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Ramana Ashtottaram

91. ओः स्मरणाद्वन्धमोचकाय नमः
   om smaranaabandhamocakaya namaah
Prostration to the One the very thought of whom brings about freedom from bondage.

What has been claimed from ancient times for Arunachala applies even more aptly, to Bhagavan himself. The name and thought of Arunachala brought this youngster moksha. Hence the tradition lives with renewed force in this actual concrete human person. As the column of light which is Siva froze into the holy Hill, Siva and the Hill became embodied in the human form divine of Ramana. Siva, Arunachala and Ramana are three outstanding manifestations (mythological, geographical and historical) of the one sole Reality, pure Awareness, whose nature is eternal bliss.

92. ओः अन्तस्तिमिरचांशवे नमः
   om antastimiracandamsave namaah
Prostration to the one who like the blazing sun dispels inner darkness.

The sun in the sky, the brightest object we know, is only a symbol of inner awareness. Siva-Ramana is that sun of Pure Awareness before which the darkness called a separate ego cannot stand: “We are all one awareness”. Ignorance or inner darkness is the false identification of the Self with bodies and objects.
Fear

Among the most memorable rhetorical statements that electrified a people are the words of F.D. Roosevelt in his first inaugural address as president of the United States in 1933 during what is known as ‘The Depression’. He declared: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified, terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

We all experience fear. It is as natural as breathing and is just as important for without fear we would not survive. Not to know fear means we are either supremely courageous or just plain fools living in a naive world of delusion. In most of us there lives a coward who dies the proverbial thousand deaths each day. The days of outright war may not exist for many, depending on where they live in the world, but civilization is just as uncertain and whether the dangers it presents are actual, or just the fear of what might happen, they still demand our attention and energy. One inattentive moment in a car and we would smash into a barrier or worse. One mistimed step on the stairs and we can stumble and break a leg. There are other subtle beasts that roam our world that are not so obvious but nonetheless deadly
either physically, emotionally or mentally. Betrayal, sly pretence, volatile words of anger and hatred can hurt just as much as physical wounds. Some people carry grievous psychic wounds all their lives and never admit it. There are endless disguises people can wear to win an advantage subtle or gross and the innocence of the lamb is no defence when there are those who are hungry and would eat us alive given the chance.

This may sound morbid and far from inspiring spiritual heights but it is the ground reality of our existence. It is the elemental earth on which we walk that has its own inviolable rules we ignore at our peril. Our lives are constantly beset with challenges and because of them we can grow and mature. To disregard them is to wither and largely become irrelevant not only to others but to ourselves. There is no meaning in a life that cannot stand for some ideal of beauty or truth or love even at the most basic level. When we bend not out of flexible strength but from weakness or laziness, it indicates giving way to the kind of fear that will destroy us like a cancer, slowly but effectively.

Fear wakes us up. It alerts us to danger so we may take appropriate action to deflect or negate the threat. We learn through fear how to navigate danger. It is like learning to drive a car. We are intently conscious of fear at first and the consequences of the wrong sequence of actions but soon we develop the skills and think no more of it. The fear, real or supposed is appraised and dealt with efficiently. Likewise in our emotional and mental traits fear alerts us to threats to our well-being and we learn how to deal with it.

How then not to fear? How to be brave? First we should know our adversary. Fear is like a mountain; it is obdurate and refuses to go away. The qualities of fear are rigidity, contraction and blind reaction. Fear is the refusal to see clearly what is in front of us because we are too weak to countermand it. Fear can also be the paralysis when we see all too clearly. Fear is the failure to recognise in ourselves that which we would find unacceptable because it is negative, imperfect and would open us to ridicule and rejection. Fear is the recognition that we cannot change that which is hurting us. Fear is the feeling of helplessness and inadequacy.
FEAR

We are not machines which can be manipulated so that if one part is removed the rest will function smoothly. It is not possible to remove one corner stone and expect the building to stand firm. We cannot remove fear but we can recognise it. There is nothing so debilitating as the pretence that one does not feel fear. Few are fooled by a façade. It is exhausting and disrupts any sense of harmony. By recognition we are in a sense half way home for the fear of the unknown is the most terrible of fears. By giving it a name and a form we can begin to see light for there is no end to the mind’s imagination to blind us with terror.

Fear and desire are a dyad — one cannot exist without the other. We desire something we do not have and we fear we will not get it. In today’s terms this is called anxiety and it is driven by the power of tension. It is not possible to have desire and not have fear. Who can truly say they have no desires? Who can live each moment without any expectation? It is not possible for us as normal human beings. This means that to be human is to know fear. The conclusion we arrive at from this is that fear is just as necessary as desire if we are to live and thrive. Courage is not the absence of fear but the ability to transcend it. We can in turn not see fear as an enemy but as a friend, an opportunity to develop respect for our opponent, be it a person or a situation. Too often we underestimate their value or significance.

The rarefied heights of Advaita Vedanta seem irrelevant to what is apparently a physical, emotional or mental condition that just requires psychological assistance but this is not so. Fearlessness is required to climb the heights. The Taittiriya Upanisad refers to fearlessness as coupled with Brahman. “For, whenever an aspirant gets fearlessly established in this un-perceivable, bodiless, inexpressible, and un-supporting Brahman, he reaches the state of fearlessness. For, whenever the aspirant creates the slightest difference in It, he is smitten with fear.”

The world we live in is our creation. It is a dream according to Vedanta. The one difference between the waking state and the dream

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1 Taittiriya Up., II-vii-1.
state is the link of the *ahamkara* which links events together with memory and mind so that it appears a person’s life has a consistency of habits and a history to which we can objectively refer. We are a bundle of thoughts held together by a tenuous thread. Our centre seems hollow for it is impossible to grasp a solid sense of identity. The more we try to catch the essence the further we are from it. Why not look at it another way? Why not in the case of fear, embrace it? Bhagavan did just that all those years ago in Madurai.

Bhagavan says: “*Atma Dharma* is inherence in the Self. There will be no distraction and no fear. Troubles arise only when there is a second to oneself. If the *Atman* be realised to be only unitary, there is no second and therefore no cause for fear. The man, as he is now, confounds the *anatma* (non-Self) *dharma* with *atma* (the Self) *dharma* and suffers. Let him know the Self and abide in it; there is an end of fear, and there are no doubts.”²

Bhagavan has declared that Arunachala is jnana itself. There is no sense of duality in its presence and therefore it is fearless. While living on the slopes of Arunachala Bhagavan composed *Sri Arunachala Askshara Manamalai*. With humour he asks Arunachala, why after he fearlessly renounced the world and came to Tiruvannamalai, Arunachala should, without giving any reason, fear to be united with him? The implied answer is that it is the very *fear* of duality which creates the sense of separation. If we are already one with it where then is the fear? The ramifications of this simple, direct insight are shattering.³

One of the wonders of being in the presence of Arunachala and the samadhi of Bhagavan is this absence of fear. We may be beset by difficulties when we enter the ashram but they soon vanish, sometimes never to return depending on the severity of the problem. It is an often heard story how as if by magic the travails of a devotee are dispelled by a visit. I have often puzzled that the world does not fall down on me if I do not diligently attend to the worries and work them out, as if one’s worst fears are real. There are times we take ourselves too

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² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§58.
³ Verse 67.
seriously and think the problem is unique and insurmountable. By some type of mysterious alchemy Bhagavan gives us medicine that dissolves those fears and grants us a sense of proportion.

We need not fear fear but embrace it knowing it will release us from our identification with all that is petty and dishonourable. As our love for Bhagavan grows there comes the fear of disappointing Bhagavan by our lack of discrimination and dispassion. We begin to realise that all our actions, thoughts and feelings are all too exposed. How often has one stood before Bhagavan ashamed of one’s behaviour? The fear that the power of the presence understands all too well wakes us up. Our less than admirable behaviour reminds us of the gratitude we experienced in the face of that unceasing love, understanding and sweet mercy. When there is gratitude in our hearts do we not fear to be less than noble in our conduct?

In this sense we have come full circle. From a position of negativity where we experienced isolation and pain because we are so full of fear, we arrive at an understanding that fear is not necessarily despair without end, but can be transformed into a healthy approach to all that is holy. We have nothing to fear from Bhagavan but we do fear that our weaknesses should keep us apart from that gracious presence. In the face of mercy, fear becomes awe before the majesty of a higher power that knows us all too well and yet does not judge or condemn. Our fear is then the tool that creates discrimination between what is right and wrong, from what is true and what is false. It generates gratitude for all the gifts of kindness we receive. It makes us realise how easy it is to lose sight of the precious love that grows in our heart for the guru. Many of us feel an inchoate, guilty fear that if we actually attain realisation then perhaps we will lose our own identity in the ‘vast formless ocean’. One only has to look at Bhagavan to see the truth, which is the converse of that fear. He was more real than any of his disciples and his love for them was transcendent.

Let us keep this love safe by constant remembrance. Fear is no longer to be feared for there is no place for it when we are absorbed in that oneness. We, in fact, become fearless.
Maha Kumbhabhishekam 24th August 2013
The Mother's Temple Kalasam
Some Essential Marks of Non-dualism

For some time I have looked for the essential marks or characteristics with which non-dualism is inextricably connected. Marks that apply for all true, radical schools of non-dualism like Advaita, Ch’an (or Zen) and Dzogchen, and which highlight how non-dualism differs from other ways. Next to the obvious ‘not-two’-ness (which is in fact a non-characteristic) and its explicit term ‘non-duality’ (advaita or advaya\(^1\), or its Chinese and Tibetan equivalents, bu-erb and gnyis-med respectively), five characteristics came to mind. I continued to look for more, but all subsequent characteristics turned out to be another term for one of the five already found.

\(^1\) Advaya is a term that is being used by Buddhists as well as Advaitins. The term advaita is as far as I know not applied by Buddhists.

Philip Renard was born in Amsterdam. In 1999 he compiled and published the Ramana Upanishad, the collected writings of Bhagavan in Dutch translation. He founded in 2000 the Advaya Foundation (www.advaya.nl), to facilitate non-duality in western translation. He published in Mountain Path a series of four articles, titled “I” is a Door’.
In thinking about a possible sixth characteristic, representative of the point in non-dualism, I came up with unconditional. Truth is not conditioned by anything. Truth is inherently present everywhere, in all circumstances. However, because in the texts the unconditional is mostly used in an implicit way and rarely a point of attention itself in the way the other five marks are, I have not included it in the list.

The five essential marks are:
1. Awareness (chit);
2. No-mind (& emptiness, shunyata; conceptlessness);
3. Immediacy (pratyaksha);
4. Changelessness (kutastha);
5. Naturalness (sahaja).

The first characteristic is paramount; the other four are inextricably connected with it (by mentioning the original Sanskrit terms it can be seen that these characteristics have always been present in the Great Tradition, in other words they are not a modern ‘invention’).

This list is of course for temporary accentuation only. In reality there is no clear demarcation between the characteristics – naming one immediately evokes the other, as will be seen in a number of quotations.

1. Awareness
The first characteristic, which you could call the basic principle of non-dualism, is the total emphasis in all expressions of non-dualism on awareness, consciousness, direct knowing and understanding. It refers to the primary fact of life, the fact that you are. ‘You are’, that is to say you are conscious. Everyone knows that he is, that he exists. Your own conscious presence is the only thing that cannot be denied. As to deny this you first need to be consciously present. Sankara made the following now classic statement regarding this:

“And it is not possible to deny such a Self;
for it is an adventitious thing alone that can be repudiated, but not so one’s own nature.
The Self constitutes the very nature of the man who would deny it.”

Descartes’ famous expression *cogito ergo sum*, ‘I think, so I am’, is in fact a limited version of Sankara’s. I call this limited, as already before a thought can arise there is conscious presence. Every thought form is a limited phenomenon arising in something that is unlimited, something that is best indicated with a word like ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’.

In the New Webster Dictionary consciousness is defined as “the faculty of knowing what effects or what goes on in one’s own mind; immediate knowledge.” In this the emphasis is put on a *faculty*, something that is not yet filled in. However, in daily use the term ‘consciousness’ is mostly applied in combination with something else, to indicate that you are conscious of something. Consciousness *itself*, consciousness as such or awareness as such never appears as an object, resulting in it generally being overlooked.

In non-dualism the invitation is made to cease overlooking this, and to notice consciousness itself, to recognize that you *are* this consciousness, consciousness that precedes any form, any particular colour.

Why is this invitation made? Because all there is, everything that manifests itself *can* only manifest itself thanks to that which we call ‘consciousness’ or ‘awareness’. All form existing in the world exists in consciousness. All degrees of good and evil, all experience of freedom and lack of it exist entirely *in* consciousness. This implies that everything you seek, happiness for example, is to be found in consciousness – and you *are* already consciousness yourself now. The direct way of non-dualism is ‘direct’ simply because it reveals this

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2 *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya of Sri Sankaracarya*. Translated by Swami Gambhirananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965; p.455. This is verse II. 3. 7, almost literally repeating I. 1. 4 at p.36.

3 The English terms *awareness* and *consciousness* are often used in different schools of non-dualism for different levels. The fact that the one school is using the one term as the higher of the two and another school the other way around gives me the freedom to consider the terms rather exchangeable here.
fact to you without having you first make a detour via a longwinded search. In the Tibetan Dzogchen text *Self-Liberation Through Seeing With Naked Awareness*, where the emphasis is on mind being in fact immediate present awareness, it is said:

“To desire something other than this is just like having an elephant (at home), but searching for its tracks elsewhere. (...) Similarly if you do not understand that everything derives from the mind, it will not be possible for you to attain Buddhahood. (...) By not seeing that your own mind is actually the Buddha, Nirvana becomes obscured.”

The understanding or recognition expressed in this quotation is the essential point. You can philosophize as long as you like about the ‘Buddha’ or ‘ever present awareness’ but it is only once you see or recognize this that it becomes a reality. This is seeing or recognizing of awareness – for a brief moment, as long as it is needed for the explanation, it is useful to use two different terms, and then suddenly in actual awareness, it becomes clear that they are one and the same. Being aware of Awareness. Light sees pure Light, or seeing sees seeing. You could say that the teachers of non-dualistic schools have always sought to keep this point completely pivotal: ‘recognize that you are already knowing’. Recognize, or see, that you are living constantly in this knowing or cognizing, and see that all form that you experience, including your perceptions of the outer world, consists of this knowing. Form has a temporary reality ‘granted’ to it the moment Awareness or Knowing as such takes on that specific form. Immediately afterwards another form has ‘reality’, as Awareness has now taken on that form. That which has continuous reality is the cognizing element, Awareness, Knowing itself. The invitation is: recognize this.

You can recognize true non-dualism and distinguish it from other ways by the emphasis or lack of emphasis on Awarenesss or Consciousness as the essential point of the teaching. The fourteenth century Dzogchen teacher Longchen Rabjam (Longchenpa) expressed

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it in his Chöying Dzöd as follows: “From the higher perspective of the
great perfection (Dzogchen), all views and meditations of these other
approaches are considered to be for the spiritually undeveloped, for
whatever is done misses the point, in that the essence of awareness
is not perceived.”

Exemplified in another tradition: Ch’an Buddhism only became
what you could call ‘radical non-dualism’ with Hui-neng’s accent
on seeing (chien) your true nature (hsing), the direct recognition of
yourself, of your mind. By bringing recognition or insight (chih-
hui, Chinese for prajña, insight, understanding) into the centre
of attention, he brought about a shift of emphasis, away from a
climate of meditation only (ch’an is the Chinese translation of
dhyana, meditation). He emphasized the unity of the two, insight
and meditation. Thereby he removed the method. What is essential is
immediate seeing, and this does not happen by the use of a method or
a tool. The same emphasis can be found in Advaita Vedanta. In Advaita
the term jnana is completely pivotal: the term for understanding,
insight, awareness itself. In many Advaita-texts it is emphasised that
jnana itself is all that is needed for liberation, any ‘doing’ can only
lead to a continuation of suffering.

2. No-mind
The second characteristic is that of ‘no-mind’. This term has been
introduced in the West by Daisetz T. Suzuki, in his The Zen Doctrine
of No-mind. ‘No-mind’ means mind ‘empty of concepts’. You could
even use ‘non-conceptuality’ as synonym for non-duality. ‘Concept’
is used here as a term for any form that our thinking can take,

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5 This is in Longchenpa’s own commentary, Lungki Térdzöd. In A Treasure Trove of
Scriptural Transmission. Translated by Richard Barron. Junction City, CA: Padma,
2001; p. 97.

6 I consider it an error to use the word ‘wisdom’ for this prajña or chih-hui.

‘no-mind’ is the translation of the Chinese wu-hsin; this term is exchangeable
with wu-nien, ‘no-thought’. Suzuki’s own term ‘the Unconscious’ for this is rather
awkward and misleading.
for all our knowledge. Ultimately therefore non-dualism comes down to ‘no-knowledge’. No-knowledge or no-mind means that it is impossible to know Truth by thinking and knowledge. Seeing this impossibility can seem like a frustration, but it is not. It is a blessing. A sigh of relief as nothing needs to be understood by the thinking mind, as nothing can be understood. Just as was said in the oldest Upanishad in the attempt to describe the ultimate Self: “neti neti, not this, not this”; no single term is able to cover it. This corresponds with what Madhyamika Buddhists refer to as ‘emptiness’ (shunyata): the unreality of separate things, of the independent existence of something. All belief in the reality of appearances is caused by the continuation of the belief in concepts, by continuing to accept concepts as real. As soon as the blind trust in concepts is recognized and resolved, separateness and bondage is also resolved.

Every concept is a limitation, and Reality is unlimited. Every form that arises is ‘empty’ with respect to the realness of its separate existence. Recognition of this aspect of emptiness and conceptlessness gives clarity on the true nature of all phenomena, including ‘yourself’ as personality. What is important is to see that in fact all phenomena are without a past, they are always beginning right now, and therefore immaculate and new. They are already flawless, so there is no need to go back to some ‘flawless beginning’. You are bound to nothing.

Buddhists do not mean by ‘emptiness’ a blank state, or a vacuum. The term indicates that objects cannot exist independently (as they always arise in mutual relationship and dependency), and in fact are not concrete, no matter how ‘concrete’ empirically spoken an object is.

The Buddhist emphasis on emptiness is also an aid in avoiding certain traps in the language of Advaita Vedanta. There are elements in the Vedantic language that tend to make out of matters like ‘the Absolute’ and ‘the Self’ a substantial entity, some sort of ‘Highest Entity’. Nisargadatta Maharaj understood this very well, and therefore even made conceptlessness the trademark of his teaching. For example, one of

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his many statements on this essential point is: “It is a very complicated riddle. You have to discard whatever you know, whatever you have read, and have a firm conviction about That about nobody knows anything.”

By recognizing all phenomena, including the most subtle, as completely transparent and empty, without any value as entity, and thereby also recognizing that not one single doctrine or story is true, no matter how nobly written, you really experience how simple reality is. All so-called ‘knowledge’ is then seen as an unnecessary addition to something that is infinitely incomprehensible, open and having no origin. No-mind or no-knowledge reveals Truth, in which all phenomena spontaneously arise.

Something implied here that appears to be pure peace. All disputes in the field of religion come down to a struggle due to a belief in the reality of concepts and noble stories. Only the total release of all concepts and stories makes it possible for peace to become reality.

Incidentally, due to this aspect of no-mind or no-knowledge there are those who share the opinion that reading books is an impediment for liberation – after all books are a source of knowledge. Yet, this is a misunderstanding. True awareness of no-knowledge, the actual awareness that book knowledge has nothing to do with direct experience, deems books as something innocent. They offer not a single threat. The only hindrance comes from remaining entangled in concepts, and this includes the concept ‘books are a hindrance’.

Before Nisargadatta’s era the term ‘empty’ was taken by most non-Buddhists to be a knotty affair. It was considered as nihilistic, an inhospitable ‘nothingness’, something that destroys everything leaving nothing to remain. Even in the Buddhist community, the sole reduction of everything to emptiness was at a certain point (probably around the fourth century) experienced as insufficient, as something that did not completely correspond with reality. So the emphasis on ‘consciousness only’ came into being, as it was seen that emptiness could only be experienced as ‘empty’ when there is knowing of this

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fact, consciousness or awareness illuminating this. Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen, influenced by both traditions, combined the two coalesce into one inseparable whole. The inseparability of cognizance and emptiness is the Dzogchen designation for our essential nature. In my view, you could in fact call the two characteristics, Awareness and No-mind the two ‘main characteristics’ in our list of five.10

3. Immediacy
Every form of radical non-dualism can be referred to as ‘the direct way’. By this is meant that pure Awareness is independent of any activity occurring over time, and independent of any means by which you could reach a goal. Your true being is already present, and the invitation is to recognize this im-medi ate-ly, right now. Any postponement of this is a protective measure against recognizing Reality.

The aspect of immediacy first dawned in the West with the introduction of Zen Buddhism in the 1920’s, and particularly during the 50’s when it received a certain degree of popularity. Stories referring to ‘sudden enlightenment’ (tun-wu; Japanese: tongo, satori) induced by Zen masters placing all emphasis on ‘now’, and encouraging students to speak and act from here, made a deep impression. Until that moment all teachings in the West were of a gradual nature, a slow development towards something. Because all personal factors seem stuck to us like a sort of glue, a shock is sometimes required to recognize that this glue is non-existent. In the shock, recognition of our ‘original face’ as it is called in Zen, can occur, being an expression for our true nature that precedes the personality. Together with the characteristic ‘no-mind’, emphasis on the immediate has evoked such expressions in Zen as, “Whether you’re facing inward or facing outward, whatever you meet up with, just kill it! If you meet a Buddha, kill the Buddha.”11 Seeing

10 Also in Ch’ an the emphasis on this combination can be found. Ninth-century teacher Tsung-mi, quoting his own teacher, said: “True awareness (chen-chih) can only be seen (chien) in no-thought (wu-nien).” Peter N. Gregory, Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991; p. 246.
Maha Kumbhabhishekam 23rd August 2013
Puja at Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam

Photograph by Michael Highburger
immediately, so that you no longer remain under the influence of an idea.

Though usually expressed less spectacularly, the same emphasis is to be found in Advaita Vedanta. The experience of real inseparability with the Absolute is referred to as pratyaksha or apraksha. As long as it remains indirect, paroksha (literally: ‘out of sight’), there is still the possibility to ponder, theorize and therefore the possibility of uncertainty, of doubtfulness. When all indirectness has fallen away, what remains is unambiguous, doubtless openness. It is immediate awareness, direct recognition. The difference between recognizing and thinking is to be found in the immediate, the direct.

Padmapada, a student of Sankara from the eighth century, wrote of apraksha: “Immediacy or self-evidence (aparoksha-ta) as such is always one and the same in different acts of awareness and perception. (…) Experience itself, which is of the nature of immediacy, is one and the same with regard to all individuals, and it must ultimately be identical with the self-luminous ‘witness’ or self.”12

The essential meaning of immediacy is also valid in the field of emotions. Whatever emotion comes up, you can experience it directly. Pure feeling, with no holding onto the story of the emotion. Because in this totally direct experience there is no restraint of emotion, the story is no longer experienced as real and the stuck togetherness of the components in the story is recognized as not real. Because the emotion is no longer distinguishable as an emotion apart, the directness of feeling as such cuts through the need to explain or the familiarity with the past, and so the emotion resolves in its own nature.

This is also the emphasis in Dzogchen. Emotions are not transformed, no correction is made. Direct recognition of the true nature of a specific emotion present is something that is compared to a drawing on still water, which unaided immediately fades into the totality of the water. Water does not go ‘into action’ in order to erase the drawing. Another comparison used in Dzogchen is that

of snowflakes falling onto a hot iron plate or stove. The snowflakes immediately disappear as soon as they touch the stove.

One of the most powerful and influential texts in Dzogchen is *Tshigsum Nedek*, the ‘Three Statements that Strike the Essential Point’, by Garab Dorje, who introduced Dzogchen into Tibet, probably during the seventh century. You could say that Dzogchen on the whole is based on the first of these Three Statements. The first Statement says: “One is introduced directly to one’s own nature.” The second and third Statements are really commitments on the first, and you can say the same of all further Dzogchen teachings. *First* the direct recognition of your true nature, and then the rest. In this way any tendency to create a gradual path, a climb to some ‘Almighty-High’ is prevented. The important point is immediate awareness of Reality, so that the training (to integrate this recognition into daily life) is based completely on Reality. For me this is true for all forms of radical non-dualism.

4. Changelessness

Many original schools of Buddhism looked upon the term ‘changeless’ as a pertinent untruth, one of the fundamental mistakes of Hinduism. All that is real, so they concluded, is a succession of very short moments of change. Though the term ‘changeless’ was occasionally used to describe *nirvana*, this always indicated an end-state, which could only ever be reached by following an array of instructions. This changed however, mostly due to the acknowledgement in subsequent Mahayana Buddhism of something referred to as ‘Buddha nature’. Buddha nature is described as inherently present, always and unchanging, the essential nature of every sentient being. Although the manifestation of this may know growth, growth toward full Buddhahood, the Buddha nature itself is not subject to change. The

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‘growth’ in the manifestation is not an enlargement of something, but an evaporation of the clouding or covering of something. Buddha nature is the most direct reference to Dharmakaya, the changeless Absolute, the essence of all form, timelessness without any possibility to differentiate or change. Tulku Urgyen, one of the greatest Dzogchen teachers of the twentieth century, referred to the benefits of recognizing the changeless: “The perceiver, which in essence is empty cognizance (...), is not impermanent. Otherwise, what would be the use of pursuing buddhahood, if it was impermanent and would only be lost again?”15 In countless places the Dzogchen teachings emphasize the permanent character of Buddha nature.

Also in Zen many statements exist referring to the changeless. For example the seventeenth-century Japanese master Bankei: “The place in which there’s no difference in the hearing of those sounds is the Unborn, the Buddha-mind, and it’s perfectly equal and absolutely the same in each one of you. (...) You see, you are always unborn”16

In Advaita Vedanta the Changeless has become something like the corner stone of talking about reality. Training the power of discernment is about seeing the difference between that which is real and unreal, or between that which is constant (nitya) and inconstant (anitya). Something is real only if it is always real. The above Sanskrit term nitya is often translated as ‘eternal’. Is eternal the right word for what is meant here? The word can have a strange effect – something that we cannot experience or see and having something to do with ‘sometime’, is still some kind of an idea. ‘Changeless’ in the sense of ‘constant’ or ‘uninterrupted’, is observable in the current experience. Sankara, the founder of Advaita, described liberation as being already the case, therefore not needing to be acquired. He said it is already eternally the case. Eternal (nitya) not in the sense that something is or becomes eternal through change, like a transformation (parinami-nitya; comparable to the above described nirvana as ‘sometime later

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attainable changelessness’), but in the sense that it undergoes no single change (kutastha-nitya). It is unchangingly permanent in an absolute sense, ever content and self-effulgent by nature. Kutastha is an essential term in Advaita, it points to our essential nature. It means ‘as a rock’, ‘as granite’, truly unassailable.

How is it possible to speak of ‘the changeless’? We are referring here to something that is not an object, something that is impossible to perceive. Everything that can be perceived has a beginning and an end and therefore undergoes change. But that which is objectless is not ‘something’, and therefore has no trace of a beginning, no birth. You are looking from it already, and that is just the same as from where you just looked. It has undergone no change in the meantime. That from where you look is an unassailable source, always fresh, clean, unspoiled and unchanged awareness.

5. Naturalness
The fifth characteristic of universal non-dualism is naturalness (sahaja). Generally what is meant with the term ‘natural’ is that although you can on the direct way indeed speak of a training, this has nothing to do with a training involving willpower, or forcing yourself to go in a particular direction. The just quoted Tulku Urgyen referred to this with: “Since this training is not an act of meditating, why worry about whether our meditation was good or not good? This is a training in not meditating, a training in naturalness, in letting be.”

You may think that this naturalness is a fine description of ‘the sage who spontaneously does everything without doing’, indeed, but what about the training: could such a thing really be natural? Is this natural not just another end result?

I see this as an essential point in radical non-dualism. Admittedly, it is only on the total realisation of your true nature that you can speak of ‘being established once and for all in the natural state’, but training in the true sense is a training of the intuitive recognition of this natural state, and *abiding* in that. It is giving expression, in a spontaneous way, to the ever-present Buddha nature. This training only happens once seeking has come to an end. Everything happens as it happens, naturally, spontaneously.

In fact naturalness is the same as effortlessness: that word could also be used to describe the fifth characteristic. There is nothing to acquire in non-dualism, your essential nature is all that there is, it has never been absent, and is always free. Intuitive understanding of this brings about a deep relaxation. There is nothing to improve, nothing to change, you simply have *to allow* the manifestation to happen, so that That which is constantly the case can become clearer and clearer.

Everything in non-dualism revolves around the natural state. This is the state where nothing is experienced as ‘special’ any more, no peak experience, far off or high states. It is the stateless state. Everything is full of what the Tibetans call ‘the same taste’ (*ro-snyoms*). Whatever the object of experience is, the experience itself always has the same taste. That is the taste of naturalness.

The point of naturalness highlights clearly the difference between radical non-dualism and other ways. A devotee of Ramana Maharshi once told the story of a meeting with a student of an advanced yogi. They sat waiting together until the yogi was ready to give a talk; this was to depend on how long the yogi would remain in *samadhi*, that is to say in the state of total absorption in objectlessness. At one point the student of the yogi asked: “At what times is your Bhagavan in *samadhi*?” At this the Ramana devotee could not suppress a burst of laughter. “There is no schedule for jnani’s [people who have realized their natural state]. They do not go into *samadhi* or come out of it at specific times. Bhagavan is always in the *sahaja-state*, the natural state.”

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This article has been written in an attempt to create a framework for talking about non-dualism and liberation, to sharpen the view of it, and to provide a certain basis for communication about the current forms of it. In short you could summarize this article with the following five-fold definition of non-dualism:

‘Natural, Immediate Awareness of Uninterrupted No-mind.’

The point of going into detail of the characteristics in this article is to demonstrate that the diverse true ways have had a correcting effect on each other – something that is worth paying attention to. On further investigation it becomes increasingly clear what exactly the differences are with ways based on the limitations of the mind and belief in the ultimate reality of time, place and gradualness. This clarity can also arise if you should want to assess some teacher or teaching, by asking the question if these five essential marks are applicable.

In emphasizing the three mainstreams of *advaya* or non-dualism (Advaita, Ch’an and Dzogchen) it is important to highlight in which sense each stream has contributed something essential.

[Translated from Dutch by Jenny Wase]

**The Master**

Patrick Roberts

Sri Ramana is a desert rose,
A silent spring,
A shady tree,
A lighthouse of the stormy sea,
A fountain of love,
The hub of the wheel.

Trust the Master’s grace
To melt your icy fear,
Then dare let go into emptiness
And be your Self as you are.
Maha Kumbhabhishekam 25th August 2013
Yagna performed by Vedapasala Students
9th January 1978

Sadhu Om [in reply to a question about celibacy]: Why seek happiness in anything but self?

In verse 14 of Ulladu Narpadu Bhagavan says:

If the first person ['I', the ego or subject] exists, second and third persons ['you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'this', 'that' and so on] will exist. [Because of] oneself scrutinising the truth of the first person, if the first person ceases, second and third persons will come to an end, and the state [or ‘selfness’] that [then] shines as one [not divided as these three persons] is indeed the [true] state of self.
Verses 14, 15 and 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu* should be understood as a whole, because they discuss the reality of time and place. In Tamil the first person, second person and third person are called the ‘three places’ rather than ‘three persons’, so verse 14 considers these three divisions of ‘place’, whereas verse 15 considers the three divisions of time: present, past and future. Verse 16 concludes by re-emphasising the unreality of both time and place.

Throughout our waking and dream life, we generally ignore the first person and the present moment, and instead attend mostly to second and third persons and to past and future. All thoughts pertain to second and third persons and to past and future, but if we try to make a thought of the first person or of the present moment, the mind will subside, since ‘I’ and ‘now’ are not other than self. Hence, investigating ‘what (when or where) is the present moment?’ is the same as investigating ‘who (or what) am I?’.

We are like a person in a triangular prison. Because we attend to only two of the three walls (second and third persons, or past and future), we think that we are imprisoned, but if we try to turn our attention towards the third wall (the first person or present moment), we will discover that there is no such wall, and that our bondage is therefore ever non-existent.

When we first discover that the third wall does not exist, we will desire to run in that direction in order to escape from the prison. This is similar to the experience of *sphurana*, the fresh clarity of self-awareness that arises when we investigate the first person or present moment. But guru then makes us see that since the third wall is actually non-existent, our imprisonment (bondage) is also non-existent, and thus our desire to run away will subside, and we will be perfectly contented to remain where we are. This is similar to the subsidence of *sphurana*, the state in which perfect clarity of self-awareness is found to be our real nature rather than something new. This is our natural state (*sahaja sthiti*), in which we are perfectly content to be just as we are.

The perpetual wandering of our attention from one, second or third person to another, and to and fro between past and future, is
like the swinging of a pendulum, whose central vertical axis is ‘I am’ or ‘now’. Just as a swinging pendulum is never out of contact with its vertical axis, yet never rests there, our attention is never out of contact with its centre, ‘I am’ or ‘now’, yet never rests there. The state in which our attention rests in ‘I am’ and in ‘now’ is known as *atmanishta* or *samadhi* (which means *sama-dhi*: even, balanced, equipoised or equanimous mind), and is similar to a steadily resting pendulum.

Because our attention never rests, time never rests, and so the present moment is never truly experienced. Time is an incessant flow from past to future. If we try to know the truth of the present moment by attending to second and third persons, we would be like a man trying to step on the head of his own shadow [because second and third persons are experienced in the illusory flow of time and not in the precise present moment]. If we try to measure something without knowing the value of a single unit of our measurement (whether that be dollars, kilos or whatever), we would not know the value of what we had measured. It is equally futile to try to know the truth of the past or future without knowing the true nature of the present, as Bhagavan says in verse 15 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Past and future stand depending on the present. While occurring, they are both only the present. [Therefore] the present is the only one [time that actually exists]. [Hence] without knowing the truth of the present, trying to know the past or future is like trying to count without [knowing the value of the unit] one.

The truth of the present is that it is non-existent. If we know that, then we can judge the true value of all other knowledge.

The present place and time, the ‘here’ and ‘now’, is ‘I am’. No second or third person can truly exist in the here and now, because they are all objects known by the first person, which alone is ‘here’, and hence they occupy places other than ‘here’. Second and third persons are subject to change, and hence to time, so they exist only in the constant flow of time from past to future, never stopping in the present. Therefore they can never be experienced in the precise
present moment, the ‘now’. Hence, ‘being in the here and now’ can only mean being in self, which is our natural state of self-attention. The ‘here and now’ is not an object; it is the subject, ‘I’, and hence it can only be known by non-objective attention.

10th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Nistha means ‘standing in’. A pendulum can stand only in its own centre; it cannot stand either to the right or to the left. Likewise the mind cannot stand by attending to second or third persons [because attention to anything other than itself draws it away from its centre]; it can stand only in its own centre, by attending only to itself. When it stands in its centre, it is no longer the mind, but is only self itself.

Presence implies knowledge. If we say that self is present, that implies that we know self. Bhagavan frequently reminded us that self is here and now, ever known or ‘realised’. Self-knowledge is the base of all other knowledge, as he says in verse 13 of Ulladu Narpadu:

Self, which is knowledge (jnana), alone is real. Manifold knowledge [knowledge of multiplicity] is ignorance (ajnana). Even [such] 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 gold [their substance], which is real?

Other things can be known only if self is known. Knowing any object is knowing self. That does not mean that the object is experienced as ‘I’, but only that the object can be known only if ‘I’ is known, because in order to experience ‘I know this object’, ‘I’ must experience itself.

When people ask me if I know self, I always reply: ‘I know nothing that you do not know. I don’t know any wonderful and glorious self. I just know that I am.’

In Nan Yar? (Who am I?) Bhagavan says that unless perception of the world-appearance ceases, self cannot be known as it really is. However, even if the world is perceived, it shows that self is known, because it is
perceived only because ‘I am’. This is why Bhagavan says in verse six of Arunachala Astakam: ‘[...] O Hill of Grace, let them appear or not appear [what does it matter?] Apart from you, they do not exist!’

It is the nature of the mind to wander and know many things, but why does that worry you? Because you identify this mind as ‘I’, you feel your attention is wandering. But are you this mind? You are that which knows the mind.

Bhagavan often used the term udasina bhava, which means an attitude of indifference, and it is necessary for us to have such an attitude towards the mind. What is required is a change of identification: instead of taking the mind to be ‘I’, take that which knows the mind to be ‘I’. I jokingly call this change of identity a ‘forgery’, though the actual forgery is our present false identification with the mind.

The mind’s attention is always knowing something, but what you must understand is that the mind has no power of attention of its own. The mind’s power of attention exists only because we attend to the mind. If instead you attend to that which knows the mind, how can the wandering of the mind affect you?

JK [J Krishnamurti] says, ‘Observe; observe and let the mind take its own course’, as if it wouldn’t do so anyway, even without our permission. In a way what he says is right, though I don’t know whether he means it in the right way or not. What he should mean is: remain just as the observer. If you do so the observing will immediately cease, because if you attend to the observer, the observing will not be attended to – it will not be known – and hence it will not exist. I have not heard him myself, and all those who tell me what he says seem to have a very poor understanding of what he means.

Most religions say that God created the world and that you are a small something in the world, but this only adds to our confusion. Bhagavan says, ‘You are, and the world appears only because you are’. This should not be taken to mean that the world really appears; it only seems to appear. That is, its appearance is not like the appearance of something that actually exists, such as the water that appears when we open a tap, but is on the contrary like the
appearance of something that just seems to exist, such as the water that appears in a mirage.

Therefore cease identifying yourself with either the world or the knower of the world. Just try to remain as ‘I am’, without identifying ‘I am’ as anything else, such as the body or mind. You know other things only because ‘I am’ is identified as something else. This is how the false ‘I’ or mind arises. If ‘I am’ is not identified with anything at all, all thoughts and perceptions will cease.

There is truly no difficulty in turning your attention towards that third wall, but so long as you identify your mind as ‘I’ it will appear that you are not succeeding.

11th January 1978

Sadhu Om: In Tamil Bhagavan often used nam, the inclusive first person plural pronoun, ‘we’, to denote self, as in verse 16 of Ulladu Narpadu:

Except we, on scrutiny where is time and where is place? If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place. [But] are we a body? Since we are one, now, then and always, one, here, there and everywhere in space, there is [only] we, the timeless and placeless we.

The first sentence of this verse should not be interpreted to mean ‘where are time and place apart from us?’ because this could imply that time and place are real. What Bhagavan means by asking this rhetorical question is that on scrutiny nothing exists except us: we alone are, and there is neither time nor place. This implied meaning is reiterated in the final sentence, which can mean either ‘there is [only] we, we who are devoid of time and place’ or ‘there is [only] we, we; time and place do not exist’.

When Bhagavan first wrote this verse he referred only to time, but then he modified it to refer to place also. In the original version,

1 In Tamil there are two distinct first person plural pronouns: nam, which includes whoever is addressed, and nangal, which excludes whoever is addressed. When referring to self, Bhagavan always used the inclusive nam rather than the exclusive nangal.
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

which is now verse 13 of *Upadesa Tanippakkal* (Individual Verses of Instruction), he wrote:

> Except we, where is time? Without scrutinising ourself, if we think we are a body, time will swallow us. [But] are we a body? We are always one, now, in time past and [in time] to come. Therefore, there is [only] we, we who have swallowed time.

Time and place (or space) are the first manifestation of mind or *maya*, and without this conception of time and place the mind could not arise. Therefore to escape from this prison of time and place, we should attend to the first person or the present moment. Attention is the power which allows for the manifestation of everything. By turning it selfward, the same power of attention can be used to merge everything back into its source. We, that power of attention, alone are. Why identify yourself as a person? We are, but why add the adjunct ‘a person’? Simply find out what this ‘I am’ is.

There are two processes in spiritual practice (*sadhana*), one is ascending and the other descending. The ascending process is negating everything as ‘not I’ by refining our mere awareness ‘I am’, disentangling it from all its superfluous adjuncts, and this leads to the rising of *sphurana*, a fresh and intense clarity of self-awareness. The descending process is embracing everything as ‘I’, by recognising that ‘I’ alone exists and all else seems to exist only because I am. This descending process leads to the subsidence of *sphurana*, which is our natural state (*sahaja sthiti*).

12th January 1978

**Sadhu Om**: In *Upadesa Undiyar*, the second and third of the three lines of each verse ends with the word *undipara*, which is a compound of two verbs, *undi*, which means ‘rise’, and *para*, which means ‘fly’, so it can mean ‘rise and fly’, but also means ‘play undi’, an ancient game played by children, which probably involved jumping and singing. *Undiyar* is thus an ancient style of song composed in a particular metre, and such songs were originally composed to accompany that game. In this playful style of song Bhagavan expressed the highest
truth, because such truth can be grasped only by a child-like mind.\textsuperscript{2} The mind of a child is like a clean slate, whereas the mind of an older person is like a well-scribbled slate, burdened with many deep-rooted beliefs and preconceived ideas.

\textit{(To be continued)}

\textsuperscript{2} In \textit{Crumbs from His Table}, Chapter 13, ‘Some Surprising Incidents’, Ramanananda Swarnagiri recalls: “Sri Bhagavan was correcting and aiding some youngsters of not more than ten years of age in memorising His Sanskrit work \textit{Upadesa Saram} and the writer was laughing, so to say, up his sleeve, at the futility of coaching these youngsters who could not understand the A, B, C of this highly metaphysical poetry. Without the utterance of a single word, Sri Bhagavan turned to him and remarked that though these children might not understand the meaning of these poems then, yet they would be of immense help to them, and would be recalled with great relief and pleasure, when they came of age and were in difficulties.”

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The Ashram has produced two different desktop calendars (Bhagavan and Arunachala) plus a wall calendar with six sheets of Sri Bhagavan’s photos which are now available for 2014.

The Desk Calendars is ₹ 100.
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Packing and Postage are extra.

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The Tradition of Vinayaka Chaturthi

M.R. Kodhandram

Vinayaka, who manifests in the form of an elephant in the Hindu pantheon is the Lord of Knowledge (jnanam). If we pray to him, he would bestow upon us the Knowledge that would liberate us from samsara, the cycle of birth and death. The tradition of Vinayaka worship is part of our ancient culture and has been given to us by our rishis so that we may understand the truth about our life. In the word ‘Vinayaka’ is Vi + Nayaka. The word ‘Nayaka’ means leader and the prefix ‘Vi’ indicates supreme. Thus Vinayaka is the supreme leader or God. It is because he is the supreme, that we pray to him first before starting anything auspicious. Even while writing a major work of poetry, there is first the invocation to Lord Vinayaka, as we can see from Bhagavan’s Aksharamanamalai, so that he would clear all the obstacles on the path. Even before writing anything on a paper there is the tradition of affixing the ‘Pillayar Suzhi’ on the top of the

M.R. Kodhandram is a post graduate from IIT Madras. He has lived in Triuvannamalai for the past ten years and has published two commentaries on Andal’s Tiruppavai and Bhagavan’s Upadesa Saram.
page. Thus we are taught to think of the Lord in all our activities. The form of Vinayaka appears like the Om symbol signifying his primordial nature.

In the Puranas, Vinayaka’s father Lord Siva had a fruit of jnanam. There was a contest between Vinayaka and his younger brother Muruga as to who would get this great fruit. The test was to go around the universe and whoever returned first would get the coveted fruit. Vinayaka cleverly went around his parents Siva and Parvati and got the fruit. He ate the fruit and became a jnani. Thus he became the God for jnanam. Similarly, in the Hindu pantheon, various gods represent various qualities — Sarasvati for learning, Lakshmi for wealth, Kali for valour, Hanuman for strength and so on. By worshipping them we hope to obtain such qualities.

On the day of Vinayaka Chaturthi, we worship a clay image of the Lord. God is formless in nature but we cannot imagine anything that is formless. It is not possible for us to imagine even how air looks like because it is formless. That is why for the purpose of worship we create a form that symbolizes him. We worship him for nine days and then immerse the idol in a tank or well so as to restore him to his original formless nature. What does this convey to us?

We were also originally one with God and formless and we have now taken on a form and the big stomach of the idol shows how we have been only pampering the body and living at the level of the body only and all our pujas have been essentially in the form of ‘stomach puja’! In fact, the prasadam for this puja is ‘Kozhukkattai’ which too has significance. The outer layers represent the pancha kosas or the five sheaths that cover the soul and the inner sweet is called the Pooranam. This is symbolic of how all beings are made up of.

Pooranam means Totality or Self. The Self or soul covered by the five sheaths is the puranam and it is all sweetness. Thus even in the offering of prasadam we are taught a great truth. Thus our rishis are

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1 Chaturthi means ‘fourth day’. The festival is called Vinayaka Chaturthi as it falls on the fourth day after the new moon day in the Tamil month of Avnai. This year it is on the 9th September.
Photograph

Temple Elephant

James Johnson
constantly reminding us of our true nature and the goal of life so that we may acquire the right knowledge in order to be liberated from this bondage of repeated births. Thus for nine days we concentrate on the various aspects of the Lord and this helps us in our spiritual development. Finally, we are shown how to attain the formless state — by having a holy dip in the waters of the Self (as the Tamil saint Andal has shown in *Tiruppavai*). By merging and dissolving in the waters of the Self — or *atma-ganga*, as Bhagavan said, — within us, the mind that is with form becomes formless and attains oneness with the Self. This is the state of *jnanam* which is to regain our true nature by merging in the Self in our own Heart. This is the significance of the clay idol being immersed in a pond or tank at the end of the worship.

Thus we see that our great rishis were wise and compassionate in giving us such a ritual by which, as we keep doing our puja, we would be able to slowly understand and attain the goal of life. Why should they use an elephant head to represent Lord Vinayaka? The significance of this has been given to us by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

The trunk of the elephant descends from the head and curls to the right side of the chest. It indicates that the mind that is residing in the head has to be brought to the spiritual Heart which is situated on the right side of the chest. This is not the physical heart which is on the left side. Thus even the path to attaining *jnanam* has been clearly delineated by the rishis. The working centre of the mind has to descend from the head to the Heart. This is the spiritual journey or *sadhana* one has to undertake in order to regain one’s formless nature and attain Liberation.

Thus as we keep doing the *puja*, year after year, we would start contemplating on the various principles indicated in this worship and this will lead us to an enquiry into our true nature. Thus over a period of time, our attention would be drawn from *puja* to enquiry which is the essence of *jnana margam* and we would embark on an inner journey that will lead us to our supreme destination.

Thus every year we worship Lord Vinayaka to remind ourselves that *jnanam* is the path to *moksham* and we pray to the Lord to grant
us the Supreme Knowledge. When our prayers are strong and the mind pure, the Lord will come to us in the form of a Guru and instruct us on the path to be taken by which we would reach Him. The Guru is the guide to take us to Him. Thus all our rituals and festivals have a great significance which is to help us to go back to the Lord who is our Source. Our pujas are not meaningless rituals as some tend to think these days. Many people in family life think that puja and rituals need not be done because they have gone above them. They should realise that even if they have spiritually evolved, they need to do them in order to set the right example for their children to practise. Then only such great traditions can be maintained. Even jnanis like Kanchi Paramacharya and Swami Chandrasekhara Bharati of Sringeri, had regularly performed such pujas for the sake of others.

Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita, Stanza 3:21, “Whatever a great man does, only that other people follow; whatever example he sets, that the world follows.” Thus we should not stop our pujas and other traditions just because we feel we no longer require them. We may have to do them for the sake of others. Moreover, if we don’t do them out of lethargy or complacency, our elders in the family may feel bad about it and treat it as indifference. This shows that we have a karma to do such things. And till there are no expectations in the family and there is no feeling of guilt, we should fulfil all our karmas without escaping. Then one day the karamas would all end and nobody would mind even if we don’t perform our pujas. Thus we should be clear as to why we have to do all these pujas and rituals. All such acts done in the right manner would surely elevate us.

We are indeed fortunate to be born in this punya bhoomi called ‘Bharata’ wherein spirituality is in our culture and our blood itself! In fact, in the name Bharata (also known as ‘Bharat’ in Hindi), ‘Bha’ means light which refers to the inner light or the light of knowledge which is spiritual knowledge and ‘rata’ means devoted to or intent upon. Thus the word ‘Bharata’ means those devoted to or keen on acquiring the inner light which is the Self.

Thus Bharata is the nation of those who are keen to attain the Self for which they are seeking spiritual knowledge. This means that
the people of \textit{Bharata} were primarily spiritual seekers and this is our heritage. This was how the people of our country lived in ancient times. That is why our country has produced numerous rishis and saints from time immemorial because seeking the Self has been part of our culture and heritage and is in the nature of all those who are born in this sacred land called \textit{Bharata}. Having been born in this glorious land, we should not miss the opportunity of acquiring spiritual knowledge and seeking the Self which is the supreme goal of life. Let us therefore follow the path of our ancient ones and achieve the grand purpose of life in this birth itself!

\section*{The Names of Lalitha}

Ramesh Menon

You are the first-born, \textit{Mukhyaa}; before time or Gods there was carmine you; before these impassioned suns, your great eyes lit the abyss.

Damask as the bud of the blithe pomegranate, memorious fruit; \textit{Dadinikusumaprabhaa}, your skin of the dye of blood.

Arms like lotus stalks, \textit{Mrinalamridudorlataa}, liana of ages; eight arms you wind around him, fuse him to you for ever.

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.
Free Will and Predestination

John Grimes

Walking and dreaming state experiences are said to have their roots in habits, latent tendencies, memories (vasanas, samskaras, karma). Bhagavan Ramana said,

“There are only two ways to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to enquire for whom is this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by destiny, not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realising one’s helplessness and saying all the time, ‘Not I but Thou, O Lord’, giving up all sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you.”

Regarding surrender, Sri Ramana said,

“Complete surrender does require that you have no desire of your

1 Devaraja Mudaliar, Day by Day with Bhagavan, 28-6-46, 2006, p.266.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
own. You must be satisfied with whatever God gives you and that means having no desires of your own.”

He often said that looking at events as predetermined is a very helpful type of spiritual discipline (\textit{sadhana}). Looking at the empirical world from this perspective is surrender.

Bhagavan’s views on free will \textit{vis-a-vis} predetermination are so astounding. According to him, at the level of an ordinary person (\textit{ajnani}), individuals, from birth to death, will experience a series of preordained activities and experiences, all of which are the consequences of previous acts and thoughts. The only freedom which exists, if one does, is to realize that, in actuality, no one is acting and no one is experiencing. If the Self is realized then the words ‘freedom’ and ‘predestination’ lose all value, for, the Self neither acts nor experiences, is neither free nor bound. For the Self, ‘nothing has ever happened’, and thus all words and concepts lose their meaning.

Are human beings victims of an inescapable fate, or do they really have the power to create their own destiny? That is the age-old question that has equally puzzled philosophers and the man on the street. According to Sri Ramana, the question of free will or predetermination does not at all arise from the point of view of non-duality. Individuality itself is illusory. However, as long as one imagines that one has a separate individuality, one also imagines that one has or does not have free will.

To set the stage, look at a quote from Arthur Osborne:

“Sri Bhagavan was uncompromising in his teaching that whatever is to happen will happen, while at the same time he taught that whatever happens is due to \textit{prarabdha karma}, a man’s balance-sheet of destiny acting according to so rigorous a law of cause and effect that even the word ‘justice’ seems too sentimental to express it. He refused ever to be entangled in a discussion on free will and predestination, for such theories, although contradictory on the mental plane, may both reflect aspects of truth. He would say, ‘Find out who it is who is predestined or has free will.’”

\footnote{Ibid., 1-3-46 Morning. 2006. p.162.}

\footnote{Arthur Osborne, \textit{Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-knowledge}, 1970. p.30.}
Alright, but what about at the level of individuality? What happens there, where ordinary individuals live and experience? What are we to make of Ramana’s words in the light of a person’s everyday experience of cause and effect in the world?

Devaraja Mudaliar asked Bhagavan:

“Are only important events in a man’s life, such as his main occupation or profession, predetermined, or are trifling acts also, such as taking a cup of water or moving from one part of the room to another?’ Ramana replied: ‘Everything is predetermined.’ Mudaliar said, ‘Then what responsibility, what free will has man?’ Ramana replied, ‘Why does the body come into existence? It is designed for various things that are marked out for it in this life . . . As for freedom, a man is always free not to identify himself with the body and not to be affected by the pleasures and pains consequent on its activities.’”

On another occasion Sri Ramana was asked:

“I can understand that the outstanding events in a man’s life such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by his karma, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been predetermined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, I should move the fan like this and put it down here?’ Ramana replied, ‘Certainly. Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence.’”

Finally, there is Ramana’s reply to his mother when she came to visit him in Tiruvannamalai for the first time. She had come in the hope of taking him back to Madurai. Sri Ramana remarked:

“The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their prarabdha-karma (destiny to be worked out in this life, resulting from the balance-sheet of actions in past lives). Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to

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5 Devaraja Mudaliar, *My Recollections of Bhagavan*, Ch.4.
happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.”

So what is one to make of this? Ramana, in his own words, from the empirical perspective, seems to uphold a doctrine of predetermination that, on the face of it, seems almost shocking, so counter-intuitive, rather disconcerting and astounding in its total thoroughness. “All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there.”

The consequences of this are not lost on any intelligent person. One’s next question will then be, if this is the case, then what responsibility does a person have? Where is the scope for bettering oneself, let alone for liberation? To this Ramana replied: “What for then does the body come into existence? It is designed for the various things that are marked out for it in this life.”

Then again, on a different occasion, to a questioner with perhaps different needs, Sri Ramana replied:

“Free will exists together with the individuality. As long as the individuality lasts, so long is there free will. All the scriptures are based on this fact and advise directing the free will in the right channel. Find out who it is who has free will or predestination and abide in that state. Then both are transcended. That is the only purpose in discussing these questions. To whom do such questions present themselves? Discover that and be at peace.”

There appears to be no contradiction here. According to Bhagavan individuality has only an illusory existence. However, as long as a person imagines that he has a separate individuality, so long does he also imagine he has free will. These two, individuality and free will, exist together inexorably and inevitably.

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Stated differently, the problem of free will, according to theologians, places God, the Creator, on the horns of a dilemma. If God gave human beings free will, then God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. If humans have free will, then God does not know what will happen because what happens will depend on the free will of what people decide. God will not have control of everything, because humans will have the power to change things. On the other hand, if God is omniscient and omnipotent and controls everything, while humans have no free will or possibility to do things other than as they happen, then such a God is unbelievably cruel and capricious. People are advised by sages and scriptures to be good; yet, if they have no ability to change their fate, then that is just cruel.

For example, in a movie that has been filmed, each actor plays his or her part and that part is written out beforehand and cannot be changed after the film is made. Each actor plays a role and yet remains unaffected by his actions, because he knows it is a role that he plays. When an actor is born or dies on the screen, the person playing the role is neither born nor dies. When fire burns or water wets, the screen remains unaffected.

Or again for example: If one acts a part in a play, the whole part is written out beforehand, and one acts faithfully, whether one is Caesar who is stabbed or Brutus who stabs. The actor is unaffected by events on the stage because he is playing a role and not ‘real’. In the same way, that person who realizes his identity with the deathless Self acts his part on the human stage without fear or anxiety, hope or regret, not being touched by the part played. If one were to ask what reality one has when all one’s actions are determined, it would lead only to the question: Who, then, am I? If the ego that thinks it and makes decisions is not real, and yet I know that I exist, what is the reality of me? This is but a preparatory, mental version of the quest that Ramana prescribed, but it is an excellent preparation for the real quest. Others are not responsible for what happens to us. They are only instruments of what would happen to us some way or other.
Maha Kumbhabhishekam 25th August 2013
Final preparations for the Abhisekam of the Mother's Temple Kalasams
Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s Commentary

Verse Forty

S. Ram Mohan

Introduction

A number of notions which exist regarding the state of jivan mukti (liberation) have become the centre of recurrent disputes among philosophers. When it is mentioned that there are several jivan muktas (liberated ones), the devotee starts doubting whether the jivan mukta is totally merged in Brahman or not. He avers that there must be some vehicle, body or form for each one of the liberated ones and that each has individuality of his or her own. The Saktas say that the subtle body existing before the dawn of the liberating experience does not cease, but undergoes a change into something divine. They state further that a multitude of divine powers also are gathered in it and that with this divinised subtle soul it enjoys the bliss of Brahman though separate from It. They state that the soul of such a subtle soul is immortal like Brahman. Some others posit that the jivan mukta has

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine Ramanodhayam, dedicated to Bhagavan.
no form or body but if and when he wants a form for any purpose, he can assume one. On the other hand, the advaitin asserts that the jivan mukta has no form. In this verse, Bhagavan clarifies that when the ego which enquires into form or formlessness or both, it loses its form. That is liberation.

Verse 40:
If it is said that mukti is of three types namely (i) with form (ii) without form and (iii) with and without form, then I declare that these three notions exist only as long as the ego exists. The truth of mukti is the extinction of the ego, which is the one that seeks to find the truth of these (namely form, formlessness and form with formlessness).

Commentary
Those who believe that the truth about mukti (liberation) can be analyzed and discussed with the aid of logic and other allied means are ignorant. Thirugnanasambandar says, “Do not try to test the existence of the Self through dialectics and sharp intellect. It shines effulgent as the Immanent Self within.” Those who have not realized the truth of Self by experience indulge in such futile discussions. They are subject to the sway of ego. It is the ego that gets projected as the mind. It is only the ego-mind that launches the attempt to grasp the reality through theoretical and indirect knowledge, be that the Vedic texts or logical arguments or a combination of both. The truth of mukti, which is the Self Itself, which is ever present, is not the subject matter of inferential knowledge. It can be grasped only through experience.

Things that are known through the senses are evanescent. The Self is the ever-present Reality. No one tries to decide whether he himself exists or not; or find out by arguments leading to inferential knowledge. One’s own existence is a fact of experience, which is uninterrupted. Can inferential knowledge of It be true knowledge? The declaration of Descartes Cogito, ergo sum — ‘I think, therefore

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1 Thevaram 3376.
I am’ is also erroneous because I-ness is not dependent on thinking. The effort to know the nature of mukti by intellectual analysis is erroneous. The ego-mind can never know the state of mukti, because the state of mukti, stated in this verse is that of the utter extinction of the ego and the mind. In mukti, the ego does not survive. So, neither the mind nor the intellect can have direct experience of that state. We know by our dissatisfaction with the results that knowing It by inference is not the right knowledge of It. Hence it follows that all these disputes are meaningless.

Because the extinction of the ego is mukti, therefore it is clear that that state is beyond the reach of mind or speech. In the Upanishads, the state of mukti is delineated by the words neti, neti – ‘not this, not this’. It means that whatever anyone predicates about mukti will prove to be false. The Upanishads avoid these pitfalls by not trying to describe in words what It is.

The solution given by Bhagavan serves as a clue to finding out which of the three views pointed as mukti is right.

The first of these statements ‘In mukti there is form’ is utterly erroneous because to posit this view is to go against the very nature of Self, as shown in Verse four of Ulladu Narpadu that all forms are non-existent and appear only in ignorance; and where it is said the Self is the Infinite Eye. It is again confirmed in verse thirty-seven.

The second view that mukti is without form is also incorrect, since to indicate that it is formless presupposes the existence of the ego as indicator, which again goes against the very implication of the concept of jivan-mukti.

The third view states that the jivan mukta, being formless, can take a form at will. This argument has an inbuilt paradox. Being formless, one cannot desire a form for desire is a function of the mind and in the state of jivan mukti, the mind is admitted to be absent.

Attributing forms to mukti arises due to the unripeness of the sadhaka. Depending on the sadhaka’s level of spiritual evolution, different kinds of mukti are posited. Such a differentiation arises only from a relative or empirical view point. As the unripe soul views the world as pluralistic, he or she erroneously assumes that the Absolute
also is pluralistic. Actually, says Bhagavan, there are no kinds or levels in mukti. He affirms that the real and only mukti is the disintegration of the ego. Through the mind-and-intellect-analysis, the ego arises and speculates on these three types of mukti through *chitta-vrittis* or ripples on the mind.

From the stand point of Truth there is no distinction in the state of jivan-muktis. There is only One – the Self, no other. The statements “I have met this Mahatma; that jivan-mukta has blessed me; or I have met many jivan-muktas” are made out of ignorance. Bhagavan says that “If you can see the Mahatma who is within you by the unique experience of the egoless state, then you will see that there is only one Mahatma inside all.”

Thus it is seen that differences do not survive in the state of the awareness of the Absolute. How can these differences that have grown out of the ego-mind – the duads, triads, space and time, the differences of persons as ‘I’, you and he, the distinction between the soul and God amid all the rest – survive in the state of mukti, which is egoless?

Those that believe in the survival of personality even in mukti also contend that the world is real. Where is the scope for such beliefs when Bhagavan reveals to us that the trinity of the soul, God and World is never real? The main concern of these unripe souls is that the personality must not be lost, rather that it must be retained. But since Bhagavan teaches us that the individual soul is non-existent, that it is a figment of the imagination, how can immortality for that non-existent person (*jiva*) be established.

These disputants contend that the jivan mukta must have a personality because there is a body belonging to him, moving among men in the world, giving instructions and guidance to the disciples.

The fact is that the jivan mukta is a profound mystery. The jivan mukta cannot be understood by a mind anchored in the world. There is no distinction between the jivan mukta and Brahman, the Absolute. The appearance of difference is due to *upadhis* (limiting adjuncts), Vedanta states that these upadhis are unreal. In *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan repeatedly affirms that for the *jnani* (realised being), the whole superimposition that has been made by the ego-
mind on the substratum, the Self, ceases to appear and the pure substratum alone ‘is’.

Some dissidents point out that scope is given in some of the Upanisads for these contentions about ‘forms and formlessness with forms’. They also point out to the replies of Bhagavan, in the 14th Chapter of Ramana Gita,

For a jivan mukta, in times, by the culturing of tapas in some cases, the absence of touch also may get established even when there is form.
Again, by culturing the absence of form also is accomplished. That siddha becomes mere consciousness and sports. It is said that he has access as he likes in all the worlds. He can assume many bodies as he will and grant favours.\(^2\)

Freedom of opinion may be conceded to these dissidents is as consistent in Bhagavan’s teachings. Especially Ulladu Narpadu which contains the quintessence of his teaching is a monolith of consistency and the verse under reference, which is utterly beautiful in its poetry embodies a teaching which should clear all doubts, for it takes one to the doubter himself and proves his non-existence. This verse is a fitting finale to an extraordinarily concise, deep, clear, lucid and powerful work which would continue to serve as a beacon to all spiritual seekers.

It is true that Bhagavan said that he taught not only Advaita but all other things also. He would give a reply in tune with the state of evolution of the sadhaka (spiritual aspirant). This was natural for he was not merely an advaitic guru but a universal master who spoke in the language of everyone who came to him seeking his Grace, but gradually and perceptibly or imperceptibly, lead him or her from form to formlessness and beyond this duality, plurality to oneness, ignorance to knowledge, bondage to freedom and beyond these dualities. He was not one to indoctrinate anyone, he freed everyone who had the fortune to come to him from all dogmas and doctrines so that one may shine as pure consciousness, the self.

\(^2\) Sri Ramana Gita, slokas 9, 10 and 15.
All the arguments about different states like forms, formlessness are only for the purpose of rousing of love for the mukti state among the unripe ones. These fascinating descriptions of mukti can be taken as true without prejudice to the truth of egoless state. The subtle bodies of the jivan mukta may survive for some time, due to various reasons as indicated by Sri Sankara in *Pravadaanubhuti*. In the perception of the aspirant, the individual soul, the personal god and the world appear as different entities. None of this is real from the standpoint of the egoless state of bliss. All this, including the personal god, are part and parcel of the world of maya. For the jnani, the differences are not real. What is real is only the Self and that alone shines in the state of mukti. When the ego is dissolved in pure consciousness through Self-enquiry, the identification with the body, mind and intellect completely dissolves. The whole universe, including one’s apparent individuality is but an expression of the ultimate reality. For a jivan mukta life in the world with a body or without body makes no difference. For he is ever that Self which is all-pervading.

\[\text{Tat Tvam Asi} \]
\[\text{Thou Art That}\]

**Feat**

Nileen Putatunda

Old barefooted rickshawpuller
You run for bread,
While the man who runs on hot coals
Does it for God.
But bread too is God,
Your feat is harder.
An Impossible Dream

The Remarkable Story of G. Venkataswamy and the Aravind Eye Hospital

Christopher Quilkey


We all dream of a better world in which there is justice, freedom of choice, abundance and good health for all. We dream of a world in which people are naturally happy. For most of us it remains a dream. We may carp at politicians and the state of society today but for the most part we do very little to effect any change. Most of us are followers by nature not leaders. For action to occur in the right direction we need a leader, a person who is willing to sacrifice their own comfort and well-being to fight what they perceive are wrongs

Christopher Quilkey is a member of the editorial board of Mountain Path.
in the world. One such leader was Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy. He dreamt of alleviating the suffering he saw all around him and the way he achieved this is the story of the Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai. It is a remarkable story of one man who gave himself totally to the development of an organisation that put the patient first in the alleviation of blindness.

Govindappa Venkataswamy (or Dr. V. as he was familiarly known in years to come) was born on the 1st October 1918, in a small village of Vadamalapuram in Tamil Nadu. His father Govindappa Naicker was a respected contractor who owned land and cattle. He was the eldest of five siblings. When their father died in the late 1940s Dr. V. took up the responsibility for his family, their education and marriages although he himself never married. Later in life his younger brother, G. Srinivasan and his two sisters, Janaky and Natchiar and their spouses, became part of his team which directly and indirectly built the foundations of the original Aravind Eye Hospital at Madurai and who still are at the core of operations.

Life in rural India was simple and to our modern eyes, relatively idyllic. One incident from childhood made a deep impression on him. At the age of five, he was awakened by the excruciating cries of a young woman in a neighbouring house. Later in the day he was told she had died in child-birth. In the following years, he lost three cousins to eclampsia, a pregnancy related-condition as there was no doctor available in his village. These tragedies caused him to resolve to become a doctor in order to relieve such suffering.

He did not have a strong constitution and suffered all his life from psoriasis, a painful skin condition that causes the skin to itch and peel, leaving raw red layers of flesh. He was frequently ill but what he lacked in physical strength, he more than made up for in sheer tenacity. He was the first boy in the village to pursue a higher education and the first to become a doctor. While growing up he was ignited by Mahatma Gandhi’s vision.

In 1944, Dr. V. graduated second in his medical class and enlisted in the army as a medical officer. The pay was good enough for him to be able to support his family. But the smooth flow of his life did not
last long. In 1948, at the age of 30, he suffered the crippling effects of rheumatoid arthritis and was hospitalised for two years. His dream of becoming an obstetrician was shattered. His joints were so badly swollen he could not sit, stand or walk. The slightest movement was agony. His youngest sister Natchiar came and took care of him.

Years later when asked about this time, Dr. V. would smile and say, “It was difficult, but then you move on.” After sufficient recovery he returned to medical school and joined the eye department. Operating on the eye required more dexterity than physical force. Through determination and persistence he trained his twisted fingers to hold a scalpel for the delicate eye operations. Soon after he began his new career he called off his wedding engagement and devoted himself to healthcare. He said once, “Severe pain has been my constant companion and it has never left me.” The suffering he endured gave him an empathy with the suffering of others. Renowned for his compassion, his life was one of unremitting dedication to the work of alleviating pain.

In the 1960s the government of Tamil Nadu initiated a programme to provide eye care services in the villages and the concept of mobile eye camps was created. Dr. V. who helped influence this service took on responsibility for this new drive. Cataract treatment in those days was a relatively long and laborious process which required a weeklong recuperation by the patient, during which time they had to be fed, administered to and nursed. To operate on, feed and provide post-operative care, medicine, spectacles and to cover staff costs was prohibitive. When the costs overran the budget he would cover the extra amount from his own savings. It seemed an impossible ambition, but to Dr. V. the word ‘impossible’ was a spur for him to prove it wrong. He seemed to come alive at the prospect of a challenge. Perhaps this was the key to understand why he was able to perform the tremendous work that he did over a lifetime of sheer hard labour. The memories of the young woman whose suffering had so haunted his childhood, as well as his own personal agony distressed him to such an extent that he could not bear the thought of others unnecessarily enduring
pain and anguish. His conscience was so finely developed that he had to do something or he could not live with himself.

At first he met with suspicion in the villages but over time his spirit of engagement and identification with the patients endeared him and soon word spread round neighbouring districts. Dr. V. learnt that when you begin doing the work you are meant to do, unforeseen resources come your way, but the point is to start with whatever you have. He wrote in his journal, “Identify yourself with all people in all villages. Not trying to exploit, but to grow with them.” This village programme laid the groundwork of his lifelong passion for helping the community. He said, “I was not greedy to take someone else’s money. I was honest, sincere in my work, and committed to helping the people who were poor. These things gave me a great advantage.” The real purpose for his life had begun and in one sense it was a battle he waged, and much like Arjuna in the Mahabharata, he wanted to right wrongs.

It was at this point that he made friends with Sir John Wilson, a blind Englishman who served as director of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, and Dr. V. was transformed by this friendship. Wilson became a mentor and steadfast supporter. This friendship was the catalyst in shifting Dr. V. in a new direction. From being a government surgeon struggling to meet the demands of his immediate community, he took on a global vision. One of the offshoots of this new drive to reach out to the poor was the creation of the first residential nutritional rehabilitation centre in Madurai to help children with vitamin A deficiency which in extreme cases can cause the corneal layer of the eye to soften and melt, causing irredeemable blindness.

When Dr. V. retired at the mandatory age of 58 from government service, he had served as an ophthalmologist, in which capacity he performed over 100,000 operations; trained hundreds of young doctors in his capacity of dean of the Madurai Medical College; and was a national public health figure. All of which resulted in his being awarded the Padma Shri, one of India’s highest honours. And yet, in 1976, his real career was just about to begin and it was one he would tenaciously pursue to his dying day.
He began again with a simple eleven bed hospital for which he mortgaged his house while he and his siblings pooled their life savings, including family jewellery to pay for the construction workers. At the beginning they knew little about budgeting or costing. Dr. V’s team worked seven days a week on a five in the morning to nine in the evening schedule. They did everything from village eye camps to cleaning the patients wards and toilets themselves. Some team members moonlighted in other hospitals to make some money to supplement the meagre salaries the new hospital could just afford. They sacrificed the income they could have got in a normal professional position and lived simply. It was always a hard choice.

One of the founding members Dr. Namperumalswamy said, “At that time, I didn’t have a bicycle, let alone a scooter. We would be at the bus stand and watch our former classmates drive by in their cars.” They all had families to support as well as parents and relatives back in the ancestral village.

Slowly each member of the team was moulded by a work ethic that had little to do with compensatory monetary gains. Dr. V. would say that, “Think of every patient who comes in as your aunt or your grandmother from the village, then automatically compassion will come. Once that feeling comes, then you naturally do a good job.” With such an ethic their workload increased as the hospital’s reputation grew and the demands on them all forced them out of their comfort zone and demanded that they trade in their small dreams for a bigger, shared one. By putting aside their personal gain in search of a higher vision they and the hospital grew exponentially, which is why the success of the Aravind Hospital cannot be explained in terms of money. It was due to the various members’ self-sacrifice and their keeping in mind the value of the vision in which their founder implicitly believed and in which they too gladly participated.

One of the founders, Dr. M. Srinivasan traced their work ethic back to Dr. V.’s farming roots where traditionally all worked hard to support the family. He said, “We had to work all 365 days. We weren’t used to vacations. The Aravind culture transferred from the
Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai
family to the hospital. It wasn’t developed through special courses, education or retreats. It’s in the blood.” Inculcated in the spirit of Aravind Hospital was the attitude that they would do whatever it takes. From that spirit the hospital became self-reliant. This was not just a goal but the very fuel that powered the hospital’s engine. The hospital grew by careful attention to pricing structures; the number of free patients accepted against the number who paid; effective resource utilisation, standardisation and an extremely cost-conscious leadership. The dream was not built on airy clouds of delusion but on choice. Everyone thinks three times before asking for money. Above all else, self-reliance governed their decisions. It freed them from organisations however well-meaning whose donations may potentially make the hospital dependent and subvert their original values.

The hospital is not a charitable hand-out institution. It has a self-selecting fee system. Its price is built round a culture that respects every patient’s right to selection, from zero to current market rates. This way the patient is empowered. In other words, the hospital always keeps the patient in mind. It is the reason the hospital can function and it also constantly reminds the doctors and staff that they are there to serve. This bond is the miracle that continues to make manifest Dr. V.’s original impossible dream.

Money then is not an end in itself but the means to achieve a higher purpose. There have been times when they refused large sums in order not to compromise in any way. Dr. Natchiar commented on this saying, “In 1978, the head of a big company came to us and said he would donate a large sum of money to Aravind in memory of his wife. All we had to do is to name the new hospital wing after her. We were very tempted because money was short. But we said no. It was a harmless request, but we figured if we started doing things just to get someone else’s money, then we wouldn’t have the same kind of energy. The purpose behind our work would start to get lost.”

Dr. V did not see the lack of money as a problem but saw that if one has implicit faith in the vision then all that is necessary will come,
sometimes without any apparent reason. In other words a spiritual approach sustained him and the hospital throughout the years. When it came to expand the resources came because the attitude of the hospital was not one of greed but of giving.

Generally commercial companies look for ways to maximise their profits through sales while streamlining their costs as much as possible. The Aravind system is based on a large volume of patients, in fact, the system needs a constant flow of patients to operate at an optimum level. Dr. V. was always looking for ways to increase the number of patients knowing implicitly that his team could find ways to improve the service in the face of each new challenge. In 1999 after opening three new hospitals outside Madurai he decided to open a fifth in Puducherry. After listening to the objections of his colleagues he at first relented but the next day called in Dr. Usha Kim, a senior doctor and said, “You know, when you think you’ve grown enough, that’s when you start to decline. It means you are walking downhill instead of climbing.” Needless to say the Aravind-Puducherry hospital was opened in 2003. Dr Usha said later, “I’ve matured into the idea that when you’re in a comfort zone, you start to deteriorate. You need to have some kind of pressure or you don’t evolve. Dr. V. was right – it isn’t about staying where you are and feeling cozy.”

The Aravind culture is built on values slowly ingrained in its staff. The buildings, money, technology can happen quickly but the character building takes longer. Over eighty per cent of the employees are women and the senior nurses are the chief decision makers for some seventy per cent of all activity that happens in the Aravind operating theatres and patient wards. Dr.V. had a profound respect for the villagers and wanted the hospitals to display Indian traditional hospitality.

He wanted patients to feel welcome and at home, and in order to do this a programme of deliberate recruitment of young women from the village level was begun. Aravind has recruited over 5,000 women for various roles in their hospitals. The basic criteria for recruitment are partly intelligence but also natural sympathy and a willingness to work. The Aravind administration usually interviews the young girl
along with members of her family. This is a great strength because it means that once a person is hired she feels part of a larger family which make for harmony and loyalty so essential for the working of a system with a steady stream of patients to be processed each day. The panel focused on two questions: ‘What does she have to offer us?’ And just as important, ‘What do we have to offer her?’ This is the bedrock of the Aravind success. It is value driven and though skill is essential it is not the overriding factor that makes the hospital accept an applicant.

By intensive residential training the young women develop into self-assured members of the extended Aravind family. The underlying intelligence at work here pays more dividends than just money. It creates a dependable and hardworking staff that enjoys their work and derives immense satisfaction from helping the blind and each other whenever the occasion arises. Dr. V. may have been a dreamer but his vision was based on a rock of astute practicality. One of Aravind’s leading glaucoma surgeons once complained to Dr. V. in the early days about the lack of personnel. Dr. V chuckled and replied, “Doctor, you don’t just find people, you have to build them.”

It is clear that for Dr. V the hospital was not just a place to cure blindness but also an opportunity to develop physical stamina, mental capability and a vision. He was interested not just in their professional development but also in the spiritual, emotional and intellectual evolution of his staff. He wanted to create an organisation that would energise the core-values of fair and impartial high quality care, kindness and transparency. He knew that a strong, mission-aligned process with strict protocols would lessen the natural entropy that leads to slackness and mistakes. He created a virtuous system that corrected personal deviations from the high standard the hospital set. Dr. Aravind, Dr. V’s nephew and hospital administrator remarked, “Good people in a bad system typically go bad. Bad people in a good system become good. That sounds simplistic, but it’s true. For the majority of us, the system becomes your dharma.”

If there was a strategy for Aravind hospital it was not obvious. The organisation grew according to anticipated need and not according
to a fixed blueprint that would fit the patient in eventually. The senior members over the years would see how he made decisions not necessarily based on so-called common sense and practicality but from a higher plane, and would overrule their protests by pushing through an outlandish expansion without noticeable funds or the required manpower till eventually, they too recognised the wisdom of what had become an obvious inevitability. Dr. V. did not just anticipate the requirements of the hospital but he was fearless and dared to dream. When asked to what he attributed Aravind’s success, Dr. V. had an unambiguous reply, “Grace. It happened by grace.”

In his last days Dr. Natchiar and Dr. V.’s nieces and grandnieces would read to him from the teachers he loved. He often asked to hear the lines from Savitri by Sri Aurobindo which bring with its recitation a special blessing on him and all in his room:

He made great dreams a mould for coming things
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun’s.

On the 7th July 2006 Dr. V. passed away quietly in a room at his beloved hospital attended by some forty relatives and friends all intimately connected with his vision. Near the end, his sister Dr. Natchiar with her voice breaking said to him, “We are all here, and we will work hard to keep your vision strong.” And they have as one can see today the Aravind hospitals which welcome all who enter their doors to serve and heal them.

Postscript
I would like to thank Dr. Natchiar and Smt Varalakshmi for their thoughtfulness and wisdom. I have stayed and visited the Aravind Hospital, Madurai a number of times and it is the only hospital where I felt reluctant to leave when it was time to go so pronounced was the kindness of the doctors and nurses. Infinite Vision is extraordinary book and I would recommend it to all who wished to be inspired by a man whose vision came true.
From April 2012 to March 2013 the Aravind Hospital Group had a total of 3.1 million out-patients visits and performed more than 371,000 surgeries. Over 50% of this was done either completely free or heavily subsidised.

Since inception in 1976, Aravind Eye Hospitals together have handled over 38 million outpatient visits and over 4.76 million surgeries. If you would like more information about the Aravind Eye Care System please visit their website: www.aravind.org

Your Sharp Arrows

Vidya Sridhar

O enchanting master divine
You who possess shafts
Golden and pristine.
You who drove away the demons
that harmed the ancient sages;
Know now those arrows penetrate the thicket
Of my dense dark fears.
Please don’t let them fail
For they must fly true
Banishing the thieves of the confused
Mind creating
Breaking my resistance to the light.

Guard then the gate, dear lotus heart,
That no trespasser breaches
What belongs to you,
— do not let it be stolen!
For what is thine, oh archer, none may steal,
But you, secret holder of my dreams,
with sharp arrows of sweet delight.
Maha Kumbhabhishekam of Sri Bhagavan Temple Kalasam 25th August 2013
The Act of Truth in the Jataka Tales

Saving and Transforming Lives

Neera Kashyap

There exists in India an ancient belief that the one who has fulfilled his dharma without a single fault throughout his life can work a miracle by the simple act of calling that fact to witness. This is known as making an ‘Act of Truth’. Citing stories extensively from Buddhist and Hindu texts and folklore, Dr E.W. Burlingame in a classic paper defines the ‘Act of Truth’ as “a formal declaration of fact accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished”.¹ In a much later excellent analysis of this theme, W. Norman Brown identifies the qualifications a person must


Neera Kashyap has worked on health communications and short stories for children. She interprets ancient literatures and scriptures to deepen self-understanding and as inspiration for writing fiction and poetry. She is a managing body member of the Delhi Ramana Kendra and visits Sri Ramanasramam every winter.
have to possess an Act of Truth. The truth is potent not because it is factual or existential or empirical or even logical. “Rather, it is truth of life, personal integrity, truth in one’s personal conduct in its totality, truth in acceptance of responsibilities and fulfillment of them. It is Truth as the metaphysical basis of the cosmic order, which for each human being – and each divine being as well – is the sanction and ethical basis of his actions……the agent of the Act evokes as the basis of the Act the perfection with which he himself or some other person whom he uses as a dynamic reference fulfils his personal duty or function in the cosmos.”

Brown further points out that the Acts of Truth could as well be based on undesirable or antisocial conduct. For what appears important is not excellence but perfection; not the perfection of goodness but of completeness; a personal duty completely and perfectly fulfilled, whether one likes it or not. So a person could be saviour, king, gambler, prostitute, ascetic or householder. It is only when duty is fully done can she or he possess an Act of Truth.

Transcending good and evil, likes and dislikes and even qualitative grades such as excellence, Truth must surely be rooted in the heart, building out from there. While dharma or the perfect enactment of one’s sacred duty in life is the traditional basis of this Hindu virtue, a Truth deeply rooted in the heart, has a force so great that, sourced in love, it saves lives, spurs growth, heals, reforms, liberates, protects, enlightens and transforms. This article aims to analyze the Act of Truth in the Jataka tales in not only saving lives as an immediate objective but with a multiplier effect that transforms individuals as well as collectives. It also aims to see what makes the agent of Truth particularly well disposed to carrying out the Act.

The Jatakas are the 550 birth stories of the Buddha in Pali which reveal some event in the long series of his previous existences as a bodhisatta. To appreciate the Act of Truth, it is necessary to understand the concept of the bodhisatta. To Mahayana Buddhists, the Theravada

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ideal of the arhat or perfected being who achieves nirvana through his own effort and for his own liberation appeared too austere and selfish to have been the full teaching of the Buddha, who had been driven by compassion to assist humanity towards liberation. So a bodhisatta while striving towards enlightenment exhibits exemplary behaviour to assist others evolve similarly, and on reaching the threshold of nirvana, turns back, postponing his own salvation till all sentient beings are saved. In the Jataka tales, one of the most significant purposes for which an Act of Truth is used is to save lives. This works at a mass level in times of disaster. This also works at an individual level to heal, enlighten, transform and liberate.

In Maccha Jataka (No. 75), the bodhisatta is the king of the fish in a land which suffers from a horrific drought. Crops wither; water dries out leaving fish and tortoises burrowing in the mud, exposed to the merciless beaks of devouring birds. The king resolves to make a solemn profession of Truth to the king of gods to save his kinsfolk from certain death. Though mired in mud, the king comes forth royally, ‘a mighty fish, blackened with mud as a casket of the finest sandal-wood which has been smeared with collyrium.’ His proclaimed Truth: “For I, though born where it is customary to prey on one’s kinsfolk, have never from my youth up devoured any fish, even of the size of a grain of rice; nor have I ever robbed a single living creature of its life. By the truth of this my Protestation, I call upon you to send rain and succour my kinsfolk.”

This truth is based not only on consistent exemplary behaviour but on the bodhisatta’s quality of helping others behave worthily as well. From Arya Sura’s later Jatakamala in Sanskrit we learn more about this king: “Any desire they (fish) might have to do each other harm he restrained, and instead he fostered mutual affection. Thanks to these efforts and to his own ingenuity, he managed to make them forget the cruel habits of fish. Under his careful surveillance the shoal flourished,

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3 All quotes and summaries of the tales are from the volumes of The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha’s former births, ed. By Prof. E.B. Cowell. Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co, 1969, UNESCO collection of representative works.
like a town freed from troubles by a king devoted to justice.' So the multiplier effect of this Act of Truth is not only that rain pours down ‘like tilted water pots’, but the community of fish evolves and the king of gods joins the king of fish to support good people in their enterprises, protecting the land forever from future blights.

In the Supparaka Jataka (No. 463), we find the same aim to save lives in disaster, though here the bodhisatta quality works more subtly. Born into the family of a master mariner, at age sixteen, Bodhisatta Supparaka attains complete mastery over the art of seamanship. Wise and full of intelligence, with him aboard, no ship ever came to harm. Then as he ages and is blinded by salt water, he takes to assessing animals and gems to be bought for the king. Not only is he able to detect the defect in each potential purchase but can also tell the cause of the defect. When the king remains miserly in his payment, Supparaka assesses the king to ‘have been a barber’s brat’, leaves his service and is pressed by merchants into becoming skipper of their ship. What follows on the voyage is only seven days of smooth sailing followed by four months of storm on a primeval ocean. From Jatakamala 14 we see the bodhisatta working overtly: exhorting his men to be prepared for a cataclysmic storm if venturing out mid-ocean; to face it, not with fear and despair, but with perseverance and positive action.

The ship passes through four seas, each more tempestuous than the last. From the colour of each sea, only Supparaka is able to assess the precious metals and gems below. He hauls them up with a net on the pretence of catching fish, telling no one of the value of this haul of diamonds and emeralds, gold and coral, lest the men sink the ship through greed. Here the bodhisatta works at a subtle level, protecting the men from their own darkest instincts. The ship reaches its crisis point when it enters the terrifying Valabhamukha sea from which no ship ever returns. With knowledge that only he can save his men, Supparaka’s Act of Truth, like the fish king’s, is also based on

4 Once the Buddha was a monkey: Arya Sura’s Jatakamala, trans. from the Sanskrit by Peter Khoroche, Univ. of Chicago, 1989, The Lord of the Fish, pp 103-6.
5 Ibid., p.105.
the fact that in his living memory he had never harmed a single living creature. He asks for the ship to return in safety. After four months of tempest, the ship reaches home port in a single day. Dividing the treasures among the merchants, he says: “This treasure is enough for you: voyage on the sea no more.” As in the *Maccha Jataka*, the act of Truth lies not only in the exemplary character of the agent but in his attempts to help others achieve the same. The character of the merchants builds up silently both through exhortation and prevention, the multiplier effect being that with faith in the leader and the right attitude, surprise treasures put the men beyond the need to face future storms, even beyond effort.

At the individual level, the Act of Truth works powerfully to save lives of well-loved individuals by releasing the poison by which they are grievously injured. The afflicted is innocent; the poison lies in the repressed energies, negative traits or karma of others close or closely involved with the dying one. To reverse death is unnatural so no mean task. In the *Kanhadipayana* and *Sama Jataka*, it takes the work of three individuals to save the life of one: an open admission of dark secret truths in the former tale and love and ripeness of soul in the latter. Renewal of life and personal transformation is achieved in the former; liberation for the mature and personal and societal transformation for the evolving in the latter.

In *Kanhadipayana Jataka* (No. 444), the youth Yannadatta is bitten by a poisonous snake and is taken by his parents to their visitor ascetic to be healed by an Act of Truth. The ascetic’s proclamation of truth is his old secret: only for seven days did he live serene of heart, pure and desirous of the holy life; since then, for fifty years he lived this life unwillingly. For revealing this truth, he makes an appeal: ‘May this truth a blessing give: Poison baulked, the lad revive!’ Because this appeal serves only to make Yannadatta open his eyes and turn over, the ascetic asks the father to use his power of truth. The father proclaims his secret: though his ancestral way of life was to give gifts freely to sages, travellers and Brahmins, he followed this way of life carefully but unwillingly. With this truth, Yannadatta is able to sit up but not stand. The father then urges his wife to make her Act of
Truth so their son can walk again. The mother addresses her truth to her son: she felt as indifferent to his father as she did to the serpent that bit him that day. With these revelations, Yannadatta’s body is purged of poison. He rises and begins to play.

Yannadatta is the inner youth of each of the three actors — decaying and dying through stagnant repression. Aired, it brings life back to life. But the multiplier effect lies in the transformation that takes place when each helps the other analyze and understand the reasons for their secrets: the ascetic sees that he was afraid to be seen as a fool if he returned to the worldly life; the father was afraid of being seen as degenerate if he went against the ancestral tradition of giving; the mother too felt afraid of being thought degenerate if she was untrue to her husband. Fear of social expectations and the tarnishing of image had repressed truth. Yet each had followed his/her dharma with complete perfection, despite the unwillingness. This worked towards their transformation. From then onwards the wife loved her husband; the husband gave gifts tranquilly and with faith; and the bodhisatta ascetic ‘cultivated the ecstatic Faculty, and became destined for Brahma’s heaven’.

In the case of *Sama Jataka* (No. 540) the Act of Truth must again be made by three people to have effect, but here the parents are already ripe souls needing to get over certain karmic faults before making their heavenly ascent. Dukulaka and Parika are born into the families of two hunter chiefs who compel them to marry each other, despite their inclinations for the holy life. In time they choose to live the life of ascetics in the forest where Sakka, the king of gods, himself arranges for their necessities. Seeing that they would lose their sight, he suggests they have a son who would care for them in need. Since the couple is pledged to celibacy, Sakka even arranges for their son to be born by Dukulaka touching Pari’s navel at an appropriate time. Sama is born and his parents serve him with great love till they are blinded by snake bite when it becomes the son’s mandate to care for his parents. One day while fetching water from the river Sama is grievously wounded by a poison arrow released by Piliyakkha, a king who has come to dwell in the forest to satisfy his craving for venison.
His sole aim of wounding the boy is to disable him so he can discover who he is so as to satisfy his ministers with tales of new marvels seen during his travels.

The king is first struck by the fact that Sama neither reviles nor blames him for his wound, speaking only gently. When he learns that Sama is solely responsible for his blind parents, he is struck by remorse and promises to look after the parents, realising hell would be his doom with every village declaring his guilt. Taking the unconscious Sama to be dead, he pays him homage. On reaching his parents’ hut he first lets it be known that he is the king – for there is no one who does not fear a king – then finds the right moment to apprise them of their son’s death at his hands, offering to wait upon their every need, like their own son. The parents’ agony is searing, their laments loud but their words to him restrained and kindly. They affirm they cannot be served by a king and ask only to be taken to Sama. In a crisis of grief, the parents hug Sama and ask for his life, each performing an Act of Truth based on Sama’s life of virtue and ‘whatever merit we have gained in former days.’ Bahusodari, a daughter of the gods and Sama’s mother in a previous existence, becomes the third unseen force to aid the task. She bases her truth in that she had passed her life alone in the forest depths’ and no earthly inhabitant was dearer to her inmost heart than Sama. Sama recovers, his parents’ sight is restored and dawn appears. The King asks Sama how he can reach the world of gods and is given instructions on ten duties that he must practise towards all – family, friends, ministers, ascetics, birds and beasts. Fulfilling these, the king ultimately goes to heaven; Sama and his parents attain the supernatural faculties and the Brahma world.

Buried in the *Sama Jataka* is the karmic cause of the parents’ blindness. In a former life the husband had been a doctor who had treated a rich man for his eyes, but who did not give him a fee. Angered by this, the wife had suggested he make a poisonous preparation and offer it to the patient as medicine, thus blinding one of his eyes. The husband, also angered, had agreed and the consequence: Dukulaka and Pari are blinded in both eyes. This casual but deliberate cruelty is amplified in the behaviour of the king: casually disabling the young
Sama with a poison arrow so he can talk to his ministers of this ‘new marvel’. It is this poison of casual but deliberate cruelty that Sama must bear. It can only be released through the past merit gathered by his parents to which is added their existing merit of gentle courage and forgiving restraint. Also needed for the magic to work are Bahusodari’s spiritual resources born from her solitary living in the forests and her deep abiding love for her son. The king’s process of transformation can be seen from meat lust and casual cruelty, to appreciation of forgiveness and restraint, to guilt and concern. He is ready for a new responsibility: an anonymous life of devoted service to the helpless. In the upsurge of new life, vision and sought instruction lies the king’s new role and destiny: devoted service towards his family and people; towards all living creatures.

In conclusion we see that the Act of Truth works at a mass level not only because the agents have lived a consistently peaceable life but also because they use their strength of character to help others evolve. At an individual level, the Act of Truth works on the basis of complete honesty and self-understanding, fostering personal transformation. It also works on the basis of spiritual maturity and love towards liberation for the mature. And for the evolving leader, it works towards personal and societal transformation through performing the given duty of devoted service towards all who live. Thus the evolving one ultimately gains the heaven of peace and fulfillment.
On the Experiential Nature of Enlightenment

Pratyabhijna-Darsanam in the Vision of Adi Sankara and Sri Ramana Maharshi

Part Two

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati

The Experiential Nature of Pratyabhijna Samadhi
In the first part of this essay that appeared in the last issue, we explored the essential concepts of pratyabhijna in the context of spiritual sadhana and its ultimate manifestation as the dawning of Self-Knowledge. This happens at the pinnacle of human effort. Pratyabhijna is the culminating Recognition of the Self in its true, immaculate form, which unravels the mystery of the Self once for all. It can be said to be a Home-coming after our wandering the world over in search of the Holy Grail and then finally stumbling on it, at last, at one’s own doorsteps from where, out of ignorance, the wearisome outward search originally began. The discovery happens in utter surrender to the higher power after realising one’s total helplessness.

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati has been residing in Arunachala since 2002.
In the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the purest form of bhakti (devotion) wrought this magical transformation of an intense seeker, who had little knowledge of Vedanta sastras, into a purna jnani. For Bhagavan Ramana, equally unschooled in spiritual lore, the explosion of prayabhiijna happened when, as a teenager in earnest quest of his true identity, he confronted fearlessly the prospect of Death, like Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad, with a cool, sharp and pure intellect.

One may ask, what was the common thread in both these celebrated histories, aside from their lack of academic knowledge, which made the result so exceptional? Temperamentally, the two could not have been more dissimilar. The former dwelt perpetually in the emotional realm of ecstasy (bhava samadhi), while the latter was the epitome of reason, anchored in rock-like stillness (achalam). Sri Ramakrishna was on the verge of offering his very life at the altar of Truth, after a pointless, futile pursuit it seemed, in which he had staked his all. As for Bhagavan Ramana, through an intense simulation of physical death with an ideal scientific temper of rigorous objectivity, he laid his very life on the funeral pyre of self-enquiry. Internally this was no less dramatic than the threat of physical extinction that Sri Ramakrishna had dared impose on himself in the Kali temple under the gaze of the Divine Mother, when he took up a sword challenging the principle of Truth to reveal Itself or accept his self-sacrifice.

In Vedantic terms, in either case, the core ego was offered, in an inimitable style that conformed to their individual temperaments, as the bali naivedyam. This ultimate offering was gladly consumed by the Lord (Atma Devata) and was the climax of all their sadhana. In a spiritual resurrection the immortal Spirit took over, superseding the dying jiva. In both cases, the descent of Grace in the form of prayabhiijna samadhi demonstrated the Upanishadic proclamation, “This Self is not attained by delivering discourses nor by mere

1 *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.21, “tannai tAn kANal .....oOaNAdal kAN” and also *Katha Up.*, v.1.2.25, “yasya brahma ca kshatram ca ubhe bhavata Odanah, mrtyuḥ yasya upaśeṣanam kah īthA veda yatra saḥ.”

2 *Katha Up.*,1.2.23,“nAyam AtmA pravachanena labhyah na medhayA na bahunA shrutena, yamaivesha vrunute tena labhyah tasyaisha AtmA vivrunute tanum svAm.”
ON THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

scriptural erudition and phenomenal memory or by a prolonged, often addictive, listening to Vedantic expositions; It is gained by the one who exclusively chooses to know the Self alone and would settle for nothing else in lieu of Self-Knowledge. To such a supreme tyagi (renouncer), the Self chooses to reveal Its true nature.” Elsewhere it is said, “It is through Tyaga (renunciation of the ego, the supreme offering to the Lord) alone that Immortality is attained.”

Grace Ignites Enlightenment
From these two illustrious examples, it is clear that the immediate knowledge of the Self (aparoksha jnanam) revealed itself in pratyabhijna samadhi; both these great souls were anchored unshakeably in it for the rest of their lives and guided others to the same perfection. Enlightenment (para vidya) is thus a direct experiential knowledge for ending the cycle of transmigration (samsara). The operation of Grace is indispensably woven into this revelation; the element of the Self choosing the recipients of Self-knowledge is thus contingent upon their unflinching commitment to the pursuit, which in turn, makes them worthy receptacles. Without surrender of the ego, the most valiant human effort cannot unlock the floodgates of Grace.

Even for celestial gods, the same holds true. The Kenopanishad reveals that the mighty gods Indra, Vayu and Agni were humbled before they were blessed with Brahma Vidya. The same truth is revealed by the Arunachala Tattvam where even the Creator Brahma or the Sustainer Vishnu could not find the ends of the column of Fire that manifested out of Grace to remove their delusion. In the pauranika allegory, the beginningless and endless Self could not be reached by the intellect or the ego, symbolised by Brahma and Vishnu respectively.

If Self-Knowledge were a matter of mere intellectual understanding of the Vedantic truths — however profound and well-assimilated — it would come purely under purusha tantra (where human effort alone would suffice). The factor of divine Grace (asserted as indispensable in

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3 Kaivalya Up., v.1.2, “na karmaNA na prajayA dhanena, tyAgenaike amrtatvamAnasuh.”
4 Sri Ramana Nool Thirattu, 7th edn. 1987, p.1, Arunachala Tattvam, “buddhi ahamkAram…aNNamalaiyinadu meiyye”.
the \textit{Kathopanishad} verse cited earlier) would then be superfluous. But Bhagavan Ramana taught that in the quest for the final beatitude, it is Grace that triggers the search, drives all the effort, manoeuvres the twists and turns in the journey and finally showers the ultimate reward for one’s unrelenting perseverance (\textit{mumukshutvam}).\footnote{\textit{Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi}, Talk§157, “Grace is in the beginning, middle and end. Grace is the Self.....Is not then the Self your Guru? Where else will Grace come from? It is from the Self alone. \textit{Manifestation of the Self is a manifestation of Grace} and vice versa .... Nothing is external to the Self.”} The surrender of the ego, through intense self-enquiry, alone finally brings about the manifestation of Grace in the form of \textit{pratyabhijna}.

Self-Knowledge, by definition, comes under \textit{vastu tantra}, that is, it cannot be known by anything other than Itself.\footnote{\textit{Arunachala Venba} by Sadhu Om, v.39, “tagunda vich\textit{Aram} ennum s\textit{Adhanai} seydulle pugundarinden endru urait\textit{tAl} poyy\textit{Am}, agandai arivadu ondrumillai, azhivadu adu, tannai arivadu Arunachalam.”} The ego cannot know the Self as an object. The resolution of the ego is the pre-requisite for Self-knowledge to shine forth. That which truly exists is called \textit{vastu}. Since the Self alone qualifies as the \textit{vastu}, Grace becomes its embodiment, by virtue of the Self being a perennial blessing. This then is the purport of the Upanishadic affirmation that the Self chooses the egoless, pure souls and fills them with Self-Knowledge (\textit{yamaivesha vr\textit{unute}}). Through surrender, Grace infuses us and ripens us for Self-Knowledge because nothing else is desired or sought in its place. In his heart-melting outpouring of \textit{Akshara Mana Malai}, Bhagavan invokes Grace numerous times using the word ‘Arul’. He attributes to Grace his own awakening and the consummation of the search for his Father, Arunachala Siva.

In all worldly accomplishments, a man can perhaps legitimately pride himself to be ‘self-made’. But in spirituality, \textit{pratyabhijna} transforms the ordinary \textit{jiva} into a sage, who is ‘Self-made’ by the annihilation of his little, separative self (\textit{vyakti bodha nAsah}). This alone truly constitutes enlightenment or Self-realisation.\footnote{op. cit., Talk§500, “\textit{Avidya nasa} is alone Self-Realisation. Self-Realisation is only \textit{owpacharika}. Self-Realisation is only a euphemism for elimination of ignorance.”} All of us
experience a limited personality due to *dehatma buddhi*, which is the offspring of primal ignorance, and this veils our limitless real nature. Eradication of this ignorance alone brings in its wake, emancipation (*apavarga*) from the bondage of *samsara*.

Bhagavan Ramana explains the term *pratyabhijna* in a simple manner: *abhijna* means direct perception (*pratyaksha*), as in ‘This is an elephant’; *prati* is to be reminded of what was already known (*smriti*), as in ‘This is *that* elephant’. Together *prati+abhijna = pratyabhijna*. In technical parlance, *pratyabhijna* is used (in the noun form) as ‘recognition’ of the ever-present reality shining as the Self, by paying exclusive attention to it. In the verb form, *pratyabhijna* means ‘to recognise’.

**Pratyabhijna in the Eyes of Acharya Sankara**

As discussed in detail in Part One earlier, Sri Sankaracharya employs the word *pratyabhijna* explicitly in verse 6 of the *Dakshinamurti Stotram* to indicate the unbroken, constant experience of the Self as we transit from deep sleep into waking state, and this alone enables the recollection of unalloyed happiness in *sushupti*. However, in the 1st verse itself, the concepts of *pratyabhijna* and *advaita drishti* are presented cryptically. In verse 1, the venerable Acharya declares that the world is just like a ‘reflection of a city in a mirror’ and therefore unreal as is a normal reflection. Just as a reflection is within the mirror and never outside it, the world is seen merely as a reflection within the Self. But due to the play of Maya, the world is felt to exist outside of us, because we limit our identity to the confines of the body.

To illustrate this, Acharya Sankara gives the dream example in the 2nd line of verse 1, where the dreamer experiences the dream-world outside his dream body, though both are enclosed within the dream. Upon waking out of the dream, the waker now finds only himself in a non-dual manner, with the duality of the dreamer and the dream-world totally resolved into himself. In the same way, upon recognition of the Self (*pratyabhijna*), the identity of the *jiva* undergoes a radical change when he no longer sees himself as a limited body but identifies

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8 *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§333.
with the infinite Consciousness (akhanda bodha svarupoham atma). Thus upon waking up from the sleep of ignorance, a gestalt shift occurs in the perspective of the now-enlightened sage. For him, the world is now seen within the limitless ocean of Consciousness — the One non-dual Self everywhere, for there is no outside at all. The genius of Adi Sankara as a sage-philosopher-poet shines brilliantly in the 3rd line of verse 1 in the Dakshinamurti Stotram, where the upamanam (dream example) and the upameyam (the indicated reality, that is enlightenment) meld seamlessly without the slightest distinction, as it applies perfectly to both the indicator (svapna drishtAntam) and the indicated reality (dArshtAntam).9

This is the ultimate non-dual vision (Advaita drishti) where the triads like the ‘seer, seen and seeing’ are resolved in one homogeneous mass of Consciousness (prajnana ghanam). He then exalts with this realisation, “In Me alone, the creation is born; in Me, it is sustained and in Me alone, it is dissolved. Thus I am that infinite, non-dual Brahman.”10 Adi Sankara therefore advises the seeker the practice of ‘seeing the world as the very form of Brahman, with the eye of wisdom’.11 The Upanishad also exhorts, “Pervade the entire world of all that moves and moves not, with the vision of the Lord…”12

Bhagavan Ramana illuminates this terse verse that catches the essence of enlightenment as follows: The light of the Self is reflected in the mirror of Mahat tattvam (buddhi) and the reflected light is the mind-ether (citta akasha) or the pure mind. This illumines the latent tendencies (vasanas) of the individual and thereby the sense of the ego (aham vritti, ‘I’) and the world (idam vritti, ‘this’) arises. That is, the emergence of the first and second persons takes place,

9 Dakshinamurti Stotram, v.1, “…yat sAkshAtkurate prabodha samaye svAtmAnam evAdvayam…”.

10 Kaivalya Up.,v.1.19, “mayyeva sakalam jAtam mayi sarvam pratishtitam, mayi sarvam layam yAti tadbrahmAdvayam asmi aham”


12 Isavasya Up.,v.1, “isAvAsyam idagam sarvam yat kincha jagatyAm jagat….”. 

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as the ‘subject-object division’. For the ajnani (ignorant), since his identity is limited to the body (dehatma buddhi), the mechanics of this perception makes him believe that the world exists outside him.

The dualists do not accept this even as a plausible explanation. They latch on to the example of the ‘reflected city in the mirror’ literally and raise the objection that ‘if this world is an unreal reflection, there must then be an original world (bimba) outside the mirror that causes the reflected image (pratibimba) within it and this new world would validate a real creation, after all’! Bhagavan Ramana explains that this is not really so and the apparent limitation of the example must not drive us to infer a patently wrong conclusion.

Examples in Vedanta: Their Power and Limitations

The extension of a metaphor beyond its limited scope does violence to the Advaitic position (Advaita hAni), which is unacceptable. Rejecting the Advaita position, based on the grounds of an imperfect example, would then be tantamount to throwing out the baby along with the bath water. Bhagavan says that this is precisely the reason why Acharya Sankara gives in the 2nd line of verse 1, the example of dream phenomenon, which is better in some respects than the first one and can guide the jignasu (the seeker who wants to know) gradually to deeper levels of clarity.

The dream example in turn, is also not perfect as it suffers from a severe limitation which the previous example of the mirror does not have. Upon waking up from the dream state, the dreamer and the

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13 op. cit., Talk§569, “Which is the darpana (mirror) here?........”.
14 op. cit., Talk§442, “...world is a reflection in the mind as it does not remain in the absence of the mind. ...Such being the truth, man continues to argue on the basis of the reality of the world...... Whoever asked him to accept a brief for the world?”
15 Bhagavan is categorical in asserting that vasanas alone constitute the original inner world (like a seed that potentially contains a tree), whose projection (as a reflection through the mirror of the intellect) manifests as the physical world outside with a sense of concrete reality about it. The verse under discussion does not present this idea explicitly, but verse 2 of Dakshinamurti Stotram contains the germ of this idea.
dream world disappear completely in the consciousness of the waker. But upon awakening into Self-knowledge, the objective world does not in a corresponding manner vanish for the \textit{jnani}, because he sees the world and transacts with it just as before, very much like the unenlightened majority. The dualists again demur at this lack of correspondence between the example and the indicated reality and contend that because of this defect, the dream example cannot be cited as a valid proof to establish the unreality of the world.

Advaitins counter that this extrapolation is unwarranted and the example is not meant for achieving total equivalence in all respects with the Advaitic vision. If the objective world were to physically disappear upon a seeker becoming a realised soul, like the collapse of the dream world upon waking, the entire \textit{jnani-guru-sishya parampara} would become null and void. The teaching tradition itself would disappear, if illogical extensions of examples were to hold sway. In this respect, we can say that the example of ‘reflection in the mirror’ is better because even after knowing that it is unreal, the reflection does not disappear but continues to be seen. Thus the world continues to be perceived by the \textit{jnani} even after enlightenment but it loses its ‘deadly sting of reality’ present during the phase of \textit{ajnana}.

The methodology of teaching in the Advaita tradition requires that different examples are used in conjunction (\textit{upamana prakriya}) for illustrating different aspects of the doctrine and thus facilitate a comprehensive apprehension of reality.\footnote{The various examples used in Vedanta can be loosely equated to the parable of ‘six blind men, each describing a particular aspect of the elephant’. Putting together all the different inputs from many examples, which are inherently defective, can help in intuiting the nature of the indefinable \textit{Brahman}, keeping in mind that the ‘whole is much more than the sum of the parts’.} In dealing with the paradigm of Advaitic truth, no example is available that is perfect in all respects. Actually, if a perfect analogy were to be available, that itself would instantly dismiss \textit{Advaita siddhanta} from its status as a valid framework of ultimate Truth. This is because \textit{Brahman} is
one non-dual reality (ekam advitiyam brahma). There is no second Brahman available to serve as a perfect example.

To drive home this point, Advaitins resort to saying in a manner of tautology, “the sky is like the sky, the ocean is like the ocean and the incomparable battle between Lord Rama and Ravana is like the Rama-Ravana battle itself.” In all these cases, there is simply no perfectly equivalent example to illustrate the original idea. If we cannot find suitable equivalents to describe even physical entities like the sea or sky, how then to speak of Brahman which is beyond the reach of words and the mind? Compelled to work within these inescapable constraints of language and conceptual limitations, we are forced to adopt a syncretic approach as the next best option, where we extract the best out of every example and put them together to arrive at a holistic vision. This is as far as intellectual understanding can proceed regarding the inconceivable Brahman, which is declared as different from all that is known and indeed, transcends even the unknown.

Nevertheless, the ‘rope-snake’ analogy is perhaps matchless in its scope and depth, being the best among all the imperfect illustrations, as we shall see presently. Bhagavan Ramana asserts that the reality of the world vision is incompatible with the Brahmic vision, as it is sublated (i.e. falsified or negated) by the latter, just as the ‘snake-vision’ is negated by the ‘rope-vision’. Brahma drishti is however irrevocable as it destroys primal ignorance (mula avidya) together with its consequent effects, namely samsara and its attendant sufferings. Hence it experientially validates the vision of Advaita.

17 “gaganam gaganAkAram sAgaram sAgaropamam, Rama-Ravanayor yuddham Rama-Ravanayor iva”.
18 Kena Up., 1.3, “na tatra cakshur gacchati na vAggacchati no manah, na vidmah na vijAnimah yathaitat anusishyAt.”
19 Kena Up., 1.4, “anyadeva tadviditAt atho aviditAt adhi…..”.
20 Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, 2011, Who am I?, p.38, “When the mind comes out of the Self, the world appears. When the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; when the Self appears (shines), the world does not appear.”
Sublating Vision Finally Wins

As Sri Sankara expounds, “the world is not entirely unreal, because of its being perceived (pratiyamanatvat sat). But it is certainly not real either, because it is subject to sublation (badhyamanatvat asat), in the wake of Brahmananam.” That is why, the world (which is a product of anirvacaniyam Maya) cannot be classified as either real (sat) or as entirely unreal (asat) but comes under the category of mithya. Vachaspati Mishra in his celebrated work Bhamati,\(^{21}\) (which is a commentary on the Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Sri Sankaracharya) asserts that a thousand Upanishads cannot convert a pot into a cloth, because perception is an experience that cannot admit opposition from even scriptural authority. Verbal testimony (shruti pramana) cannot annul the empirical validity of sensory perception (pratyaksha pramana), as it is the foundation for all other valid means of knowledge, including the Vedas. However, Vachaspati says that the Upanishads can, in a higher dimension of knowledge, namely Brahma Vidya, annul the absolute validity of perception because the knowledge of reality of the world gained from sensory perception suffers sublation in aparoksha jnanam of Brahma.

Reverting to the rope-snake example, when the true ‘rope vision’ is gained, the false ‘snake vision’ disappears and along with it, the fear it caused. If the snake vision were not to be falsified, the latter cognition of rope, whose essence is the sublation of the former snake-cognition, could never occur. That is, the rope can never be seen without falsifying the snake. In the classical Advaita text of Ozhivil Odukkam, the author Kannudaiya Vallalar paints this poignantly:\(^{22}\) “When rope-knowledge has arisen and all fear of the illusory snake has vanished with its accompanying effects of palpitations, profuse sweating etc., can one even simulate the fear of snake with all its symptoms as a repeat performance, by deliberately superimposing the snake on the rope once again? In the same way, for a jnani anchored...
in the Brahmi sthiti, can the former states suffered by the jīva in the realm of ajnana ever revisit him, even if he invites them with great ardour?” Bhagavan Ramana also confirms that the world-appearance can never again overwhelm a jnani, who has seen the Truth and crossed the delusion of bondage.”

**Pratyabhijna in the Vision of Bhagavan Ramana**

The very last composition of Bhagavan Ramana, *Ekatma Panchakam* was written in February 1947 and contains five verses upon the non-dual truth of Atma. These verses have revolutionary implications for vichara sadhana because coming from the swanubhuti of Bhagavan, they set the final seal of approval on ajata vada as the ultimate truth of his life-long unswerving Self-abidance. The very first verse distils the essence of *pratyabhijna samadhi*, as we shall see now.

The true original nature of a human being is the Self, ever shining as the limitless pure Consciousness (*akhanda bodha svarupam atma*). Awareness of this true nature of oneself is equated here to the real waking state. When a person enters the deep sleep state, he forgets his waking state reality. Thus forgetfulness of the truth of the Self is then equated to the sleep of ignorance. In this state of forgetfulness (*pramada*), he is deluded and limits himself to a physical body, whereas he is truly the infinite Consciousness principle. This restricted individuality (*paricchinna vyakti bodhah*) constitutes the fall from *bhuma sthiti* (infinitude) to *alpa jivatvam* (finitude). The Upanishad proclaims, “In Infinitude alone, there is absolute joy; there is no joy in finitude. That which indeed is the Infinite, is immortal; that which is finite, is but mortal.”

The assumption of this limited role corresponds to the dream state in his sleep of Self-ignorance. Thus in

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23 *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.9, “….uNmai kANdAr kalangAre kAN” and v.35, “siddhamAi ulporulai...uNmai nilai nindru poimmai teerndAr tiyanguvaro ter.”

24 *Sri Ramana Nool Thirattu*, 7th edn. 1987, p.48, “Tannai marandu tanuve tAnAveNNi yeNNil piravi yedutthirudhi tannai uNarndu tAnAdal, ulaga sanchArak kanavin vizhitthale kAN”.

this sleep (avidya nidra), the person projects a dream world wherein he confounds himself as a helpless creature (the jiva, who is the dreamer), and undergoes untold misery. He is then whirled helplessly in the inescapable wheel of samsara without a shred of hope or relief, in countless births of transmigratory cycle.  

The dreamer travels all over the world in his dream, undergoing countless experiences of pleasure and pain. In the end, he is helplessly pushed out of the dream into the waking state. Instantly he feels immense relief that all his tiresome exertions were unreal, realising that he has been all along lying comfortably in his own bed. In the same way, all our struggles and spiritual sadhana of self-enquiry (following the instructions of the Advaita Jnana-Guru), and finally realising the Self and getting liberated from the cycle of birth and death, amount to merely waking up from the beginningless sleep of Self-ignorance.  

Thus by recognition of the true nature of the Self (pratyabhijna), we finally realize that all our sufferings in the preceding lives have been just a dream ride on the mythical wheel of samsara. We laugh at our own folly and know that our real svarupa had never suffered the slightest dent at any time. As Sage Gaudapada declared, “There is never any creation or dissolution, neither a bound jiva nor a seeker, none striving for release, and finally no liberated person either. This is the ultimate vision of Truth.” 

The first verse of Ekatma Panchakam reveals this as the final truth of ajata anubhava, borne out in the pratyabhijna samadhi of the Self, wherein Bhagavan revelled all his life from that momentous day of his Enlightenment.

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26 Dakshinamurti Stotram, v.8, “visvam pasyati kArya kAraNatayA…
svapne jAgrati vA ya esha purushah mAyA paribhrAmitah…”

27 Mandukya Karika, v.1.16, “anAdi mAyAyA suptah yadA jivah prabudhyate,
ajam anidram asvapnam advaitam budhyate tadaA”.

28 Mandukya Karika, v.2.32, “na nirodho nachotpattihi na baddho na ca sAdhakah,
namumukshuh na vai muktah ityeshA paramArthatA”.

October - December
The first part of this essay titled “How I came to Bhagavan” ended with a reference to how, after I came to Bhagavan through a fortuitous configuration of circumstances, neither I nor Bhagavan left the other. I had enough wisdom not to tune-out the great good fortune that I had in the living presence of Bhagavan by my side every moment of my life.

Now in this concluding part I would like to elaborate on how I have attempted to see the most basic principle of my existence, the very foundation of my being, by regressing all the way to the core, the “I” that is. I am calling that foundation the “default mode.” The reference of course is to the operating system of a computer before it is modified to perform its myriad functions. It is different from the despondent stupor into which we often fall when things go wrong. Far from it — our default mode is blissful and self-aware, while also being aware of everything that is superimposed on it.
No detective work is needed to know that we do have such a default mode to which we all revert periodically, because we experience it and taste its indescribable peace. During those fleeting moments, we forget all our trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows, and the entire phenomenal world, as we relax peacefully in the bosom of our own being. We experience this incomparable happiness while both happy and not-so-happy events befall us during the course of our lives. We slip into the default state at the end of a hard day’s work. We take comfort in it as we forget a calamity that has occurred against which we are powerless. We immerse ourselves in the tranquility of our inner self after we are done revelling in a happy event. We learn about that inner being from the timeless teachings of a great sage like Bhagavan who lived in that state every second of his life as a jnani and proved the very real possibility of making that default mode permanent here and now.

The default mode is a state of consciousness where there is no mind as we know it. It is rather the natural state of one’s being. It is *sahaja samadhi*. It is our natural condition, our birthright. The million dollar question of course is how to attain that state consciously. We need help. Sri Ramakrishna describes this state:

“After a man has attained Samadhi all his actions drop away. All devotional activities….as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God the outer display of his work diminishes, so much so that he cannot even sing God’s name and glories.”

Let’s look at how Bhagavan calls our attention to the fact that this default mode is our real existence, contrary to how we live our lives helplessly pushed from one extreme to another without realising there is relief at hand. He starts by distinguishing two kinds of samadhi:

“When the senses are merged in darkness it is deep sleep; when merged in light it is samadhi. Just as a passenger in a carriage is unaware of the motion, the halting or the harnessing of the horses, so also a

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jnani in *sahaja samadhi* is unaware of the happenings, waking, dream and deep sleep...

“In *kevala samadhi*, the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep, are only merged, ready to emerge after regaining the state other than *samadhi*. In *sahaja samadhi* the activities vital and mental, and the three states are destroyed, never to reappear….They pertain to his (the jnani’s) body and not his Real Self, *swarupa*. For himself, he is like the sleeping passenger….”

Our concern is with *sahaja samadhi*, for it alone qualifies as the default state, the deepest condition there is where we taste of lasting bliss. Bhagavan stresses the fact that (*sahaja*) *samadhi* is one’s default state of existence:

> “*Samadhi* is one’s natural state. It is the undercurrent in all the three states. This—that is, ‘I’—is not in those states, but these states are in It. If we get *samadhi* in our waking state that will persist in deep sleep also. The distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness belongs to the realm of mind, which is transcended by the state of the Real Self.”

To further drill the notion of *samadhi* as being our true nature to which we habitually revert effortlessly and unconsciously, he reiterates:

> “When the real, effortless, permanent, happy nature is realized, it will be found to be not inconsistent with the ordinary activities of life. The samadhi reached after efforts looks like abstraction from the external activities. A person might be so abstracted or live freely among people without detriment to his Peace and Happiness because that is his true nature or the Self.”

The greatest gift that I believe I have received from Bhagavan is this understanding, this sense of direction, and the assurance that this goal is within reach. Where at one time I wouldn’t have known about my own default state even when I touched it off and on, I am now convinced that it is what I should aim for to the exclusion of every

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2 *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§82.
3 Ibid., Talk§136.
4 Ibid., Talk§597.
other mundane goal. As they say, “I have been there and done that,” and have no further interest in doing any more of that. I truly feel at peace with the world and free from every worldly shackle. Again, I can only say that I have been lucky, in that I never lost my direction or felt helpless as I arrived at many crossroads over the decades. I was not looking for miracles but what I considered miracles did happen, and I was lovingly put back on track whenever I tended to derail.

At the risk of sounding self-important, let me mention a couple of instances of such derailment and near-derailment.

The very first event dates back to the ’50s when I was desperately trying to do postgraduate work at an American university, partly as an ego trip and partly for professional reasons. Secretly, I always admired the automobile as a symbol of civilization (wrongly, needless to add) and of course the U.S. was the country at the time for automobile aficionados. The whole country seemed to have grown around the automobile, at least in my thinking. I was more obsessed with the automobile than even the higher studies, though I wanted a “foreign” degree for my job. My personal astrologer told me to forget it, because my stars even remotely did not indicate the possibility.

The obsession (and the resultant depression) took hold of me stronger than ever, and for about a year or so, I thought of nothing and prayed for nothing except enrolling in an American university. Lo and behold, my prayers were answered and, after dozens of applications and tons of correspondence, a major university accepted me as a candidate for the Ph.D. So much for my non-cooperative stars and the omniscient astrologers.

After I came to the U.S. and achieved my “ambition,” my Indian roots began tugging at my heart strings as did the waiting job offers over the years through the ’70s intermittently. Each time I decided to return to India and teach at the university, I surrendered my coveted “green card” and figured I was going to settle down without further wandering, but after a year or two, the wanderlust got the better of me again or the family’s decision overruled my own. After doing this three times, it was a near impossibility to regain the green card for a
fourth time, but I remember the U.S. Consul telling me, upon my pleading, “we will work something out.” He surely did and I finally landed back in the U.S., this time for good, in 1982. One night during this stressful period, I had a dream, probably a trick of my overwrought mind, in which I was walking down a trail on the Arunachala hill when I saw Bhagavan coming in the opposite direction. I stepped aside as I made bold to ask him if I would be able to return to the U.S. He replied, in Telugu, that I would be “coming and going.”

Forgetting the immediate occasion, I assumed that his answer applied to the larger context of rebirth. If I have his helping hand available to me in each birth, what is the big deal about it? Again, it could all be my imagination.

Our family had its share of tragedies, the most heart-wrenching being the loss of our six-year-old daughter, who was hit by a truck driven by a drunk driver in Hyderabad as she and her friends were crossing the road to catch the bus to go to school. Her friends were just slightly faster, but our little girl was hit by the bumper and was instantly killed. Girls are very prized in our family because we have had very few of them, and she was our only daughter. My wife was permanently affected by the incident, but I consoled myself and the rest of the family saying that, if we deserved that girl, she would come back to us. And come back she did within the year — I was sure of that — and I now have a happily married 33-year-old daughter. My wife never fully recovered from the loss of her daughter, despite her second coming, through her own end a few years back.

Once when I was driving home in Hyderabad with the family after watching a movie, the car stalled on a side street around 10:30 p.m. and it was beyond my mechanical prowess to get it restarted. The kids were getting cranky and we were a good ten miles away from home. Not a soul in sight, to help mechanically or otherwise. I got out of the car and tried to fiddle with the engine, but really hoping that a ‘miracle’ would happen. Pretty soon, before I got too desperate, someone came out of nowhere and got the recalcitrant

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5 “vastu untavu, potu untavu.”
vehicle going again. A mechanic in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere? Well, why not?

In the “nothing is impossible” department, a very special and incredible thing happened as I was hopelessly in a bind. For a variety of reasons including medical, but mostly due to my own fiscal irresponsibility, I had racked up tens of thousands of dollars in credit card debt and there was no way I was going to be able to pay it off just before I retired. I explored all the avenues, except filing for bankruptcy, because I had my dignity left. If I owed something to somebody, I must repay it, but how? I then happened to participate in a nationwide game of chance, whose odds of winning were 3,904,701 to one. But no odds are too low when you are in good hands. I hit it big and won the exact amount I needed to discharge all my obligations. I was dumbstruck. Coincidence? Maybe, but just in the nick of time? I think not.

Just before my retirement a few years ago from the City of Palm Springs, my mother fell very ill in a different city and the prognosis was dire. She was in a nursing home. I could not go to see her at the time, and I prayed that she be alive for two more months until I retired and stayed with her. Though the doctors gave her only weeks, she had lived until I was able to see her and spend two full weeks with her. Though she was supposed not to recognize anyone, I am certain she knew me as she shed tears upon seeing me, though she could not verbalize her happiness. She passed away peacefully.

Let me mention just one more instance of Bhagavan watching out for me, and this was particularly important to me. In 2001, when I was getting the second edition of my book on Sankara for the press, we had a major fire which completely gutted the apartment and everything in it including my computer with all the files in it. The revised Sankara book was one of them. I had no other copy. The augmented edition would not have seen the light of day, but for the fact that just a couple of days prior to the fire, I had mailed the computer file to the publisher with great foresight, which I normally don’t exhibit. And the book came out on schedule intact. Another case of the subtle workings of grace.
Things happen to all of us on a daily basis which we often dismiss as coincidences but, if coincidence after coincidence happens almost in a predictable way, it’s logical and also common sense to conclude that there is “Someone up there” taking care of us. The extraordinary and unexpected happenings not only serve as lifesavers at the time but also act as pointers to our innate potential—the default powerhouse—with the help of our faith in the Master’s grace. Alternatively, we can continue to live our lives in ignorance of the very bliss that powers us.

At this point I am sure of one thing: if I had not come into Bhagavan’s fold when I did, I hate to imagine what would have happened to me. Simple truths appear too complicated to understand on one’s own; the spirit may be willing but the flesh tends to be weak; temptation lurks in every corner waiting to shanghai one’s resolve—this is exactly where one needs a firm hand to hold on to, to get out of the mess that our lives get us into. I have found that firmest of hands. I am, once again, a free person thoroughly enjoying my efforts to go back to the very basis of this crazy existence.

The default state of living and being is just amazing, with nothing that needs to be done and nothing that is worth hankering after. No action, no consequence, no residual aftertaste. Bhagavan asks rhetorically, “For the noble yogi who has transcended his mind and realized his true nature, what else is there to do?” 6 According to Sankara, this state of consciousness is samadhi in which the mind is first made steady and pure awareness (Brahman) then shines in its place.7 It is real self-knowledge.

I am aware that it takes a great deal of practice for us to arrive at our default state, but a logical understanding of it and a conviction that it is our true and natural existence is a good beginning. Again, Bhagavan’s assurances should leave no doubt:

“What is samadhi? Samadhi is one’s true essential nature. How then can it come and go?

“If you do not realize your essential nature, your sight remains obstructed. What is the obstruction? Find it and remove it. So one’s

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6 *Upadesasaram*, verse 15. Translation mine.
7 *Aparokshanubhuti*, verse 124.
efforts are meant only for the removal of obstructions which hide the true vision. The real nature remains the same. When once it is realized it is permanent…

“A practiser (sic) gains peace of mind and is happy. That peace is the result of his efforts. But the real state must be effortless. The effortless samadhi is the true one and the perfect state. It is permanent.”

So where am I at now? In my admittedly limited understanding of my own default state, I must just keep at it delving deeper and deeper by the hour, and by the day until the time when:

“….the one who asks the nature of samadhi and the method of getting into it vanishes, (and) samadhi will result”

A long way to go, but what a fun way!
Through the thick mists of the night
And the sharp rays of the day,
Through the dark gloom of sorrow
And the clear sparkle of joy,
Through the timid discontent of winter
And the bold surfeit of summer,
Above and beyond and below
And hither and thither — It shines,
The Great Effulgence — by default.
My noxious ego
Must needs find It— to self-destruct.

Yes, the pesky ego must first be destroyed, and “there’s the rub.”
I am not worried, though I live far away from Bhagavan’s “house” in Tiruvannamalai. I have hope, based on his replies to devotees:

….one lady asked: “Do you ever intend to go to America?”
M: America is just where India is (i.e. in the plane of thought).

Doesn’t this also mean, by the same token, that India is where America is on the plane of thought?

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8 op.cit., *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§597.
9 Ibid., Talk§155.
10 With apologies to the Bard.
Again, when an American visitor was feeling bad about having to leave Bhagavan and return to the U.S., Bhagavan told him:

The Master is not outside you as you seem to imagine. He is within, is in fact the Self. Recognize this truth. Seek within you and find Him there. Then you will have constant communion with Him. The message is always there; it is never silent; it can never forsake you; nor can you ever move away from the Master.¹²

“Constant communion with Him” is exactly what happens in the default mode.

¹² Ibid., Talk§503.

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**Faith**

D. Samarender Reddy

Faith is a fragile thing
Any wind of errant reason can topple it over
And reasons are aplenty
As to how things are the way they are.
Not knowing the truth
You are at the mercy of others who claim
They know the truth.
Adjudicating between competing claims
Can leave you perplexed
For how can the mind that does not
Itself know what the truth is
Decide between competing claims.
So man cannot avoid
Faith of one sort or another
By listening keenly to what the heart says
To the mind’s chatter.
If you come into my house
You come into my heart
Where all is not as it might be
Even though beauty is here
And an aroma of peace perhaps
For all who understand.

How easy it is to forget that our life is not fully of our own making and that we are the product of many influences – a continuation of a past without beginning. In the early years of life, helpless in our incomprehension, we were totally dependent on those...
from generations before, who were willing to care for us in our turn, as we would care for our children when we came to maturity – if such be our destiny. We have always been nurtured, instructed and encouraged by the adults in our world for good or ill and we have naturally inherited from them both their finest qualities and their flaws. Fortunate indeed are we when we have been offered a sublime vision and not too many reasons for discouragement.

The beginnings of learning are often none too easy and it is then perhaps that we have been only too glad in our bewilderment to find a mentor, who may have come just at the right time to clarify our life’s purpose. These most important encounters of our life – the most significant and pivotal meetings – often seem to come swiftly out of the blue in a totally unforced way. They are unexpected moments that have a natural and easy flow, as if they were waiting for us to pass by. Taken by surprise, we are available and open to their invitation; only later, upon reflection, do we suspect their significance and marvel how easily things fell into place as part of a meaningful pattern.

That is how it seemed to be in the spring of 1971, when I first met the small, elderly Englishwoman, who was to become for me a valuable spiritual guide and close friend. There have been several other good teachers in my life, all of whom have made a significant contribution to my inner growth in distinctive ways, but none other perhaps has understood me so well or retained a more telling awareness of my inner calling as Clare Cameron. It was Clare, who seemed to have the most definite intimation of my specific gifts, as well as evidently appreciating that there were still some daunting obstacles in my path yet to be acknowledged and met by myself.

My first impression of her was of a slight, bustling figure rushing to go elsewhere. As I approached the front door of her house, she emerged suddenly out of a side-entrance. I hesitantly murmured my greetings and spoke shyly of the letter I had written to her from India.

‘Yes, of course, I remember, but I can’t stop now as I have to catch a train,’ she smiled as she thrust a bundle of pamphlets into my arms.

‘You may find these interesting. Do let me know what you think of them.’
And before I could collect my thoughts, she was walking quickly away across the lawn and was gone. I was left alone in the extensive wooded garden, with its spacious and tranquil air, which would later become so familiar – more than a second home.

Her courteous welcome and hurried departure hinted at a very particular aspect of Clare’s character. She often liked to present herself as a restless, fugitive gypsy with no place to rest her head finally in this ever-changing world. She sometimes seemed like a wise and wizened Taoist sage, accustomed to wandering in Nature and only fully at ease in the solitude of the mountains or at large under the open sky.

Nevertheless it was here, in this lovely spot on the edge of a meandering, tidal inlet on the south coast of England, that Clare lived and worked hard in the mellow autumn of her years. Widowed twenty five years previously, she was now dedicated to her task as busy editor of a small but influential spiritual magazine, dedicated to esoteric Christian teachings and the exploration of comparative religion. Few indeed were the books on spirituality published in that era that did not benefit from a discerning yet broadly sympathetic critique in her journal, *The Science of Thought Review* – and more often than not the review was written by Clare herself in her distinctive style. It was in her upstairs study, overlooking the tranquil garden, that she composed her editorials and attended dutifully to her vast and unceasing correspondence from all over the world; so it would have been here too that she received my own letter posted a few months earlier from South India.

I had left my job as reporter on a local newspaper the previous year to study Indian spiritual teachings and had ended up staying at a native hermitage in the burning heat of the plains in Tamil Nadu. This was the peaceful ashram at the foot of the sacred mountain Arunachala, which had grown up around the great Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi, after he first decided to settle in that remote spot and his devotees followed after him to fulfil his wishes.

This famous teacher of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, who had revitalised the ancient spiritual path of self-knowledge through the
MOUNTAIN PATH

use of the profound question ‘Who am I?, was no longer alive by the
time I arrived at Sri Ramanasramam, but the extraordinary spiritual
atmosphere at his former hermitage remained just as potent as in
his lifetime – and this beautiful place deeply impressed most visitors
fortunate enough to find themselves there.

When once you have alighted and settled at such a special place,
it is hardly surprising that you do not feel much inclined to leave;
it was during an extended eight-month stay at the ashram that I
stumbled upon some copies of the journal of which Clare was the
Editor. One afternoon I was studying in the library there, when I
casually picked up a copy of The Science of Thought Review and soon
became absorbed in it. I wrote to Clare saying how much I enjoyed
her writing and to my surprise she replied promptly, signing off the
typed letter in a quaint and unusual way: – ‘with warm hands from
across the seas’. Encouraged by her welcoming tone, I lost little time
in going to see her upon my return to England. It was the beginning
of an affectionate, creative relationship that endured until the day
she died. Although she passed away many years ago, I hardly feel her
absence – it is as if she is still around, for the deep connection with
people we have loved is never lost.

Clare has been described as a Mystic of Nature, but she was also
a free-thinker and rebel, who did not easily fit into a conventional
mould. At long last, as the years have passed, I have grown to
understand her more fully and have finally begun to comprehend
the universal message that she constantly endeavoured to share
enthusiastically with anyone who would care to listen.

I still have several notebooks from this formative time in my life
and they serve as nostalgic reminder of the considerable impact her
teachings had on me when I first encountered them. I had spent
literally hours in the refreshing coolness and calm of the Indian
mornings patiently copying extensive passages from her editorials;
my neat handwritten notes are a sign of how intent I was upon the
task, how voracious for wisdom I was in an earnest attempt to clarify
my mind and formulate an articulate synthesis of the most illumined
spiritual teachings I could find. Clare’s approach matched my aspiring
mood perfectly and I had absorbed pure nourishment from her; my mind and heart had soaked it up like a sponge.

During this youthful period of study and seclusion in India, I was grateful to be given the opportunity of editing and making literary contributions to the celebrated ashram quarterly magazine, copies of which are still distributed all over the world to ardent spiritual seekers and which is still dedicated to clarifying ancient paths available to people in the modern world. One of the first complete articles I wrote for *The Mountain Path* at that time was entitled ‘Renewal of Faith in the West’ and I was surprised recently to find just how relevant it still seemed when I stumbled upon it unexpectedly after an elapse of thirtyfive years. I was even more astonished to notice how I had quoted some words from Clare to support my argument that religious life seemed to be undergoing a fundamental transformation in the West – and that this much-needed renewal of faith was occurring outside the institutional church. I had written decisively that it was Eastern religions, which were providing the essential inspiration for a fusion of cultures, before adding that a deep spiritual discontent was at the root of a strong revival of religious values in Europe and America. Then I had gone on to mention how Clare, writing in her own magazine, had drawn attention to the need for enrichment of tradition with the following sensible words:

> We do urge a regard for all that was of good report in the past, a seeking out of meaning in tradition that we as ordinary people may receive new hope. Life can be infinitely richer than we imagine when we look about us and begin to reflect. For all that has crystallised in tradition can be dissolved (is it not already dissolving?) in order that the Tree of Life may put forward new branches.

My own observations, altogether familiar to me of course, seemed nevertheless like those from someone I hardly recognised, while Clare’s thoughts seemed as cogent as ever and it was an invigorating tonic to read her lines once again. My attention quickly took in the list of
other articles in the on-line archive of previous issues of the Indian journal – and yes, there was another piece I had written the previous year, which I had all but forgotten.

The title of this second article provides a clear pointer to my state of mind at the time. ‘The Pain of Purification’ represented a clear summing-up of the process of spiritual inquiry, which I was then actually undergoing at no small discomfort to my self esteem. As a concise description of the nature of the task before me, it could hardly be bettered even now – the only difference was that the process I was describing still remained to be traversed and made real in my own experience. Actual realisation was crucial – as I was to discover, for there are no short cuts to Truth. These are some of the thoughts I set down:

From the ultimate Vedantic standpoint of non-duality, there can be no discussion of the subject. At the centre, Truth is realised to be all there is; the problem of purification and the pain that goes with it only arise when we are away from this Centre of Being and wandering in the shadows of duality. We must be purified of a false sense of separation from the Self – that is the only task before us…It is selfishness, which has to die at the cost of our struggle and pain…but that is the tremendous price to be paid for eternal freedom – there is no easy way…What is most required is a basic reorientation of attitude, in which one seeks to give rather than take – to put joy into life instead of extracting every drop of self-centred satisfaction from it…Thus we open our heart to allow the Truth to flow. So we pass from the theory of purification to practice, from idealism to realism. Steadfast practice alone can translate speculation into living truth; it is the actual inner transformation that counts – not empty talk about it.

I have often reflected since about the exact origin of the strong connecting link I had immediately felt to Clare’s sane and balanced spiritual philosophy of life. What was the root of this close, natural
affinity we shared? From the beginning I had been touched by her eloquence and delicate sense of beauty. I was moved by her compassion for all living things and deeply attracted by the all-embracing scope of her universal vision. These are certainly my initial answers, but perhaps they do not go far enough or penetrate deep enough. Perhaps the true answer is altogether more uncomfortable, but also more real and reassuring. In her courageous unconventionality, Clare had somehow enabled me to answer the impossible question – how to find fortitude and creativity in the midst of the rawness of my pain when my life fell apart. Yet she did not stop there; she had also firmly pushed the boundaries of my understanding and graciously transmitted to me the means and capacity to carry out the essential task that naturally follows: how I may begin to help others truly when the same thing happens to them.

Clare was no saint. She had saintly qualities, but she also certainly had her fair share of human frailty; above all she understood what it meant to be fully human and had penetrated the hidden depths of her nature to find compassion for herself and other people. She once wrote that Life, when lit by love and shaped by wisdom, is an art open to all. Probably what I loved most about Clare is best summed up in her own words, which were set out in the following beautiful prayer. Entitled simply ‘Let me stand’, it can be regarded as her creed and is both a powerful invocation to God and a plea for true sanity:

Let me stand for peace and order in a disordered world. Let me not be involved in the feverish distractions, the constant busyness and restlessness that drives so many lives, but tune my days and nights to the quiet rhythms of the universe. For these express and satisfy the spirit. Let me find my personal rhythm in that Greater Rhythm and abide in it, in all changing scenes, circumstances and events, as a ship rides the sea or a bird the air. For this is to feel one with, and at home in the universe, which nourishes, sustains and forever recreates us through life and death. Let me stand for good manners, good taste and a true sense of values in everything, amidst much that is so shoddy, cheap and
second-rate that the young amongst us no longer remember the art and the discipline of gracious living. Let me be courteous to all and superior to none – and reverence all life, since God is contained in all its forms.

Let me keep my sense of wonder before the perpetual miracles of simple things – daily bread, the fruitful earth, open skies, running water, the grace of beasts, the skill of men and the inspirations of art.

Let not my senses run after false glamour in any of its allures, lest I encourage the commerce and the greed in every country, which exploits the ignorant.

Let me listen and try to understand everyone, every situation and circumstance – rather than judge on insufficient evidence. Let me never assault the sacred territory of another but, aware of concealed distress, do all I can to support, comfort and alleviate – thus bridging in love and sympathy the loneliness in which so many live.

Let me be happy, that I may bring happiness to others. Let my vision be clear and far-flung for those who cannot see very well or very far – thus helping them discover the patterns of eternity in the chaos of history and be re-inspired and find new hope.

Let me give thanks all the days of my life for the radiance of the opening vistas on every side for the children of God. For they that have walked in darkness have seen a great light. Let me take the hands of all who stumble in the darkness and do all in my power to help them to that Light. In this is the greatest joy that anyone can know. Let me bring that joy. Amen.
Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Seven

Tulasidas obtains Sri Hanuman’s Darshan

A fter leaving the ghost’s haunt, Tulasidas wandered around crying, “Rama, Rama”. By evening he reached the venue of where the recital of Ramayana was to take place. Parking himself on one side of the path, he awaited for the first guests to arrive. Soon, he saw an old man who fit the description given by the ghost. Approaching him fast Tulasidas touched Sri Hanuman’s feet in reverence and asked, “Where do you live, Swami?”. But the aged man continued to walk fast to the venue without replying. Tulasidas waited till the discourse was over and then accosted the old man again as he was walking behind the brahmans.

He addressed the aged man, “O noble Swami! You appear to be an exalted soul. I would like to accompany you to your Ashram.”

Sri Hanuman interposed, “My place is far from here. Further, I live alone and don’t prefer any company.”

The servant of Hari, Tulasidas said, “I want to become worthy of your blessings. Be merciful and take me with you to your Ashram and give me initiation.”
The messenger of Ram said, “I am a poor brahmin. Why do you offer so much respect to me? Further, I don’t know any mantra. The pauranik who is a great jnani has initiated many. If you approach him, your wish will be fulfilled.” Saying this, he accelerated his pace and fast disappeared into the crowd. The audience was on its way out.

Tulsidas got flustered at this and pushing through the crowd, he peered into the faces of the old men. People were offended at his strange and impolite behaviour and shied away from him. Some rebuked him, “What an uncivilized fellow you are!” Tulsidas didn’t pay attention to their words. As the old man was so swift in his movements and could not be located amidst the crowd, Tulsidas became sure that he was Sri Hanuman himself.

He returned early the next day and awaited the old man’s arrival. Sri Hanuman espied Tulsidas waiting in ambush for him. He thought, “O, he is waiting there like Yama from whom no one can escape!” He averted his face from Tulsidas to not stand out and walked very rapidly while passing him. However, Tulsidas recognized him and ran after him. Catching hold of his feet, Tulsidas said, “Swami, why are you turning away from me? Yesterday you tricked me and slipped away into the crowd, but today I will not let you move from this place.”

Feigning anger Sri Hanuman said, “Hey rascal! You are troubling me by barring my way. I am getting late in reaching the locale of discourse. If you are waylaying me for initiation, let me first learn some mantra from the pauranik for you.”

Tulsidas asked, “Swami, please divulge your true identity to me. Where are you coming from? In the name of God, I beg you to please reveal the truth.”

“Why have you picked on me to start an unnecessary dispute? It is none of your business as to who I am or where I live. Unless there is any connection between us, why should I relate to you anything about myself or my whereabouts? Like a daylight robber, you are harassing me for the last two days. You scum, get lost,” hissed Sri Hanuman angrily.

Tulsidas stood unfazed and saying, “Unless you reveal the truth about yourself, I am not going to release you from here,” he held the old man forcibly in his grip.
Becoming agitated, Sri Hanuman exerted pressure on the ground with his feet and released himself from Tulasidas’ grip. Jumping away from him, Sri Hanuman spoke in a furious voice, “How dare you prevent me from going to the discourse? Have you sworn to disturb my schedule and austerities? First you provoke me with words and then hold me against my will. You, rogue, if you ever again come near, I will beat you into a pulp. I will not spare you.” Sri Hanuman sped away to the pauranik’s place.

Now fully convinced that it was Sri Hanuman himself, Tulasidas waited outside till the discourse was over. He planned to follow him when he came out. Sri Hanuman waited inside till the crowd dispersed. Then he sneaked a look outside to see if Tulasidas had left.

Just then, Tulasidas entered the pauranik’s house and almost bumped into Sri Hanuman. He pleaded, “O revered Swami! I have been waiting for you outside for a long while. Won’t you take pity on me?”

“O..O… he is a smart scoundrel!” muttering thus, Sri Hanuman vanished from sight by his mystical power.

Unaware of this, Tulasidas searched for him inside the house and all around. Suddenly, it dawned on him that the old man had played a trick on him. Swallowing his disappointment, Tulasidas decided to try again next day and retraced his steps home with a heavy heart.

He came to the venue of the discourse early next day and laid himself in wait for Sri Hanuman’s arrival. Fearing that Tulasidas might again intercept him and draw him into a scuffle, if he took the same route, Sri Hanuman materialized himself inside the pauranik’s house and sat listening to the discourse with rapt attention.

Poor Tulasidas, becoming weary of the long futile wait entered the house. There, he was surprised to find the old man sitting in the front and joyfully enjoying the discourse. His heart fluttering with joy, Tulasidas sallied forth into the house. Approaching Sri Hanuman, he prostrated and asked humbly, “O Swami! By which way you left yesterday and by which way you entered today? Be kind to me and allay my doubts.”

Sri Hanuman, annoyed at being tracked down, ground his teeth showing strong signs of disapproval. His face red with anger, he
pushed away Tulasidas roughly with his elbow. Averting his face, he ignored him and with eyes closed, became absorbed in the discourse.

Undaunted, the staunch devotee asked, “O revered Swami, why do you despise me so much and become angry at my very sight? Won’t you open your eyes and cast your gracious look on me?”

Sri Hanuman, gritting his teeth, contained his outburst of anger so as not to disturb the discourse. But Tulasidas would not leave him alone. He continued to pester him. After sometime, Sri Hanuman lost his patience. He turned furiously to Tulasidas and whispered through his teeth, “You idiot! Why do you keep prattling while the recital is going on? Don’t you have the sense to keep quiet in a sacred place? Get away from me and sit at a distance. I warn you, don’t disturb me again.”

“O Swami! If I leave your proximity even for a moment, you will perform your vanishing tricks and leave me high and dry. That is why I am sticking close to you. Please tell me by which way you entered the house?” questioned Tulasidas undeterred.

Sri Hanuman exclaimed, “O Lord! Won’t you save me from this annoying bug? Just like a thief who lost his son in the place he went to rob, I have lost my peace in this place where I had hoped to enjoy listening to Your pastimes. I am harassed by this irksome fellow rendering it difficult to concentrate on the discourse. He is obstinate and is sticking to me like a pest.”

Sri Hanuman was thoroughly vexed with Tulasidas. Incensed with his brazenness, Sri Hanuman whispered angrily, “Hey idiot, what are you blabbering about? Please don’t disturb me. He who obstructs holy acts is like poison. Go and sit away from me.”

Tulasidas protested, “No, no. I will not move away from you even by an inch. Like yesterday, you will throw dust in my eyes and disappear.” Hurling abuses at him in low tones, Sri Hanuman got up and sat further away.

But the intrepid Tulasidas followed him like a shadow and beleaguered him, “O Swami, why do you get annoyed with me? Which way did you come?”

Now Sri Hanuman, losing patience, became livid with fury and spoke wrathfully, “Hey rascal! It is none of your business how I arrive
or how I depart. Have you come here with the sole intention of upsetting me?” When heads turned in their direction, Sri Hanuman regained his composure and put his attention on the narrative.

Undaunted by his reprisals, Tulasidas pursued, “Take pity on me and bestow your grace on me. Please don’t vanish in the air like yesterday, O Swami!” He started cajoling Sri Hanuman.

“Ha..Ha! O God, now this fellow croons to me as if he is talking to his sweetheart. I am trying to enjoy the discourse, but he keeps disturbing me.” Drawing deep breaths, Sri Hanuman said to Tulasidas, “If you don’t stop this, I will thrash you.” He got up and moved to another place.

Tulasidas tagged on to him and sitting close whispered in his ears, “O supreme being! Please don’t become cross with me. I know for sure that you are Sri Hanuman. I have been struggling for the last twelve years to get the Lord’s darshan. Won’t you be compassionate and grant me the darshan of my Beloved!”

Sri Hanuman exclaimed, “I am indeed accursed with a terrible fate! He takes no notice of my repeated pleas to leave me in peace. He goes on talking drivel. O Rama, will you not rescue me from this blabbering fool?” Sri Hanuman seemed quite exasperated.

Jumping in joy to hear the name of Rama, Tulasidas said, “O Swami, I am eager to see the Lord whose nectarine name you uttered just now. If you do me this favour, I will be grateful to you till eternity.”

In order to buy temporary peace, Sri Hanuman said, “O dear, if you can keep quiet till the discourse is over, we can talk in the end. Now, I bow to you and beg you to let me listen to the narration.”

Prostrating to him with great fervour, Tulasidas said, “O Swami, Truth-incarnate, you yourself are the hero of Ramayana! Where is the need for you to listen to these glories from the lips of others?”

Bewildered by this utterance, Sri Hanuman thought, “Ha! It seems he truly knows my secret. He has seen through my disguise. If others come to know of this, they will also start harassing me. I must escape from here through some ruse.” With this resolve, he waited patiently till the recital was over and vanished from that place as if by a sleight of hand.
At once, Tulasidas jumped to his feet and parking himself in front of the gate, scanned every face to ascertain whether the aged brahmin was amongst them. The irate devotees shouted at his insolence, “Who is this fellow checking everyone at the entrance like a tax collector at the toll gate? Let us slap him hard, kick him, scratch or maul him, or let him be impaled on the spear.” More people joined in the verbal assault.

In his anxiety and eagerness to locate Sri Hanuman, Tulasidas paid no heed to their insults. Stoically bearing with their invectives, he continued to check the faces till the last person left. Assailed by disappointment and sorrow, he ran hither and thither desperately like a blind man, searching in all directions. Returning to the same place, after a futile search, he burnt in the fire of grief and dejection for having missed Sri Hanuman yet another day. Resolving to get hold of him the next day without fail, he retraced his steps home.

On the next day, the same story was repeated. While Tulasidas was waiting for hours outside, Sri Hanuman was merrily listening to the discourse inside. When Tulasidas beheld Sri Hanuman sitting in the hall, he bounded towards him and falling flat at his feet said with tears streaming down his eyes, “O Swami, why do you play this unkind game with me? Can anyone else quench the fire raging in my heart except you? Please bestow your compassion on me today and enable me to get Lord Rama’s darshan.” Prostrating to him again and again, he sang the adoration of Sri Hanuman and begged him to rescue him from his anguish.

Sri Hanuman said, “You foolish brahmin! You are obstinate like a mule. Why do you inflict yourself on me? Lord Rama is in Vaikunta. If you are so devoted to Him, why don’t you go to Vaikunta and have His darshan? What is the idea in groaning for Rama, sitting here? You are overcome by madness and you need a doctor to cure you. Don’t you come anywhere near me! Don’t stand in front of me, get away from me.”

Tulasidas replied in a mellowed voice, “O my Sadguru! Awakener of Knowledge in our hearts! O Lord, I will certainly go to Vaikunta and have the Lord’s darshan when I have a hero like you on my side! Is it a big deal when I have taken refuge in you? Your amazing feats of crossing the vast ocean in one breath and jumping from Lanka to the
Himalayas in a single leap etc. prove that anything is possible for you. Didn’t you lift the hill with its sanjivini herb in a trice and carry it in one hand from Himalayas to Lanka and back and save Lakshmana? What will be lacking for me, who has taken shelter under an intrepid champion like you?” Tulasidas started to sing and dance in ecstasy.

Sri Hanuman chided him, “Why do you jump up and down? Don’t flaunt your learning and all your smart tricks before me. You are indeed making a fool of yourself in front of everyone here. Enough of your parade! Go out and talk rhetoric before people of your ilk.” He tried to chase him away.

But Tulasidas refused to budge, “O great ascetic! I will not leave you even for a moment. If I lose you again, I will not remain alive. You are known to be a mine of compassion to the weak and helpless. While so, how can you be partial in my case? Please forgive any offence of mine and instead look upon it as homage. I am prepared to do whatever it takes to earn the grace of the Lord. Won’t you help me in this? O darling of Anjana! Friend of the noble! Dispeller of obstacles! O mighty hero!”

“Hurray!” drawled Sri Hanuman in a mocking tone, “First, you tried to sweet-talk me. Now you are glorifying me. Your overflowing devotion seems ready to break the banks! You are resorting to all kinds of tricks. I have had enough of your antics.” He left that place and sat closer to the pauranik. Realising that Sri Hanuman intended to slip away again, Tulasidas went close to Sri Hanuman and began to fasten Sri Hanuman’s left hand with his upper cloth.

Sri Hanuman thought to himself, “Oh..Oh… I am lost! What is this? When I am listening to Hari’s glories, this rogue is tying my hand as if I am a thief. What temerity! He thwarts all my attempts to absorb myself in the discourse. He is lucky that I have spared his life until now. He will not learn his lesson unless he gets a taste of my strength.”

Sri Hanuman started hitting him, raining heavy blows on his head. He choked him with his fist and kicked him. The force of the blows knocked Tulasidas down and he fell crashing down on a brahmin sitting next. Lo and behold! He managed to get up and started skipping in great delight. Hair standing on end on the body,
bathed in bliss, folding both palms, Tulasidas said, “Aha…! I have been redeemed.” Dancing and singing Sri Hanuman’s glories and mystified by the overwhelming joy that was sweeping over him, he ran hither and thither. He started tying the other hand of Sri Hanuman’s, saying, “For sure I will not let you go now!”

Appalled by the scene, some jumped on Tulasidas calling him names, “Why do you a pick up a fight with this helpless old man? Are you mad, dancing and singing in a respectable place? Is it a courtesan’s place for you to prance and croon? You should not enter this place from tomorrow.”

Intoxicated with joy, Tulasidas didn’t seem to hear these rebukes. He teased Sri Hanuman, “Swami, now how will you escape from me?”

Sri Hanuman mused, “Oh, he surely sees beyond my disguise! Someone must have divulged it to him. He is not going to lose me this time. I am trapped. Now, I should remain calm and find a ruse.”

He addressed Tulasidas, “O noble brahmin, it is improper to create disturbance during the discourse. Sin will befall us. Contemplating on the Lord, listen to the discourse patiently. Listening to holy scriptures bestows all auspiciousness. It is like a wish-fulfilling tree. Sri Hari is the supreme Godhead.” Again Sri Hanuman began to get engrossed.

Tulasidas asked, “Swami, when you leave, will you promise to get me the Lord’s darshan?”

Though Sri Hanuman tried to dodge him, Tulasidas wouldn’t give up. He continued to importune him, “You are unpredictable! How can I be sure of what you will do after the discourse? I want your assurance now itself.”

Sri Hanuman mused, “He seems to be quite quick-witted. He has sapped my energy with his smart arguments and importunate questions. There is no way to silence him with counter talk. It is better to keep quiet.” Without further reply, Sri Hanuman fell silent.

Tulasidas pressed him again, “Don’t pretend to be absorbed. I know you are scheming to disappear without leaving any trail. I have learnt your ways. I know who you are. Without any prejudice against me, you must help me to get Lord’s darshan.” He continued with tying his other hand.
Immediately, Sri Hanuman jumped to his feet and roared, “O evil man, you are so blatant. I have not seen anyone so shameless and dull-headed. O brahmins who are listening to the discourse earnestly! This ruffian has been disturbing me for the last few days and obstructing me from listening to the recital. He is tying me up and forcing me to leave the place. Is there no one in this vast assembly to punish such evil doers? Why has he picked on me for his entertainment? Why am I made the victim?”

The brahmins falling upon Tulasidas shouted, “We have been witness to your atrocities and harassment. Why do you cause disturbance in a holy place where scriptures are read?”

The pauranik asked the brahmins to throw out the trouble makers. The devotees started pushing both of them out. Sri Hanuman wailed in despair, “O noble men! Is it humane to betray an old man to this fellow?”

He pulled himself away and tried to escape. Tulasidas firmly holding on to the uppercloth to which Sri Hanuman was fastened, ran along with Sri Hanuman. To test him further, Sri Hanuman started to run wildly in the midst of the crowd dragging him through stone pillars and walls along rugged path. Without slackening his hold, Tulasidas kept up with him, knocking himself against hard objects and people. He started to bleed. He stumbled and fell, yet he didn’t relax his grip. Sri Hanuman gathering momentum, uttered a loud cry, leapt into the air and disappeared. Tulasidas crashed to the ground, his body and face bruised hitting against the stones and gravel and collapsed.

Sri Hanuman was truly amazed to see the determination and fortitude of this devotee of Rama. Moved by the intensity of his devotion, Sri Hanuman’s heart melted with compassion. He waited aside to give him darshan. After a long time, Tulasidas recovered and looked around for Sri Hanuman. Unable to find him, he broke into a heart-rending wail, “Alas! I have failed in my attempts. What is the use of keeping this life?” He pounded his head hard against a stone.

Immediately, Sri Hanuman rushed to Tulasidas, restrained him and held him in his arms with abundant love and tenderness and said, “O unparalleled among devotees, clever enough to penetrate my disguise,
I have put you through much hardship with my wild nature. Don’t be displeased with me. Please forgive me.”

All his pain and fatigue left Tulasidas in a moment. In great excitement, he clasped Sri Hanuman and falling at his feet said, “O king among ascetics! How kind you are to grant me your darshan and enslave me by your love! How fortunate am I to behold your divine form! What great merits must have been in my account for this blessing!”

Sri Hanuman embracing Tulasidas asked tenderly, “How can I be of service to you, my dear friend?”

“I am pining for Lord Rama’s darshan,” petitioned Tulasidas.

Sri Hanuman said, “If He has not given you His vision even after twelve years of rigorous penance, will my intercession bear any fruit?”

“What is the use of being alive without His darshan?” groaned Tulasidas miserably.

“The Lord is all-pervading, formless entity who has descended to earth as different incarnations. How will you have the darshan of a formless, nameless God?” parried Sri Hanuman.

Tulasidas replied, “God condescends to appear to the devotees in their favourite form of worship. Unless He appears as Rama, whom you also adore, along with Sita and Lakshmana, seated on the divine eagle, my thirst will not leave me.” Sri Hanuman quibbled, “How can the incarnation that happened in Treta Yuga appear to you now?”

Tulasidas put in doggedly, “Did He not appear as Narasimha, half-lion and half-man for the sake of Prahlada from a pillar? Is it difficult for such a Lord to appear as Rama now? What can come in the way of the Lord who appeared as fish, tortoise, boar and dwarf and an entrancing damsel; who appeared in manifold forms of Rama to destroy the Moola-bala, the vast reserve of army of Ravana and in multiple forms of Krishna to tame the pride of Narada? He is the Lord of Maya; what can be beyond His power? If I do not have His divine vision soon, I will not retain the life in this body.”

Sri Hanuman was overcome by admiration for his intense devotion and promised to plead his case to the Lord. He then said, “O holy one! I will try my best to ensure that the Lord walks along your street tomorrow.”
Words cannot grasp and express the loss of the ego consciousness. Will the people of the world be able to grasp it by going up to it on foot, by thinking about it, or by looking at it? Should you wish to understand it, it is like being shown the entire ocean reduced to an image in a peepshow, or like the subtle signs that women make to their lovers. This you should know. (19)

By *words* are meant the Vedic and Agamic *shastras* and their various commentaries. The *shastras* talk about the Self, but are helpless to

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has 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](http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666).
describe it. Mind, trying to define it, comes back defeated.¹ People of the world try to grasp the nature of an object by examining at first hand, evaluating it with their minds or examining it visually. Can such strategies ever grasp the state of the loss of ego consciousness?

The author illustrates his point with two analogies. In the first he asks the reader to imagine someone who has never seen the sea, looking at an image of it in some form of peepshow. For such a person to imagine it as it actually is after being shown a representation of it in the glass of a peepshow will require a great leap of imagination. In the same way the readers of this work are asked to look beyond the actual words and attempt to grasp the state it is attempting to convey through their own spiritual intuition.

The second simile alludes to the subtle, imperceptible signals of a woman to her lover. The subtle signs she employs to communicate with her lover are not understood by other people, who are unable to interpret them. Likewise only a mature sadhaka will understand the import of this work which treats of the loss of ego and the dawn of self-knowledge.

Can divine silence, the undivided non-dual bliss, which is [onefold, yet twofold] like the trunk of an elephant, be grasped by speech or mind? If you dwell upon it with the insight of *jnana*, in the way one recognises a house by the crow perched upon it, or the moon by the finger pointing at it, you will become Sivam. (20)

This verse continues the theme of the preceding one. The author cites the example of the elephant’s trunk, which serves a twofold function, first as the subtle organ of smell, and secondly as the grosser organ of touch, yet is not defined by either of these. Likewise, the state of reality cannot be defined either as one and undivided, as Sivam or

¹ *Taittiriya Upanisad*, II-iv-1: One is not subjected to fear at any time if one knows the Bliss that is *Brahman* failing to reach which (*Brahman*, as conditioned by the mind), words, along with the mind, turn back.
the Self, or as multiple, as the individual consciousness which perceives a world of multiplicity, yet it includes and transcends in its non-dual nature both of these, which in the end are both mental concepts, the creations of the mind.

How does the disciple interpret and understand the subtle teachings of the guru? He takes them simply as pointers towards the truth. Just as we might identify a house which is hidden amongst trees or other houses, having being informed by someone that it is the one with a crow perched upon it, the mature disciple takes the teachings of the guru as pointers towards the truth he is seeking, using his own spiritual insight to make the final step towards realisation. He does not take those teachings to be the truth itself, no more than the house seeker takes the crow perched upon it to be the house itself. This is the import of the phrase *if you dwell upon it with true insight* (jnana).

The second analogy reinforces the first. Here the truth or the true state is compared to the bright moon in the sky, and the guru’s teaching, to a finger pointing towards it. Time spent discussing the pointer, and its nature, without attempting to grasp the thing pointed at, will be time wasted, as will time spent dissecting the content and style of the guru’s utterance, without attempting to grasp its inner essence.

Those who engage in reasoning and argument are ignorant fools, like ticks on the teat of cow, [unable to drink the milk], like a great buffalo who drinks the water [only after muddying it], or like those who would grind up sandalwood without using water. If you heed their words – a collection of falsehoods which are like the many streams of water flowing through a sieve or strainer – behold, hell will be your destiny. 

In this verse the author warns against using mental reasoning as a means to attain the authentic knowledge of the real. Such people are referred to a *tharukkar*, from the Sanskrit *tarka*, meaning *reasoning, the*
The art of reasoning, logic, dialectics. They are unable to grasp the essence of spirituality, like the tick which can bite the cow’s flesh but cannot drink its milk. Caught up in their own logic, which ever obscures the truth they are trying to grasp, they are like the buffalo who wades into the water, muddying it before it is able to drink. Divorced from true insight, their painstaking arguments will be fruitless, as will be the attempt to make sandalwood paste without water. Sandalwood paste is made by rubbing the sandalwood on a stone with water. Without water, of course, a paste could not form.

The futility of such endeavours is emphasised in the final analogy of the verse, where truth is compared to water, and its formulations by the different schools of thought and belief, to a sieve or strainer through which the water is passing. Truth, like water, is only one, but just as water passes through a strainer in a series of streams through the various holes, the logicians and theologians attempt to divide up and label this truth according to their various logical systems. Water is always the same regardless of which hole in the sieve it passes through, just as the truth we are seeking is always the same, whatever systems of belief we may from time to time espouse in our attempts to attain it.

In this verse, Vallalar gives a powerful warning to those who would waste their time in empty dialectics. The beautiful poem in Thevaram (§ 3376) by another great saint-son of Sirkazhi, Tirujnanasambandhar, conveys a similar idea. He sings, “Do not try to test the Reality through dialectics or sharp intellectual prowess. The Absolute shines effulgently in your heart – find Him there!”

The god of death himself, Yama, also instructs Naciketas in Kathopanishad likewise: “The Self is not gained by the weak, not through high intellect nor through massive learning of the srutis (sacred texts). It reveals itself to those who diligently seek it.” (Kathopanishad 1.2.23).

Know that the search for the sadguru is the sign of extreme spiritual maturity. It is like that of a blind man seeking water after suffering from the heat of a forest fire in the
mountains; or that of a calf at the times when it yearns for its mother, or like that of someone who is totally obsessed with the thought of possessing a certain object.  (22)

The topics of the mature disciple seeking and finally finding his guru, and the dynamics and meaning of that relationship are dealt with in Chapter Two of this work. Here it is clearly implied that the requisite intensity of desire for liberation will arise only in the most spiritually mature, those who have made the most strenuous efforts to overcome their worldly attachments.

Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 1.22, distinguishes three types of disciples – the soft (mrudu), the middling (madhyama) and the intense (tivra). Vallalar says that the search for the guru should be of the third type, intense, as indicated in the three analogies in the verse itself. Sri Ramakrishna says that the search has to be intense like the one-pointed effort of a person whose head has been pushed under water to come up out of it. There is no place for anything other than this in his mind. So intense should be the search for the guru.

Without a single, unifying nature, a multitude of different forms, male, female and neuter, are created, evolve and disappear. In order for this to take place, there must be one Creator who is the cause of these phenomena. Those works which reveal Him are the Vedas and Agamas. (23)

The phenomena which make up the world are described as iyalbu indri – devoid of [one, essential] nature. There is no identifiable single underlying nature for the myriad phenomena that make up the world. This leads to the conclusion that there must be a single underlying cause for these disparate phenomena. This cause is stated in this verse to be kaarana kattaa oruvan – one Creator [who is] the cause [of these phenomena]. In Hindu philosophy kaaranam – cause is threefold: mutal karanam is the immediate, proximate cause, as the clay from which pottery is made, or the primitive maya out of which the universe is produced; tunai karanam is the secondary, instrumental or co-efficient
cause, as the wheel used by the potter or the creative energy, *kiriyai catti*, in Sanskrit, *kriyaa shakti*, of Lord Siva, and *nimitta kaaranam*, is the efficient cause, as the potter, or Lord Siva himself, the ultimate Cause of all that is, although, unlike the potter, not involved in any way with the actual act of creation. The following three verses expand upon the nature of this supreme reality, Sivam.

That Sivam (the Self) is not known unto itself nor does it know anything that is other than itself. If it possessed thought then there would be for it the absence of thought, forgetfulness. [Therefore it does not possess thought]. There is for it no birth or death. The five divine operations unfold in its mere presence. The blissful voice of the Vedas and Agamas gives only the merest hint of its nature. (24)

That whose very nature is pure knowingness, consciousness, cannot, by definition, know itself. It can only be itself. As Sri Ramana Maharshi points out in v. 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, the very question as to whether the supreme reality, the substratum of the individual consciousness, can know itself is an occasion for ridicule: “To say ‘I do not know myself’ or ‘I have known myself’ is an occasion for ridicule. Why so? Can there be two selves, with one making the other its object, when it is the experience of everyone that they are one?” By the same token, because Sivam contains and transcends all that is or ever could be, there cannot be anything separate from itself for it to know, as Bhagavan asserts in v. 12 of the same work, “Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or which makes it known, the Self is [true] knowledge.”

A further argument against the notion that Sivam, the supreme reality, might know something as other than itself is now given: since thought has no permanent nature, but is forever arising and subsiding, to impute thought to the supreme reality would imply that

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2 The translations of *Ulladu Narpadu* in this commentary are taken from *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, published by Sri Ramanasramam.
the consciousness exhibited by that supreme reality was intermittent, subject to lapses and forgetfulness, which is a nonsense.

In the final part of the verse the nature of the mode of functioning of that supreme reality is dealt with. The five operations of the deity are defined in Siddhanta as creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and granting of grace. In this analogy the pure consciousness, in performing these operations, is compared to the sun, since all phenomena are seen to arise, subsist and decay due to its mere presence, just as the world we experience is a function of the mere presence of pure consciousness.

Beginningless, it exist for all eternity; it is unchanging and all-transcending; it is infinitely subtle; it neither waxes nor wanes; it is unmoving like the ether through which the air moves; know that it is the absolute fullness [of the Self]. (25)

This verse continues to expand upon the nature of the supreme reality, in whose mere presence the origination, existence and dissolution of all worlds take place. It did not come into existence, but has always existed – utiyaatu ulatu aaki; it is transcendent – ongi, in that it is not affected in any way by the manifestation over which it presides. Although unaffected by anything, it pervades everything entirely. Therefore it is infinitely subtle – ati suukkumam. Being of one essence, itself alone, there is no change or modification within it – peraamal. As the Absolute its nature is infinite; there is therefore no contraction or expansion of it – kuraintu aagaamal.

Like the unmoving ether and the wind, the supreme reality, Sivam, is devoid of all movement. Just as the wind, when in motion, is distinguished from the unmoving background of the ether, the pure space which supports it, consciousness, in the unenlightened state, manifests as the world against the unmoving background of the Self. When the wind dies down, it is indistinguishable from the ether, just as consciousness becomes one with the Absolute upon the eradication of the individual consciousness, which prior to that had erroneously perceived in it the trinity of god, soul and world.
MOUNTAIN PATH

Its eightfold form; its five divine operations; the divine forms [in which it manifests according to its] will; the rewards [accorded to the worshippers of those forms]; its absolute perfection, which is impossible to perceive with the mind; the revealing of it [through the agency of the guru]; the meditation practices [which are prescribed on the spiritual path]; the non-dual state in which you subside, as bliss arises upon the loss of yourself; the duality [which precedes that state] – all these are due to Sivam’s grace. (26)

Here a brief resume is given of the function of the divine in relation to the world and the individual soul in the traditional Saiva Siddhanta model of reality. The world comes into being through Lord Siva’s grace for the salvation of souls. Having been involved with various external manifestations of the divine, the soul in time comes to feel that there is a transcendent reality which it cannot apprehend, at which point the guru appears to point the way. The jiva thus becomes involved with various religious and ascetic practices, experiencing various spiritual states, until it attains access to Lord Siva’s grace, through which it is freed from the impurities which cause it to perceive itself as a separate individual, whereupon it experiences the states of parai yogam and bliss, before merging in non-dual union with Sivam. It should be emphasised again here that this work is not attempting to teach a Saivite, or any other belief system. Rather does it aim to show that all such belief systems are ultimately illusory, and will surely be left behind upon the loss of the personal self, the ego. Having been brought up in the Saivite tradition, and with a readership composed entirely or mainly of Saivites, it is perhaps inevitable that the author should take Saivism as the model in his analysis of formal religion and its relationship, or lack of it, to the non-dual experience of the Self.

When we speak of ‘you’, of the worldly bond, and of Him who is your support, [you should know that] you alone are the ground [for the other two]. Just as, when firewood
is kindled into fire, the flame cannot be known separately from its heat, just so, you are That [the Self]. (27)

This verse supports the contention made in the commentary to the previous one, that it is not the specifics of any particular belief system that concern the author, but only the need to illustrate how in the final analysis all such belief systems must be transcended. In Siddhanta, the world, the soul and god are seen as eternally existing primal entities, with god, Sivam, somehow subsuming the other two, but without, in essence, having any connection with them at all. However, the author undercuts all such ratiocination with the extraordinary statement neeye talam aam – you alone are the ground [for the other two]. Sri Ramana makes precisely the same point in Ulladu Narpadu when in v.3 he states, “Every religion postulates three fundamentals. The argument as to whether one First Cause manifests as three or whether three First Principles remain as three will continue as long as the ego exists. To remain in one’s own true state after the ‘I’ has perished is the highest attainment.” The ideas of an external world, which entraps us through the organs of sense, action and thought, and a deity who can lead us to salvation from that world, arise only in the consciousness that is deluded as to its true nature. That consciousness is the talam – ground against which this drama is played out.

In the latter part of the verse the individual consciousness and Sivam are compared to the flame and its heat. Fire is only one. Just as the flame and its heat cannot be separated, so the individual consciousness, pacu, cannot be separated from pathi, Sivam. The Tamil commentator, Chidambara Swamigal, rounds out the analogy by suggesting that the light of the fire can be compared to paasam – the worldly bond.

Ceaselessly the conscious soul, united with the body and the rest of the faculties, endures unbearable torment, veiled by the three avasthas, waking, dream and deep sleep. It is as if they had taken poison. That is the way of the three
impurities, which constitute the objects of your desires. Know that if [the _avasthas_], the mould [that shapes the individual consciousness], is removed, it will be seen that the way of divine grace is only yourself.  (28)

The _avasthas_ are the states of _waking, dream_ and _deep sleep or unconsciousness_. As long as these dominate our awareness, there is no time at which the _conscious self_ and its _inert conditioning factors_ (consisting of the physical, sensory and mental faculties) are not inextricably linked, and no opportunity therefore for that awareness to free itself and glimpse its higher nature. It is as if it were in a permanent state of being _poisoned_ or _drugged_ – _vidam pusitaal pol_.

The result of being veiled by these states is to become involved in the world of the ego, oscillating between desire and fear under the influence of the three impurities _anavam, kanmam_ and _mayai_ (see the commentary to v. 4), which mould our experience in those three states.

The answer to this dilemma, says the author, is to strip away this mould and to realise that _you are the way of grace_ – _nee arul vazhi_. ‘You’ is the pure ‘I’ which is present in all three states, which ‘mould’ our experience. Therefore _arul vazhi_ – _the path of grace_ is simply the consciousness ‘I’, turning in upon itself, so stripping away those conditioning factors, and allowing itself to dwell simply as itself, in its true nature. The alternative is to attempt to investigate one’s own nature through the mental and sensory faculties which condition us in the three _avasthas_, an attempt which can only leave us yet further embroiled in the delusion of the three _malams_.

### October - December
This year is the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda. After all that has been written about him in the intervening time, Prema Nandakumar has nonetheless brought alive the story of this great lion of India. The story is simply told but with great feeling, felicity and command of language. It is quite clear from reading this biography that Vivekananda was no ordinary human being and the author has successfully brought across an intimation of this phenomenon who was not only charismatic but also a force of nature. He sowed seeds in the minds of hearts of those privileged to hear or be with him that galvanised them to radically change their lives and serve humanity. His books continue to inspire young and old with his enthusiasm and integrity. He was but 39 years old when he entered mahanirvana but the shortness of his life bore no relation to the magnitude of his achievements. Today the highly-respected Ramakrishna Math and the ideals of Advaita Vedanta being part of the intellectual discussions round the world are due to this one sannyasi who obeyed the commands of his beloved guru with implicit faith in a higher ideal not just in word but in looking back on it, miraculous selfless action. All who he touched were turned to gold, so to speak. The author has given us some taste of his oratory by judicious selection.

The central place in this fine book is the period leading up to and after the famous speech in Chicago in 1893. For westerners in particular, to fully appreciate the impact of his speech and presence at this gathering an understanding of the grinding poverty, casteism, the treatment of women and the general dejection of the people of India who were losing their deep-rooted faith is imperative. Vivekananda broke through the barriers of race and religion through his sheer
courage, noble intellect and unqualified dedication to the cause of upliftment of the *sanatana dharma*. He was no ordinary unusual person. He left behind his meteoric career a light that still burns bright today in the hearts of all Indians who love Mother India and care for her well-being. This is an astonishing achievement and the author is to be congratulated for her sensible approach that allows the swami’s life and speeches speak for themselves. — Christopher Quilkey


By profession an academic, teacher, accountant and management expert, and it goes without saying, a Bengali who is trenchant in his observations, the author has focused his attention on the qualities of leadership that made Vivekananda the effective power that he was and the ideals which he valiantly strove to revivify in the *sanatana dharma* that was under threat both from without and from within. There was the materialism, rationalism and missionary proselytising from the west, as well as the inner decay from mindless adherence to irrelevant customs and the corruption of the noblest ideals and thought systems of the *sanatana dharma* by the narrow bigotry of custodians more intent on holding power than sharing the fruits of wisdom.

Vivekananda’s efforts were directed to: “‘Serve *Shiva* in *Jiva.*’ The inherent Shiva is sacred, the apparent *jiva*, secular (i.e. material, mundane). Out of this seed grew the trunk: *atmano mokshartham, jagat hitaya cha*, that is, for one’s own liberation, and for the good of the world.” Vivekananda was a breath of fresh air. He combined humanity with scholarship. A compassionate heart with a formidable memory and a subtle powerful mind.

His fight, and it was a fight with his fellow Hindus, was the pervasive lack of responsibility or sense of duty and unloading onto anyone or any organisation the shortcomings and sufferings by the general populace. It is
the inevitability of history, it is the neighbour, it is the government, it is my karma....all these justifications would bring out the audacious lion in him. “Swami Vivekananda sees through the general Indian character with pinpoint accuracy. These signposts remain as valid today as they were more than one hundred and fifteen years ago. Obedience, discipline, penchant for detail — these are the sine qua nons of an effective organization for spreading ‘noble ideas’.” He was not one for hypocritical gentleness. It was a war he was fighting to break through the inertia, the tamasic state into which the dharma has fallen. He argued that it was not so much its laws and agreements as the sincerity, self-sacrifice and enthusiasm of its members, which created a healthy society.

Vivekananda’s answer to all the challenges faced by humanity is based on Vedanta and in particular Advaita Vedanta. The answer lies not in bigger and better machines. “If the fisherman thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student...and so on.” It is the feeling of identity or oneness which is the basis of nobility, compassion, vitality which can galvanise and sustain humanity.

It is interesting to read these observations by a professor who has over the years read report after official report on how to improve conditions in the economy and society and yet he comes back to the underlying principles which are the most effective catalyst for radical and efficient transformation. Unless we get the fundamental motive or ideal right in the first time, all that comes after is skewered.

He is scathing at the so-called progress in modern India at the cost of what he sees as a decline in values and the sheer impudence and lack of shame by those who are the custodians of the public trust in government. All this cannot be denied and one wonders at times where India is heading with its pursuit of modernism. It comes back again to the two opposing camps who in Gandhiji’s lifetime sought to influence India’s development. What is clear from both the economic and political reality of India today is that if the spirit embodied by Vivekananda is ignored, the country is in grave danger. His centenary is a timely reminder of all that is noble in the land of Bharat.

— T.V. Ramamurthy
Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Sri Ramanasramam
An extraordinary series of ceremonies were performed at the ashram between the 23-25th of August. This was the culmination of three months intense work renovating the Sri Matrubhuteswarar and Sri Ramaneswara mahalingams. Extensive repairs to the gopuram and vimanam above each of the Matrubhuteswara and Bhagavan shrines were undertaken at the appropriate time according to the sastras, and also it was due because of the wear and tear of age and the harsh weather. The roofs of both structures were sealed against rain and the main shrine platform of the Sri Ramaneswara mahalingam was laid with new stone. The three-day event began with the Vigneshwara puja and concluded on August 25th with the mahakhumbhabhishekam and deeparadhanai of both shrines. This is the sixth kumbhabhishekam being performed, beginning with the very first one in 1949 during Bhagavan’s time. The periodic renovation and kumbhabhishekam have ensured very good maintenance of the shrines. The first kumbhabhishekam in 1949 was carried out by Vaidyanatha Sthapathi and the renovation work for the 1995 and 2004 kumbhabhishekams was done by his son, Ramachandra Sthapathi. And now the work for this new kumbhabhishekam was supervised by Selvanatha Sthapathi, the grandson of the first sthapathi. Thus the rich tradition of the ashram is being carried forward.

On Friday, the 23rd the first puja commenced at 7am culminating in purnahuti and maha deeparadhana between 10.30am and 11am. In the afternoon the first kaala yagashalai pravesham started at 5pm and continued until the maha deeparadhanai at 8pm.

In the afternoon between 3 and 5pm, Oduvars Tiruttani Swannathan and Sivakumar enthralled the audience at the ashram’s Granthalaya auditorium with their stirring recital of devotional songs.

On Saturday, the 24th the second kaala yagashalai puja commenced at 6.30am ending with purnahuti followed by maha deeparadhana at
11am. In the afternoon the 3rd *kaala yagashalai puja* commenced at 5pm ending with *maha deeparadhanai* at 8pm.

After the puja, pundits chanted portions from each of the four Vedas. Oduvars recited *Thevaram* songs of Appar, Sundarar and JnanaSambandhar and Manickavachakar. Nadasvaram vidvans and Tamil vidvans delineated the characteristics of a few ragas and talas on their instruments. In the afternoon at the Granthalaya, Srimati Bhairavi and Malavi Sisters delighted the audience with mellifluous singing of Carnatic and other compositions.

During all three days of this sacred festival the ashram resonated with dulcet music of nadasvaram vidvans, oduvar’s recitals and Vedic pundits chanting.

On **Sunday the 25th** at 5.30am the 4th *kaala yagashala puja* commenced ending with *maha deeparadhanai* was at 8am. The *yatra dhanam* then began followed by the culmination of all the work and pujas of the three days with the *mahakumbhabhishekam* between 9.45 and 10.15am of the metal *kalasams* on the top of the respective *vimanams* of Bhagavan and The Mother’s shrines. The final act was the *maha abhishekam* of both shrines with *maha deeparadhana* after 11.00 a.m.

*Annadhanam* (poor feeding) was carried out on a large scale through the three day period. A large number of devotees, upto 5,000 each day attended the ceremonies which were conducted in a specially constructed *yagasalai* next to the men’s communal hall.

**Obituaries**

**Professor K.V. Narayanan**, popularly called KVN, was peacefully absorbed in Arunachala on 11th July 2013 at the age of 76. He had been unwell for the past seven years and had been in and out of the hospital. He maintained his good cheer throughout but finally his frail frame gave way. He was totally free from *abhinivesa*, the clinging to life which causes fear of death, but this was not amazing to those who knew the depth of his devotion to Bhagavan. He was called a *dheera* (brave one). As a student, KVN was recognised as a
born teacher by his principal at college and this was proved right by his becoming one of the most beloved and revered professors of the Madras Institute of Technology, Chromepet. He became a devotee of Bhagavan in the 1970’s and occasionally visited Sri Ramanasramam. After retirement in 1999, he came frequently and in 2003 settled down near the Ashram. Old students kept visiting him from India and abroad and found themselves being drawn to Bhagavan. Wise, astute, self-effacing, witty and caring, KVN lived a pure, exemplary life completely devoted to Bhagavan.

The eminent gastroenterologist, surgeon and teacher, Dr. N. Rangabashyam, passed away peacefully in his sleep at his home in Chennai, on the 14th July. He was 79 years old. He was a pioneer in the field of surgical gastroenterology and proctology in India, and was respected by many in his profession as an excellent teacher, a guide and inspiration for many young medical students. He was a great devotee of Bhagavan and the Paramacharya of Kanchi. His father, Dr. Natesa Mudaliar was a regular visitor to the ashram and he brought his son for his aksharabhyasam (first lesson in writing). When he became a young man Bhagavan indirectly advised him to become a doctor like his father. Among many awards he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan (2002) and The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh Gold Medal (1995).

Sri Vasant Kothari, a Gujarati devotee of Bhagavan was absorbed in Arunachala at 12.52 am, the 21st August, a poornima (full moon) night. He was fully conscious right up to the end. Kothari who was a hatha yoga teacher first came to Arunachala in the late 1970s and settled in Ramananagar. He was close to Bhagavan’s devotee, Jagadish Swami and served him for many years. In his last years he assisted the ashram in bringing out Gujarati and Hindi translations of Bhagavan’s works. He was a kind, simple and helpful person.