincere.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

Meritorious actions (*punya karmas*) done with *kamyata* (desire for personal benefit) do not purify the mind. Actions done without such desire (*nishkamyas karmas*) purify the mind, but they are the least efficacious means.

Unless worship and prayer are done with an attitude of ego-abasement, they will not purify the mind. Worshipping with pride only feeds the ego. Better than worship is *sravana* (hearing or studying the guru's teachings) and *manana* (reflection on them). Reading about the lives of saints and reflecting on their behaviour and teachings will help us to subside our ego. Better than that is *satsanga*: in the company of real *sadhus* [*jnanis*], we cannot but act with humility. *Satsanga* (association with *sat*, truth) purifies the mind in many ways, but the best *satsanga* is to remain quietly as 'I am'. As Sankara says in *Vivekacudamani* [verse 364], a hundred times better than *sravana* is *manana*, but one *lakh* (a hundred thousand) times better than *manana* is *nididhyasana* (contemplation), which is just remaining attentively as 'I am'.

The reality of whatever is seen is the same as that of what sees it. The God you see is only as real as you who see him. If you worship God in a name and form, your mind will be purified, and when it is sufficiently purified, he will appear as guru to teach you the practice of self-attention. The guru is not just to be worshiped – he is to be obeyed. In verse 274 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Bhagavan says:

Those who do not have [the clarity of] mind to recognise that the jnana-guru – who appears as a human form [though he is actually] abiding firmly as the supreme space [of consciousness, 'I am'] – is formless, [thereby] bear the yoke of wicked conduct and sin.

This is not to say that *guru-bhakti* (devotion to the guru) is wrong, but that our devotion is not true *guru-bhakti* unless we also practise what he taught us. Though the outward form of the guru and his teachings are a projection of our own *vasanas* (tendencies), they will nevertheless wake us up, like a lion that an elephant sees in its dream.

Self-attention is the most effective means of purifying the mind. The more you try to attend to self and the more you thereby experience

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the happiness of self-abidance, the more clearly you will understand and be firmly convinced that all happiness comes only from self, and that rising as 'I' is misery. Thus your *vairagya* (desirelessness) will increase and your attachments to things will become less.

Whenever you have some moments free, reflect: 'What is this ego-life? Now I take this body to be 'I' and this world to be real. I feel attachment to things, people and circumstances, but I have only experienced this life for a certain number of years, and some years from now I will cease experiencing it forever. Therefore why should I take interest in or be ambitious for this transient and futile life? All these things seem to exist only because I exist, so should I not try to find out the truth behind this 'I'?' The more you reflect in such a way, the more you will lose interest in your life and the more you will wish to remain just as 'I am'.

When people used to say to me, 'You are lucky because you were with Bhagavan', I would sometimes find some ego rising in me with pride. However, by Bhagavan's grace I thought of a good reply: 'In a hospital there is an outpatient department to treat minor cases, but the worst cases are admitted into the inpatient department to be treated under the personal supervision of the doctor. The same happens in this spiritual line, so I am such a helpless case that Bhagavan had to admit me into his inpatient department to treat me under his personal supervision'. Those who were not in Bhagavan's physical presence are lucky, because they are protected from the delusion of mistaking him to be his body.

Ignorance is of two types: 'I know' and 'I don't know'. Both depend upon the rising 'I', and both disappear when that rising 'I' is scrutinised. In verse 9 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

Dyads [pairs of opposites such as knowing and not knowing] and triads [the three factors of objective knowledge: the knower, the knowing and the known] exist [only by] clinging always to 'one' [namely our mind or ego, which alone experiences such knowledge or ignorance]. If [anyone] looks within the mind [to discover] what that 'one' is, they [the dyads and triads] will cease

to exist [because the ego on which they depend will be found to be non-existent]. Only those who have seen [this non-existence of the ego] are those who have seen the reality. See, they will not be confused.

In the state of *jnana* (knowledge) no 'I' can rise either to say 'I know myself' or 'I do not know myself'. This is the truth that Bhagavan teaches us in both verse 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu* and verse two of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*:

Saying 'I do not know myself' [or] 'I have known myself' is ground for ridicule. Why? To make oneself an object known, are there two selves? Because being one is the truth of everyone's experience.

When within [my] mind I investigated who the seer is, [and] when the seer [thereby] became non-existent, I saw that which remained [namely beginningless, endless and unbroken being-consciousness-bliss]. The mind does not [now] rise to say 'I saw', [so] in what way can the mind rise to say 'I did not see'? Who has the power to elucidate this [by] speaking, when in ancient times [even] you [as Dakshinamurti] elucidated [it] without speaking? Only to elucidate your state without speaking, you stood shining [from] earth [to] sky motionlessly [or as a hill].

To say 'I know myself' is as absurd as saying 'I do not know myself'. In verse twelve of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

That which is completely devoid of knowledge and ignorance is [true] knowledge. That which knows [anything other than itself] is not true knowledge. Since it shines without anything that is other [than itself] to know or to make known, self is [true] knowledge. Know it is not a void.

Bhagavan once told Muruganar: "It is not only that self does not know other things, it does not even know itself as 'I am this'." In verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he says: 'Being self alone is knowing self, because self is devoid of two. ...'. That is, there are not two selves so that one could be known by the other. Since

self is indivisibly single, it can know itself only by being itself. And since being conscious of itself is its very nature, its being itself is itself its knowing itself.

In verse 8 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

Whoever worships [it] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is the way to see that [nameless and formless] substance [the absolute reality or God] in name and form. However, know [that] knowing the reality of oneself [by] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is seeing [it] in reality.

Here 'knowing the reality [or truth] of oneself' may mean either knowing the non-existence of the ego or knowing what we really are. However, 'knowing the non-existence of the ego' fits better in this context, considering the phrase 'subsiding in the reality of that true substance', though both meanings amount to the same thing. Whichever way it is taken, 'the reality of oneself' can be correctly known only by our subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance, which is our real self.

Worshipping that true substance (which is also called 'the supreme reality' or 'God') in any name or form may be a means to see visions of it in that name and form, but it cannot be a means to experience knowledge of the true nature of that reality, which is devoid of any name or form. In order to know the true nature of the reality one must know the true nature of oneself, the knower. Therefore in verse 1073 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Bhagavan says:

Since the many [forms of] God that are obtained [as visions or other such dualistic experiences] by clear [pure-hearted] worship undergo appearance and disappearance and [thus] perish, only one's own [true] nature, which always exists with clarity [or certainty], is the true form of God that exists immutably.

If God is experienced or known as other than the knower, he becomes an object of knowledge and as such he depends for his existence upon the knower. Since the knower is unreal, so too is whatever it knows. Therefore, the absolute reality or God can only

be known truly by the knower being one with it. When the knower and the known are both resolved into the one reality, that is true knowledge.

8th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan begins verse thirteen of *Ulladu Narpadu* by saying: ‘Self, which is abundant knowledge (*jnana*), alone is real; knowledge that is manifold [that is, knowledge of multiplicity] is ignorance (*ajnana*)’. Self-knowledge shines as ‘am’. Multiplicity here includes the world, God and the ego. Since nothing exists unless it is known (experienced), our knowledge of multiplicity is itself the existence of that multiplicity.

He then continues the same verse by saying: ‘Even [this] ignorance, which is unreal, does not exist apart from self, which is knowledge. All the many ornaments are unreal; say, do they exist apart from the gold, which is real’. That is, even the knowledge and existence of multiplicity cannot exist apart from or independent of ‘I am’. Multiplicity is like the variety of gold ornaments, and ‘I am’ is like gold, their substance. Just as a goldsmith sees only the gold, so the jnani sees only ‘I am’, which is jnana. When a jnani says that the world is unreal, he means that multiplicity is ever non-existent, and when he says that the world is real, he means that ‘I am’ alone exists.

Religions try to make God, who is a third person, into a second person so that he may be known directly (*sakshat*), but even second persons are only known indirectly through the first person. When the light of ‘I am’ passes through the film of our vasanas, it appears in two forms: as both the seer (the first person) and the seen (the second and third persons). The first person, ‘I am so-and-so’, is one of the expansions of the vasanas – that is, it is one of the pictures (a name and form) projected on the screen of being by the light of consciousness. It is the first vasana, the root of all other vasanas.

In Tamil the first person is called *tanmai-y-idam*, which literally means the ‘selfness-place’, because each of the three grammatical persons is considered to be a ‘place’ (*idam*). The second person is called *munnilai-y-idam*, the ‘place that stands in front’, and the

third person is called *padarkkai-y-idam*, the ‘place that spreads out’. Therefore Bhagavan is discussing these three ‘places’ when he says in verse fourteen of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

If the first person (*tanmai*) exists, the second and third persons (*munnilai-padarkkaigal*) will exist. If the first person ceases to exist [because of] oneself investigating the truth of the first person, the second and third person, come to an end, and *tanmai* [the real ‘selfness’], which shines as one [undivided by the appearance of the three seemingly separate persons or ‘places’], alone is one’s [true] state, which is self.

Therefore ‘I am’ is the true *tanmai*, and ‘I am so-and-so’ is a thief, a second person posing as if it were the first person or *tanmai*. True knowledge (*jnana*) is attained only when the body and person that were taken to be ‘I’, the first person, are recognised to be second persons, things that are not ‘I’.

One important point to note here in this verse is that Bhagavan does not say that this false first person, the ego, actually exists, but only says conditionally: ‘If the first person exists ...’. He never actually accepted its existence.

Until they come to Bhagavan, people generally believe that self will be experienced if they get rid of all thoughts, which are second or third persons. They don’t understand that the first person, which is the root of all thoughts, must also go. That is why when some people come and ask me what my experience is, I say that I do not have any experience, because in the absence of an experiencer there can be no experience.

(To be continued)





Nandi at Vinayaka Temple on the Giripradakshina Road

Sri. opalakrishnan

The Significance of Guru Purnima at Arunachala

M.R. KODHANDRAM

Any *purnima* or full moon is significant because on this day the forces of nature are at their peak. During full moon, the earth lies between the sun and the moon, and so the moon becomes fully visible. As seen from the earth, the hemisphere of the moon that is facing the earth (the near side) is almost fully illuminated by the sun and appears round. During full moon and new moon, the moon, earth and sun are aligned, and the gravitational pull of the sun adds to that of the moon causing maximum tides. The vibration and feel of the moon is very different when it is full; and its magnetic pull is also different at that time, working upon the surface of the Earth which is exposed to it. When there is such a natural pull, there is a tendency for your energies to move upward, vertically along the spine. This means that blood and the life force, *prana* or energy, are pulled up and blood flow increases to the brain.

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More life energy flows to the brain, which increases your energy and awareness. In fact, all your qualities are enhanced during this period, for the moon and mind are related. A worldly person's desire for enjoyments will increase, and that is why our sastras urge us to devote these periods to spiritual activities like prayers, *japa* and *dhyana*. Those who meditate on these special days will find it more beneficial; in fact, all spiritual activity has greater benefits during these periods. In spiritual parlance, the moon symbolises the mind, while the sun is symbolic of the Self. The negative aspect of this is that if a person is mentally imbalanced, his condition will be aggravated. The term 'lunatic' came from this connection with the moon (Latin, luna).

The holy hill of Arunachala has a special significance during full moon, and the benefits for those who do a *pradakshina*, or ambulate it, are immense. The hill is considered to be the manifestation of Lord Siva and those who go around it will always receive His Grace, as *pradakshina* of the hill is an act of worship similar to what worshippers do in a temple when they go around the idol. This holy hill is said to be ancient, and is unique in that it emits what are known as alpha rays, which help to calm the mind by creating alpha waves in the brain. Alpha waves have a frequency of 8–12 hertz (Hz) and can be measured by Electroencephalography (EEG).

In the normal wakeful state, the brain operates at a frequency of 13-30 Hz, which is known as the beta wave. Alpha waves reduce the brain's activity and have a calming influence. Normally, this state occurs when one goes to sleep. When the same state of sleep can be simulated in the wakeful state, the mind becomes calm, yet alert and aware in the midst of activity. This is the goal of meditation. This state is given to us by the Grace of Arunachala, with no effort on our part, when the mind is exposed to the aura of the holy hill. This calmness of mind gives us clarity of perception and helps us take the right decisions in life.

During the full moon period, just as all the forces of nature are at their peak, so are the alpha rays emitted by the hill. The intensity of these rays is considered to be at least three times more than normal during this period. That is why, if you go around the hill during this

period, you will absorb these beneficial rays. Your mind would become very calm, and in that stillness you will be able to analyse your actions and correct any mistakes. A calm mind is a strong mind. With the benefits of the alpha rays from Arunachala, you will be better equipped to face life's challenges. The alpha rays emitted by the hill are pure and powerful, and are not harmful like those emitted by radioactive materials like uranium, thorium, radium etc. The alpha rays from the hill are strong enough to travel a distance of 30 miles (3 *yojanas*), and people living within this radius will also benefit.

From the spiritual point of view, too, there are immense benefits. The bad karma that is in the uppermost part of the soul will get silently destroyed as you go around the hill in worship. Just as a bear vigorously shakes the water from its fur after bathing, so also the top layer of bad karmas will be shaken off as you go around the hill, negating the consequences. It is a small effort to make in order to be rid of some bad karma. This is like the pain you feel when taking an injection; it is minimal compared to the possible discomfort of an illness, and especially when you look at the benefits. Even this effort becomes negligible when you go around the hill with your guru remembered in the heart because he helps you to bear all the discomforts in your life and shows you the way to moksha. Your guru takes on your misery when you cannot bear it. When you go around the hill in his holy company, your bond with him is strengthened, paving the way for spiritual progress.

Guru Purnima has a special significance in our culture. It is a day of remembrance and thanksgiving to our gurus who have guided us through life, and through whom God grants the grace of knowledge (*jnana*) to the disciples. Guru Purnima is a festival traditionally celebrated by Hindus and Buddhists. On this day, disciples offer *puja* (worship) and pay homage to the guru. It falls on the day of the full moon, *purnima*, in the month of Ashad (June–July). On this day, Hindus honour the great Sage Vyasa, one of the greatest gurus in the *guru-shishya parampara*, the ancient Hindu tradition of guru lineage. It is believed that Sage Vyasa was born on this day, and so the day is also celebrated as Vyasa Purnima. Hindus are indebted to this great Sage

who compiled the four Vedas, wrote the 18 *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Sage Vyasa even taught Dattatreya, who is regarded as the Guru of gurus. The festival is common to all spiritual traditions in Hinduism, and it is an expression of gratitude towards the teacher by his/her disciples.

The relationship between the guru and the disciple is sacred, spiritual in nature and independent of the age of both the people. The word 'guru' means remover of darkness (in Sanskrit, 'gu' means darkness and 'ru' means remover). Guru Purnima is the day to make a commitment to eradicate ignorance and to illuminate our lives with knowledge. Through the guru, God who is ever-silent speaks clearly. He comes in the form of a guru to guide his devotees so that they may go back to Him. The guru is a mirror in which disciples see themselves clearly. Under the guidance of a guru, they see their faults and correct them in order to progress in life.

It is the guru's desire that his disciples give up the path of darkness and follow the path to God, which is lit by the knowledge imparted by the guru. The guru knows his disciples better than they know themselves and can, therefore, lead them safely out of the woods of samsara, worldly life. However, disciples must play an active part in this evolution by opening their hearts and minds fully to his guidance and by striving to put the teachings into practice. Such receptivity and earnestness comes when disciples approach him with love, unwavering faith and humility.

You need not hide anything from your guru; he is father, mother and friend, who will never turn away from you whatever be your mistakes or flaws. The more you look to him for his guidance and support, the greater will be his grace. His responsibility for your progress will increase proportionally to your love, faith and surrender.

When you go around Arunachala in the company of your guru in your heart, the benefits are many. Although you may encounter distractions, it is still a great experience for the mind, which is cleansed of some of its impurities. Walking barefoot can give you additional benefits: acupressure therapy when the feet come into contact with the stone particles on the road; and the discomfort helps in working out

some of the accumulated bad karma. The breeze on the mountainside, passing over many medicinal herbs growing there, gives strength to the body. Thus the body, mind and spirit are purified and strengthened as you go around the hill. This is the greatness of giri pradakshina.

Fortunate are those who get attracted to this hill, for it is famed as the destroyer of the ego, which is the greatest impediment to spiritual progress. Arunachala is the fire of knowledge that destroys the darkness of ignorance. Whenever we think of Arunachala, in addition to His energy, alpha rays also enter our mind. These alpha rays calm the mind and that is why this place is famed as *ninaitthale mukti* — that which bestows liberation on those who think of Him. All the efforts you take to reach God shall never go in vain. If you take but one step towards Him, He will take ten steps towards you! Such is His supreme compassion, which is also known as Grace.

Bhagavan Ramana said that each time we go around the hill, a portion of our ego gets sliced off much like how one slices potato wafers. Those who go around the hill will want to go again and again, by His Grace. Bhagavan says that Arunachala is the Supreme Magnet of the earth. It is the magnet that attracts the soul to itself. This is evidenced by the teeming crowds coming in ever-increasing numbers every purnima. Bhagavan said that there are many *siddhas* (adepts) living on the hill, and they too do giri pradakshina along with the rest during the full moon. He suggested that we walk on the left side of the hill, leaving the right side for the siddhas, whereby we would be going around the siddhas and this would fetch us their blessings too. As we keep going around the hill in worship and faith, our egos get progressively destroyed, and finally we will become one with Him and thus attain liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

According to the *Puranas* Parvati was able to unite with the Lord only after doing giri pradakshina here. So too Bhagavan when He left His body on April 14th 1950, for He was seen as a big *jyothi* (light) merging with the Hill.

The term pradakshina has a distinctive meaning: The letter ‘*pra*’ stands for removal of all kinds of sins; ‘*da*’ stands for fulfilling of desires; ‘*kshi*’ stands for freedom from future births and ‘*na*’ stands for

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deliverance through jnana. We should go around the hill in silence, or in japa, or in *sankirthana* (singing bhajans), whilst praying constantly so that we are thinking of God all the time.

Bhagavan himself set an example during His lifetime by going around the hill countless times. He said that it is the best sadhana, (spiritual exercise) one can do. Bhagavan said we should walk slowly so as to derive the full benefit, as slowly as a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy. Then we will be in His presence for a longer time and walking will not be strenuous. It is walking meditation. May all the devotees benefit by going around the hill with devotion and reverence and attain the supreme goal of life. ▲

I Am

Ana Ramana

Softly they fold me into me,
These waves.
The moon is a white sheet
In the sky.
I breath deep and more deeply
Until I become the sea, until
I become the air, the sand,
A grain ground into nothing
Until I flower into
Every single thing.
I have become the sun,
I have fallen into light.
More true is that
The 'i' has simply
Taken flight.
The dream world is
A silver sheen of dust
Where once I lived
But now the heart has exploded.

KEYWORD

Aham Sphurana

JOHN GRIMES

Seekers wonder if it is possible to have a glimpse of the Self and then lose it? This question has relevance not only for seekers but also to those individuals who believe themselves to be fully illumined. Bhagavan said, “Partial realization? If it is partial, it is not realization, and if it is realization it is not partial.”¹ The term, ‘*aham sphurana*’ illumines this query. Bhagavan said, referring to this term, “It is a foretaste of Realisation.”² A foretaste is a foretaste (preliminary or first taste; slight experience of something to be enjoyed in the future), but a foretaste is not *sahaja samadhi*, a complete, natural, and never-ending direct experience of the Absolute nor is it even *kevala nirvikalpa*

¹ Reddy, Balarama, N., *My Reminiscences*, 2008, p.21.

² Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1996. Talk 62, 6th July, 1935, p.68.

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samadhi, the state of temporary but effortless Self-awareness in which the mind/ego has not been finally eliminated.

Imagine a lake with a layer of green scum covering its surface. If the scum is suddenly pushed aside, one has a clear vision of the pure water below. The pure water was always there, but was hidden by the obscuring scum. Bhagavan said, "Although *aham sphurana* is always and all over, yet it is felt at a particular centre and on particular occasions. It is associated with antecedent causes and confounded with the body. Whereas, it is all alone and pure, it is the Self. To fix the mind on the *sphurana* and one senses it continuously and automatically is realisation."³

The term *aham sphurana*, like other terms that Bhagavan employs such as the Self, *jnana*, or *sahaja samadhi*, is difficult precisely because the ego lives in the world of subjects and objects. Yet, these terms do not refer to an objective experience by a knowing subject. Actually, language is an impediment when dealing with Reality. All languages have a place in the lives of individuals, at the empirical level, but Bhagavan 'speaks' the language of the Self.

Aham: 'I' (in certain contexts it refers to the individual ego and in other contexts it refers to the Self; in this context it refers to the Self); *sphurana*: appear clearly, become visible, flashing forth, to shine. The term 'aham sphurana' raises the questions: What is this 'I' (*aham*) and what is it that flashes forth (*sphurana*)?

Everyone knows an egotistical 'I' (*aham vritti*) or that knot which (mysteriously) arises between Consciousness and the insentient physical body. We are the knowing subject and objects, different from us, are what are known. On the other hand, the term '*aham*' sometimes refers to the Supreme Reality, Consciousness-Itself. When the *aham sphurana* suddenly, spontaneously, appears clearly, there is no knowing subject and known object. It is best described not as an experience but as experience itself, the Self shining forth as it has always been and always will be.

³ Ibid.

What is this ‘shining forth’? Is it the ego or is it the Self? Bhagavan replied, “It is neither the one, nor the other, but something in between the two, it is something which is a combination of the ‘I’ (Self) and the ‘I-thought’ (ego), and that the Self is without even this sphurana.”⁴

Continuing, Bhagavan said, “Again *sphurana* is the foretaste of Realisation. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If a person mistakes him or herself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from them. Objects are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject’s enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, a person feels him or herself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion, and one can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self.”⁵

When a person is deep asleep, one knows nothing as there is no “I”, no ego, the mind is not functioning. On waking one’s personal ‘I’ arises and is perceived as associated with the body, the world, the non-self in general. Such an associated ‘I’ is known as the mind moving (*aham vritti*). The egotistical ‘I’ is oscillating. When *aham* represents only the Self, it is steady (*aham sphurana*). This is the natural state of the *jnani* (self-realised) and is itself called *jnana* (knowledge) by *jnanis*. Though ever present, even in sleep, it is not clearly perceived. It will not appear to a person where the ego persists. As one’s true nature underlying the waking, dream, and deep sleep states, it is said that it must first be realised in the waking state. Thus, the importance and value of the waking condition.

“Efforts must be made in the waking state and the Self must be realized here and now. After the initial flash(es) of the *aham sphurana*, this will afterwards be realized to be the continuous Self, uninterrupted by the waking, dreaming, deep sleep states. This *aham sphurana* is described in Vedanta as an unbroken flashing forth (*akhandakara vritti*). The term *vritti* is used for lack of a better expression. It should not be understood to be literally a *vritti*, for in that case, the *vritti*

⁴ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002. 23-3-45, p.5.

⁵ op.cit., *Talks*, Talk 62, 6th July, 1935, p.68.

will resemble an ocean-like river,⁶ which is absurd. *Vrittis* are limited and of short duration. They are the absolute Consciousness broken up by the cognition of thoughts, senses, etc. *Vrittis* are the function of the mind, whereas the continuous Consciousness transcends the mind. This is the natural, primal state of the jnani or the liberated being. It asserts itself when relative consciousness totally subsides. *Aham vritti* ('egotistical I-thought') is broken; *aham sphurana* (the light of 'I-I') is unbroken, continuous. After thoughts subside, the light shines forth."⁷

The root obstacle to Self-realisation, Bhagavan often said, is the 'I am the body thought'. This thought is rooted in a mind dominated by activity (*rajas*) and lethargy (*tamas*). In fact, what is known as the mind is nothing but *rajas* and *tamas* predominating. What is sought is to abide in a pure (*sattva*) state. But note that, truly speaking, the mind cannot do this for the mind has ceased to function in such a condition. When a person ceases to cling to a mind dominated by rajasic and tamasic thoughts, when one ceases to cling to the idea that one is the physical body, the pure sattvic mind shines (*aham sphurana*). In Bhagavan's language, the pure sattvic mind spontaneously flashes forth with the death of the egotistical mind. However, it should be noted that this spontaneous manifestation of *aham sphurana* still contains the subtle dualistic feeling that there is an 'I' that is clinging to the Self. In such a manifestation a person may have the experience of the Self, but there remains a subtle subjective element to it.

Bhagavan said, "This *sphurana* cannot remain independently apart from the Reality, but it is the correct sign that indicates the forthcoming direct experience of that Reality. The source to which this *sphurana* clings alone is called the Reality or pure Consciousness . . . During the time of practice the natural state is called *upasana*

⁶ "He that has won the Natural State is the Sage; he is free once for all, and cannot become bound again. The difference is illustrated thus. The mind of the Sage that has attained the Natural State is like a river that has joined the ocean and becomes one with it; it does not return." *Maha Yoga* by WHO, 1984, p.130.

⁷ op.cit., *Talks*, Talk 307, December 27th 1936, p.267.

[meditation], and when that state becomes firmly and permanently established it is called *jnana*.”⁸

Therefore, discarding the physical mind/body and remaining without even uttering the word ‘I’, if one keenly enquires ‘what is it that rises as I?’ then in the heart a certain soundless sphurana, ‘I-I’ will shine forth of its own accord. Without ever leaving this ‘I-I’, even the sphurana will itself in the end subside, just like the flame that catches the camphor. This alone is said to be liberation by Sages and Scriptures.

‘I-I’ is the Self; ‘I am this’ or ‘I and that’ is the ego. The Self is there always. The ego is transitory. The flashing of aham sphurana is the correct sign indicating that the Reality is appearing clearly. But since in this state there is still a feeling of attending to the Self, this sphurana is not the complete, unending manifestation of the Self, the Reality. The Reality is the source to which this sphurana attends. When even this feeling of attending to the Self subsides, the sphurana itself subsides, and only Being remains. This state, in which even the slightest trace of the ego or individuality has been completely annihilated, is called liberation, the direct experience of the Reality.

Aham sphurana as presented here as a descriptive term indicating a genuine vision of the Self clearly flashing forth. Bhagavan said that many (most) individuals have this vision (though of short duration) during certain dramatic moments in their lives, for instance during a moment of great fear. However, generally this state is confused with the mind/body complex and though genuine is temporary. When an individual is ripe, qualified, this flashing forth will last for a longer period and eventually will become the permanent state of Self-realisation. ▲

⁸ *Sri Ramana Gita*, 1.13.



Matrubhuteswara Temple

Michael Highburger

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Thirty Nine

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 39: “There can be thoughts of bondage and of freedom only as long as there is the belief, ‘I am bound’. But when one seeks the answer to the question ‘Who is the one that is bound?’, there remains only the ever-free Self as One that has always existed as the resplendent Self boundless and infinite. When realisation is attained the thought of bondage will not survive. How then can the thought of freedom (liberation) arise?”

Commentary:

Both bondage and deliverance are thoughts that arise in the mind. They are like two sides of a coin and the two are inseparable; as long as the thought of bondage exists the thought of deliverance will also arise. In fact, deliverance is no more real than bondage, the two being

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a dyad and the general truth about dyads has been already discussed in the foregoing verses ten to fourteen.

The root and support of the dyad – as of all dyads – is the ego. As so long as ego survives, and only so long the dyad will also live. If the ego dies, these two will cease simultaneously with it. It is not possible for one to survive, when the other dies.

The means for the extinction of the ego is Self-enquiry. If one asks himself the question “To whom is this bondage?”, one will receive the answer, “To me!” Then the question arises: “Who am I?”, in other words, “Who is the bound one?”.

When the ego dies and thereby one becomes a Self-realised *jnani*, it does not appear to him that the bondage (which so far existed) has come to an end now. His experience is not “I have become”, but “I am always free.” That is, he exemplifies the truth that the Self is never bound. This is shown by the declaration in the verse that “There remains only the ever-free-Self.” The substance of the instruction therefore is, only the Self, whose nature is to be ever-free, is the survivor after the death of the ego, and all else vanishes to one that wakes up from his dream, like the characters in the dream-world.

The same meaning has been indicated earlier, in verse twenty-four, where it is said that bondage and the bound-one are both the same – the *jiva* (individual soul) who is nothing but the ephemeral product of knotting together the conscious or *chit* and the inert or *jada* (*chit-jada granthi*). Therefore it is clear that both bondage and deliverance are equally chimerical false; they are the creations of the mind. It is the idea that ‘there is bondage’ arising from *ajnana* (ignorance), which is to be eliminated. From this, flow two facts. One is that the *jivan-mukta* (liberated one) does not think of him or herself as a *jnani* or *mukta*, nor does he see the so-called the *ajnanis* or bound-ones as ignorant, because he does not see any one as apart from himself. The second point is that he does not think that he has become free due to the cessation of bondage, for there never was bondage.

When somebody asked Bhagavan, “When did you attain Self-realisation?” Bhagavan replied, “Nothing at all has come to me.

I remain as I ever was.” There is nothing newly dawning as ‘*jnanam*’ to the Self. It is your inalienable, unchanging eternal nature.

Then, what is the meaning of the term *mukti* in Vedanta? The answer is, in the spirit of Bhagavan’s teaching, “It is the state in which both the thoughts i.e., of bondage and deliverance have ceased to arise”.

The thought of liberation can arise only when there is the feeling of bondage. By enquiring “Whose is this bondage?” one realises that one is the ever-free Self. Bhagavan rhetorically asks, “Where, then, can the thought of bondage arise and when the thought of liberation?”

In the lower stages of mental evolution, man is concerned only about sensual enjoyment. He never thinks beyond the physical existence, as to where he came from or where he would ultimately go. But as he starts thinking more deeply, facilitated by his observation of himself and the world around, he becomes aware of his limited existence and feels the ligatures of bondage. It is then there arises the desire for liberation and to end the misery of bondage. How to attain this? Bhagavan says, “Search out who is having the thought of bondage and go to the root of your being. You will find that you are not bound at all; you are the Self that is ever free.”

It is only the phantom ego that has the feeling of bondage and the thirst for liberation. We should first know who is bound, before trying for release. When you thus launch into Self-enquiry, the ego disintegrates and you find that you have ever been free.

In the *Mandukya Karika*, chapter two, verse 32, Gaudapada has declared, “There is no destruction or origination; no one is bound nor any one engaged in *sadhana* (spiritual practice). There is no one seeking release nor any one released.” This is the ultimate truth.

In phenomenal world, our bondage seems so real that it is necessary to do strong *sadhana* for liberation. On attaining liberation, one realises that one was never bound in the first place. Both bondage and liberation are mere notions of the mind. The *Amrta-bindu Upanishad* declares, “Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation (*Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha – mokshayoh*).”

Bhagavan has often said, “If you think you are bound, you are bound. In reality, you are always free.” How simple it is to liberate

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oneself, yet how difficult it seems to us! This is only because we have been leading our life as the limited self, constrained by *upadhis* (limiting adjuncts) for so many life-times. Therefore, we are not ready to accept that we are ever free, even now! Bondage seems to be a reality and liberation a far-away target, to be reached after long struggle.



Only Love Will Last

Dave Ramowski

When beauty has faded
And youth has grown old.
The harvest has been gathered
And summer's turned cold.
When all that has happened
Fades into the past.
You're left holding nothing.
But love will last.

Each movement has frozen
The speaking at rest.
It's time to surrender,
The clothing undressed.
A heart that was closed,
Has opened at last.
Sharing all that's been given
'Cause only love will last.

While faces grow older
Life losing its glow
Eyes grasping the future,
Afraid to let go.
The strength of your Presence
Melts into the vast.
You live on forever
In love you will last.

Maragatham

The Extraordinary Story of a Modern Saint

V.S. KRISHNAN

We often hear and read about saints and sages as if they are distant from us and impossible to emulate. We rarely hear about those who lead lives of quiet sanctity and whose humility hides their greatness. There are many hidden saints who lead ordinary lives. There does not seem to be any apparent difference between them and those who spend their time in the pursuit of plain survival or the fulfilment of their ever burgeoning desires. Often they are vilified for their deceptively strange behaviour that can, according to the accepted norms, border on madness. One such saint was a housewife in Chennai in the mid-20th Century. Her story is an example of fortitude and conviction. It is also a story of anguish and of the courage

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to overcome numerous obstacles, with and without the understanding of those closest who were bewildered by the turn of events.

Maragatham's is an extraordinary story. She was born to Sankaranarayana Sastri and his wife Sitalakshmi on the 6th of September 1899 in Mylapore, Madras. She was named Maragathavalli. 'Maragatham' is Tamil for emerald, and Valli is the name of Lord Muruga's consort. Hailing from a family of scholars, Sastri expected his daughter to be educated and engaged a private tutor for her. However, Maragatham did not show much interest in formal studies. Her mother Sitalakshmi had passed away early in her childhood and her father spent most of his time absorbed in his own studies.

Sankaranarayana Sastri was a scholar by nature, and a brilliant lawyer. One day, whilst he was in his library, deeply absorbed in his studies, his attention was diverted by the unusual occurrence of someone entering the room, for nobody disturbed him when he was working. Looking up, he saw his daughter Maragatham standing by his side, looking uncharacteristically serious. Sastri was puzzled and asked her what the matter was. Maragatham replied not in words but with a song. The strangeness of her behaviour was overridden by the underlying meaning of the song she had sung. The scholarly Sastri understood the eternal truth implicit in the lyrics of the song, the truth sought by spiritual seekers and saints.

When her song ended Sastri said to his daughter, "Brilliantly composed and beautifully rendered. Tell me, when and where did you learn this song?"

"Muruga appeared in my dream last night and graced me. The song came into my mind on its own", she replied simply.¹

Maragatham's song began with the words: "In the beginning, there was only one. It became two and then three and then many."

¹ Krishna Rao, Smt. Radha & Dr., *The Gift of God or Andavan Pichhai*, Divine Life Society, Sivanandanagar, U.P., 1983, p.6. Later, as an adult she composed many songs in praise of Muruga which expressed her deep devotion, among which is *Ullam Uruguthayya*, an ever green devotional song rendered by T.M. Soundarajan in the 1960s. The song became so popular that it was heard at every Muruga temple and recited not only by musicians and devotees but by almost every music lover.



Lord Muruga

Sastri understood instantly. ‘One’ represented the eternal reality, Brahman; ‘two’ represented Siva and Vishnu; ‘three’ represented the addition of Brahma, the creator; and ‘many’ symbolised the different forms of God. The same meaning is conveyed in Arunagirinathar’s *Thiruppugazh*, in which he explains how ‘one’ became ‘many’ (*Oruvakiaya tharaka ...*).

In keeping with the social norms of the day, Sastri got Maragatham married to Narasimhan, honouring a commitment that his father had made to Narasimhan’s family a generation before. After her marriage Maragatham visited her parental home regularly, and on one such visit during the Navaratri festival she asked her grandmother to tell her a story at bedtime. Maragatham had grown up hearing the great tales of Muruga from her grandmother who was an ardent devotee of Tiruttani Muruga, and, as usual, the story that evening extolled his glory.

Maragatham fell asleep, and that night she had a dream that changed the course of her life. In the same way that Muruga had repeatedly appeared in the dreams of Valli, the tribal girl, who became his consort, he began to come to Maragathavalli in her dreams, and captured her soul. Lord Muruga was in the habit of capturing the hearts; first it was Valli and then the heart of various devotees. That is why Saint Arunagirinathar described him as the ‘thief who captured hearts’ (*Semman magalai thirudum thirudan – kandar anubhuti*).

Maragatham explained her dream experience to her family members, saying, “Muruga came in my dream. He took my hands into his and said, ‘I love you’. I felt he was taking possession of me. He blessed me like an Acharya initiating his disciple into sainthood. I felt I was completely in the hands of Tiruttani Muruga. It is His grace that has given me voice as a singer. He asked me to give Him garlands, not of jasmine or rose but made of sweet Tamil verses. This is what Lord Ranganatha asked His devotee Andal to do, and just as *Tiruppavai* started flowing from Andal, songs on the glory of Lord Muruga came spontaneously to me. I made no effort in their composition — I did not pause for even a second while lyrics and

music flowed from within me — and I adorned the twelve broad shoulders of Muruga with my garland of songs. Muruga has entered into the deep recesses of my heart and taken a permanent seat there; and it was He who composed the songs for me.”²

Maragatham rendered many songs, all instantly and, hearing them, her family was enthralled.

Maragatham became an ardent devotee of Muruga, always singing His glory. Although she lived in a world surrounded by her family and their material possessions, she remained detached from it all. Her physical body dutifully carried out the various duties to her husband, children and relations, but her inner Self was absorbed in Muruga. She mingled with her loved ones and seemed apparently to be in the midst of *samsara*, but her heart always rested joyfully at the lotus feet of Lord Muruga. Around her neck she wore an emerald necklace, symbolic of her name, and she named it Muruga symbolic of her aspiration to be one with the Lord.

Maragatham’s devotion and aspiration to unite with Lord Muruga were pure, and one day the Lord descended to grace her with a vision. Lord Muruga had come to Vallimalai, the land of Nambirajan, to see Valli. When Muruga came then, Sundaravalli, as she was known, was tending the millet fields. When Lord Muruga came now, Maragathavalli was in the hospital, having just given birth to a baby. While sitting on the hospital bed, with her baby nearby, Maragatham had a vision of Muruga and, at once, she began to sing songs in His praise. She was so involved in her songs that she did not hear her baby crying. The nurse heard it and asked Margatham to take care of the child, and when her parents-in-law heard about this from the nurse, they reprimanded Maragatham for neglecting her baby. The manuscripts of her compositions were taken away from her, and locked in a trunk.

Maragatham started to refer to Muruga as *Aandi Pandaram*, the saint who has renounced everything and lives entirely on the food offered by the public. This attitude of total renunciation, which

² Ibid., p.x-xi.

inspired Maragatham, did not go well in a family whose members aspired for material prosperity. Despite the tension that this created, Maragatham went about her daily life, singing her songs and distancing herself from the material world, and thus bringing herself closer to the Lord.

Life went on for Maragatham. She had many children; she witnessed the death of some; she dealt with and overcame difficulties that the family faced; through it all she remained calm, composed and dispassionate, her attention always centred on Lord Muruga. The only expression of her distress or grievance was in the songs she sang to her Muruga.

In one she sang, “Lord Muruga! You appear now and disappear later. Why do I not experience you always?”. Then, one day, Muruga came in her vision and said, “Oh foolish one, why do you search for me outside, when I reside deep inside your heart?”.

Her life reached a turning point in the year 1948. She was climbing down the stairs when she slipped and fell. She sustained serious injuries and was admitted to the hospital. Her condition became critical and gradually she went into a coma. She briefly regained consciousness before lapsing into a coma again. She remained in this state, alternating between consciousness and unconsciousness, for about six months. Occasionally, when she regained consciousness, she would ask, “Who are you?” or “Who am I?”, recognising neither others nor indeed herself. All the health indicators – her pulse rate, blood pressure and heart beat – signalled her end. But Maragatham proved it all wrong.

In the opening verses which invoke the blessings of the guru, *Thiruppugazh* devotees hail Arunagirinathar for describing Muruga as one who has no beginning or end. (*Anthadi illa iraiivanukku*). Similarly, Maragatham showed that a true devotee of Muruga also has no beginning or end and that every end marks a beginning. It was not the end of Maragatham’s life, but the beginning of a new phase. She recovered fully and went about her life as a wife and mother. She resumed her devotional work of singing as well. As Arunagirinathar

said in *Kandar anubhuti*, she kept herself occupied with the work of singing the glory of Muruga – *Paadum paniye paniyai arulvai*.

While Maragatham was in a coma, someone from the family had opened the trunk in which her mother-in-law had kept all the song scripts. These manuscripts were sent to a great luminary, known as Thiruppugazh Sri Mani Iyer.³ A gentleman who had gone to attend the Step Festival (*Padvizha*) at Tiruttani returned with a message from Thiruppugazh Sri Mani Iyer that he was very impressed with Maragatham's compositions and he had initiated the process of publishing them. He also sent to her, as *prasad*, a photograph of Arunagirinathar.

Sometime in 1950, Maragatham went to Tiruvannamalai with some friends. By the time they reached the temple of Arunachala, it was 10 pm and too late for darshan. However, Maragatham and some of her friends managed to go inside, and after worshipping Arunachala, they reached the shrine of Unnamulai Amman. There, they saw a young boy beckoning them. The boy helped them to conduct the *pujas* and gave them *prasad*. When asked, he said his name was Dhandapani. The boy caught hold of Maragatham's hands and led her to the shrine of Lord Muruga on the northern side, left her there and disappeared. It was exactly at this spot that Lord Muruga had graced His devotee Arunagirinathar with His darshan. Arunagirinathar affirms this fact in the opening lines of His immortal

³ Since there were more than one person with the name of Thiruppugazh Mani Iyer, an enquiry was made about his identity. In his article 'Chandrasekhara of Kanchi and the Chandrasekhara of Sringeri', appearing in Kamakoti.org, Sri Ra Ganapati says that Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam has conferred the title 'Thiruppugazh Mani' on Sri T.M. Krishnaswamy Iyer not only for his devotion in *Thiruppugazh* but also to match his initial. It is therefore possible that while addressing him as 'Thiruppugazh Mani Iyer', Maragatham was referring to Sri T.M. Krishnaswamy Iyer who was the Chief Justice of Travancore State and an ardent *Thiruppugazh* singer, who lived almost in the same period. Sri Krishnaswamy Iyer, alias 'Thiruppugazh Mani' called on Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and received his blessings. He described Ramanasramam as an oasis in the desert of the modern world (*Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 43).

work *Kandar Alankaram* by saying, “I have received the darshan at the northern side of the tower of Arunai temple,” (*Adalarunai thiru gopurathe antha vayilukku vada arukilsenru kandukonden*). When some members of the group went to the temple next morning and enquired about the boy, the temple priests said that they knew of no such boy, and further, it was impossible for anyone to perform a puja at that time of night when the temple was closed.

From the temple of Arunachala, Maragatham and her friends proceeded to Ramanasramam. While entering the Ashram, Maragatham felt as if she was entering her own house. She saw Maharshi reclined in the hall, his grace radiating everywhere. Seeing him, she felt she was looking at her own Self. She prostrated before Bhagavan, and his gaze fell on her when she rose. From the blessing that emanated from his benign eyes, and Maragatham knew that Bhagavan was initiating her to sainthood by means of his eyes – *nayanadiksha*. She underwent a divine experience. A brilliant light passed through her which eliminated all her ignorance and elevated her to the state of realisation. She now got the answer to the question that was bothering her all along: ‘Who am I?’. She realised that the Self in her is the expression of the eternal reality, the *Parabrahman*. But the most amazing moment was yet to come.

Maharshi asked her, “Have you met Dhandapani?”.

Maragatham stood motionless for a moment. How could Bhagavan know of her experience at Arunachaleswarar temple the evening before?

From the bunch of grapes Maragatham brought, Bhagavan took one and put it in his mouth saying, “This body likes these grapes,” indicating, by his action, his recognition of the presence of divinity in her.

Later, when Ramana Maharshi became very seriously ill, Maragatham went once more to Ramanasramam, on 12th April 1950, a few days before his *mahanirvana*. There was a steady stream of devotees eager to have darshan of Bhagavan and, in view of the heavy rush, only one minute was earmarked for everyone. Maragatham waited her turn, with

Bhagavan's photo on her hand. When she reached Bhagavan, she did not know where to set down the photo, and she said that Bhagavan himself took it from her to enable her to do proper *pranam* to him. He smiled and gave her back the photo as mark of his blessing. Maragatham offered her obeisance once more and left.⁴

Two days later, the world heard the news that Bhagavan had attained *mahasamadhi*. Maragatham remained in a state of truth, awareness and bliss — *sat chit ananda*: the experience which she documented under the title *Jiva Brahma Aikyam* ('The Unity of Jiva and Brahman'). Maragatham gave the manuscript to Chengalvaraya Pillai,⁵ who went through it thoroughly and passed it on to Muruganar, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan Ramana. Impressed by Maragatham's interpretation of the state of *samadhi*, Muruganar asked Chengalvarayan to publish it, but unfortunately, the manuscript got destroyed.

She had a further encounter with Bhagavan Ramana on the 28th August 1951. She walked into the courtyard of her house and saw him sitting on the platform, holding Dhandapani's hand. He said, "Are you afraid of me because you think I am a ghost? Come close to me; I am Ramana. I have come to talk with you, just as you desired when you met me last time". He then explained the secrets of Vedanta; about the subtle body, the gross body and the five *koshas*. He gave her *jnana* (knowledge) and then initiated her into the Gayatri mantra. Being a woman, she felt hesitant to recite that holiest mantra, but Maharshi made her repeat it along with him. Much of his *upadesha*, (instruction) however, was transmitted to her through his piercing

⁴ op.cit.,p.38.

⁵ Sri Chengalvaraya Pillai is a great scholar and an ardent devotee of Tiruthani Muruga. It is believed that the songs composed by Arunagirinathar, believed to be over 16000, were scattered at different places. It was Sri Chengalvaraya Pillai who made a thorough search and obtained the songs from different persons by great effort. If he had not taken the initiative and efforts, perhaps we would not have been blessed with 1400 songs of *Thiruppugazh* that guide humanity to the path of truth and perfection. Apart from giving interpretations to *Thiruppugazh* songs, he has written an outstanding research work, *Arunagirinathar varalarum nool araichiyum*.

look. Once again she prostrated before Sri Ramana and tried to touch his feet, but found herself unable to do so. Ramana Maharshi laughed and told her that her gross body could not feel his subtle body. He blessed her by placing his hands on her head, and that she could feel. The Maharshi again explained that he could touch her.⁶

The vision then vanished and she entered a deep state, losing all sense of her body and of time. Her family could not revive her and she remained in this state for two days. Tiruppugazh Mani Iyer came to the house the next day for the weekly *bhajan*, and after he had sung *Kandar anubhuti* she slowly opened her eyes. Mani Iyer applied kumkum on her forehead and asked her how she was.

A song burst forth from her lips, describing how she had climbed six steps and seen the light of Arunachala (*Annamalaijyoti*). She had gone further, and there was nothing there, and she merged into that nothingness. When they wanted more explanation of her experience, she could not say anything, because when she thought of it she would again lose consciousness of this world. Later on, however, through the grace of Bhagavan Ramana, she wrote a number of songs called *Shashthimalai*, giving a description of all the six states of consciousness.

Once she visited Srisailam along with her friends, and there, quite by chance, she met her mentor, Thiruppugazh Sri Mani Iyer. Telling Maragatham that the time and place were right for him to give her *upadesa* (instruction), he initiated her to the state of sainthood. Days later, Mani Iyer went to Maragatham's house to conduct a bhajan. She expressed her joy at having been blessed with upadesa by him in Srisalam. To her surprise, Mani Iyer told her that he had not been in Srisailam, and she realised that it was Lord Muruga himself who had appeared as her Guru. Maragatham now entered a new phase of her life. It reminds one of Arunagirinathar who sang in his *Kandar Anubhuti* "Come as my guru, Oh Lord and grace me" (*Guruvai varuvai arulvai guhane*).

Biographers who studied her life history in depth have come across some intriguing facts when they did research into the time, in 1948,

⁶ op.cit., p.43-44.



Andavan Pichhai

when she was in hospital in a coma. Her recovery was remarkable and very unusual, despite all the signs and symptoms pointing to a hopeless prognosis. Her subsequent behavioural pattern also showed that Maragatham was a changed person. Her biographers concluded that someone else was in her body. The biographers stumbled upon a unique character named Ramakrishna, a Telugu Brahmin by birth and, by linking events in his life with Maragatham's, they concluded that Ramakrishna resided in Maragatham's body.

Ramakrishna's life in Pinnavasal in Tamil Nadu was one of meditation and austerities. His aim was to attain spiritual perfection. He was married to Lakshmi, a devout woman ever willing to serve her husband, but Ramakrishna kept her at a distance, asking her to leave whenever she came near him. Though Lakshmi nursed a grievance deep in her heart, she never showed it and took his behaviour in her stride. In his eagerness to attain the ultimate end of spirituality, Ramakrishna travelled to Rishikesh and met Swami Sivananda, but the Swamiji turned down his request for initiation into *sannyasa*.

Undeterred, Ramakrishna adopted sainthood by mentally accepting the Paramaguru Sadasiva Brahmendra whose samadhi is at Nerur near Karur, as his Guru (*maanasika guru*) and proceeded on his spiritual path. But something was holding him back; he could not reach his desired spiritual destination. On consulting his Guru, Sri Sadasiva Brahmendra, he was told that he still carried the consequence of his karma (*karmavinai*), and the guru suggested a way out of his predicament. Ramakrishna had gained *siddha* power from his tapas, and decided to use it to enter into the body of a mature devotee in order to attain his spiritual end. Sometime in the 1943, Ramakrishna went into a state of *samadhi* – the state of body-lessness – and went in search of a person who was purified by devotion and whose life had come nearly to its end.

Maragatham's biographers and both Maragatham's and Ramakrishna's close companions believe that Ramakrishna's soul hovered for five years and ultimately entered Maragatham's body in 1948. The question that naturally arises is how, by entering into the body of another person, Ramakrishna could free himself from the consequences of sufferings

he had inflicted on his wife. It is possible that, by entering into the body of a person of pure soul, like Maragatham, he gained jnana and attained self-realisation. And once the Self is realised, the question of karma loses its relevance. All scriptures are unanimous in their view that attainment of *atmajnana* that leads to realisation is possible only when devotion matures. Ramakrishna must have found that Maragatham's body was the ideal vessel from which to gain jnana.

Once Ramakrishna had taken residence in Maragatham's body, she began to exhibit character traits that were never hers. Her devotion to Muruga was still steadfast and continued to manifest in her songs; her interest in visiting places like Tiruvannamalai and her participation in *Thiruppugazh* bhajans were also natural; but the eagerness to go to Srisailam, to see Ramana Maharshi and to visit Sivananda Ashram were evidence of the presence of Ramakrishna who was in quest of jnana.

Ramakrishna's presence was acknowledged by Swami Sivananda and the then Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Sri Chandrasekara Saraswathi, and therefore accepted by others as true. Indeed the priest at Aavudiyar Koil, where Ramakrishna had performed austerities for many years, greeted Maragatham as if she was Ramakrishna, when she visited that place.

Ramakrishna's traits began to manifest in the person of Maragatham one after another, but as those close to her observed, her devotion for Lord Muruga remained constant. As usual, Muruga often came into her dream and guided her. Once, Muruga came in her vision and said, "This body of yours is a temple where a great saint will visit. Continue your path of devotion and I bless you to sing again". Maragatham, surrendered herself to Muruga and continued her mission of singing his glory. Most of the time, she remained quiet and silent, in keeping with the hymn of *Kandar anubhuti* that highlights the state of stillness (*summa iru*). Simultaneously, Ramakrishna's personality began to become apparent, prompting Maragatham, who has been treading the path of devotion all along, to focus now on the path of jnana. In 1954, Maragatham went to Rishikesh and met Swami Sivananda, and requested him to accept her as a sannyasini. Since Maragatham was a *grihasta*, a married

woman with a family, Swami Sivananda was reluctant to initiate her. Ramakrishna (in her) asserted himself, and she persisted in her request. Finally Swami Sivananda agreed that she could continue to lead a family life and yet remain detached from it as a true *sannyasini*.

Maragatham recounts her experience:

“That day I was half insane, knowing and yet not knowing my whereabouts, and struggling like a ship caught in a storm. I came to Sivananda Ashram. Swami Sivananda gave me the refuge (*abhaya*) and removed all my fears and obstacles. Calling me to his side, he gave me the mantra *diksha* (initiation). This was the seed of knowledge gracefully implanted in the ground of my heart by the Guru. Well-nourished and watered, it sprouted like a blooming lotus. On the 3rd March 1954, a protective fence was put on it by way of *sannyasa*, and I was sent back to live in the material world as a *sannyasini*. The plant flowered on the household fence from 1954 to 1968, yielding the fruit [of grace]. If it had continued to stay there, the raw fruit might have dried up, withered and fallen away without ripening. Hence on 4th July 1968 it was removed to the Vaishnavi temple near Madras to be under the protective care of the Devi. It started to ripen there. If the fruit was left on the tree, it could have been eaten away by crows, sparrows or squirrels, when ripened, and got lost. Mother Vaishnavi Devi wanted to give the fruit, when it ripened, to Gurudev Bhagavan himself, who had planted the seed. The fruit came into the hands of Swami Chidananda, Gurudev’s beloved successor, so that he could offer the ripe fruit at the right time to the right hand.”⁷

We see two phases in Maragatham’s life, the first half entirely devoted to Muruga where she attained immortality by uniting with Muruga (*jiva brahma aikyam*) and the second half which she gave to Ramakrishna to fulfil his allotted destiny (Self-realisation) by gaining *jnana* from Swami Sivananda.

The foreword that she wrote for her biography gives us a better insight into her experience: “He [Muruga] took permanent residence inside my heart and His presence was felt whether I was awake or

⁷ op.cit.,p.viii-ix.

asleep. It is so from the time He entered my being in 1908 till this day, the Lord guarding me like the eyelids protecting the eyeball. He has shown me that He exists in all forms, that He is present in all names, and that He alone appears as father and mother, as uncle and aunt, as lover and the beloved, and as children and relations. I found the one Supreme reflected as many, like the one sun reflected as many in the waves of the ocean. My mind became calm and undisturbed, reflecting the Lord's presence, as the placid lake reflecting the full moon."⁸

After living in Rishikesh, Maragatham returned to Madras at the age of eighty-nine and passed away peacefully in her family home in November 1990. Maragatham's divine calling is evidenced by the fact that she received the initiation of the same mantra from six gurus – from Lord Subramanya Himself at the age of nine; from the Kanchi Paramacharya; at Srisailam from Tirupugazh Sri Mani Iyer (though Mani Iyer never went to Srisailam at that time); from Sri Ramana Maharshi; from Bhogar in Palani (the presiding Siddha of the holy shrine); and from Swami Sivananda, who initiated her into sannyasa.

Going through the life of Maragatham, two points emerge. One, she received advice (*upadesa*) from a number of saints. Is it advisable to have more than one Guru and, if so, whose advice would one follow and which saint one would adopt as a guru? Sage Dattatreya, the legendary *avadhoot* said to King Yadu,⁹ "My bliss and contentment are the fruits of Self-realisation. I have gained necessary wisdom from the whole creation, through 24 gurus. They are earth, air, sky, fire, sun, pigeon, python, sea, moth, elephant, ant, *pingala*, playful boy and so on. How can a playful boy be a guru? Young boys do not nurse grudges nor have prejudices against anyone. They do not know what is their own, or what belongs to others. Their happiness springs from their own selves, their innate creativity, and they do not need any external objects or conditions to be happy. I realised that the sage of

⁸ op.cit., p.xi.

⁹ Sri Dattatreya was an enlightened sage who was held in high veneration by devotees and saints. He was considered as an *avatar* and an embodiment of jnana. Wherever Sage Dattatreya went, the four different-coloured dogs accompanied him; the dogs who represented the four Vedas.

perfect enlightenment is also such. A playful boy thus happened to be my fifteenth guru. Therefore, one can attain jnana from wherever it comes.” The second point that strikes us is whether it would be justifiable for Ramakrishna to occupy the body of a devout woman. Actually, the Self is the reflection of Brahman, the eternal reality. The Self in me is the same as the Self in others. They are all one. If at all we have to receive a message from this story, it is this: Maragatham was an embodiment of devotion. Ramakrishna was an embodiment of jnana. It is when devotion merges with jnana that one is able to realise his Supreme Self. Bhagavan Ramana said, “*Bhakti is jnanamaata*” (Bhakti gives birth to jnana). ▲

Here

Upahar

Silent one, unspoken love,
Laying again these broken words at your feet;
What is there to forget, or to remember?
How should You ever come? How could you go?

Majesty, all-pervading, where shall I look and not see You?
Unspeakable beauty, may I find you here without seeking;
May I arrive without leaving,
so be your Will

Circle of blood, rhythm of heart,
whatever turns and falls and rises,
this endless Dance,
a ray from Your bright eye reveals as only Love

Like a tree, breaking the ancient earth
to spread its vast prayer skyward,
its secret infinite breath;
the fragrant remembrance, deep and joyful:
I am already here.

The Ashram Gosala

V. S. MANI

The Gosala is an important feature of the Ashram. Besides providing all the required dairy products, there is a strong belief that the Ashram started to grow and flourish only after the advent of cow Lakshmi and the establishment of the Gosala which is situated in the north eastern corner (*esanya moolai*) of the ashram, believed in the sastras, to be the most auspicious corner. The advent of Lakshmi was recorded by Devaraja Mudaliar who tells us that around 1926, four years after Sri Bhagavan had moved to live at the foot of Arunachala, one Arunachala Pillai of Kumaramangalam, near Gudiyatham, came to the Ashram with an offering to Bhagavan of a cow and her young female calf as a token of his devotion. Bhagavan tried to dissuade him, pointing out that there were no proper facilities at the Ashram for looking after the animals and that the act of presenting them was enough and he could now take them back with him and keep them and care for them as though on Bhagavan's behalf. All this was lost on the devotee who insisted on leaving the two animals with Sri Bhagavan

and exclaimed: "I have made my humble gift and would not take it back even if my throat were to be cut." As Devaraja Mudaliar reports:

"Seeing his insistence and the devotion behind it, one Ramanatha Dikshitar who was then living near Sri Bhagavan and who passed away a few years before him after some forty years of his gracious company, declared energetically: 'I will look after the cow and the calf.' Now this Dikshitar was a frail, puny, insignificant-looking man from whom one would normally never expect any vehemence, but on this occasion he seemed like one inspired and cried out, smiting his chest: 'Here I am! I make myself responsible for the upkeep of these animals.' So it was that, owing to the devout insistence of Arunachala Pillai and the unusual vehemence of Ramanatha Dikshitar, the cow and her calf came to live at the Ashram."¹

Ramanatha Dikshitar tended the animals carefully and with great kindness for a few months, after which they were given into the care of one Pasupathi Aiyar who lived in the town and kept a dairy. They were well cared for by him. About a year later he set out one day to bathe in Palitirtham Tank and to have *darshan* of Bhagavan and brought the cow and her calf with him to show to Bhagavan.

The calf seems to have noted the road they had taken and the layout of the Ashram, because next morning she came again by herself and appeared before Sri Bhagavan. Such was the attraction that Sri Bhagavan had for her, that from that day onwards she used to come alone from the town every morning, spend the day at the Ashram, and find her way back to Pasupathi Aiyar's house in the town in the evening. While at the Ashram, her attraction to Sri Bhagavan was so strong that she would scarcely leave his presence, spending all her time by his side. He, for his part, treated her very graciously and with his own hands gave her bananas or any delicacy that was brought to him. Thus passed several happy years of almost continuous *satsang*

¹ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *The Maharshi and Lakshmi*, a small pamphlet published by the ashram sometime in the 1960-70s, undated. Devaraja Mudaliar took some trouble to ascertain all the facts about Lakshmi after her samadhi in 1948.

(association) with Sri Bhagavan, during which time she came to be known affectionately at the Ashram as Lakshmi.

The life of cow Lakshmi from the time she was donated to Bhagavan in 1926 as a calf, to her becoming a permanent inmate of the Ashram in 1930 and her *samadhi* in 1948 and her amazing special, loving rapport with Bhagavan is absolutely inspiring. That an animal can get liberation and attain nirvana, as confirmed by Bhagavan in the epitaph composed by Him for the inscription on Lakshmi's tomb, confirms and strengthens our faith in the power of Bhagavan's Grace.

All are beholden to the cow Lakshmi for the establishment of the Gosala. To properly house Lakshmi and the increasing number of cattle, a fine stone cow-house (*gosala*) was built in the late 1930s. According to Devaraja Mudaliar's interesting account: "On the day of the laying of the foundation stone, Lakshmi walked into the presence of Bhagavan shortly before the time fixed for the ceremony and led Him back there, she going first and Bhagavan following. On the day of the ceremonial opening of the cow-house, it was decided that she should be the first to enter. She was bathed and decorated for entering her new abode, but then she slipped away and went to Bhagavan and sat down before Him. She would not budge until He went too, so that He was the first to enter her new house and she stepped in behind Him."²

Originally, in the main building, the central courtyard was open to the sky. But in those times the scare of leopards was very real so a steel grill was provided. Over the years, the number of cows & calves has increased and consequently more sheds and pens have been built in order to house them all. Now there are more than 130 cows and calves, besides a bull & bullock. In recent years, some of the pure, good Indian breeds like Tharparkar, Gir and Sindhi have been added. The Tharparkars were brought all the way from Rajasthan in two big trucks and they have adapted well here.

² Ibid.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Milk yield-wise the Indian breeds have limitations. For an institution quantity is important and, hence, many Jersey cross and HF cross cows are also being maintained. Milking, mostly by machine, is being done twice a day — 5:30 am and 3:30 pm. Total yield per day varies – 230 litres in lean season to 270 litres in flush season. Normally the flush season, winter, coincides with the crowded period and so it evens out. The cows are given a balanced feed — ready-made Cattle Feed pellets, rice bran, ‘*urad*’ dust, besides Napier grass grown in the Ashram gardens and their ever-favourite *Sesbania* greens and ‘*ponni*’ rice straw as bulk feed.

The once-a-year Maatu Pongal Festival is an important day for the Gosala. All the cows’ horns are freshly painted, new neck/nose ropes are provided and they are given a ceremonial bath before a special ceremony in the morning. Puja is performed to a chosen cow; needless to mention that it used to be Lakshmi. Now a puja is offered at Cow Lakshmi’s samadhi on that day. It is a joyous occasion and devotees take part enthusiastically.

The bounty of the Gosala extends beyond supplying milk. Cow dung and urine are invaluable. Part of the cow dung is the input for the two Gobar Gas plants, which produce ‘gobar gas’, which is piped to the kitchen to be used as fuel in the special burners/stoves. The rest of the cow dung goes to compost pits along with fallen leaves etc to produce organic manure. Cow urine with a few drops of neem oil is an excellent pesticide/fungicide, used in the Ashram gardens, whenever required. Also, cow dung is the main ingredient in *panchagavya* prepared regularly to be used as a foliar and root feed fertiliser in the gardens.

Cow Lakshmi’s Gosala is a blessed bountiful feature of the Ashram.



On the Nature of Enlightenment as *Pratyabhijna*

An Inquiry in the Light of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*

Part One

SWAMI TANMAYANANDA SARASVATI

Introduction

The goal of all spiritual sadhana is Advaita Siddhi (the accomplishment of non-dual vision), which is also called Self-realisation (or God-realisation, in *bhakti* terminology). In Sanskrit, it is called *Atma Sakshatkaram* or *Brahma Sakshatkaram* (realisation of the universal spirit, shining as the in-dwelling Self of every being). Upon inquiring into the nature of this liberating Knowledge, the venerable ancient rishis asserted that it is not a matter of reaching any destination or

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati received Vedanta *siksha* from Swami Tejomayananda, Head of Chinmaya Mission and later on *sannyasa diksha* from Swami Virajeshwara Sarasvati of Hamsa Ashrama in Anusoni. During the period 2006-11, he contributed several keywords for the *Mountain Path* like *Tanmayam*, *Mithya*, *Mounam*, *Yoga*, *Samadhi*, *Pramada*, *Anubhava*, *Ananda*, *Abhyasa* etc. In his *purvashrama*, he was an academic faculty of metallurgical engg. in IIT Madras. He has been residing in Arunachala since 2002.

gaining something anew (in terms of a variety of religious or mystical experiences) nor is it a transformation of the mind-stuff and much less is it a product of any action, howsoever exalted; lastly it does not consist of mere purification of the soul.¹

In the inner journey of the soul, there are a variety of landmarks which could be loosely described using the above terms. They may have some limited validity on the relative plane, which strictly pertains to the preparatory stages of sadhana. When Brunton queried Bhagavan regarding the time required for enlightenment, he replied that while it takes a long time to set fire to coal, gunpowder catches fire instantly² and it is all a matter of maturity of mind. The final explosion that destroys *samsara* (the cycle of transmigration) with all its sufferings happens only with the dawn of Self-knowledge (*jnanadeva tu kaivalyam*). In Vedantic parlance, the nature of such enlightenment is more accurately described as *pratyabhijna* or ‘recognition of the inner Self’. ‘It is pure, plain and as simple as recognising a gooseberry fruit in one’s own palm and hence easy even for simpletons’ exclaims Bhagavan Ramana in his *Atma Vidya Kirtanam*.

In the empirical plane of reality, the *jiva* (the individual self) is said to be covered by *avidya* (ignorance) and consequently has forgotten its real nature as being identical with the limitless universal Self (*Brahman*). Instead, it has identified itself with a limited body-mind complex, thereby falling into *samsara* and experiencing all its attendant sorrows endlessly. After going through an elaborate process of spiritual sadhana, capped with self-enquiry, one finally gains the ‘saving knowledge’ — which is direct and immediate (*aparoksha jnanam*) — of one’s true nature as the immortal, limitless Brahma svarupam. This discovery is called *pratyabhijnanam* or recognition of one’s original nature, the ever-present spirit as the ultimate truth, and this alone sets one free from the thralldom of matter and consequently *samsara* forever.

¹ Gambhirananda, Swami, trans., *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, Advaita Ashrama, 2006, sutra 4: ‘*tat tu samanvayat*’, p.32. Also see *Isavasya Bhashyam*, opening paragraph.

² Narasimha Swami, B.V., *Self Realization*, 2002, p.258.

Etymological Meaning of *Pratyabhijanam*

The etymology of the word is traced as follows: ‘*prati + abhi + jna*’. ‘*prati*’ and ‘*abhi*’ are prefixes to the root word ‘*jna*’, which means ‘to know’. Of the several meanings available for the prefix ‘*prati*’, two are relevant in the present context; one of them is ‘in comparison with’ and ‘as a match for’. ‘*abhi*’ means ‘facing’, ‘all around’, ‘both sides’ or ‘in front of’. Suppose you see a person called Ganesh whom you had seen years ago with characteristics corresponding to his youthful age, status etc., which are vastly different ‘compared’ to his present features; then you discard the incidental differences between the present and the earlier versions and quickly ‘match their basic commonalities’ (often in a subliminal way) and conclude that ‘he is the same person whom you had encountered in the past’. This is the standard process of recognition of any person or object.³

Such a sudden spark of recognition culminates in the flowering of ‘knowledge or illumination’ (signified by the root word ‘*jna*’). The brief definition of the technical term ‘*pratyabhijna*’ is thus in the form of ascertaining the identity of a person as, ‘he whom I saw in the past, is the same person in front of me now’. Sri Sureshvaracharya in his commentary *Manasollasa*⁴ on the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, describes thus: *pratyabhijanam* consists in a sudden flash of memory triggering recognition of a thing (or person) — in the form ‘that is the same as this’ (*soyamiti anusandhanam*) — which, having presented itself before one’s awareness in a past experience (referred to as ‘that’), once again becomes an object of consciousness at the present moment of experience (referred to by ‘this’).

The second meaning for the prefix ‘*prati*’ valid in this context is ‘to return’ or ‘to traverse in the reverse or opposite direction’, because with reference to the object cognised in the present moment, the mind quickly ‘travels back’ in time to compare it with a past experience

³The feeling of déjà vu is also such a recognition, as in the case of events or encounters.

⁴*Dakshinamurti Stotra with Manasollasa*, Samata Books, Madras 1978, v.7.3, p.133, ‘*bhaatasya kasyachit purvam bhaasamaanasya saampratam, soyamiti anusandhanam pratyabhijanam uchyate*’.

of the same object, by recollection. Thus the attention of the mind (*antahkaranam*) is 'turned within' or 'reversed' from the outside perception. For, while 'cognition' takes place outside of oneself with the eyes operating outward to reach out to the object, 'recollection' can take place only by the mind's attention 'turning inward in the opposite direction'. Thus *smriti* (recollection) combines with *pratyaksha* (cognition) to make the knowledge of the object complete with re-cognition, viz. *pratyabhijna*.

It is important to understand these concepts because language conditions our thinking, which in turn conditions our attitude and approach to sadhana. The use of precise, technical words is a powerful aid in removing the psychological cobwebs in the mind which hinder our sadhana in the form of vagueness or incorrect understanding. The process of gaining clarity is thereby facilitated by cutting through many subliminal barriers. Oftentimes the same word can mean different things to different people and a lack of consensual approach leads to bitter debates which are easily avoided by assigning precise meanings to specific terms. We shall shortly see an instance of a philosophical schism germane to the present topic and how it can be reconciled by eliminating the confusion caused by semantics.

Philosophical Meaning of *Pratyabhijna-Darsanam*

The core doctrine of Kashmir Saivism is, in fact, called *Pratyabhijna-Darsana* or the Philosophy of Recognition, which teaches that the individual self (*jiva*) is, in essence, identical with the universal Self (*Siva*), when we discard the *upadhis* (attributes) of *vyashti* (limited individual) and *samashti* (totality). Abhinavagupta in his *Isvara-Pratyabhijna-Vimarshini*⁵ gives an elaborate exposition of the above, which is in perfect consonance with the Advaitic position as enunciated by Sureshvaracharya in *Manasollasa*⁶: the *pratyabhijna* of *Atman* consists in *jivatma* (the embodied self) becoming conscious that He is omniscient, etc., owing to intuitive recognition of His essential

⁵ Cited from *Pratyabhijna-Hridayam* by Jaidev Singh, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1977, p.117. '*pratipam atma abhimukhyena jnanam prakashaha iti pratyabhijna*'.

⁶ *Dakshinamurti Stotra with Manasollasa*, Samata Books, Madras 1978, verse 7.5, p.133.

nature as infinite Consciousness, after casting away all notions of limitations experienced by the *jiva* through its association with Maya. Sri Ramana expressed this same identity between *jiva* and *Isvara*⁷ from the standpoint of their true nature, shorn of all their *upadhis* (attributes). Sri Sankara declared this identity as, “Brahman alone is *satyam*, the world being illusory and *jiva* is none other than Brahman.”⁸

In ordinary life also, *pratyabhijna* then consists in the ‘unification through cogitation’ (*anusandhanam*) of what appeared before, with what is appearing now, as in the statement that ascertains, ‘This is the same person that I had encountered earlier’. Recollection of a past experience is *paramarsha* or *smriti*. The present cognition is *pratyaksha*. When both *pratyaksha* and *paraamarsha* occur at the same time together, it ignites a re-cognition, which is *pratyabhijna*. In fact, most of our daily *vyaavaharika* activities are founded on *pratyabhijna* only. But it takes place so fast and effortlessly as a continual process that it is taken for granted and hardly given the *recognition* that it merits! Sri Sankaracharya employs this concept of *pratyabhijna* brilliantly in verses 6 and 7 of his celebrated advaitic hymn *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, to refute the hypothesis that there is no substantive underlying Reality behind the empirical world experienced in every-day life, even though the world is treated as illusory by the proponents of that theory.⁹

⁷ *Upadesa Saram*, v.24, ‘*isajivayor veshadhibhida, sat svabhavato vastu kevalam.*’

⁸ *Asangoham*, v.18. ‘*brahma satyam....jivo brahmaiva naaparah...iti vedanta dindimah.*’

⁹ Among various theories of ‘erroneous cognition’ (*khyati vaada*), one major theory is ‘*asat khyati vaada*’ which asserts that though the world is as unreal as an optical illusion like mirage waters, it does not emerge from a real substratum. Advaita does not accept this view – akin to Berkeley’s solipsism – because the illusion of a snake cannot arise without the substratum of a real rope. In the same way, the illusory appearance of the world cannot arise without a real substratum, namely *Brahman* (This is *anirvachaniya khyati*). Illusions are superimpositions which always require a substratum to be projected upon, whereas hallucinations are purely mental creations without any real substratum or basis. Vedanta declares that the world is not a mental hallucination but an illusion that requires a substratum. This is an important distinction. The various theories of *khyati vaada* are discussed in detail in the commentaries of *Adhyasa Bhashya* of Sri Sankara, using the standard illusions of ‘rope-snake’ and ‘silver-nacre’ examples.

Perspectives on the Source of All Creation

The brilliant philosophers championing the Great Void theory (which bears close resemblance to Taoistic philosophy, an altogether independent system), broadly classified the whole creation into *jiva* or individual self (subject, or the 'seer') and *jagat*, that is, the world (which is the object, or the 'seen' encountered by the former). These nihilist philosophers treated the *jagat* as an illusory creation of the mind denying it altogether even objective reality (see footnote no. 9 on *khyati vaada*). Being ephemeral and yet a perennial source of suffering, it was not considered worthy of deeper enquiry. Instead they chose to focus on the sufferer, the *jiva* and analysed the three states of human experience, namely waking, dream and deep sleep states. They rightly concluded that *sushupti* (deep sleep) is the source of the former two conditions in which both the 'seer' and the 'seen' are experienced. Analysing *sushupti* itself, they concluded that since neither the *jagat* is experienced nor even the *jiva* is available in deep sleep, the underlying essence of both these entities is Nothingness or the Great Void (*sunyam*) from which alone they emerge.

All existence therefore has nothing but non-existence (*asat*) as its origin or primordial source, which is said to be the ultimate Reality. Nothing exists in a positively real manner in this world. There is no positively existing underlying Reality either, beneath the illusion of the world-appearance. Thus the Void indicates the complete absence of any Real Entity and is Itself not a positive entity. Many centuries earlier, Lao Tzu also stated axiomatically (without taking recourse to logical tools) that all the manifest worlds have emerged from the Great Void, the Mother of all creation. For the moment, let this be a valid aspect of Reality. We will see later how this can be reconciled in a qualified way in the Advaitic vision.

The Vedantic World-View

Reverting to the earlier discussion, the question arises: why does the *jiva* forget its real nature and lose its identity with the universal Self and thus fall into bondage? Vedanta *shastra* answers this question

thus: the *jivatma* confounds itself with the various layers of his/her personality because of the deluding power of Maya. These layers are called the 'five principal sheaths' (*kosas*), beginning with the gross physical body as the outermost layer (*annamaya kosa*) and ending with causal ignorance (*kaarana sarira*), characterised by the bliss of ignorance in deep sleep (*anandamaya kosa*), which is the innermost sheath. It is to be noted that these various sheaths do not literally cover the *atma* but are said to cover the *jiva* only by virtue of casting the veil of ignorance through the veiling power (*aavarana sakti*) of Maya.

Consider now some examples. The pot does not hide the clay out of which it is made nor does the ornament conceal the gold. The cloth does not suppress or smother the yarn it is spun out of. The waves and the bubbles in the ocean do not ever camouflage the water. In these classical examples, the name and form (*nama-rupa*) of the objects merely steal away our attention from the 'substantives' of the objects and this alone is said to be the veiling of our sight; it is not a literal blinding of our vision.

Thus all 'names and forms' turn out to be apparent modifications of the underlying reality, and are no more than resting flimsily on the tip of the tongue.¹⁰ The modifications are apparent because water never ceases to be water when it takes the form of bubbles, waves or even a mighty tsunami. Ontologically '*nama-rupa*' thus enjoys the status of *mithya* only i.e. 'apparent reality'. Ascertainment of *mithya* is thus reduction of all things mentally into mere '*nama-rupa*' and

¹⁰ *Chandogya Up.*: verses 6.1.4-6... '*Vacharambhanam vikaro namadeyam, mrittika iti eva satyam...*' When a lump of clay is shaped into a pot, the clay-nature of the pot remains unchanged; so also, gold does not lose an iota of its inherent gold-nature, upon an ornament being formed out of it. In any such 'value-added product', the only change (or 'value-addition') pertains to the acquisition of merely a 'name that corresponds to the new form'; hence all such transformations (such as pot, ornament, waves etc.) are only apparent, not real. Thus they are said to exist only on the tongue-tip as mere names. In the examples cited above, only the substantives such as clay, gold, water etc. are to be considered real. Similarly the world as a whole is reduced to mere '*nama-rupa*', resting on the substantive Brahman.

seeing the underlying substantive as the real entity. This process called *mithyatva nischaya* is a powerful aid in assimilating Vedantic teachings.

Modern examples make this even clearer. For instance, reading an essay makes us unconscious of the paper on which it is printed. The movie pictures dancing on the screen make us forget the screen. Saint Thirumular¹¹ sings famously that a life-sized exquisite wooden carving of an elephant form ‘hides the timber’ it came from and appears as though real from a distance but the ‘elephant disappears into the wood’ upon closer inspection; in the same way, the world which is made out of the five great elements masks the *Brahman* from which it has emerged apparently. Upon realising Brahman, which is the ultimate source of all creation, the world of forms ‘disappears’ into its Source; it is not a literal disappearance because perceptions continue but in our understanding everything resolves into Brahman. Thus for *jnanis* like Sri Ramana and Sadashiva Brahmendra, the attention is ever riveted on the Self, the substratum for the world-appearance,¹² which is now reduced to merely a passing show projected on the screen of Consciousness. But without the direct Knowledge (*aparoksha jnanam*) of the substratum Brahman, the phenomenal world of names and forms (*nama-rupa jagat*) perpetually deludes us into believing it as a reality show!

The Identity Crisis of the *Jivatma* and its Resolution

Thus among the five *kosas* enumerated by the scriptures that ‘supposedly envelope’ the *jivatma*, the gross materialists (like *charvakas*) confound the physical body (*annamaya kosa*) to be the Self. The biologists identify It with the sense organs and the vital airs that enliven them (*pranamaya kosa*) while modern psychologists (like Freud, Jung etc.) reduce the Self to the mind principle (*manomaya kosa*). Some philosophers identified the Self with the constantly changing intellect principle (*vijnanamaya kosa*), comparable to a lamp flame which is new in every moment of its life.¹³ As mentioned above,

¹¹ *Thirumandiram* v. 2290: ‘*maratthai maraitthadhu maamatha yaanai....?*’

¹² *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 18: ‘*ulagu unmaiyaagum unarvillarkum ullarkkum....?*’

¹³ Yogachara Buddhist proponents of the *kshanikavijnana vaada*.

some others repudiated these progressively evolving philosophical formulations with powerful tools of logic and finally established the Theory of the Void as the irreducible final reality.¹⁴ No doubt, these are laudable intellectual feats representing significant milestones but in the uncompromising search for the ultimate Truth, they fall short in different measures.

Acharya Sankara lists these various philosophical perspectives in verse 5 of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram* and exclaims it is the power of the Maya that causes the *jivatma's* various levels of mistaken identities. In verse 6, he rejects the concept of void by invoking the phenomenon of *pratyabhijna*, occurring while awakening from deep sleep. In verse 7, this vision of recognition is extended to various stages in life and establishes the Self as the one invariant factor, which enables all cognitions to take place and thus is their very substratum.

Echoing the Upanishadic declarations, Sri Sankara cites in verse 4, the example of a clay jar with many holes and a lamp placed within, where the light emanates through the holes and illumines the objects in the room outside; in a similar way, the light of the Self flows through the five sense organs of perception (*jnanendriyas*) and illumines the world of our perception. Thus the Self alone truly and independently shines and all the worlds shine only after that Intelligence Principle.¹⁵ Bhagavan Ramana concurs identically with this position of Sri Sankara that the Consciousness principle inhering in the Self alone constitutes absolute Knowledge and hence is not a void — Itself shining without any support whatsoever. It supports and enlivens all relative knowledge.¹⁶

Exposition of *Pratyabhijna-Darsanam* through Analysis of Deep Sleep

Sri Sankaracharya cites in verse 6 of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, the universal experience of everyone after waking up from a refreshing spell of deep sleep exclaiming as “I slept happily; I did not know

¹⁴ The Madhyamika school of Buddhists who propounded the *sunya vaada*.

¹⁵ *Katha Up.* v. 2.5.15: ‘*na tatra suryo bhati....tasya bhasa sarvam idam vibhati*’.

¹⁶ *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 12, ‘*arivu ariyamai attradhu....arivagum paazh andru ari*’.

anything!'. Analysing this, 'not knowing anything' indicates the 'absence of the world' (called *jagat abhava vritti* or *nidra vritti*, which are technical synonyms for sleep). However in deep sleep, because one is not aware of oneself as in waking or dreaming, we should not hastily conclude that one ceases to exist altogether, even temporarily.

If it were so, as Bhagavan Ramana remarked, a Johnson going to sleep could wake up as a Benson, bereft of any continuity in the identity of the person involved.¹⁷ The phrase 'slept happily' is the recollection component (*smriti*), while the 'I' component indicates *pratyabhijna*. The phrase 'slept well' cannot be classified as either 'pratyaksha' (current perception) or 'pratyabhijna' (recognition), unless one makes the statement while one is asleep, which is clearly not possible. This is because all the sense organs have been withdrawn into a passive, non-operational condition (*karanopasamharanam*) and no transaction with the world can occur during sleep.

To counter the objection of the nihilists that since one is not aware of oneself in sleep one becomes non-existent temporarily, Acharya Sankara argues that if an object is not perceived, then there are two possibilities: either it is really absent or its existence has been veiled by an unknown factor. Before concluding that it is non-existent, we have to make sure that there is no veiling mechanism involved, which precludes its apprehension. During deep sleep, Sri Sankara says the 'I' sense (the pure presence, 'I AM') has not become non-existent but has been merely covered by the veiling power (*aavarana sakti*) of Maya, just as during an eclipse the sun or the moon is covered by the shadow of the moon or the earth respectively.

Now during sleep, the mind has resolved into its causal body form (the *kaarana sariram*) and is only potentially existent (*bija avastha*, i.e. seed state). During transition into the waking state, the mind is roused from its potential form (or dormancy) of the causal body, back into the state of an operational inner instrument (*antahkaranam*) by the projecting power (*vikshepa sakti*) of Maya which is once again

¹⁷ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2000, Talk 487, 2nd May 1938, p.485.

responsible for the perception of the world and oneself, thus making all transactions possible. But the mind in its causal mode of existence (*kaarana sariram*) in deep sleep is capable of subconsciously registering *one positive* experience (the pure presence, 'I AM') and *two negative* experiences viz. 'absence of the world' (*jagat abhava vrtti*) and the 'absence of I-thought' (*ahamvrtti abhava*).

It is the recollection of these experiences, while gliding into the waking state that enables one to state clearly that "I slept well; I did not know anything. I was not aware of myself too." While 'slept well' refers to the past experience of sleep and hence falls under *smriti* (recollection), the 'I' component of the statement does not come under this category of recollection of a past entity or something spasmodically recurrent. It must be classified as *pratyabhijna* because it refers to the *re-cognition* of the unbroken experience of the Self during the past event of *sushupti* (deep sleep) and its continued existence in the present waking state too, without a break or an iota of change.

The only difference then is, in the waking state the 'I' shines prominently because it is available for interacting with the world and exists in the 'transactional mode'. In deep sleep, the 'I' becomes a non-transactional entity (eclipsed by Maya) and reverts to the merely 'existential mode' as pure presence (*nirvishesha, saamaanya satta*), that is, the non-prominent substratum. Thus the 'waker' himself was the 'sleeper' and being one and the same *jiva*, it is a *re-cognition*. It is neither a new cognition (or knowledge of a new entity) nor mere remembrance of the past. This is the essence of *pratyabhijna*. Similarly Self-Knowledge is also an awakening from the beginningless slumber of primal ignorance¹⁸ and is best described in paradoxical terms like 'Attainment of the Already Attained' (*praptasya praptih*) and 'Revelation of the Ever-Revealed (*anaavrtasya niraavaranam*)'!

In verse 6 of *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, Sri Sankara clearly states that during *sushupti*, the experience of 'absence of world' (*jagat abhava vrtti*) is because of withdrawal of all sense organs of perception into

¹⁸ *Mandukya Karika*, v. 1.16: 'anadi mayaya suptah yada jivah prabudhyate
ajam anidram asvapnam advaitam budhyate tada'.

a passive mode and the lapsing of the mind into its causal seed form. That is, the *antahkaranam* (mind) merges into the *kaarana sariram* (causal sheath), and ceases to function as the 'inner instrument'. Both 'I AM' (the pure unqualified and limitless *sat* aspect) and the 'absence of I-thought' (*ahamvrtti abhava*) are registered in the *kaarana sariram* which are recollected upon waking. The imprint of the former, 'I AM', is responsible for the waker's statement, 'I did exist in sleep' and the imprint of the latter, the 'absence of I-thought', is responsible for his saying, 'I was not aware of myself in sleep'. No one ever says, "I did not exist in sleep!" To claim 'non-existence in sleep' is ludicrous, for it effectively means 'I died during sleep and revived upon waking mysteriously', since death is nothing but a 'withdrawal of existence'.

The Self being *sat-chit-ananda-svarupa*, the power of Maya can only veil the *chit* (consciousness) aspect but cannot destroy the *sat* (being) or *ananda* (joy) aspects. The *Bhagavad Gita* declares that for *sat* (the Self, which alone qualifies as the real) there can be no non-existence while the unreal can never have existence.¹⁹ That is why everyone desires the happiness experienced in sleep and uncaused happiness inheres only in the limitless pure Existence principle (*sat tattvam*)²⁰. Thus when a person enters the state of deep sleep, the Upanishad says, he merges with pure Existence, which is the ultimate reality that constitutes the very nature of his Self and therefore attains his own Self.²¹ Bhagavan Ramana affirms that this Self ever shining as pure Consciousness in all three states, is alone to be known as true Knowledge and can never be deemed as a void.²²

In the next instalment, we shall see how it is possible to arrive at a reconciliation of the Advaitic position with the Void theory as also the experiential nature of enlightenment based on *Pratyabhijna*.

(to be continued) ▲

¹⁹ *Bhagavad Gita*, v.2.16., 'na asato vidyate bhavah, na abhavo vidyate satah...'.

²⁰ *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2007, 'Who am I?', p.36.

²¹ *Chandogya Up.* v.6.8.1., 'yatra etat purushah....svam apito bhavati..'.

²² *Sat Darsanam*, v.14, 'nidra na vidya....chideva vidya, vilasanti asunya'.

An Introduction to the *Dakshinamurti* *Stotram*

MARYE TONNAIRE

The *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, written by Adi Sankara,¹ is a hymn of praise addressed to Sri Dakshinamurti, the aspect of Lord Siva who personifies spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) and is hence the primal teacher (*adi guru*). The hymn is said to contain the essence of Advaita Vedanta (the non-dual school) and was the first among several of Sankara's works that Bhagavan translated into Tamil during his stay at Virupaksha cave.² Devotees identify Bhagavan with Dakshinamurti since both of them reveal through the eloquence of silence (*mauna vyakhya prakatita*) the true nature of the all-pervasive, non-dual Self.

Sri Dakshinamurti is usually pictured as a youth sitting under a banyan tree facing south (*dakshina*) and surrounded by elderly disciples. He holds a palm-leaf manuscript in his lower left hand, indicating that he is the Lord of all learning. His right hand forms

¹ Adi Sankara lived in the late eighth century A.D. During his short life he restored the non-dual school of Advaita Vedanta, which states that all is the Supreme Self (*Brahman*). The phenomenal world is illusory, like a dream projected by the power of Brahman (*Maya*) and the individual self (*jivatman*) is in fact not different from Brahman. Ignorance of this non-duality is the cause of suffering. Liberation wipes out ignorance through knowledge (*jnana*) of the true nature of the non-dual Brahman.

² Other works of Sankara that Bhagavan translated include *Vivekachudamani*, *Drik Drisya Viveka* and *Atma Bodha*.

the pose of perfect knowledge (*cinmudra*). The index finger is united with the thumb and the last three fingers of the hand are extended. This pose indicates the non-dual identity between the individual soul (*jivatman*) and the Supreme (*Brahman*) beyond the three gunas (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), the three bodies (gross, subtle and causal), the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep) and the trinity consisting of the individual soul (*jivatman*), God (*Isvara*) and the world (*jagat*). The demon ego which is the root cause of all misery is crushed by the right foot and the left foot is lifted in victory and placed on the right knee. A necklace of *rudraksha* beads (representing the underlying Reality and the effort of spiritual sadhana) is held in the upper right hand, and the flame (of Awareness) is in the upper left hand.³

The best known invocatory verse to the *Dakshinamurti Stotram* runs as follows:

citram vaṭatarormūle vṛddhāḥ śiṣyā gururyuvā |
gurostu maunaṁ vyākhyānaṁ śiṣyāstu chinnaśayāḥ |

What a wonder it is! Under the banyan tree a youthful teacher (sits surrounded by) aged disciples. He teaches them in silence, yet their doubts are dispelled.

In Bhagavan's Tamil version of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram* he refers to Dakshinamurti as a child and explains the reason to a devotee:

"I have rendered the word 'youth' (*yuva*) in *Dakshinamurti Stotram* by child (*bala*). This seems more appropriate. To be reborn is to become children over again. One must be reborn before gaining jnana i.e., recovering the natural state.⁴

The name 'Dakshinamurti' can be interpreted in several different ways. It is the effulgent Self experienced on the right side (*dakshina*), and Bhagavan has often referred to the 'spiritual heart' being on the right side of the chest rather than the left, the location of the physical heart. He is the form (*murti*) of awareness (*dakshina*) and he is also formless (*amurti*) awareness. Dakshinamurti is facing south, and the

³ Visvanatha Swami, 'Hindu Iconology: Dakshinamurthi', *The Mountain Path*, Jan. 1976, pp.39-40.

⁴ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.) *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 414.

southern direction is governed by Yama, god of death. Dakshinamurti, is therefore, conqueror of death (*mrityunjaya*).

The *Dakshinamurti Upanishad* which belongs to the *Krishna Yajur Veda* proclaims that the word *dakshina* means *buddhi*, and *buddhi* is the eye by which Siva can be *directly* seen.⁵ In the Upanishads *buddhi* is deemed higher than the rational mind because it is attracted directly to the Self (*Brahman*) rather than towards illusory objects. It is also called the Heart. *Buddhi* makes knowledge (*jnana*) possible. It is like a ray of sunlight that leads back to its source, whereas the rational mind turns outward, becomes dispersed and loses itself in a maze of differentiated objects that appear to be real.

Bhagavan wrote the following introduction to his Tamil translation of Sankara's *Dakshinamurti Stotram* to explain the origins of the hymn: "Through the power of thought, Brahma created four sons Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata, who were supposed to contribute to the creation of the world, but none of them were interested in that task. They only wanted to seek Truth and Knowledge and therefore devoted themselves entirely to searching for a Guru. Since they were spiritually ripe, Lord Siva sympathized with their earnest endeavours and manifested Himself sitting under a banyan tree in the silent state as Dakshinamurti with the hand pose of knowledge (*chinmudra*). Sanaka and the others were at once attracted to Him like iron by a magnet. In His presence they immediately attained Self-Realisation. Adi Sankara composed this *stotram* for those highly developed souls (*uttamadhikaris*) who are still unable to grasp the real significance of Dakshinamurti's silent form."⁶

In relation to the significance of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram* Bhagavan said: "The people are under an illusion. If the spell is removed they will realize the Truth. They must be told to realize the error of the illusion. Then they will try to escape its snares. Vairagya will result. They will enquire into the Truth, i.e., seek the Self. That will make them abide as the Self. What is the nature of the illusion?"

⁵ *Dakshinamurti Upanishad* translated into English <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/dast/dast16.htm>.

⁶ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (§89),

All are in the grip of enjoyment, i.e., the enjoyer (*bhokta*), what may be enjoyed (*bhogyam*), and the act of enjoyment (*bhoga*). This is due to the wrong notion that objects of enjoyment (*bhogyavastu*) are real. The ego, the world and the creator are the fundamentals underlying the illusion. If they are known to be not apart from the Self there will be no more illusion.⁷

Bhagavan then remarked that the *stotram* is divided into sections to describe the real nature of the world (*jagat*) and the ego (*jiva*) and to affirm that all is indeed the Self, who is eulogized in each stanza as Dakshinamurti in the form of the Guru.

The first four stanzas deal with the world. It is shown to be the same as the Guru whose Self is that of the seeker also, or the Guru to whom the seeker surrenders himself. The second four stanzas deal with the individual whose Self is shown to be the Self of the Guru. The ninth stanza deals with *Isvara* and the tenth with the *siddhi* or Realisation. Such is the scheme of the *stotra*.⁸

In reference to how the silent teaching (*upadesa*) of Dakshinamurti dispelled the doubts of his four disciples who were ripe for Self Realisation, Bhagavan observed: "Silence is the true upadesa. It is the perfect upadesa. It is suited only for the most advanced seeker. The others are unable to draw full inspiration from it. Therefore they require words to explain the Truth. But Truth is beyond words. It does not admit of explanation. All that is possible to do is only to indicate It."⁹

The question then becomes, "How can the Truth which can only be revealed through silent communication (*mauna vyakhya prakatita*) be indicated for those who cannot grasp the real significance of Dakshinamurti's silent form?" Sankara chooses the method of praising Dakshinamurti in the form of a hymn. Bhagavan has also used hymns of praise to Arunachala as a way of evoking the Self. In the second verse of the *Arunachala Ashtakam*, Bhagavan makes reference to Dakshinamurti's silent *upadesa* in relation to Arunachala:

⁷ op., cit., *Talks*, Talk 569.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

“Enquiring within, ‘Who is the seer?’ I saw the seer disappearing and That alone which stands for ever. No thought arose to say ‘I saw’. How then could the thought arise to say ‘I did not see?’ Who has the power to explain all this in words, when even You (as Dakshinamurti) conveyed this of yore in silence only? And in order to reveal by silence, Your state transcendent, now You stand here, a Hill resplendent soaring to the sky.”¹⁰

Many instances have been recorded where Bhagavan illustrated the power of silent teaching (*upadesa*) to his devotees. One such incident occurred on Sivaratri after worship was completed in the Mother’s shrine. The devotees were sitting with Bhagavan and asked him to explain the meaning of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*. Bhagavan just sat in silence smiling. The hall became absolutely still as Bhagavan and the devotees sat motionless. For a long time nobody spoke a word. Time was suspended and deep peace prevailed. It became clear to the devotees that Bhagavan was in fact teaching them the true meaning of the verses by his silent presence. When asked to confirm, Bhagavan replied with a smile, “Yes, it is true.”¹¹

Someone asked Bhagavan, “True silence means abiding in the Self, doesn’t it?”. Bhagavan replied: “Yes of course. Without the Self how could it be Silence? True Silence is really endless speech. There is no such thing as attaining it, because it is always there. All you have to do is to remove the worldly concerns that cover it. There is no question of attaining it.”¹²

Visvanatha Swami composed the following verse in Sanskrit that Bhagavan translated into Tamil and adopted as the *mangala sloka* for his Tamil rendition of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*. Bhagavan reveals succinctly that he is no different from the Self Supreme in which all abide:

That Sankara who appeared as Dakshinamurti to grant peace to the great ascetics, who revealed his real state of silence, and who has expressed the nature of the Self in this hymn, **abides in me.** ▲

¹⁰ *Five Hymns to Arunachala*, Translated by Prof K. Swaminathan.

¹¹ See T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, p.31, and Suri Nagamma both in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (§136) and in *The Mountain Path*, April 1964.

¹² Nagamma, Suri, ‘True Silence’, *The Mountain Path*, April 1964.



Dakshinamurti Statue at Sri Ramana Granthalaya

D. Thiyagarajan

The Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram

ADI SANKARA
TRANSLATED BY MARYE TONNAIRE

मौनव्याख्याप्रकटितपरब्रह्मतत्त्वं युवानं
वर्षिष्ठान्तेवसदृषिगणैरावृतं ब्रह्मनिष्ठैः ।
आचार्येन्द्रङ्करकलितचिन्मुद्रमानन्दमूर्तिं
स्वात्मरामं मुदितवदनं दक्षिणामूर्तिमीडे ॥ १ ॥

*maunavyākhyāprakṛitaparabrahmatattvaṃ yuvānaṃ
varṣiṣṭhāntevasadṛṣigaṇairāvṛtaṃ brahmaniṣṭhaiḥ ।
ācāryendraṅkarakalitacinmudramānandamūrtiṃ
svātmārāmaṃ muditavadanaṃ dakṣiṇāmūrtimīḍe ॥1॥¹*

Let us worship Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the eternal youth, with the hand-pose of perfect knowledge (*cinmudrā*) and a radiant countenance, whose form is bliss and who revels in His own Self. Surrounding Him are the most eminent and aged rishis who are steadfast in their devotion to the Supreme Self. He is the best among teachers, revealing through silence the nature of Brahman.

¹ This first verse is a *dhyana sloka* which is recited before the other slokas as a prayer so that the devotee is able to visualize the deity.

विश्वं दर्पणदृश्यमाननगरीतुल्यं निजान्तर्गतं
 पश्यन्नात्मनि मायया बहिरिवोद्भूतं यथा निद्रया ।
 यस्साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्वयं
 तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥ २ ॥

*viśvaṁ darpaṇadr̥śyamānanagaritulyaṁ nijāntargataṁ
 paśyannātmani māyayā bahirivodbhūtaṁ yathā nidrayā ।
 yaśśākṣātkurute prabodhasamaye svātmānamevādvayaṁ
 tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥2॥*

To the one who sees the universe within Himself like a city that is reflected in a mirror but due to (the play of) Māyā, appears to exist externally as if in a dream, and Who, upon awakening, has the direct experience (of the universe) as His own non-dual Self. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

बीजस्यान्तरिवाङ्कुरो जगदिदं प्राङ्निर्विकल्पं पुनः
 मायाकल्पितदेशकालकलनावैचित्र्यचित्रीकृतम् ।
 मायावीव विजृम्भयत्यपि महायोगीव यः स्वेच्छया
 तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥ ३ ॥

*bījasyañtarivāṅkuro jagadidaṁ prāṅnirvikalpaṁ punaḥ
 māyākalpitadeśakālakalanāvāicitryacitrīkṛtam ।
 māyāvīva vijṛmbhayatyapi mahāyogīva yaḥ svecchayā
 tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥3॥*

In the beginning the world is undifferentiated, but it blossoms forth like a sprout within a seed through the illusion (Māyā) that gives rise to time and space. By His own desire, like a magician or a great yogi, He projects this world which becomes manifold, as if changed into a picture of variegated names and forms. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

यस्यैव स्फुरणं सदात्मकमसत्कल्पार्थकं भासते
 साक्षात्तत्त्वमसीति वेदवचसा यो बोधयत्याश्रितान् ।
 यत्साक्षात्करणाद्भवेन्न पुनरावृत्तिर्भवाम्भोनिधौ
 तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥ ४ ॥

*yasyaiva sphuraṇam sadātmakamasatkalpārthakam bhāsate
sākṣāttattvamasīti vedavacasā yo bodhayatyāśritān |
yatsākṣātkaraṇādbhavenna punarāvṛttirbhavāmbhonidhau
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||4||*

To the one whose real effulgence shines forth even through unreal, non-existent objects. And who teaches the great Vedic injunction, “tattvamasi,” “That thou art,” leading to immediate and direct experience (of Truth). Those who seek refuge in Him will never again fall into the endless ocean of births and death. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

**नानाच्छिद्रघटोदरस्थितमहादीपप्रभाभास्वरं
ज्ञानं यस्य तु चक्षुरादिकरणद्वारा बहिः स्पन्दते ।
जानामीति तमेव भान्तमनुभात्येतत्समस्तं जगत्
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥५॥**

*nānācchidraghaṭodarasthitamahādīpaprabhābhāsvaram
jñānam yasya tu cakṣurādikaraṇadvārā bahiḥ spandate |
jānāmīti tameva bhāntamanubhātyetatsamastam jagat
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||5||*

To the one whose effulgence is like the light of a great lamp inside a pot with many holes, pulsating outward through the gates of the five senses, shining forth as the awareness “I know” and reflecting the appearance of the entire world. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

**देहं प्राणमपीन्द्रियाण्यपि चलां बुद्धिं च शून्यं विदुः
स्त्रीबालान्धजडोपमास्त्वहमिति भ्रान्ता भृशं वादिनः ।
मायाशक्तिविलासकल्पितमहाव्यामोहसंहारिणे
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥६॥**

*deham praṇamapīndriyāṅyapi calāṁ buddhim ca śūnyam viduḥ
strībālāndhajaḍopamāstvahamīti bhrāntā bhṛśam vādinaḥ |
māyāśaktivilāsakalpītamahāvvyāmohasamhāriṇe
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||6||*

There are those who talk too much, identifying the “I” with the body, breath, senses, the active mind or the void. They are misguided like women, children, the blind or dull people.² To the one who destroys the great delusion due to the imaginary play of Māyā Sakti. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

राहुग्रस्तदिवाकरेन्दुसदृशो मायासमाच्छादनात्
सन्मात्रः करणोपसंहरणतो योऽभूत्सुषुप्तः पुमान्
प्रागस्वाप्समिति प्रबोधसमये यः प्रत्यभिज्ञायते
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥७॥

*rāhugrastadivākarendusadr̥śo māyāsamācchādanāt
sanmātraḥ karaṇopasaṅharanato yo’bhūtsusuptaḥ pumān
prāgasvāpsamiti prabodhasamaye yaḥ pratyabhijñāyate
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥7॥*

To the one who remains as Pure Being in deep sleep, when the senses are withdrawn by Māyā, like the sun and moon are obscured by Rāhu³ (during an eclipse) and who upon waking recognizes, “It is ‘I’ who have slept till now.” Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

बाल्यादिष्वपि जाग्रदादिषु तथा सर्वास्ववस्थास्वपि
व्यावृत्तास्वनुवर्तमानमहमित्यन्तः स्फुरन्तं सदा ।
स्वात्मानं प्रकटीकरोति भजतां यो मुद्रया भद्रया
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥८॥

*bālyādiṣvapi jāgradādiṣu tathā sarvāsvavasthāsvapi
vyāvṛttāsvanuvarṭamānamahamityantaḥ sphurantaṁ sadā ।
svātmānaṁ prakāṭikaroti bhajatāṁ yo mudrayā bhadrayā
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥8॥*

² In Sankara’s time, most women were not formally educated, however in earlier Vedic times many women were considered to be epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainments, notably the Vedic seers Ghosha, Lopamudra, Maitreyi and Gargi.

³ A demon who is said to temporarily devour the sun and moon during an eclipse.

To the one who reveals to his devotees, by means of the auspicious hand-pose, the ever present “I” pulsating within as one’s own true nature, at all times free from the changing stages of life (childhood, adulthood and old age) and the states of experience (waking, dream and deep sleep). Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

विश्वं पश्यति कार्यकारणतया स्वस्वामिसम्बन्धतः
शिष्याचार्यतया तथैव पितृपुत्राद्यात्मना भेदतः ।
स्वप्ने जाग्रति वा य एष पुरुषो मायापरिभ्रामितः
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥९॥

*viśvaṁ paśyati kāryakāraṇatayā svasvāmisambandhataḥ
śiṣyācāryatayā tathaiṣa pitṛputrādyaātmanā bhedataḥ ।
svapne jāgrati vā ya eṣa puruṣo māyāparibhrāmītaḥ
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥9॥*

To the Self Supreme who because of Māyā has roamed about in the waking and dream states, perceiving the world as being split up into relationships such as cause and effect, possession and proprietor, pupil and teacher, father and son etc. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

भूरम्भांस्यनलोऽनिलोऽम्बरमहर्नाथो हिमांशुः पुमाम्
इत्याभाति चराचरात्मकमिदं यस्यैव मूर्त्यष्टकम् ।
नान्यत्किञ्चन विद्यते विमृशतां यस्मात्परस्माद्विभोः
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥१०॥

*bhūrambhāṁsyanalo’nilo’mbaramaharnātho himāṁśuḥ pumām
ityābhāti carācarātmakamidam yasyaiṣa mūrtyaṣṭakam ।
nānyatkiñcana vidyate vimṛśatām yasmātparasmādvibhoḥ
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṁ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥10॥*

To the one whose eight-fold form appears in all that is moving and unmoving, earth, water, fire, air, ether, sun, moon and the individual soul (jīva). Beyond this supreme and all pervading Consciousness there is nothing else; those who enquire with discrimination know. Salutations to Him, Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the form of the Guru.

सर्वात्मत्वमिति स्फुटीकृतमिदं यस्मादमुष्मिंस्तवे
तेनास्य श्रवणात्तथार्थमननाद्ध्यानाच्च संकीर्तनात् ।
सर्वात्मत्वमहाविभूतिसहितं स्यादीश्वरत्वं स्वतः
सिद्धयेत्तत्पुनरष्टधा परिणतं चैश्वर्यमव्याहृतम् ॥११॥

*sarvātmavamiti sphuṭīkṛtamidaṁ yasmādamuṣmīṁstave
tenāsyā śravanāttathārthamananāddhyānācca saṅkīrtanāt ।
sarvātmavamahāvibhūtisahitaṁ syādīśvaratvaṁ svataḥ
siddhyettatpunaraṣṭadhā pariṇataṁ caiśvaryaṁavyāhṛtam ॥11॥*

Because the all pervasiveness of the Self has been explained in this hymn, by listening to it, reflecting upon its meaning, meditating upon it and reciting it, one will achieve without obstacle the great splendour of Selfhood with its supreme sovereignty and the eight-fold powers (siddhis) that ensue automatically. ▲

Ramamani

A Man of Faith and Quiet Decency

R. SRIKANTH

My uncle, Ramasubramanyan, also known as Ramamani was born in March 1932 to N.Nataraja Iyer and Kamalambal. He was the eldest of their three children and was born on the day his grandparents completed a recitation of *Rama Pattabhisheka* (Coronation of Lord Rama) from the Ramayana which accounted for his being named Ramasubramanyan in honour of Lord Rama and Subramanyan. In childhood his nickname was Rama.

My grandfather, Sri Nataraja Iyer also known as ‘Station Master’, first came to Bhagavan in 1935. He wrote books for the ashram under the name N.N. Rajan by which he was more commonly known. His first visit made such a deep impression that he applied for a transfer to

R. Srikanth lives in Bangalore with his parents. He works with GE Healthcare.

Tiruvannamalai. Both my grandparents became steadfast devotees of Bhagavan and never let go of an opportunity to be in Sri Bhagavan's presence. As a result Ramamani and his siblings had the good fortune to grow up close to Bhagavan and as a boy he used to recite devotional hymns in Bhagavan's presence.

My grandfather wrote an article about those happy times for *The Mountain Path*, "He used to joke with my two sons," he wrote, "and also would sometimes touch them. My second son was once offering some fruit and the Maharshi laughed and took hold of his hand. My elder son, who was then six years old, used to recite Sanskrit verses as prayers both in the Ashram and at home. If he said them too fast Bhagavan would tell him to go slowly; and when he recited them at home he would sometimes have a vision of Bhagavan and say to me: 'Father, Bhagavan is telling me to go slowly.' It was a wonderful experience to see my child gifted with such visions when I myself had no such experiences. The children are grown up now but all three still enjoy lasting benefits from the touch and blessings of Bhagavan."¹

Ramamani and my father Ramanan had their *upanayanam* (sacred thread ceremony) at the ashram. Bhagavan had blessed the sacred threads before the ceremony. After the ceremony, Bhagavan explained how to tie the *kaupinam* (loin cloth), and had even adjusted my uncle's *kaupinam*.

After three years of such peace and happiness my grandfather received an order from Southern Railways and was transferred to a place near Madras. However the order was stayed for six months in circumstances which he attributed to Bhagavan's Grace, but eventually he left with his family to take up the new position. Interestingly, "Before taking leave of Sri Bhagavan he placed before Him a short note praying for some instructions for his future sadhana, but Sri Bhagavan simply put it under his pillow implying thereby that he needed no instructions."²

¹ Rajan, N.N., *The Mountain Path*, 'Suffer Little Children', January 1966, p.10.

² *The Mountain Path*, 'Introducing N. Nataraja Iyer', April 1969, p.128-29.



Ramamani

Ramamani was blessed with keen intellect and a sharp memory. He was a voracious reader and would often finish reading a book overnight. He frequently had to be reminded that he had missed his meals during his reading. He read a lot of books from the ashram publications and often aptly recollected and quoted from them. One can sense this erudition from the time when, as editor of *The Mountain Path* he revealed his learning in articles with apt quotes from the scriptures to support his arguments.

He studied at a college at Kumbakonam and had a keen interest in physics which he read about extensively even when well into his 70s, and he could talk vividly about the various theories and developments in the subject. Though a science student, he was a gold medalist in the English literature competitions of the college. His award-winning essay on the global implications of nuclear energy was somehow prophetic in that here he elaborated how countries would try to dominate world politics with their nuclear prowess, and how disarming the nuclear weapons would be the key to world peace. He was unsurprised to note many decades later that the world scenario was exactly as he had predicted.

Ramamani had the good fortune of being at the ashram during Bhagavan's *brahmanirvana*. A day before the momentous event, Alan Chadwick, sensing the moment approaching, had written a one-word post card to his father Nataraja Iyer: 'Come'. As he could not obtain leave from work for that day, he sent his son, Ramamani, immediately to the ashram to represent the family.

Ramamani began service in the ashram by working on ashram publications. He typed the entire *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* for its first publication in 1955-6. If one sees the copy now preserved in the ashram archives, it is neat and practically error free. He also started assisting Arthur Osborne in the mid-1960s and later Lucia Osborne with work on *The Mountain Path* and other ashram publications. It was when he was serving at the ashram that he received an appointment with the Postal and Telegraph Department and he went on to serve with them in various positions and cities for the rest of his career.

Ramamani served on the editorial board of *The Mountain Path* in the 1980s and after his father's passing away, he was the editor of *The Mountain Path* from December 1995 to December 2002. He well understood the sacredness of the job, and would often pray that he have the strength to do it right. In an editorial for the magazine he wrote, "The world resembles a huge workroom. And we are all members of the universal work force, either as consenting volunteers or conscripts under an unwritten law. Broadly speaking, everyone has some allotted work to do, irrespective of his status in life."³

He would spend several hours sitting in meditation before Bhagavan's picture at home and he cherished the memories of those years working in the ashram till his last days. He would often talk about how special and blessed were the people, young and old who visited the ashram. He strongly believed that Bhagavan would always bring the right people to the ashram. His loyalty to the ashram was unquestioned. In his article for *The Mountain Path*, 'Material Problems in a Spiritual Centre', he wrote: "And last, a thrilling remark from Bhagavan's own lips on critics and others who engage in uncalled for activities: 'They come here to bathe; but they do not use water but put mud on themselves!' On another occasion He said that people come to the Ashram for purification and sadhana but before long get involved in Ashram affairs."⁴

Ramamani eventually retired from service with the Bangalore General Post office. He remained a bachelor and when not at the ashram, he lived with his brother Ramanan, and the latter's family in Bangalore who were deeply religious and observed all the necessary rituals and obligations enjoined by the *sastras* (sacred scriptures).

Right from his childhood he actively participated in the family's Devi worship. Wherever he may have been due to work commitments or when residing at the ashram, he would return to be with the family during the annual Navaratri celebrations. During his later years, in spite of frail health he would be ready for the morning and evening

³ *The Mountain Path*, Editorial 'Who Does it All?', 1996 Jayanthi, p.111.

⁴ *The Mountain Path*, October 1971, p.242.

puja (ritual) during the ten days of the Navaratri festival where, right up to his last year he continued with his exceptional memory to guide the family during the puja. During his last two Navaratri, when the family was in two minds about conducting the puja (due to my father's health issues), Ramamani was resolute in his belief that the Mother would take care of it. And needless to say, she did and the pujas went smoothly with all their elaborate ritual. Such was his faith.

As a person, Ramamani was always very calm and unassuming. He had a dry sense of humour that would invariably bring forth chuckles from whoever was listening. His voice would choke with emotion when he spoke about Bhagavan. His vivid descriptions about Bhagavan and narration of related anecdotes were always great moments for the family. He could easily re-create the scene for his listeners even with his simple explanations.

Ramamani led a noble life, and demonstrated the importance of *saranagati* (surrender) to Bhagavan. He advocated a cheerful acceptance of life's events, maintaining that Bhagavan would always take care of his devotees. His humble attitude can be summed up from the same editorial quoted earlier. He ended the editorial thus, "The answer to the question 'Who does it all?' is not far to seek. Vedanta makes things clear and gives no scope for any doubt. He does it all. He does it all the while."⁵

Ramamani passed away suddenly at 9:25 pm on 5th January 2013, while sitting in front of Bhagavan's photo when he breathed his last. It was a fitting departure indeed for a person who from an early age had dedicated his whole heart and mind to Bhagavan. ▲

⁵ *The Mountain Path*, 'Who Does it All?' 1996 Jayanti, p.114.

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

How I Came To Bhagavan (And Stayed with Him)

I.S. MADUGULA

*Isvaranugrahadevapumsamadvaitavasana
Mahadbhayaparitranadvipranamupajayate¹*

I consider myself lucky. It certainly couldn't have been an accident, the way I happened to hear about Bhagavan.

This is a two-part essay, the first describing the events and circumstances that led me to Sri Ramana Maharshi, popularly known as Bhagavan, and the second mulling over how his constant presence by my side has given me a taste of freedom.

Rewind to June 1950

In the upstairs corridor of the Andhra University College of Arts and Commerce, Waltair (Visakhapatnam), I was waiting to go to the next class outside the faculty offices. This was the first year of my three-year B.A. (Hons) programme and I was full of wide-eyed wonder about

¹ Only through the grace of the Lord is achieved the non-dual outlook that frees one from the frightening bonds of samsara. *Avadhuta Gita*, v.1.

everything that I was seeing and learning. At age 17, probably a lot of things impress one from a rural background about a big university and a big town. But what impressed me most, though, was a conversation between a professor of history, Dr. Oruganti Ramachandriah and another individual. The conversation was about Bhagavan, who had passed on a couple of months before, and his unique stature in the world of spirituality.

I don't know how many others who were standing there with me paid attention to that conversation, but it surely struck a chord inside me. I should probably add that since childhood I had been interested in matters spiritual, both from family discussions and some of the books on saints' lives that I had read, including a textbook on the life of Swami Vivekananda. In that text, it was Sri Ramakrishna who had impressed me for many of the same qualities and personal conduct for which Bhagavan had been known during his lifetime. Inexplicably, I experienced a feeling of discomfort that I had not known about Bhagavan or read about him when he was alive. I was always drawn to holy people who did not proclaim their holiness or show it off. To me a saint is humble, self-effacing, inviting, compassionate, and forgiving. From the brief remarks that I had overheard from Professor Ramachandriah, I knew right then and there that Bhagavan was the saint I was looking for in my heart of hearts. And he had just passed on, much to my disappointment. I knew that such living gods were hard to come by.

These thoughts and musings subsided within for quite a while, as I went through the university system, graduated, and started to teach. But not for long. Every summer vacation I would go to my village to recharge my batteries, where a small coterie of friends regularly got together and discussed Ramana philosophy. Listening to those discussions, the distance between me and Bhagavan gradually narrowed, distance because I was not sure if I was a fit enough devotee, based on my worldly activities and vulnerabilities. There were many, many others more qualified than I was. It took me a long time to understand that Bhagavan was never judgmental and his kindness extended to one and all, no matter how unready they were for spiritual instruction.

During one such summer visit, Sri Gunturi Lakshmikantam happened to be visiting a relative of his in the village. He had just published his comprehensive Telugu biography of Nayana, who had been one of the earliest followers of Bhagavan and who had remained closest to him till the end of his life. The impoverished author was selling the 500-odd-page bound volumes for the paltry sum of ten rupees each from his shoulder bag and there weren't too many buyers in the village. I reluctantly bought a copy, not so much because I knew about Nayana that well but just to help out the writer turned street vendor. That was one of the few great buys I ever made, considering all the rich detail the book provided me about Bhagavan and the Asramam. My desire to learn about Bhagavan was rekindled.

But I needed yet another jolt, another re-awakening.

Fast-forward to the early 1970s

I was at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. I had moved there from the United States to teach at the Institute and, a few months after I started, Dr. K. Subramanian, who had been a professor there for some time, returned from his studies in the U.S. After we had met for only a few minutes, we realised that we had a lot in common, not the least of which was our interest in Bhagavan. I started looking up to him when he told me that he had seen Bhagavan from the age of three when his father took him to the Asramam. He got my total attention with that one statement. When I found out about his continuing contact with the Asramam and his writings for *The Mountain Path*, I suddenly felt an urge to visit the Asramam. He graciously gave me a letter of introduction to Sri Viswanatha Swami, armed with which I made my maiden trip to Bhagavan's home. It was a very pleasant trip, needless to say, and I was totally fascinated by the old-world tranquility that was everywhere. Subsequently I took my family including the children, and I myself have been visiting it during every trip of mine to India. In fact, I can say that a visit to the Asramam has always been a major incentive for me to visit India. I returned to the Institute for a second time for three years, mostly at Dr. Subramanian's behest and, during

this second stay of mine, he and I thought about and established the Hyderabad Ramana Kendra, whose first meeting was attended by about ten people in a room at the Hindi Arts College. It's very gratifying to see that the Kendra has been growing from strength to strength ever since, thanks to the vision and leadership of my late friend, Dr. K.S. (as he was affectionately called).

Pause at 2013

How do I feel Bhagavan's constant presence in my daily life? In the many ways help came my way when I needed it, whether it was when my car stalled, when I fell and was unable to get up, when I was in dire straits, or simply when I needed direction in my life. Somehow I never felt I was left alone or abandoned. Far from it: I could always count on his help whether my need was trivial or critical.

Some call such unexpected help coming their way a miracle. But we are taught that there is no such thing as a miracle, only an occurrence that we cannot rationally explain. Besides, if you can virtually predict the outcome of an event based on sincere conviction, then that outcome cannot be termed a miracle.

I mentioned above that I have been shown direction in my life on a regular basis. Undoubtedly owing to Bhagavan's grace, I am now able to see life from a different perspective than before. My outlook on life, things, and people has changed — changed in such a way as to provide me with a new understanding of what they really are. I tend to question the ultimate significance of what I see around me. Sure enough, there is plenty of glamour and pizzazz all around me, but I wonder how any of that matters. Beginnings and endings in mundane existence and the fervid pursuits in between seem so irrelevant in an ultimate sense. I understand the necessity of activity on a practical level, but it is silly to be personally affected by it. The mind is the culprit and needs to be eliminated from any valid understanding of the ultimate human goal. Hence the segregation of the mind, defined as a bunch of thoughts, from the inner Self, which is their source. We constantly remind ourselves that everything is fleeting and that "this, too, shall pass," whatever it is. Whatever is transitory cannot be true or significant.

I now wonder how I missed out so long on such simple spiritual lessons. How can anything be real pleasure, given that every pleasure is accompanied by its own kind of pain in the world we live in? Indulging one's desires has consequences, no matter what the desire is. A major driving force of humanity is carnal desire, which is justified on the basis of the need to continue the race.² But then one has to willingly suspend one's aversion to the body to obey this command. Notice what Patanjali says³ regarding one of the *niyamas*: the body is so foul that a yogi looks upon his own body with disgust and shuns contact with another. Even if all goes well with everything worldly, the very fact that our lives are subject to the travails of constant change, uncertainties, and tensions makes a wise man shudder with fear.⁴ Then if you develop an attachment to a person, place, or thing, you are guaranteed to suffer heartache when separation occurs.

Have you ever stopped to feel the power surge you experience when you focus all your faculties and your full attention on the inner I? It is amazing how totally liberating it can be. Shouldn't we explore the 'I' instead?

Am I leading a double life enjoying the show as it passes before my eyes, yet dwelling constantly only on the 'I' that Bhagavan taught us about? Who said you have to renounce the world to become a sannyasin? You can surely be in the world while remaining without, in your own Self.

In my younger days in the family, I often heard it said that a happy person in this world is one who asks only that they be granted a life that is not pitiful and an end that is not painful.⁵ At this stage of my life, I am hoping that I will be granted the latter, and I have enlisted the help of my doctor to that end. While nothing in life or death is

² Cf. the Upanishadic instruction, *prajatantumavyavacchetsih*, Do not sever the thread of progeny. Taittiriya Upanishad, I.11.1.

³ *Saucatsvangajugupsaparairasansargah*. Yoga Sutra, II. 40. Sankara emphasises that the body is made of flesh and is unclean, *dehomamsamayo'sucih*. Aparokshanubhuti, 19.

⁴ *Parinamatapasamskaraduhkhahgunavrttivirodhaccaduhkhamevasarvamvivekinah*. Yoga Sutra, II.15.

⁵ *Anayasa maranam, vinadainyenajivanam* (A popular saying).

guaranteed, all I can do is to train myself to be at peace with the world, getting rid of all distractions of the mind, if I can. The disappearance of the mind is the start of *moksha*, the final release, without making any special effort in that direction. If there is rebirth, so be it. There is no need to worry, once you are liberated from the thoughts, the *samskaras*, the 'four ends of life', the attachments, etc. I believe I can see the light at the end of the tunnel, because of Bhagavan's distinct presence by my side. I came to him decades ago, and he has been with me ever since. The 'Hound of Heaven' never let go of me. That vivid presence allows me to yell at the top of my lungs, Look, I am free!

Hence the parenthetical title of this essay, 'and stayed with him'. ▲

Mind For The Asking

D. Samarender Reddy

If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower,
fruit or water, I will accept it. – *Bhagavad Gita*

Thank you, dear Krishna,
For showing me the easy way out
How difficult it would have been
If you had asked for my mind
For you see
Trees and water are in abundance
On this earth
But a mind I have only one
Though I speculate
What I would have got in return
If I offered my mind
At your feet
And sometimes think
If you would accept it at all
For it may not be as pure
As a leaf, flower, fruit or water.

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Six

Tulasidas' Encounter with the Ghost

NABAJI SIDDHA

Tulasidas spent twelve years in the home of the brahmin engaging himself in divine remembrance. He used to wash his feet on a large slab of stone every morning after attending to nature's call. One day, while he was pouring water on his feet, a ghost, a spirit under curse, sprang from the stone and bowing down to Tulasidas said, "O supreme brahmin! Please ask for whatever boon you want of me."

With a surprised look, Tulasidas asked, "May I know who you are?"

"O reciter of Vedas! Due to a curse, I had been imprisoned in this stone for twelve years," said the ghost. "The water with which you have been washing your feet on this stone has been washing away my sins over the years. It has purified me and freed me from the curse. Anything that comes in contact with you is sanctified and acquires the power to redeem creatures like me. As an expression of gratitude, I want to confer a boon on you. Do you desire a beautiful damsel or royal privileges or cart-loads of precious treasures, dazzling gems or

do you want to travel beyond the seven seas? Tell me quickly, what you wish to have from me. I am in your debt forever.” Filled with gratitude, the liberated spirit urged, “Please tell me, O holy man, what I can do for you.”

There was but one wish that haunted Tulasidas day and night and that was to have the divine vision of Sri Rama. Laughing at this offer, Tulasidas said, “Do you think you can entice me even with the best of things that the world can offer? One who seeks the wish-fulfilling tree will not be tempted to settle for a thorny bush, or prefer a donkey to Kamadhenu, the celestial cow! Will an ascetic opt to cohabit with a courtesan? Or a noble woman consent to cheat on her husband? Likewise, will I, who aspire to kiss the feet of Hari, ever curry favours from you? It is nothing but wild fantasy to expect a person yearning for eternal bliss to be swayed by carnal pleasure, or a nectar seeker to settle for poison or striving to attain the Brahman through charities. My goal is Self-realisation and I will not be lured by your petty boons. Are you crazy? How dare you, a despicable apparition, approach me with your cheap wares?”

The ghost replied humbly, “Don’t get annoyed with me, O brahmin. You wish to have the darshan of Lord Narayana. It poses no problem. Please follow me and I will fulfil your heart’s wish.”

This sounded outrageous to Tulasidas. He spoke sharply, “You must be indeed devious, given to cunning machinations! A chaste woman will not trust a prostitute as a guide. There can be no contract between a worldly man and an ascetic, ignorant and a jnani, a charitable man and a miser, an honest man and a liar, a noble man and one who is an *ajnani*, a depraved one. So also, I don’t want to even strike a conversation with you, let alone be guided by you. Don’t tarry here any longer. Get out of my sight. Because of you, I have wasted my precious time talking to you instead of chanting the glories of Hari. One is led astray if he or she keeps the company of the wicked.”

The ghost would not give up. It persevered in its appeal, “O noble brahmin! Don’t belittle anyone on the basis of appearance. One can see even a huge mountain through the narrow slit of his eyes; a spark

of fire can set aflame a huge bundle of cotton. Likewise, you will get Hari's darshan through me, though an accursed one. Trust me without a trace of doubt. You will soon realise why I persist in convincing you. Let me take you to my chief. He will quench the fire in your heart and get you the darshan of the Lord."

"O devil", said Tulasidas sounding wary, "seeking your guidance is like following the trail of a dog. A dog runs the whole day hankering after a piece of bone. Similarly, ghouls engage in many practices to propitiate lower deities only to accomplish their base desires and always look out for an opportunity to convert innocent people to their ways. If you are capable of facilitating Hari's darshan for me, then why do you live in the subhuman plane? If you have so much power, wouldn't you have redeemed yourself and attained a higher form and state of being?"

The ghost replied, "O learned brahmin, each one has to work out the destiny allotted to him for his evil deeds. Even if one knows the path to the royal court, can a criminal dare to walk that way? One may know the practices necessary to attain liberation, but if he is ensnared by worldly enjoyments, can he succeed in his practices? Even if a man knows all the intricacies of law, but if he is attached to money and materials, can he remain impartial in his judgement? One may discriminate between right and wrong, but if he is given to immoral conduct, can he tread the righteous path? Just by being a scholar in metaphysics, can one still the wavering mind? However much a prostitute glorifies chastity, she cannot become a woman of purity. Similarly, even though I know the means of attaining the feet of the Lord, my past deeds shame me and constrain me. However, your grace has purified me. Now, I am uplifted."

Tulasidas asked in wonder, "O ghost, what were your misdeeds in the past that landed you in this predicament, though given to making wise utterances? How did I help in releasing you from your curse or sins?"

"In my past birth", replied the ghost, "I was the wife of your brahmin host and the mistress of this house. I was overcome by lust

and as a result indulged with other men, thereby losing my purity. I acted like a low class woman, yielding to wayward fancies.

“One day, the noble husband called me to his side and said, ‘I have lost all my reputation in the society because of your immoral behaviour. When I go out, our neighbours and townsfolk look upon me with contempt and speak hurtful and humiliating words. I have given up going out of the house for fear of being ridiculed. Are you not aware that your cheap conduct will ruin you in the end and consign your soul to perdition?’

“If you entertain even a modicum of respect and love for me, you must mend your ways immediately. Cultivate some fear of God to whom you have to account for your deeds. If you cannot walk on the right path, leave this house and then continue with your wilful ways. It is a great sin to wake up to see the face of an unfaithful woman every morning. Keeping your company will stain my mind and create negative impressions in me.’

“When a disloyal woman lives in the house, it becomes the abode of all sins. The scriptures warn that evil propensities like deceit, adultery, jealousy, killing, consumption of intoxicants, stealing, slander, hatred, restlessness, unhappiness, shamelessness, exploitation etc. will take residence in such a house and flourish. There will be no line of succession in the family, denying it the privilege of progeny. Curse and ill-fate will befall the ancestors also. It is better to forsake such a home and go to the forest rather than live with a shameless woman.’

“If you don’t want to live within the confines of moral conduct, leave the house immediately. If you want to mend your ways, then this is your last chance. From today, you should not leave the house without my permission. Don’t engage in teasing behaviour with other men or behave shamelessly. Stop talking disrespectfully to me. Don’t indulge in deceit and lies hereafter. If you accept these conditions, you can stay here. God, king and preceptor bear with our transgressions three times. I have indicated to you my strong displeasure in different ways several times, but you have not paid heed. I have discussed it

now openly with you to clear the air and to decide where we go from here. If there is going to be any lapse hereafter, it will be the end of my patience.'

"He was very forgiving of my faults. While restraining my activities, he also treated me with love and forbearance. Initially, I acted with a sense of responsibility. But after a while, my old habits returned. Whenever he went out for alms, I resumed my old pattern of behaviour and cheated on him. In his presence, I would act like a virtuous and obedient wife. One day, he caught me red-handed with my paramour. He flew into a rage and cursed me to become a ghoul.'

"When I begged his forgiveness and asked for a means of deliverance, he calmed down and said, 'Ah...Ah....! It is rightly said that anger leads to hell. I have lost the merits of my austerities by giving room to anger. It is your evil nature which has caused all this. After your death, you will enter this stone in your ghost form and await release from the curse. When water sanctified by the touch of any mahatma's holy hands or feet falls on this stone for twelve years, you will be freed from this curse.'

"Overcome by remorse, I drowned myself in the Ganga and after death I was accursed with the form of a ghost in which I came to reside in this stone. I spent my time in sincere repentance, but it was like performing *surya-namaskar* after losing eyesight or bending one's head after getting hit by a low beam. My husband, being a very compassionate being, arranged for ways of purifying me. He converted this house into a lodge for sadhus to stay and pursue their austerities. He made many sadhus wash their feet on this slab which got me the sprinkling of holy water and contact of the holy feet of sadhus. For twelve years, you have blessed me with holy water and touch of your holy feet and now freed me from the curse and given me a new lease of life. If I don't repay you for this in some way, my mind will not be at peace. Kindly listen to me and follow me."

Tulasidas started a monologue within, "It seems this ghost is well informed on scriptural truths. We should not underrate a person on the basis of appearances, but judge him on his inner worth. Whatever

it takes to get Hari's darshan, I should not miss out on it. It was a subtle being which presented the bowl of sweet pudding to king Dasaratha at the end of *yajna* by which the king's desire for progeny was fulfilled. Let me not reject its proposal."

He said aloud, "O ghost, let us go to your chief."

The ghost led him to the dwelling place of the chief and praising it with hymns, prayed for its favour. The disembodied voice of the chief of ghosts asked for the reason for the visit.

The ghost said, "O chief, this revered brahmin has released me from my curse. I want to return his blessing with a favour. He yearns to have the darshan of Lord Hari. Can you facilitate it?"

The chief replied, "I don't have the power to secure him the Lord's darshan. But I can guide him to Sri Hanuman who can certainly get him Lord's darshan. However, to see Sri Hanuman also, one must have immense merits. Is he virtuous enough to deserve Sri Hanuman's darshan?"

"O chief, this noble man has performed intense austerities for twelve years," answered the ghost.

The chief ghost made itself visible to Tulasidas and asked, "O brahmin, Sri Hanuman is not accessible to those who have lost themselves in the desire for women, wealth and gold. Are you free from these three faults?"

Tulasidas responded, "O chief of ghosts, I have rejected not only these three desires, but remained unattached to the body and world for over twelve years. My mind is obsessed only with the desire for God. He alone knows the state of my mind."

Pleased with his reply, the chief said, "In this city of Varanasi, in Asi street, a *pauranik* (pandit) discourses everyday on the esoteric truths contained in the *Valmiki Ramayana*. His words impart the nectar of Brahman to the listeners and Sri Hanuman attends the discourse daily in the guise of an old brahmin. You can have the darshan of Sri Hanuman there."

Tulasidas said mockingly, "Sri Hanuman is a great grammarian, a scholar in Vedanta, a master of sixty-four siddhis and a supreme

devotee of the Lord. It sounds funny that such a great being should mark attendance daily at a mere brahmin's discourse on Ramayana. This is the extent of your judgement! I should have known better! My act of looking for guidance from a ghost is as funny as chasing a dog to get Lord's darshan."

However, the chief saluted the brahmin and said respectfully, "O brahmin of great merit! Wherever sadhus gather and praise the glories of the Lord and speak what is pleasing to Him, there the Lord Himself is present. This is the claim of great sages. Can you deny this? You should not jump at the chance to make fun of me without recognising the truth in my words. I never utter a lie. Your tenacity to attain God-vision is indeed praiseworthy. Your ardent desire will bear fruit in three days. You will have the touch of the lotus feet of the Lord soon."

Tulasidas experienced horripilation. Thrills coursed through his body. Shedding tears of joy, he asked, "O chief of ghosts, how will I recognise Sri Hanuman amidst several brahmins assembled there?"

The chief said, "Everyday, Sri Hanuman comes first and leaves last. Moreover, he carries behind whenever he hears people hail, 'Rama, Rama' and walks unsteadily soaked in bliss. These are the signs by which you will recognise him." After giving these hints, both ghosts disappeared. ▲

(To be continued)



The Empty Ashram Puja Well

S. Gopalakrishnan

TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN
AND ROBERT BUTLER

Alas, will they [the false gurus] ever free themselves from the error of prescribing to us how we may obtain the fruits of union [with Sivam], when they do not possess the evidence provided by their own consciousness? [Their disciples are like] strangers who do not know [where they are], wandering about, getting lost and suffering, after taking directions to a place from someone who has never been there himself. (6)

This verse expresses the author's horror at seeing the disastrous condition into which the disciple is led by heeding the wrong guidance

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>.

or the false guru. The false guru, though he himself has not attained the state of union with the divine, attempts to prescribe to the disciple how he can reach that state. Woe betide him! Can these imposters ever become free of the great error of such misguidance? Even in the worldly plane a stranger journeying on the instructions of an ignorant fellow traveller, who himself has never been to the place of destination, will certainly lose his way and come to grief. How much greater the harm that can come to someone on the spiritual plane from the attempts of the would-be guru to convey to him a state of being which he has never experienced himself!

Know that only he is the *jnana guru* who with a glance brings the disciple to absolute stillness, having perceived [in him] the state of maturity wherein he becomes harmonised [with the Self] as that which is false gradually disappears, so that he dissolves into the waves [of the ocean] of bliss of union [with the divine], in which he exists as Reality itself. (7)

Having described the characteristics of the false guru, (vv 3-6), the author now speaks of the attributes of the true guru, the *jnana guru*. In his enlightened state he is able both to recognise those disciples who are already experiencing a degree of the bliss which precedes the annihilation of the ego, and to establish them in that state by focusing the energy of grace upon them through his glance. The state of bliss which typically precedes final liberation is one in which the aspirant runs the risk of being caught up in, and overwhelmed by that state, mistaking it for liberation itself. At this point the guru fixes *his gaze upon him so that he is not agitated – pathaiyaamal paarkkum*, enabling him to merge in the state of the Self which is beyond even bliss.

The Tamil phrase used to describe the evolving state of the mature devotee, *poka poka porunthi – becoming harmonised [with the Self] as the false gradually disappears* describes the gradual process through which the mind is purified and made steady prior to its final elimination in the state of realisation. This phrase finds an echo in the words of Krishna (in *Bhagavad Gita*, 6.25): “Let him gain little by

little (*shanaih-shanaih*) tranquillity by means of reason controlled by steadiness, and having fixed his mind on the Self, let him not think of anything else.”

In divine silence, overflowing with the bliss of Sivam, the guru speaks [without speaking], like a honey bee regurgitating the nectar it has consumed into the honeycomb. For those [disciples] who at that time wait in attendance without any thought in their minds, like the seasons which appear in due course, his words will constitute lofty *tapas*, or the import of the Vedas. (8)

A honey bee collects nectar from flowers and discharges it into the honeycomb, without contaminating it in any way, even though the nectar is discharged only through its mouth. Similarly the guru absorbs and transmits the knowledge of Sivam, free of any contamination by his body, mind and senses. In due course, the supreme bliss or jnana of the guru will surely manifest itself as a glance of grace, a thought of love, words of instruction or by mere touch. This is movingly expressed by Sri Ramana in *Akshara-mana-malai* v.63: “Look at me! Think of me! Touch me! Ripen me and make me fit! Then be my master and rule me, O Arunachala!”

Just as the seasons of the year silently bide their time to manifest in due course, unaffected by the cycles of growth and decay that they cause, the grace of the guru, flowing in divine silence, will surely be granted to those disciples who patiently dwell in the service of the master, unaffected by the changing conditions of their bodily incarnation. The phrase *without any thought in their minds* might be translated as *free of all objective thought*. There can be no thought without an object, and when thought turns in upon itself, it subsides into pure being. Such is the state of the disciple who is ripe for divine grace. The presence or absence of the spoken word is not at issue in the authentic communication between guru and disciple. Sri Ramana eloquently expresses the nature of this communication as follows: “Silence is ever-speaking; it is the perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language.

There is electricity flowing in a wire. With resistance to its passage, it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly also, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.” *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 246, 8th September 1936.

Like a lamp in the dark, like the shining of the moon and sun, the holy word of him whose form is supreme bliss, and who transcends even grace itself, resembles a rain of ambrosia, a voice from the heavens, or a good omen. Know that there is in it no trace of the ego. (9)

Lord Siva’s *arul sakti* – *power of grace* is required by the individual soul, the *jiva*, to bring about its final union with Sivam, the Self. However, upon that union, there no longer exists any individual soul to experience that grace. Therefore it is said here that the guru, who is divine grace made manifest, transcends even grace. This grace of the guru is described as manifesting in three different degrees: at first it is like the flame of lamp, burning in the darkness; later it is like the moon, which radiates the reflected light of the sun, and in its most powerful manifestation it is like the sun itself, in whose light the duality of seer and seen is entirely effaced.

The analogies of a *rain of nectar*, a *voice from the heavens* and a *good omen* are given to emphasise the truth that the words of the guru are in their very nature free of any contamination by the ego. The earthly rains are munificent. Their downpour makes the world flourish, with no expectation of reward on their part. However, as generous as they are, at times a heavy downpour of these beneficent rains may itself cause harm. Guru’s grace, on the other hand, is like a rain of nectar. The more it pours down, the greater the benefit to the aspirant. The disembodied *voice from the sky* – *ambara sol* (*asariri* in Sanskrit) can speak only the truth, and a *good omen* indicates that what one desires will come to fruition, just as the guru’s words carry the assurance that the aspirant’s longing for liberation will be fulfilled.

The guru who, like the shadow person in the sky, materialises in the bliss [of the Self], is the enemy of *maya*. His compassionate word in which the mind has died is like the utterance of a man possessed, a brave warrior, a king, a spurned lover riding the palmyra branch, or a suicidal maniac. (10)

In truth there is only the Self. However, for the mature disciple, the guru appears to manifest in physical form as a solid, three-dimensional reality, the true nature of which is known upon realisation to be the Self, whose nature is bliss. For a description of the unity of god, guru and Self the reader can do no better than refer to *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, Talk 198, 10th June 1936.

In the technique of the shadow person, Sanskrit *chaayaa purusha*, the practitioner concentrates intensely on his own shadow, then looks up into the clear sky, where a shadow image of a person appears; through practice he will come to recognise this as himself, whereupon it will act as a guide, aiding him in his search for self-knowledge and enlightenment. Here it is being employed as a simile for the way in which the disciple's earnest desire causes the guru to manifest in human form. Therefore the guru is said to materialise in [the] bliss [of the Self].

The final part of the verse gives a series of analogies pointing to how the words of the guru are unaffected by his bodily incarnation:

A man possessed – when a man is possessed, his normal faculties are suppressed, and his words are those of whatever demon or supernatural entity is possessing him. In the same way the words of the jnana guru are the pure expression of the Self, unaffected by his physical incarnation and attributes.

A brave warrior – a brave warrior will pursue his enemy to the death without regard for his own life, just as the jnana guru will have relentlessly pursued the enemy that is his own ignorance until it is destroyed.

A lover riding the palmyra branch – In Tamil *Akam* love literature the last recourse of a spurned lover, unable to make his beloved's heart melt towards him, is to dress up a *madal* – *palmyra* branch as a horse,

with flowers, bells and so on, and ride it through the village streets proclaiming her harshness to the world, oblivious, in his obsession with his beloved, to the ridicule and censure of all and sundry. Thus he is compared to the jnana guru, who, in his quest for the real, is oblivious to everything but his love for the Self, Sivam.

A king – just as the ordinance of a king is all-powerful within his own realm, the utterance of the jnana guru is all-powerful in the realm of the Self.

A suicidal maniac, literally *one for whom death is bliss* – just as a person intent on suicide has no thought other than that of his own destruction, the jnana guru has no other thought than that of the elimination of the disciple's personal consciousness.

This work was created for our salvation through the grace of the one known as Sambandhar of Sirkazhi, he who is learned in the Vedas, the pure One, the King of Tamil, who, cutting away the contamination of my personal self through [the initiation known as] *sadya-nirvana-diksha*, and establishing me [in the state of Sivam], reveals [through me] the path of liberation. (11)

The commentator notes that this verse constitutes the *nul marapu*, which we might translate as the *work's lineage, established authority, ancestral line*, which, as readers of the *Introduction to Ozhivil Odukkam* and the text and commentary to verse one in the last issue will know, is declared by the author to be from the Tamil saint Jnanasambandhar.

Here Jnanasambandhar of Sirkazhi is referred to as *suddhar* – the *pure one*, as he has freed himself from the three *malams*, the three deadly impurities which obscure the soul, *kanma, anavam and mayai*. See verse four and commentary. He is the 'adopted' son of Lord Siva, who the *Svetasvara Upanisad* describes as *niravadyam* – flawless. He is the adept of the Vedas. He is also master of the Tamil tongue. Sri Sankara's reference to *Dravida sisu* – the *Tamil Child in Soundarya Lahari* is thought by some to refer to him. His powerful songs constitute the first three books of *Tirumurai*, the anthology of Saivite devotional works, popularly known as the Tamil Veda. In his

songs he refers to himself as *Marai jnana sambandhar* and *Marai jnana munivar – Jnanasambandhar*, the sage who is learned in the Vedas.

The author ends by affirming that he is fully qualified to transmit the teaching of Jnanasambandhar, and thus of revealing the path of liberation, having received from him the initiation known as *sadya-nirvana-diksha*, which enables the disciple to attain salvation instantaneously. *Nirvana-diksha* is defined by the Tamil Lexicon as ‘the third or last step in initiation which enables the disciple to free himself from the bonds of existence and attain emancipation.’ Sanskrit *sa-dyas* (*sadyo* in combination) means, literally, *on the same day*, and hence, *at once, instantaneously*.

The Self exists free of all association in the absolute fullness that is free of all divisions. Many are the means pursued by those who desire to be released from the suffering caused by the defilements that obscure it. As one might tip a bag upside down to fully reveal its contents, we shall now speak of the state of your subsiding through the destruction [of your personal self], in which you[r true Self] do[es] not die. (12)

Vallalar declares that many are the means found by those who strive to get rid of the sufferings caused by the obstruction veiling the knowledge of the Self. We are reminded of the fifth verse of *Thiruvaymozhi* where Nammazhvar declares, “Many are the ways to know God; each differs in way and content, depending on the mental setup of the devotee. By following any chosen path diligently, one would reach cosmic consciousness.” The paths are many but all are seen merely as means to an end upon the attainment of Self realisation.

Hindu theories of the nature of reality are many and varied, but they mostly centre around the arguments as to whether the soul and god are in essence identical (*abheda – non-different*), entirely separate (*bheda – different*) or both identical and separate (*bhedabheda – both different and non-different*). The import of the present work is to dismiss all the foregoing and reveal the absolute truth which transcends all such arbitrary divisions, which occur at the level of the mind only.

At the end of the verse the words *ozhivil odukkam*, which, as we know, is the title of this work, appear for the first time. The words can be, and have been, translated into English in a variety of ways. They can be translated as “Subsiding [into the Self or Sivam] through the elimination [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego]”, or, taking a slightly different grammatical interpretation, “Ceaseless abidance [in the Self or Sivam]”. Both meanings are valid and both would very probably have been intended by the author. In order to make it clear that it is not the eternal, unchanging Self which dies, but only the ephemeral and essentially non-existent personal self, he qualifies the phrase with the words *nee maaLaa – in which you (i.e. your true Self) do not die*.

In the concluding portion of the verse, Vallalar gives an apt simile for launching this work. He says that he will lay forth his arguments as one might *tip a bag upside-down*, or *turn it inside-out*, to fully reveal its contents. This is the first of a great number of striking and powerful images with which the author illustrates his subject matter, driving home his point with similes and metaphors rendered all the more effective by being largely drawn from everyday life, our common experience.

Hear the title of this work, which speaks in a clearly comprehensible manner of the consciousness in which the word of the guru, the holy scriptures and one’s personal experience are harmoniously combined, and of the limiting factors which veil it. It is ‘Ozhivil Odukkam’, the seed of all works which elaborate upon these matters. (13)

In this verse Vallalar announces the title of this work, *Ozhivil Odukkam*, the meaning of which was discussed in the commentary to the previous verse. He declares that *Ozhivil Odukkam* is the work which truly reveals the true knowledge acceptable to all the three sources of validation, that is, the scriptures, the words of the guru and one’s own experience. The most mature disciples may attain realisation merely on hearing the words of the guru. For those of

lesser attainment there are the holy scriptures to assuage their doubts, but for all, without exception, the personal validation of one's own consciousness is absolutely essential. The work is described as the *seed* from which all other works *unfold*, in the sense that its subject is consciousness itself, the source from which all thought, and hence all written works, evolve, and into which they finally subside.

Its other subject is described as *munai caarvu* – *those things adhering to [consciousness], [which] oppose [it]*, since in one sense realisation is only the elimination of those obscuring factors that prevent us from realising that we are not and never could be apart from the Self. In the Siddhanta system the *pacu* – *soul* is unable to know *pati* – the *Lord* because it is obscured by *paacam* – *the worldly bond*. In Advaita, which does not admit of the concept of an eternal soul or *jiva* existing separately from god, *caarvu* would equate to *maya*, within which the *jiva* is an illusory appearance. These obscuring factors are here jointly described as *caarvu* – *things which adhere to, are attached to [pure consciousness]*. *munai* means to be *angry with, fight, hate*, expressing how the limiting factors which constitute the worldly bond are antagonistic to realisation of the truth.

The other paths, of which *cariyai* is the first, treat of the *disciplines of tantra and mantra*, and can only lead to further attachments. Know that this path is the teaching given only to those who, through merit previously earned, are extremely mature in the *tapas* of renunciation, in order to remove their [remaining] attachments. (14)

In this verse, Vallalar talks about the superiority of the path shown in *Ozhivil Odukkam* to other traditional paths. *The disciplines of tantra and mantra* correspond to divisions of the Saiva Agamas; *tantrakalai* deals with rites and ceremonies etc. and *mantrakalai* treats of *mantras* (prayers, hymns, invocations, etc.). Siddhanta recognises four stages on the spiritual path: the first and lowest is *cariyai*, Sanskrit *caryaa*, in which the initiate worships the deity with mantras and performs various external religious duties; the second is *kiriyai*, Sanskrit *kriyaa*,

in which the initiate is allowed to perform rituals including puja; the third is *yokam*, Sanskrit *yoga* in which the aspirant performs yogic *asanas* – physical postures and *pranayama* – *control of the breath*, and engages in meditation and contemplation, and the highest is *nanam*, Sanskrit *jnana*, the direct path in which the disciple seeks to attain direct intuitive awareness of his oneness with Sivam, the supreme reality.

Although useful as a means of purification for the aspirant, the lower paths are portrayed in *Ozhivil Odukkam* as hindrances to those who are qualified to follow the path *nanam*. Vallalar says that though they may be useful as preliminary procedures, they carry the risk of conditioning the devotee's mind and causing him to become immersed deeper and deeper in attachment to the very act of worship itself, rather than using it as a ladder for future evolution on the spiritual path.

Finally the author states that this work is intended for those extremely mature in the tapas of renunciation. The implication appears to be that this work will be most useful to those who, in previous births, have passed through the other three degrees, and have entered the current birth ripe for liberation through the direct transmission of *nanam*. This class of person should on no account allow himself to become sidetracked on these lower paths. Whatever our view on rebirth in general, most would agree that people's interest in and aptitude for the spiritual quest appears to be something that they possess from birth, and it is only the few that ever come to view the extinction of their personal self as a worthwhile goal. Only the few therefore are likely to profit from the study of such works as this. In fact later verses will show how worldly people will view the *jnani* as a madman, a fool and even an heretic.

This work is for those who would enter fire, or abandon themselves to a tiger or a snake, if the guru so commanded it. They are to him as life is to the body, as the eyelid is to the eye, or as thread is to the needle. It will be of no use to the spiritually immature, just as a banana tree will not be consumed even if

burned in a hot fire, nor a clay pot transformed into gold by
the alchemist's stone. (15)

In this verse Vallalar identifies those to whom this work will be useful, and contrasts them with those who will not get benefit from it. He puts emphasis on the fact that it is meant for, and will be useful to, the ardent disciple who would do anything for his guru. That sort of disciple will, on the guru's command or for his sake, readily enter fire or defy a tiger or serpent. Those who are caught in a fiery blaze, or in the jaws of a tiger or a venomous serpent will never survive. Likewise those disciples who have been caught up in the grace of the guru will see the total destruction of their ego, their individual identity.

The relationship of such disciples to the guru is like that of life to the body, the eyelids to the eye or thread to the needle. The three similes are very profound. The perfect disciple serves the guru unflinchingly, just as life identifies itself with the body, and dwells within it unflinchingly sustaining it and serving it. Likewise, just as the eyelid reacts instinctively to protect the eye from anything that is likely to damage it, the disciple never leaves the master and protects him in any every way possible. Finally, just as thread has no choice but to follow the needle, the disciple cannot but follow and obey the guru.

The author ends the verse with two similes illustrating how the work will not benefit those who are spiritually immature. In the first of these, the disciple's lack of spiritual maturity is compared to the way in which the stem of a banana tree will burn. The banana tree or plantain is actually, in botanical terms, a flowering plant, not a tree, as it does not form a woody trunk, but retains a sappy green stem which is very hard to burn. The four stages of spiritual ripeness are given as follows: *mantataram* – *exceedingly slow*, *mantam* – *slow*, *tiiviram* – *swift*, *tiivirataram* – *exceedingly swift*; these terms refer to the speed at which fire will take hold of, respectively, *(the flower-spike of) a banana tree, green firewood, dry firewood and charcoal*.

In the second simile the immature disciple is compared to a clay pot, which even the *sparsa vedi* – *alchemist's stone*, which turns base metals into gold, will not be able to transform, since clay, not being a

metal, cannot be affected by it. Similarly, even the powerful proximity of the sadguru will not have any effect on the spiritual progress of an immature aspirant whose mind is not yet ripe. Even the flow of grace from the guru is not of any use to him. Vallalar refers to such a person as *ezhai* or *spiritually poor*. Though in normal parlance the Tamil word *ezhai* refers to a person who is poor in a material sense, here it specifically refers to a person who is bereft of spiritual wealth.

This work is intended for those who experience it as would a sensualist, immersed in the thrilling waves of an ocean of bliss as he listens to a song about the fivefold pleasures of the lover's embrace; like the lotus flower opening at dawn, its mouth like the tiny slit in a tinkling bell; or like those who succumb to delight on hearing a song from the lutes of celestial minstrels. (16)

In this verse Vallalar indicates the target audience to whom this precious book is intended. It is meant for those *sadbhakas* who would study in the same way of self-absorption as a libertine would enjoy an amorous song, as the lotus flower with its mouth resembling a tiny slit in a tinkling bell on a girdle or anklet, opens at sunrise and as a music lover listens to music.

The first line of the verse illustrates the bliss of the *sadbhaka* through a powerful simile. When a person who has fully experienced the pleasures of love sings an amorous song, composed by a poet who himself has experienced those pleasures, it will evoke in him the actual sensation of experiencing the pleasure, just by his singing it. Abhinava Gupta, the famed Sanskrit aesthetician of Kashmir, terms aesthetic delight as 'transfer of experience'. A *rasika* will not be able to fully empathise with the impact of the song unless he himself has experienced and internalised the pleasures portrayed in the song. Likewise a guru will be able to transmit the bliss of atmic experience, the bliss of self-realisation, only when he himself has experienced it, and as for the disciples, only those who are mature and have already experienced a degree of that bliss will be fit to receive its transmission. This transfer of experience is indeed the purpose of this book.

The second analogy is to the lotus flower that opens at dawn to the touch of the first rays of the sun. Here the disciple is the lotus flower and the *sadguru* is the sun of jnana in whose presence the lotus of the disciple's heart cannot but open. This is beautifully brought out by Poygai Azhwar in verse 67 of *Divya Prabandham*, which says, "The river will flow only towards the ocean; lives in the world will look towards the god of Dharma (or Yama, god of death); a rising flower will look for the sun; my consciousness is looking forward only to the union with the lord of cosmic consciousness."

The third analogy is to those who experience bliss on hearing the music of celestial musicians, playing the *kinnari*, a type of two-stringed lute, played by the *kinnara* – *celestial musicians*.

These three analogies delineate the state of spiritual bliss of a person who has the potential to completely dissolve his personal identity in divine bliss. This is an important verse because it makes clear the author's intention to compose a work that has the power to directly point to, and actually invoke in certain ripe aspirants, the state of being which is the subject of the work itself. We shall see as the work progresses that these terse verses, full of images which are bold, vivid, visceral and concrete almost to the point of tangibility, are designed to impact directly upon the experience of the reader, and are not simply a set of instructions or prescriptions for action at a later date.

For a work that does not bow [to any god], there can be no obeisance [paid to any god]. What good would it do if, begging indulgence for its flaws, I solicited praise on its behalf? Whether I begged indulgence for it or not, it would not be pleasing to all. Yet there is no work that would be considered bad by all. (17)

This verse stands as an *avai adakkam* – *homage paid before the assembly*, in which, in traditional works, the poet confesses his lack of worth before the assembly of his peers, and begs for their indulgence in overlooking its flaws. With characteristic forthrightness the author states that, because this work is a *vanangaa urai* – *a work that does*

not bow down, there is no point in trying to excuse or mitigate its faults. In other words his *avai adakkam* consists solely of a blunt statement to the effect that for a work such as this no such pleading is even admissible!

But what is it to which the *work does not bow down*? We can derive from the text no less than three different interpretations of the phrase *vanangaa urai*, and hence three good reasons why such homage might be inadmissible. On the simplest of levels, we could take the phrase to mean a *work that is lacking in humility, an arrogant work*. In this case it would be saying that, if it were truly a work written out of arrogance, it would be idle to ask anyone to excuse it.

In the second interpretation, the one adopted in the translation above, the words are interpreted as meaning a *work which does not bow [to any god]*. A work of this kind invariably contains a homage or obeisance to one or, as often, a number of deities, such as Siva, Murugan, Ganesha, Parvati and so on. However, since a principal argument of the work is that realisation will not be gained by worshipping a deity as separate from oneself, the author asks what would be the point of deliberately committing that error, merely to comply with the convention that demands that such an obeisance be made? The main idea in this interpretation is that the poet is portraying himself as afraid of offending traditionalists by omitting the obeisance, and of offending the strict Advaitists by including it. In this way he might hope to satisfy both parties, at the same time underlining the non-dual credentials of the work as a whole.

In the third interpretation, the words are taken to mean a *work that does not yield [to dualistic concepts]*, i.e. one which does not admit of the existence of anything but the non-dual reality. If it succeeds there is no more to be said, and indeed, no one to say it, and if it fails, there is no way of minimising that failure by pointing out any specific good qualities in it. This is a point which is eloquently taken up in the next verse.

The sounds made by those who, forgetting themselves entirely, weep uncontrollably [at a funeral] will not chime with the rhythm

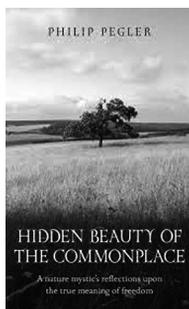
of the drum, [the sounds of] the flute, and [the movements of] those who dance to them. Listen, for such is the nature of this work. If I am to explain it, [I would ask] who will be left to judge of the utility of a work which has no [objective] fruits? All one can do is dissolve away, so that one unites with it. (18)

In this verse, Vallalar says that the worth of this work is not in its technical construction or grammatical excellence; its utility consists in conveying the state of dissolution of the ego in the Self. To explain this, the author gives a dramatic presentation of a scene in a funeral house. There are professional mourners at the house who are paid to sing mournful songs with dance and accompanying music. They have no emotional attachment to the deceased, but remain in full control of themselves while performing their dance and music. On the other hand, the bereaved persons themselves, who are emotionally attached to the deceased, are totally lost in their grief. They weep uncontrollably and are quite oblivious to what is going on around them. Having become totally dissolved in their sorrow, their sobbing expressions will not be in tune with the drum beat, flute playing and dance movements of the professional mourners. In the same way, the author intimates that he has composed this work, not through intellectual artifice, but by totally immersing himself in the non-dual bliss of the self and that, this being so, some flaws are likely, but should be excused by the lofty endeavour that inspired it.

Since the work is written from the standpoint of the ego-free state in which the bondage of good and evil deeds does not exist, it does not admit of any karmic fruits, or anyone to reap them. Clearly, the only way to understand a book that was composed in such a state is to enter that state. In such a state there will be no personal self remaining to deliberate on its merits and demerits. Perhaps this book will help the ripe seeker to enter that state. The author seems confident of that.



BOOK REVIEWS



HIDDEN BEAUTY OF THE COMMON PLACE. A Nature Mystic's Reflections upon the True Meaning of Freedom by Philip Pegler. Changemakers Books, Winchester, UK. \$26.95, pp311. ISBN: 978-1-78099-337-9

Clare Cameron was an English mystic and nature poet in the tradition of John Clare, Wordsworth, Richard Jefferies and Edward Thomas. The latter two lived at the turn of the 20th century and it was during this time in music too that there was also an English flowering which saw Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Delius, Elgar and Finzi among others exploring in sound the beauty and glory of the English countryside. There is a profound bond between the English artist and the land Shakespeare called the 'sceptred isle'. Born in the crowded East End of London notorious for its hard living and grey skies, she rose to be one of the finest nature poets of her generation.

Philip Pegler has written a sensitive and penetrating book about her life and writings. It is not a straight chronological history of her life so much as a presentation of her inner life based on his close contact with her in her last years and an intimate knowledge of her writings right from the 1920s both in prose and poetry. A more conventional biography of her was written in 1984 by her friend and carer, Brian Graham. That book was entitled *Clare Cameron – A Human and Spiritual Journey*.

In brief, Clare was born in 1896 and from an early age wrote verse and short stories. Her first job was with the newspaper *The Daily News* on Fleet Street. She soon joined a publishing firm and married a writer, Thomas Burke ten years her senior. She published her first book of poetry soon after and her youthful autobiography *Rustle of Spring* was published in 1927. She was an artist who lived to create. Her tools were words and her writing was as much a part of her make-up as breathing. Over the next sixty years she wrote a steady flow of poems and prose both as an individual author and as the editor of several magazines, the most prominent being, *The Middle Way*, the first and still, the premier magazine of Buddhism in England. From 1940 to 1945, she held it together in London under the perils of war. In

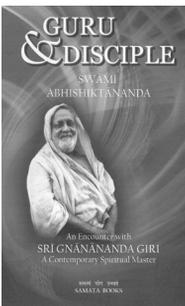
the late-1950s she took up the editorship of *The Science of Thought Review* founded by the English mystic Henry Hamblin who was admired by our founding editor Arthur Osborne. She gave her loyalty, energy and time to it right up to her death in 1983.

Another interesting facet of her life were the friendships with Alan Watts, Christmas Humphreys, and Sangharakshita, founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order as well as a lifelong friendship with Israel Regardie, who became a leading authority on occult magic. He was also involved with the legendary Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and edited the writings of the shadowy Aleister Crowley.

One cannot but admire the lyrical empathy, literary skill and graciousness of her poems and prose. The delicacy of her touch reveals more in a few adroit words than a plethora of explanations. She seems to have an innate feeling for words, a rare gift not for show but to reveal the intricacy and penetration of her insights.

This is a complex and rich book about Clare and the author does her justice in his elaboration of her life, writings and his personal contact with her. The more I read the book the more I admire her and the skill of the author to weave throughout the narrative her wonderfully evocative writings, poems along with his relationship to this most uncommon and wise woman. It is a book to inspire and is well worth the effort required to enter the spirit of her journey. One does not often say this nowadays – this is a ‘good’ book in every sense of the word.

— Christopher Quilkey



GURU AND DISCIPLE: An Encounter with Sri Gnanananda Giri, A Contemporary Spiritual Master by Swami Abhishiktananda, Samatabooks, Chennai, 2012. pp107, Rs250. ISBN: 978-81-85208-55-8

This brief volume presents the Advaita reflections of the Benedictine monk Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux 1910-1973) following his encounter with Sri Gnanananda Giri in 1955-56. As such, it a valuable contribution to East-West religious dialogue and a thoughtful exploration of the challenges faced by Western aspirants when they encounter the profound spiritual traditions of India. The monk's contemplative life in Brittany, France, led to a desire to travel to India as a

missionary. After arriving he began a serious study of Advaita Vedanta and eventually founded Shantivanam ashram on the Kaveri river in Tamil Nadu. As part of his growing immersion in Advaita philosophy and practice he came to Tiruvannamalai in 1949 and met Sri Ramana Maharshi. This life-altering meeting led to his decision to seek periodic meditative refuge on the slopes of Arunachala between 1952 and 1954. During one of his sojourns on the holy mountain a friend encouraged him to visit a living jnani, Sri Gnanananda Giri, in the nearby town of Tirukoyilur. It was at a temple there in 1896 that Sri Ramana had received his vision of light streaming from Arunachala on his journey to Tiruvannamalai.

This book relates the French monk's experiences at Gnanananda's ashram, Tapovanam, in December 1955 (a four-day visit) and in March 1956, when he stayed for a fortnight. Gnanananda's guru was the famed Sri Swami Shivaratna Giri of Jyotir Math, who trained the young swami at Srinagar in Kashmir. Following his guru's *mahasamadhi*, Gnanananda renounced leadership of the Jyotir Math and began a long journey that took him to mountain hermitages in the Himalayas and other holy places in British India. These peregrinations as an unknown sadhu included meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, Siddharudha Swami, and Swami Nityananda of Ganeshpuri. He finally settled at Tirukoyilur where he was recognised as a mahayogi and jnanasiddha with links to both the Natha tradition of North Indian siddhas and the Tamil tradition of siddhas.

In the book's early chapters Abhishiktananda relates his initial experiences with Gnanananda, which convince him that he is his satguru. The monk also reflects on the significance of the guru tradition and on the distinctive qualities associated with the guru and his disciples. With deep insight Abhishiktananda writes that the darsana of the satguru "is the final step toward the ultimate darsana, in which the last veil is lifted and all duality transcended."

We know from his other writings that Abhishiktananda struggled to reconcile the (apparently) exclusive claims of Jesus Christ to be his lord and satguru with his recognition that Gnanananda was now the living "form under which Christ presents himself to my senses. . . in order to help me reach himself, in the depth of my own soul." In an epiphany during this visit he came to see that "Christ is more truly close to me in my guru than in any memory I may have of his appearance on earth." As interesting as these reflections may be for students of Eastern and Western spirituality,

a virtue of this volume is that Abhishiktananda's struggles to reconcile his limited theological views during the 1950s and early 1960s with his Advaita spiritual awakening are not allowed to superimpose themselves on to the teachings of his guru.

Beginning with chapter four, Abhishiktananda chronicles his second visit with Gnanananda. Because his guru is not in the ashram when he arrives, the swami spends several days as the guest of a brahmin priest at the Shiva temple in Tirukoyilur. In chapters four through six Abhishiktananda engages in a detailed description of the life of the priest and his family and shares his insights into the Saivite tradition, including its iconography, pujas, and temple architecture. These chapters contain valuable perspectives for students of comparative religions, as Abhishiktananda explains local Tamil traditions in conceptual modes accessible to Western readers.

Chapters seven and eight contain the heart of Gnanananda's teaching and address such themes as the inner meanings of ashram rituals, the apparent similarities and differences between Gnanananda and Ramana Maharshi (in particular the Maharshi's perceived indifference to personal matters and the world is compared to Gnanananda's full engagement with the lives of his disciples), the essential importance of meditation, the relative benefits of tapas, and the supreme realisation of non-dual reality.

The volume's main value lies in its serious engagement with issues that confront Western spiritual seekers when they encounter the deep traditions of non-dual spirituality that are found in the lives of modern jnanis like Ramana Maharshi and Gnanananda. The book has a useful glossary of Sanskrit, Tamil, and Hindi terms, a select bibliography of works by and about Gnanananda and Abhishiktananda, and an index.

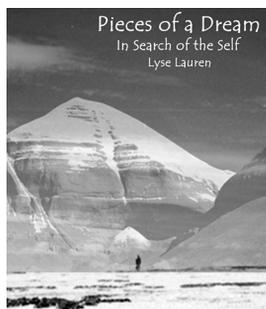
Abhishiktananda embraced Advaita spirituality fully in the last decade of his life and in 1968 founded a hermitage near Uttarkashi on the banks of the Ganges. He died in December 1973, shortly before his satguru's *mahasamadhi*. It is largely because of Abhishiktananda's writings that Westerners have come to know of Gnanananda's life and teachings.

— Phillip Lucas

PIECES OF A DREAM by Lyse Lauren pp150. Kindle Amazon Edition \$8.28 ISBN: 978-09874881-0-7. <http://www.everherenow.com>

This is an autobiography, the spiritual odyssey of a very extraordinary person with an extraordinary tale to tell. Born New Zealand, the author

MOUNTAIN PATH



had a normal upbringing with loving if not particularly religious parents. Three events in her childhood set the course for what was, however, to become a deeply spiritual life. The first of these occurred when she was about seven years old. In the middle of playing a game with other children, the world suddenly stood still for a moment in which she felt a complete sense of oneness with the whole of creation. The second was when she was ill, 'hot and bothered', at the height of a fever. Some words came to her out of nowhere, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, the Buddhist mantra, which brought immediate relief, although she was not to discover until many years later what these words actually meant. The third experience took place when she was alone, bathing in the sea. A sand bank on which she was standing collapsed, plunging her into a maelstrom of fast moving currents. Sucked under the waves, she felt herself bumping along the bottom before being expelled onto the surface gasping for breath, only to find that she was being carried out to sea on a swift ebb tide with no help available from a completely deserted shore. At which point a sudden calmness came over her and she began to swim slowly but determinedly towards the beach. She did not share either of these experiences with her parents for fear of worrying them.

She later found her way to Australia where she was at last able to do what she most deeply yearned to do, to meditate alone. Then, after a spell in Sydney, where she both learned and taught music, she found her way to Tibet with the help of a scholarship. After a tough journey, staying in Lhasa, Gyantse and Shigatse, she decided, on reaching Kathmandu, to depart from her schedule to make a visit to Bodh-Gaya. There she met one of her Masters as well as HH the Dalai Lama, an experience which filled her with ecstasy and inspiration, as well as a determination to return to that part of the world as soon as she could.

During her next stay, this time in the Everest region, she lived by herself in a meditation cell high up in the mountains, above an isolated gumpa occupied by an elderly lama and his daughter. Here it was that on one occasion, after a three-day storm, she found some large, humanoid footprints in deep snow around her cell. The lama and his daughter were not surprised at her description of these prints which they knew to be those of a Yeti, a shy

creature whose presence was well known in those parts and whose mournful cries could be heard at night.

At some point after this, in pursuit of a long-held ambition, the author embarked, with a friend, on an expedition to Mount Kailash, entering Chinese-occupied Tibet through western Nepal. The hardships endured by those two in that extremely arduous trek, planned and executed with military precision, were almost superhuman. They were more than once saved from arrest by the police through the power of prayer. On one occasion the author managed to prevent herself being devoured by a pack of guard dogs by uttering a mantra, causing those savage creatures to stop dead in their tracks. The descriptions of the natural beauty of that region are enthralling.

In addition to the sheer, page-turning appeal of this account as an adventure story, there is throughout it a deeper dimension in the way that the author interprets all that happens to her in a spiritual light. In a final chapter she says, “It is so vital to know that we enter this life from our natural state which is infinite, eternal and changeless,” and that after passing through a kaleidoscope of illusory events, ‘pieces of a dream’, the journey ends where it began. The courage, depth and spiritual insight revealed in this account are truly inspiring. This is an altogether worthwhile and very readable book. — Alasdair Black



Ashram Website

We have moved the ashram website www.sriramanamaharshi.org to a new host with a Virtual Private Server. The website now offers contents in French, German, Russian, Hebrew, Spanish, Hindi, Polish, Tamil and Japanese. We hope to add other languages soon. We thank devotees for their enthusiastic response to our need for translators.

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Sri Vidya Havan

The *Sri Vidya Havan* has been an annual Ashram event and usually takes place on a Friday in March. This year's *Sri Vidya Homa* took place on Friday the 15th March beginning at 8am with *Kalasthapana*. From 12 noon until 3pm, *Lalita Sahasranamam*, *Trisathi* and other prayers were recited, ending with *poornahuti* and *arati* at 3pm. A procession to shift the consecrated *kalasam* into the Mother's Shrine was followed by *abhishekam*, *alankaram* and *deepaaradhana* at 4pm. This is an important ritual in the ashram to invoke the blessings of the great goddess to protect and nurture the ashram in its endeavour to preserve the pristine purity of Bhagavan's teachings and disseminate it to all who come in the right spirit.

Tamil New Year

The first day of the Tamil New Year was celebrated with a special *Mahanyasa* puja in the morning and the reading of the *panchangam* (almanac) in the afternoon. Bhagavan's Mahanirvana was observed (according to the Gregorian calendar) in the evening when devotees gathered to sing *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* with refrain 'Arunachala Siva' for every couplet at 8pm, timed to conclude at the moment of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana at 8.47. Afterward all arose and filed past the Nirvana room to pay their respects to Bhagavan.

Aradhana of Sri Ramana Maharshi

On the 7th May the 63rd Aradhana was performed at the ashram to commemorate the Mahanirvana of our beloved sadguru Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Though it is more solemn than not a joyous occasion, it is nonetheless a day of blessings for all who were fortunate to attend the elaborate rituals at the Sri Rameswara Maha Lingam.

Aradhana of Sri Ramana Maharshi at Khammam (A.P.)

The *aradhana* day of Sri Ramana Maharshi was celebrated on the same day thirteen years ago when the Sri Ramana Samalochana

Kendram, Khammam (A.P) came into existence. The day, 7th May, 2013 was a day of remembrance and re-dedication. The day started with puja to Sri Ramana Maharshi at 8am and *abhishekam* for the stone from Arunachala was performed. The sankalpa on the day was that all the members should remember Bhagavan throughout the day by His Grace.

At the conclusion of the puja and before the distribution of prasad, the last letter from *Sri Ramanasrama Lekhalu (Letters)* by Smt. Suri Nagamma was read. The reading evoked considerable emotion in the reader and audience. A book containing the experiences of some seventeen devotees over the past ten years or so of their attending the Kendra was dedicated to Bhagavan and released at the puja.

The experiences range from 'toddler' level of sadhana to the advanced level where flashes of freedom were experienced. One devotee wrote that *smarana* (remembrance) of Ramana's name quells all his worries in case of any troubles.

The Chanting of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*

The continuously chanting for two days of the complete *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* (of Muruganar) has been conducted by devotees in various places over the past years. Recently it was chanted in the Chennai-Chromepet Sri Ramanalayam, in the Tiru Mullai Vayil at the Sri Vaishnavi Temple, near Chennai and also at Ramanadapuram in Muruganar's birth-house which is called Muruganar Mandiram.

A regular Ramana *satsangh* is being held in Pollachi near Coimbatore for the past ten years. This *satsangh* is conducted by a dedicated couple: Ramana Kumar who is a great grandson of Sofa Gounder (who donated the sofa, which even now adores the old hall in the ashram) and Damayanti, a grand-daughter of one of the attendants of Bhagavan, Vadivudayar. It was suggested to them to have a session in their town. Accordingly on May 25th & 26th- 2013, a group of devotees from Chennai, who were trained by the Mylapore Temple Odhuvar, and also devotees from Sri Ramana Ashram participated in the chanting at Pollachi.

There was a good response for the chanting and the local devotees requested the programme to be repeated at least once a year.

Kumbhabhishekam at Ashram

The *kumbhabhishekam* to Sri Matrubbhuteswara and Sri Ramaneswara Maha Lingam was last performed on 03.11.2004. All the three towers of both the deities are in need of repair due to the damage caused by monkeys and the minor repainting work over the years that has deteriorated. The three-tiered Rajagopuram, the Sri Matrubbhuteswara *vimanam*, Sri Bhagavan's *vimanam* and the Tirumadhil *sudhai vighras* are all to be chipped, scrapped and redone with fine plaster. A single colour of cream or white will be applied when the repairs are complete. The Sri Matrubbhuteswara Temple which is considered as a superb work of sculpture was constructed under the direct supervision of Sri Vaidhyanatha Stapathy. It is his family who will undertake this new repair project. The team is headed by Sri Selvanatha Stapathy, who is the grandson of Sri Vaidyanatha Stapathy.

The *kumbhabhishekam* function will commence on 23.08.2013 and conclude on 25.08.2013.

Ashram Puja Well

The ashram puja well from which all water is drawn for the daily pujas of the Sri Matrubbhuteswara and Sri Ramaneswara Maha Lingam was recently polluted due to the death of hundreds of fish in the well. More than likely this was due to the hot summer conditions, low water levels, overfeeding by full moon crowds and accumulated sediment at the bottom. These factors probably caused an increase in algae and bacteria content, thus depleting oxygen levels and poisoning the well's fish population. Fortunately a few fish survived and were safely evacuated to the large well in front of the Ashram office. As a consequence the entire well had to be drained, desilted and scoured with fresh water. It was Bhagavan who indicated that in the apparently solid rock site was a significant spring and a deep well of over forty feet was dug, which ever since, supplied drinking water and later water solely for the pujas. ▲