<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDITORIAL</strong> The Uncertainty Principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AT THE GATES OF SRI RAMANA’S ASHRAM</strong> Kenneth Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION</strong> Sadhu Om</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AKSHARAMANAMALAI</strong> Geetha Ravichandran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KEYWORD: NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI</strong> John Grimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ULLADU NARPADU ANUBANDHAM: VERSES THREE TO FIVE</strong> S. Ram Mohan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAUL BRUNTON: A LIFE IN THE SPIRIT</strong> Christi Cox and Tim Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCEPTS OF INTERMEDIATE REALITY: PART TWO</strong> N. A. Mohan Rao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KUMBHA MELA</strong> Savithri Krishnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENLIGHTENMENT: THE ULTIMATE PARADOX IN VEDANTA</strong> Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VERSE: THE NAMES OF LALITHA</strong> Ramesh Menon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RENÉ GUÉNON AND SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI: PART TWO</strong> Samuel B. Sotillos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POEM: AT YOUR FEET</strong> Sharada Bhanu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN: THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY</strong> S. Mohan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: INITIATION INTO THE PATH OF JNANA</strong> Nabaji Siddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OZHIVIL ODUKKAM</strong> Kannudaiya Vallalar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOOK REVIEWS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASHRAM BULLETIN</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ramana Ashtottaram

93. ओः संसाराण्वतारकाय नमः:
om samsārāṇavatārakāya namaḥ
Prostration to the One who takes us across the sea of samsara.

To those who struggle in the deep stormy waters of phenomenal existence, Bhagavan comes as a boatman ready and able to rescue and carry us to the safety of the other shore.

94. ओः शोणद्रीशस्तुतिद्रश्येनन्मः:
om śoṇādṛīśastutidraṣṭre namaḥ
Prostration to the One who saw and revealed the Five Hymns in praise of Arunachala.

The Five Hymns were not composed like ordinary poems; they were outpourings direct from the Heart. Like the Vedic mantras seen by the rishis, these Hymns were seen rather than composed. The Hymns came into being because Bhagavan loved his devotees and sought to express for them their longings; he himself had none. In these hymns some passages are autobiographical, but many are philosophical and convey Bhagavan’s teachings. The Hymns serve as a bridge between Bhagavan and his devotees. Words and events which are rooted in Eternity and flower in Time should not be analysed and pulled apart and attributed to either Bhagavan, the embodiment of pure transcendent Awareness, or to the good, simple human being living on terms of perfect equality with other creatures. The drashta or the True Seer sees the unity of Time and Eternity, of ‘others’ and himself, of the natural and the supernatural. His words and actions reveal this unity. The Five Hymns should be studied and understood in this light, as mystical utterances comparable to the Vedic hymns.
The Uncertainty Principle

For the majority of us the idea of God is directly related to human need, and the most basic need is to feel secure. The idea of a higher benign power we call God – in whatever name or form – is strongest when we are threatened by physical danger and emotional or mental stress. This is a survival mode of outlook in the face of seeming chaos and uncertainty. God is a benevolent deity to whom we pray to deal with anything that may be menacing and if possible, cause it not to happen in the first place. He is inevitably on our side against the world, however illogical that may seem to the rational mind.

We see heaven as a release from our physical suffering and pray to be free of all cares and uncertainties and be close to God. Each one of us has a picture of heaven that is personal and we are fairly sure it is what we are aiming for. At the back of one’s mind may be a slight hesitation as to whether we have got it right, but in our experience once relieved from trouble and anxiety we think no more about it.

We all face uncertainty in our lives. This is the nature of our reality. We can never be truly certain about anything. But if we accept the notion of uncertainty in the right way this can be liberating, because
now, our circumstances are full of possibility. We are not frozen in a state where everything is drained of creativity.

The only state we know that is guaranteed and does not alter is death. However we should be aware that there are various degrees of death, not just physical. The devotee, self-satisfied with his piety, is just as dead as the egotist blind to the sensitivities of others. The sportsman has his all-too-brief moment of triumph and lives the rest of his life reliving the experience much to the boredom of his friends and family.

The challenge we face is to see things as they are and not as we would wish them. There is a gap between our knowledge and reality. That crack in the veneer of certainty we all tirelessly cultivate is our salvation. Without uncertainty we would not mature. The emphasis is shifted from our obsession for control into living now.

The value of uncertainty is evident when we begin to trust in a higher power not out of weakness but as a strong affirmation that all will be well. And to do this we must be willing to be vulnerable, to be uncertain. Doubt then becomes our honest tool of discrimination and not a worrying knife that cuts us to pieces. In spirituality the principle of uncertainty means we know that we do not know and are modest but confident that we can learn whatever the price.

How often we can look back and see that the result of some occurrence that seemed disastrous at the time become, with hindsight, a positive benefit, in that the shock made us grow deeper in awareness, richer in heart and broader in outlook. We should be neither fearful of change nor complacent that we have done enough. There is always more to do. We are reminded of Vivekananda’s call “Awake, arise. Stop not till the goal is reached.”

Acceptance of this insecurity keeps us humble. We pray for understanding, we pray for our confusion to be cleared. Though we may chaff at the apparent slowness of our development we should be aware that Self-realisation is not to be taken lightly. The power and majesty of Ramana Arunachala should be approached with circumspection. We are playing with fire. There is a humorous story about the wonderful and idiosyncratic rabbi, Zusya of Hanipol.
God’s acquiescence in Rabbi Zusya’s request went a little too far for the rabbi’s own liking.

“Once Zusya prayed to God: ‘Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Let me stand in awe of you like your angels, who are penetrated by your awe-inspiring name.’ And God heard his prayer, and His Name penetrated the hidden heart of Zusya as it does those of the angels. But Zusya crawled under the bed like a little dog, and animal fear shook him until he howled, ‘Lord, let me love you like Zusya again!’ And God heard him this time also.”¹

Awe and respect are necessary when we approach the guru. And the realisation that we cannot control the forces at play in our lives plays not a little part in our active surrender, this in spite of the fact that many of our prayers are to tell God exactly what He should do and how He should do it! Uncertainty is an asset because it keeps us truthful. We can presume nothing, just as it would be foolish to assume the guru thinks or acts the same way we do. The best act of merit we can possibly do is to let God or the guru into our lives in whatever shape or form is best for us. Like the North Star the guru is the one constant upon whom we can rely.

“Complete self-surrender to God is not an easy matter. The mind always creates doubts and raises questions such as: ‘I have neither seen nor known God. How can I love and devote myself to Him?’

“Once a person complained to Sri Ramakrishna, ‘I do not feel inclined to take the name of God.’ ‘What is it that draws your mind away?’ asked Sri Ramakrishna. ‘It is my goat, I love it more than anything else,’ was the reply. ‘Very well,’ said Sri Ramakrishna. ‘When you feed and serve your goat, think that you are feeding and serving God Himself. Do this sincerely for some time and you will find everything all right.’²

Arunachala has been described as a hill of medicine. One of the names of Lord Siva is Vaidyanathan, the Lord of Medicine. When we are ill we seek the advice of a doctor. We do not say to the doctor nothing is wrong. We give all the symptoms that afflict us. The guru is a doctor who knows us through and through. We cannot hide any of the darkness in our hearts. This is not a bad predicament to be in especially when we trust and know the guru is the embodiment of compassion. Our job is to surrender not only the good in us but also the bad. If we are angry we offer it up. If we are selfish we recognise it and offer it up. We are all less than perfect.

It may not be at first a whole-hearted renunciation of our individual will but at least it is a start. When we begin to accept our shortcomings we have stepped onto the royal road that leads to liberation. We cannot be reborn or twice-born until all our preconceptions as to who we think we are, are broken down into their impersonal parts and seen as traits universal to all. Just as there is nothing personal about an ocean wave crashing into us, so also events can affect us with a supreme indifference to our squawks, “Why me?”.

That being so, if we closely observe our mental and emotional condition with all its contrary forces, then it is a positive relief to surrender the load. Bhagavan spoke about the man who upon entering a train lays down his burden and enjoys the journey. This is not to say that we should abrogate our responsibilities but that we should be aware at each moment and do what is obvious and necessary according to what is right. It is the sense of doership we surrender.

Jnanesvara in his commentary of the Bhagavad Gita chapter nine, wrote that there is no sin the guru cannot forgive. “Even though a man may be quite sinful at first, still believing in Me, he becomes the best of men, as one, who is dying in an ocean, might escape death in the waters…No sin is too great to remain undestroyed in a supernal kind of devotion.”³ The fire may be scorching but nothing escapes the guru’s glance of grace.

Many of us have seen the disturbing phenomena of those who are sincere seekers but who, it seems needlessly, suffer so much. We see those whose personalities are infuriating and who make life unnecessarily tough as much for themselves as others. We see others who apparently are ‘further’ along the path than us and we become depressed thinking we lag so far behind. And obversely, we pride ourselves on our own status. Advaita Vedanta states that we are already ‘That’, *tat twam asi*. That one thought (*jnana vritti*) may redeem us.

Once we even accept the possibility of this powerful idea let alone realise its reality, these conceptions of far or near, attraction or repulsion, knowledge or ignorance, realised or unrealised increasingly lose their potency and relevance. But who can unreservedly affirm it with heart and mind?

The Virasaiva saint Akka Mahadevi in her devotion to Lord Siva in the form of Cennamallikarjuna,⁴ knew well of this incandescent longing for certainty:

Like treasure hiding in the earth  
Like taste hiding in the fruit  
Like gold hiding in the stone  
Like oil hiding in the sesame  
Like fire hiding in the tree  
No one can see Cennamallikarjuna —  
The Brahman hiding in the yearning.⁵

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⁴ Literally, ‘The Beautiful [Lord] White as Jasmine’. Cennamallikarjuna is the tutelary deity at Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh. The temple is one of the twelve *jyotirlingams* of Lord Siva in India.  
Dakshinamurti Statue in the Ashram Auditorium
At the Gates of Sri Ramana’s Ashram

Kenneth Rose

On a January morning in 2007 we set out for Sri Ramanasramam from Puducherry. It was during Pongal, a four-day harvest festival for the Tamil people in southern India. At the beginning of the festival, people make bonfires to burn old clothing while wearing the new clothing that they have bought in a frenzy of shopping in the days before the holiday begins. Burning the old and putting on the new is a suitable metaphor for what I hoped would happen to me at Sri Ramana Maharshi’s ashram.

As we turned a corner in the road a couple of hours into the ride, we had our first glimpse of Arunachala as it suddenly appeared above the canopy of coconut palm trees. Arunachala looks like a gently curving wave of reddish stone slowly undulating across the horizon. Although Arunachala is believed to represent Siva as the light of pure

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consciousness, it also projects a motherly presence, which promises
refuge and restful contemplation to the mind that for too long has
been tossed about upon the sea of samsara, the world of cyclical rebirth
and death, of alternating delight and despair.

The first sight of the holy hill is considered auspicious, or spiritually
beneficial, and for the devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi, seeing
Arunachala for the first time or after a long absence is like having
darshan, or an audience, with the great sage himself, who so loved
this mountain.

Slowly as we rode along the road, the lush countryside gave way
to the urban sprawl of Tiruvannamalai. The town which had grown
from a quiet town to a bustling city since I had last been here in 1994,
seemed similar to me to other South Indian towns until we came upon
the district surrounding the vast temple complex on the eastern base
of Arunachala. As I looked at the western tower of the temple against
the tall backdrop of Arunachala, I was inwardly stilled by the shakti,
the energy of the mother goddess, which radiates through India’s holy
places. I felt happy to be here again.

A few minutes’ drive beyond the temple, the taxi slowed, and we
turned into the simple but elegant entrance to Sri Ramanasramam.
On the sign arching above the gate of the ashram, a stylized sun
with streaming rays encircles the sacred Sanskrit syllable Om, which
for Hindus symbolizes the central teaching of the Upanishads that
the visible and invisible dimensions of the cosmos are expansions of
the universal spirit, Brahman. The courtyard was busier than I had
remembered it. When I had been here last, it was in a very hot July
before the monsoon and there were virtually no guests at the ashram.
Now we were arriving in the cool days of winter immediately after Sri
Bhagavan’s birthday celebration, so the ashram was full of devotees
and tourists.

We were welcomed to the ashram and directed to our room in
a whitewashed guesthouse beside the ashram’s post office. After
quickly settling into the room, we went back to the ashram to pay
our respects to Sri Ramana Maharshi at his samadhi. What had once
been a tree-lined, sandy path between the post office and the ashram was now a busy, blacktop road crowded with pilgrims.

The ashram itself, however, was unchanged. As we walked through the gate, the hot asphalt of the busy road gave way to the cool sand of the shaded courtyard, and we surrendered our shoes at a booth just inside the entrance. With bare feet, we walked under the iluppai tree toward Sri Ramana Maharshi’s tomb in the Samadhi Hall. A boisterous troop of monkeys patrolled the courtyard and strutting peacocks eyed us with cool appraisal.

Inside the entrance of the large hall where Bhagavan is interred a crowd of devotees was chanting in Tamil in front of a platform on which a representation of Nandi, Siva’s gentle and devoted bull, sits and lovingly gazes upon the lingam, a black, granite cone, which marks the place where Bhagavan’s body was buried in the lotus position. At the first sight of Bhagavan’s samadhi, I fell to the cool, stone floor in a full prostration and chanted Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.

I was still agitated from the small challenges of adjusting to being in a new place and I couldn’t enter right away into meditation, so, after paying my obeisance to Bhagavan, I sat against a wall and soaked in the gentle, calming atmosphere of the ashram. Soon I felt more relaxed, and my mind began to turn away from minor logistical issues like what to do for lunch since we had missed the noon ashram meal and how to get laundry done at the ashram. These thoughts began to thin out and subside, revealing an inner plain of golden awareness of nothing in particular except the mind itself. It was a happy feeling, and I stayed with it for a quarter hour or so until it broke and dissolved.

In the hot off-season, the ashram can be a quiet place, but now it was bustling, though most of the activity was created by the crowds of people passing though the ashram and not the ashram’s relaxed, hands-off administration. As I glanced around the crowded Samadhi Hall, I noticed that many visitors passed through the spacious hall in a matter of minutes, taking a quick and glimpse at the shrines but others were not so quick to leave.

The flow of pilgrims through the gate of Sri Ramanasramam shows that Bhagavan has, in the lengthening decades since his death, turned
into a universal guru for religiously uprooted Westerners, for Indians from all over the Subcontinent and throughout the Indian diaspora, and for other Asians, all of whom mix without discord while sitting in quiet meditation around his samadhi. As they linger there, they enter into the old, holy spirit of the Upanishads, which pervades this place, making its revered words a living force: *sarvam khalvidam brahma*: “All of this — everything visible and invisible — is actually nothing other than Brahman, the eternal Spirit.”

These words from the *Chandogya Upanisad* have been scripture for me for forty years and have often spoken to me across the decades like words made of sunlight with the power to outshine all the lesser thoughts that my mind creates. For me, these words are revelation and offer me a new way of experiencing life in light of them. Something more than only a desire to understand Indian culture has drawn me and countless others to this and other ashrams in India, something hard to find at home, but as tangible here as bread and milk and the cool stone floor upon which I was sitting — the living, palpable presence of a saint whose body had died over fifty years ago.

My wife Beate and I walked out of the open and airy Samadhi Hall into the sun-washed courtyard connecting to the dining hall and the Old Hall, where Bhagavan gave darshan until just a year before the death of his body. We stopped for a moment to look over a low, whitewashed wall into the ashram’s well. A couple of steps behind the well is the Old Hall, the most sanctified and beloved spot in Sri Ramanasramam. The Old Hall is easy to miss, since it looks from outside like just another part of the Samadhi Hall, and its door is indistinguishable from the doors of the ashram’s offices. Beate seemed puzzled about my eagerness to show her what was behind the simple door, but when we got inside, she looked at me with surprise at the unexpected scene that stands hidden behind the door. It is a modestly furnished room and not very large, measuring only about fifteen by forty feet, yet it was here that Bhagavan reclined and slept on a brown sofa for more than twenty four years, with occasional breaks for walks, meals and bathing. As his fame drew ever larger crowds to the ashram, he hesitated to spend more
than the briefest periods away from the sofa for fear that a pilgrim in search of his darshan would miss him and go away disappointed.

A few people were sitting in the meditation posture in the hall, and we found a couple of cushions and sat down directly in front of Bhagavan’s sofa to have his darshan. This room had been my favourite place in the ashram when I was last there in 1994, but now my mind was restless. I was distracted by the constant coming and going in and out of the room of guests and devotees, so I left after a short attempt at meditation.

I soon settled into a routine of sitting for hours at a time in the tranquil atmosphere of the ashram, where pilgrims sit quietly in the halls and alongside the buildings while engaging in a quiet form of personal satsang with Bhagavan. Over the course of a few days of sitting in the ashram, I began to notice a pleasant and completely unexpected sensation: my mind spontaneously slowed down and I felt centered and gently blissful. This was a pleasant sensation, which seemed to be a gift of the ashram to the spiritually sensitive visitor.

One afternoon, I was sitting on the veranda outside the book depot near the spacious courtyard at the entrance of the ashram watching the flow of people in and out of the gate of the ashram, I described what I was experiencing to an Indian devotee of Bhagavan who said that people who come to Arunachala and Sri Ramanasramam naturally enter into *savitraka samadhi*, which is a gentle state of pleasant concentration, or low-level samadhi. This explanation made sense, for at the ashram my mind becomes calm, although not completely still, as it does in deeper levels of samadhi, or meditative absorption. I found that I had entered, without any effort on my part, into what an editorial that I had just read in the latest edition of the ashram journal, *Mountain Path*, called “the low-key spacious awareness we associate with Bhagavan.”

Although I didn’t want to engage in any strenuous thought and the usual inner dialogue about this and that had stopped, I was completely alert to my environment. This was not a state of dullness

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and stupor but a state of clarity and precision. I didn’t want anything or fear anything, and my mind was unmarred with anxiety about the future or death.

To my surprise, this mood didn’t vanish after a few minutes. Although it ebbed and flowed throughout the day, it didn’t completely dissolve. On my previous pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam I had been unable to sense this divine presence for more than a few moments. Now, it flowed majestically through my mind like the waters of a wide river flowing under a spring sun into the shining sea. I felt as if I had come to the portal of a greater and more enduring awakening than I had previously experienced.

One night under a bright moon, as if to confirm that the pleasant new sensation that I had been experiencing over the last few days was a gift of his grace, a vision rose from some mystical depth within me of the spirit of Sri Ramana Maharshi and illumined me inwardly like the sudden brightness of lightning within a cloud. Bhagavan’s spirit was bright, wide, magnanimous, and electric with intelligence, compassion, and bliss. I felt myself united with him, and I sensed that I need only to look to him and the goal of all these lives will in its right time be achieved.

As I stood there, exulting in this encounter with the spirit of Bhagavan, I realized that I had entered into an awareness of deathlessness. I felt the eternity of life. I saw that life has no real breaks, and that I have never been born and have never died. There is no death, but only episodes, with fadeouts and fade-ins, that were book-ending each of my individual and successive lives. Now I am Kenneth Rose from New York, a religious studies professor in Virginia. Before I was .... ? In the future I will be .... ? And finally the stream of individual lives will blend, like a river into the ocean, into the One, into Brahman. And awareness then will be complete.

Now it became clear to me that Bhagavan is my guru, that the tie between us is eternal and unbreakable. Thoughts like this were surprising to me since I had thought that I had grown beyond the need for any spiritual affiliations external to my own inner awareness, my own inner guru. But the deeper truth is that from a nondual
perspective, there is only one guru — the Self. And now, for me, the face that the one, inner guru was revealing to me was Bhagavan’s. I realized that Bhagavan is the Self, which is the undying heart of all that exists.

There is an ancient debate in Hinduism about whether one needs a physically living guru or not. This can become an issue for contemporary disciples of a guru like Bhagavan, who died physically in 1950. Followers of physically living gurus will sometimes say that a physically living guru can test and try his or her disciples in ways that a physically dead guru cannot, which allows the disciples of a physically dead guru to get away with things that a physically living guru wouldn’t allow. But this criticism doesn’t apply to my relationship with Bhagavan, since Bhagavan is not dead. Twice he summoned me to India, and his presence remains with me inwardly as a bright, warm mass of intelligence and compassion, which is identical to the Self witnessed to in the Upanishads and which is Bhagavan’s true Self. The increasing awareness of freedom from desire, anger, and fear, the vision of divine fullness, and the delight in the light of the Self that I received through the darshan of Bhagavan is no different from what I would get from a physically living guru.

Bhagavan himself seemed to have anticipated this objection. Whenever devotees lamented the days when he would no longer be physically present at the ashram, he would say that they placed too much emphasis on the body. “They say that I am dying. I am not going away. Where could I go. I am here.” These were not idle words, for I was beginning to experience their verification in the gift of his deathless presence, which is the gift of Arunachala to pilgrims who journey there — or just think about it. Bhagavan remains a vivid presence at Sri Ramanasramam that is best encountered in silence.

One clear, bright morning as I walked up Arunachala to Skandashram, I sensed that the divine is infinite compassion with no degree of enmity and that all divisions dissolve the moment one sees the divine unity. When I got to the cave, I gazed for a while down at

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the vast temple complex with its multiple towers shining in the sun, symbols of the solidity and reality of an ancient and integral religious tradition and culture completely independent of the one in which I was raised. I felt now that I had come home spiritually. Then I began meditatively reading the *Sri Ramana Gita*, a book based on Bhagavan’s teachings, which closes with Bhagavan’s bold promise:

The magnitude of the realm of the Siddhas is difficult to understand. They are similar to Siva, with the form of Siva, and they are able to grant every wish.3

My reflections were greeted with a vision of a delicate golden light, which arose in my mind and suffused it with unifying knowledge and bliss. It occurred to me that this was Arunachala’s true, inner form, or Self — it is Siva, the supreme, divine awareness revealing itself as a shaft of revelatory light congealed into the disguise of this revered mountain. Arunachala had compelled Bhagavan to come to live in its caves and slopes, and now, again, it had summoned me to walk on its slopes and to sleep in its shadow.

In the days remaining for us in Tiruvannamalai, I entered more deeply into awareness of the Self. Occasionally, I entered into a gentle, eyes-open degree of samadhi in which I felt as if I were dying to myself and awakening to the true Self. Then I began to notice that my mind was swimming in an ocean of light and peace — the realm of the deathless.

This abiding sense of deathlessness waxes and wanes but often, when I look beneath the skein of thoughts that is my mind, it is there like a coin at the bottom of a pocket or like the sun behind the clouds. This sense of conscious immortality washes away the pain of life and reveals life as a play of radiant forms against a background of light. There is no death, and there is no birth, it proclaims, for there is only this deathless, blissful moment. This secret, nutritive knowledge is the gift that I received at the gate of Ramana’s ashram, even though it was always mine. I had just forgotten it for a while.

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3 *Sri Ramana Gita*, 18.26 (my translation).
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Ten

Sadhu Om

as recorded by Michael James

1st February 1978

Sadhu Om: We must understand that Bhagavan does not use the word *ulladu* [which means ‘what is’ or ‘that which is’] to denote some abstract concept of being or reality, as some philosophers do. He uses it simply to mean the one self-existing and self-evident reality, ‘I am’, which is always clearly known by everyone.

When ‘I’ remains as it is, without any adjuncts, it is the sole reality, but when it seems to rise as ‘I am this body’, it is as such unreal. That is, in the compound experience ‘I am this body’, ‘I am’ alone is real, and the adjunct ‘this body’ is unreal. Thus as a compound of the real and the unreal, the ‘I’ that feels ‘I am this body’ is itself unreal.

Since this ‘I’ is unreal, why should we worry about its defects: *karma* [action], *vibhakti* [lack of devotion], *viyoga* [separation] and *ajnana* [ignorance of self]? If we investigate the ‘I’ that seems to have
these defects, we will find it to be unreal, and hence all its defects are likewise unreal. Therefore in verse fourteen of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says:

Investigating to whom are these, karma, vibhakti, viyoga and ajnana, is itself karma, bhakti, yoga and jnana. [This is because] when [one] investigates [oneself], [it will be clear that] they [karma, vibhakti, viyoga and ajnana] never exist without ‘I’ [which is itself not real]. Only being permanently as self is true.

The first and only duty we have is to find out the truth of this ‘I’. Bhagavan says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) that even if one is the worst sinner, if one would cling firmly to self-attention (*svarupa-dhyana*), one would certainly be reformed and saved.

All the so-called ‘other paths’ are only intended to purify the mind, because they cannot actually annihilate the ego. This is why Bhagavan says in verse three of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

Desireless action (**niskamya karma**) done [with love] for God purifies the mind and [thereby] it shows the path to liberation.

The ‘path to liberation’ is only **atma-vicara** [self-investigation or self-enquiry], but only a mind that is to some extent purified will be able to recognise that this is the only means to annihilate the ego. If we have recognised this, we do not need to follow any other path, because vicara will not only annihilate our ego eventually, but will also in the meanwhile purify our mind far more effectively and efficiently than any other path could.

Therefore paths other than atma-vicara are only for those who do not understand that eradication of one’s individuality is the goal, and that vicara is the only means by which we can achieve this goal. Such people are not true aspirants, because we only become aspirants when we have genuine love to make this ‘I’ subside, for which atma-vicara is the only means. The only benefit to be gained from other paths is sufficient mental purity to be able to grasp that atma-vicara alone is the path by which we can reach our final destination, the state of liberation or true self-knowledge.

Atma-vicara appears to be ‘intellectual self-analysis’ only in the view of those who do not have sufficient mental purity to understand that
we can know ourself only by attending to ourself, and consequently to have true love for self-attention, which alone is the correct practice of vicara.

2nd February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan repeatedly emphasised that atma-vicara is the only path, the direct path for everyone, and also the easiest path. For example, in Nan Yar? he says:

- Only by [means of] the vicara [investigation] who am I will the mind subside [or cease to be]; […]
- To make the mind subside [permanently], there are no adequate means other than vicara. If restrained by other means, the mind will remain as if subsided, [but] will emerge again. […] Therefore pranayama [breath-restraint] is just an aid to restrain the mind, but will not bring about manonasa [the annihilation of the mind]. Just like pranayama, murti-dhyana [meditation upon a form of God], mantra-japa [repetition of sacred words such as a name of God] and ahara-niyama [restriction of diet] are only aids that restrain the mind [but will not bring about its annihilation]. […]

- In verse 885 of Guru Vacaka Kovai he says:

  Except [by] the path of investigating the vital awareness ['I am'], whatever effort is made by other means beginning with karma, one will not attain and enjoy self, the treasure shining in the heart.

- In verse 17 of Upadesa Undiyar he says:

  When [anyone] scrutinises the form of the mind without forgetting, [it will become clear that] there is no such thing as 'mind'. For everyone this is the direct path.

- Likewise, in Maharshi’s Gospel (Book 2, chapter 1) it is recorded that he said:

  Whatever form your enquiry may take, you must finally come to the one I, the Self. […]

  Self-enquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realise the unconditioned, Absolute Being that you really are. […]
every kind of sadhana [spiritual practice] except that of atma-vichara presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the sadhana, and without the mind it cannot be practised. The ego may take different and subtler forms at the different stages of one’s practice, but is itself never destroyed. [...] The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through sadhanas other than atma-vichara is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself. Atma-vichara alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realise the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute.

[... ] To be the Self that you really are is the only means to realise the bliss that is ever yours.

Since self is aware of nothing other than itself, ‘I am’, ‘to be the self’ simply means to be aware of nothing but ‘I’ alone, which is all that the practice of atma-vicara entails. As Bhagavan says in verse 26 of Upadesa Undiyar: ‘Being self alone is knowing self, because self is not two. […]’.

Because of our desire to be constantly experiencing something other than just ‘I’, it may seem difficult for us to experience only ‘I’, but Bhagavan assures us that this is actually very easy – much easier than any other means by which we may try to attain liberation. This is emphatically affirmed by him in verse 4 of Atma-Vidya Kirtanam:

To untie the bonds beginning with karma, [and] to rise above the ruin beginning with birth, rather than whatever [other] path, this path [atma-vicara] is exceedingly easy. When [one] just is, having settled down without even the least action of mind, speech or body, ah, in [one’s] heart the light of self [will shine forth]. [This is our] eternal experience. Fear will not exist. The ocean of bliss alone [will remain]. ([Therefore] ah, the science of self is extremely easy, ah, extremely easy!)

Every other sadhana entails doing some action (karma) by mind, speech or body, whereas atma-vicara entails the mind subsiding without the least action by focusing its entire attention on its source,
‘I am’. Therefore, whereas any other sadhana is a practice of ‘doing’, atma-vicara is the practice of just being as we really are – with perfect clarity of self-awareness. Hence, since being is easier than doing, atma-vicara is the easiest of all paths.

The purpose of niskamya puja, japa and dhyana, and of all sadhanas other than atma-vicara, is only to purify the mind. Purification of mind is the sole benefit that can be gained from any such sadhanas, because none of them can ever by itself destroy the ego. The benefit of a purified mind is that ‘it shows the path to liberation’, as Bhagavan says in verse three of Upadesa Undiyar. That is, it enables the mind to discriminate, understand and be firmly convinced that atma-vicara alone is the path to liberation.

Thus, when Sri Bhagavan says in Maharshi’s Gospel (Bk.2, ch.1), ‘Atma-vichara alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists’, he is not being partial, nor is he criticising other sadhanas. He is merely asserting the truth that though other sadhanas can purify the mind, they cannot destroy it. Therefore, we should not confuse these paths for mental purification with ‘the path to liberation’, which is the ‘one path’ taught by Bhagavan – the path he describes as or vazhi [the ‘one path’ or the ‘path of investigation’] in verse 14 of Upadesa Undiyar.

A true aspirant is one whose mind is sufficiently purified to understand that atma-vicara alone can be ‘the path to liberation’, and therefore to love to practise it. Those who cannot understand this are at best just devotees of God.

Bhagavan says that atma-vicara is the direct path, not because he expects us to attack the mind directly, but because he expects us to turn directly towards self, ‘I am’, and by thus remaining in self to ignore the mind. Thus atma-vicara is, so to speak, avoiding and hiding from the mind instead of fighting it face to face. This is what is signified by Rama’s method of killing Vali.

Vali had a boon that he would receive half of the strength of anyone he faced in battle, so he was automatically more powerful than any opponent he had to face. Therefore even Rama could not have killed him in face-to-face combat, so he had to hide behind a
tree and shoot him from behind. Just as Vali gained half the strength of his opponent, if we try to fight the mind in direct combat, we will be giving it half of our strength, because our attention is what sustains and nourishes it, so the more we attend to it (that is, to its constant flow of thoughts), the more we are giving it strength. Therefore the only way to destroy the mind is by attending only to ‘I’ and thereby ignoring all the other thoughts that constitute the mind.

All other sadhanas, which are only actions performed by ‘I’, attempt to destroy the mind using it as the means or instrument, and hence Bhagavan likens them to someone confronting Vali, or to a thief pretending to be a policeman trying to catch the thief, or to a person trying to get rid of his own shadow. Therefore Bhagavan advises us to ignore our shadow, the mind or ego, by turning our attention towards the sun, ‘I am’.

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Sri Ramana Satsang in Paris

A new satsang group has been established in Paris which holds regular meetings. During the satsang chants from the Tamil Parayana, in particular Aksharamanamalai, are played. Participants are invited to chant using the booklets provided. There is then a period of silence. Those who are interested may check the following internet page for the times and contact numbers.


Forum104 is the spiritual centre run by Marist catholic priests, which fosters expression of various spiritual traditions and organises inter-spiritual celebrations and lectures. Forum104 is situated at 104 rue de Vaugirard - 75006 Paris.

The next satsang is on 10th July between 6.15pm - 7.15pm. And every Thursday of July thereafter (17th, 24th).

In the following months the satsang is on 11th September, 16th October, 13th November, 11th December.

On 11th April 2015 there is a film ‘Qui suis-je?’ (‘Abide of the Self’) followed by chanting and an Indian meal.

The organiser of these Ramana Satsangs is Martine Le Peutrec who may be contacted at: 06 74 83 86 88 (00 33 6 7483 8688 if calling from outside France) or martine.lepeutrec@orange.fr
The refrain of Arunachala Siva resonates in the heart of every one whose life is touched by Bhagavan Ramana. Chanting this led me to learning the Aksharamanamalai by rote almost fifteen years ago. I did not study the meaning or references. It was enough for me that the words of the song had spontaneously emerged from Bhagavan’s heart. I took it that reciting occasionally those very words, meant that Bhagavan’s grace would be showered upon me in some manner. It was an axiom of sorts and I did not even think whether I deserved it. Therefore when I began exploring the meaning much later, it was a wonderful journey of unravelling. Calling the Lord names, making illogical accusations and then apologising half-heartedly, foisting the responsibility of being looked after on the Lord himself — the process we go through in approaching Arunachala, is vividly pictured. I have

Geetha Ravichandran is an ardent devotee of Ramana Bhagavan. She considers herself specially blessed to be guided on the path of Bhagavan by Swami Shantananda Puri, while at the feet of Arunachala. She is an IRS officer, presently posted as Commissioner of Income Tax at Bangalore.
therefore attempted to share a few lines of this song, which have left a lasting impression on me.

The *Aksharamanamalai* is an example of bridal mysticism – when the soul sees the almighty as the beloved. It is in such a relationship when the barriers are broken that the liberty is available to make what may otherwise seem preposterous demands. With a sense of utter abandon the lover tells the beloved that it is his duty to take care of her.

\[
\text{Aruk kavenai yandanai agatridil} \\
\text{Akilam pazhittidum arunachala}
\]

For whose sake did you rescue me? If [now] you reject me, the entire blame will fall on you!

\[
\text{Ippazhi tappunai yeninaip pittai} \\
\text{Yiniyar viduvar arunachala}
\]

Arunachala! Save yourself from this blame [of abandoning me]. You made me pine for you. Who will [How will I], now, leave you?

\[
\text{Kanta mirumbupol kavarnthenai vidamal} \\
\text{Kalentheno diruppai arunachala}
\]

Arunachala you drew me close, inexorably, the way a magnet draws iron filings to itself.

The reason why many even today are smitten by Bhagavan and Arunachala is inexplicable. It is a hypnotic attraction that cannot be rationalised or expressed in words. This has been expressed by Bhagavan himself. It is the nature of a magnet to draw to itself the iron filings within its range. When Arunachala Ramana draws the soul near, the devotee in her insecurity seeks to extract a promise that she will be taken care of. Still stuck in the habits of the mind that weigh and calculate advantages, she apprehends the prospect of being rejected and apportions a little blame. However as it turns out even devotion that is tainted by wiles and guiles draws the devotee close to
Arunachala and ultimately the bond of love is forged and sealed due to the centrifugal force of attraction from which there is no escape.

_Eendridu mannayir peridarul purivoi_
_Yiduvo vinadarul arunachala_ (6)
You are known to shower grace which is greater than that of one’s own mother.
Is this, then, your grace? [Or, such, indeed, is your grace!]

_Avvaipol enakkun arulait tandenai_
_Yaluva tunkadan arunachala_ (14)
Bestow on me your grace, like a mother.
To redeem me is your duty.

_Mudiadi kana mudividut tanainer_
_Mudividak kadanilai arunachala_ (80)
Like a mother you have to untie the knot of ignorance whose beginning or end cannot be traced; I cannot untie it by myself.

This bridal garland of verses inscribes a very special symbolism of the Lord as the divine mother. The mother’s love is selfless and unconditional. It is love that brings to the demands of instinctual maternal duty the melody of joyous music. There is grace in every action of the mother. Grace which is known by the term _pushti_ in Sanskrit is also interpreted as nourishment. The mother’s grace nourishes the child and nurtures its being. The mother’s love is unique as it is boundless. It is the nature of the child to make outrageous demands on the mother. A child prone to get into mischief innocently turns to the mother to sort out its problems. Acknowledging this precious love the devotee after exhausting all her resourcefulness turns to the beloved helplessly but secure in the knowledge that it is the mother’s duty to look after her errant child. Whether the baby is a monkey that clings to the mother or a kitten that’s picked up by
the mother’s teeth, merely being with the mother is enough to be taken care of.

In the *Lalita Sahasranama* the divine mother is described as the one who dissolves the psychic knots, the *granthis*, which bind the soul to materialistic desires. It is this abiding, unconditional love that enables the devotee to see the true nature of reality and sets her free.

*Sappa dunnai sarndhuna vayan*  
*Santamai poven arunachala*  
I came to you thinking that you were my food, but I have been devoured. May I become peaceful.

*Chindit tarulpada chilandipor katti*  
*Chirraiyt tundanai arunachala*  
Thinking of you, as you caught me in your grace, you bound me in your web like a spider and ate me up.

Most prayers begin with some kind of bargaining. The impetus in a spiritual journey is very often a calculation of benefit and the better the trade off, the greater the fervour. However the lord calls the bluff of the devotee very swiftly. In this game the hunter ends up as the prey. The spider’s gossamer web emerges from its mouth and is seen as an elaborate contraption, but when the game is up, the spider swallows the whole web. The Lord creates, maintains and dissolves the universe just as the spider does its web. The individual identity is completely destroyed. It slowly and surely dawns on the devotee that the source of manifold activities is the one Lord.

*Yavanen vayin manninai yatti*  
*Enpizhai pozhitthathu arunachala*  
Who was it that threw mud into my mouth and robbed me of my living?

In the earlier verse the devotee first admits that she came with the hope of getting ‘food’. Instead she ended up being consumed. In the
verse above there is a starker description of the fierce love of the Lord. Arunachala is the fire that purifies. The devotee finds herself not just denied food but with mud stuffed in her mouth, she is robbed of the very means of sustenance. The ego and its vanities are vanquished relentlessly as one approaches the Lord.

\[
Labhani \text{ igapara labhami lenaiyutru} \\
Labhamen nutranai arunachala
\]

You are the ultimate gain. You have accepted me who is without any merit. What is it that you have got?

The beauty of the song is that the rhythms include all the vacillations of the devotee’s moods which swing from petulant and plaintive to a contrite acknowledgement of the worth of the beloved. The underlying tenor of this love song with its many strains of a one-sided quarrel is fearlessness. It is because of this trait that the devotee exposes all her vulnerabilities, her fickle and unsteady mind, knowing that the transformation through love will make her one with the beloved. When she exclaims that the beloved has not exactly gained anything, there is also a realisation that the essence of the Lord is Wholeness to which nothing can be added and nothing can be taken away.

\[
Velivitten \text{ unseyal veruttida dunnarul} \\
Velivittu enaikka arunachala
\]

I have exposed your actions. But do not reject me for that, show me Your Grace now openly and save me.

The devotee’s soul while realising her folly in seeing the Lord according to her own whims still seeks to become one with the beloved. What the soul craves is constant indulgence and an outpouring of grace irrespective of whether she has any merit or deserts.

The Tamil poet Andal whose of \text{Tiruppavai} is a gentler example of bridal mysticism also compares the devotee to a foolish child and seeks forgiveness for the temerity with which she has addressed the Lord by \text{sirupeyar} (literally, ‘small names’).

2014 27
Ariyada pillaigalo manbinal undrannai
Sirupe razhaittanavum seeri arulathe

We innocent children have addressed you by inappropriate names, do not hiss your annoyance at us.

When the devotee is enamoured by the beloved she does not measure her words carefully. The litany of woes is endless and the hymn of praise sparing.

In the Aksharamanamalai there is an undertone of playfulness. It brings to mind the sloka from the great devotional poem Sivanandalahiri, where Sankara says,

Kreedartham srujasi prapanchamakhilam, kreedamrgaste jana
Yat karmacharitam maya cha bhavatah preetyai bhavat yeva tat
Shambho svasya kutubalasya karanam maccheshtitam nischitam
Tasmaanmamakarakshnam pasupathe kartavyameva tvaya.  (66)

The world is your sport, and all of creation is your plaything. All my actions are therefore meant for your pleasure. It is thus your duty to look after me.

The burden of our care and protection is on Bhagavan.
In the Ramana Suprabhatam of Swami Shantananda Puri it is said:

Uttishtasesha Ramana Bhaktanam Mangalam Kuru
Bhagavan Ramana arise to bestow on your devotees auspiciousness.

The relationship of Bhagavan Ramana and his devotees is one of a complete dependence. Therefore we deem it fit to exhort the Lord to do his duty of protecting us. There is a comforting security in the knowledge of his overwhelming, limitless grace.
John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

**KEYWORD**

*Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

*John Grimes*

*Nirvikalpa*, from the Sanskrit prefix ‘*nir*’ meaning ‘without, not, away’ and ‘vikalpa’ meaning ‘alternative, variant thought or conception’. *Samadhi* from the verb-root ‘*dha*’ meaning ‘to hold’ plus the prefixes ‘*a*’ and ‘*sam*’ meaning ‘together, completely’. Thus samadhi means absorption, union, one-pointedness. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* thus means, “completely absorbed in the Self without any variant thought.” The question remains whether this is the final goal of life or not.

*Nirvikalpa samadhi* is an oft-used term in Indian philosophy that is often employed by some to designate the supreme goal of life. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* speak of four types of *samprajnata* (or *savitraka*) samadhi or oneness, union with ‘*seeds-sabija*’, name and form. This type of samadhi is not the supreme goal of life according to Patanjali. The *Yoga Sutras* also speak of *asamprajnata* (or *nirvitarka*) samadhi that is union devoid of names and forms. This type of samadhi Patanjali calls *ritambhara prajna* or absolute true Consciousness.
However, even here Patanjali says the subtle mind is still there. In this state a person has the thought, ‘I have realised the Absolute or God.’ There are numerous examples of yogis who declare this state of being. However, Patanjali declares that when even this extremely subtle impression is wiped out, all that remains is immortality, Self-realisation (nirbiya samadhi).

Now, the situation arises that many yogis, swamis, and holy persons of varying descriptions in India often speak of nirvikalpa samadhi as the supreme goal of life. The question before us is, ‘how is the supreme goal of life to be described, defined and what does it entail’?

The word ‘samadhi’ is often used as a term to denote an advanced state of meditation. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi divided the various samadhis into a three-fold hierarchical scheme: sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi, kevala nirvikalpa samadhi and savikalpa samadhi. He described these three as: “Holding on to Reality is samadhi. Holding on to Reality with effort is savikalpa samadhi. Merging in Reality and remaining unaware of the world is nirvikalpa samadhi. Remaining in the primal, pure nature state without effort is sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi.”

According to Sri Ramana, savikalpa samadhi is a state of Self-awareness or union that is maintained by a constant effort. “Holding on to the Supreme State is samadhi. When it is with effort due to mental disturbances, it is savikalpa.” Here there is always a name and/or form involved. In kevala nirvikalpa samadhi there is a temporary but effortless Self-awareness or union. Though there is no body-consciousness, no input of sensory information at all, the ego has not yet been completely eliminated. “When all disturbances are absent it is nirvikalpa.” Finally, when the ego has been totally eliminated and the sage or jnani is able to function naturally in the world, Bhagavan called it sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi. “Remaining permanently in the primal state without effort is sahaja.”

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3 Ibid., p.79.
Sri Ramana said, “The nirvikalpa samadhi of Raja Yoga may have its use. But in jnana yoga this sahaja sthiti or nishtha (natural state) itself is the nirvikalpa state.” Sri Ramana’s position is that in this egoless state, there are no doubts, no effort, no differences (vikalpa) of any kind. Whether active or inactive, such a state knows, is, the Self, the Supreme Being.

A person asked Ramana about Romain Rolland’s views on nirvikalpa samadhi and he replied, “People have all sorts of fantastic notions about nirvikalpa.” He said that some yogis, by performing breathing exercises, fall into a cataleptic state far deeper than dreamless sleep. They are aware of absolutely nothing and glorify such as nirvikalpa. Other people think that once a person has fallen into nirvikalpa they become something totally different. Still others take nirvikalpa to be a trance state wherein worldly consciousness is totally obliterated. He concluded that such beliefs are mistakenly due to attempts to understand nirvikalpa merely intellectually.

Bhagavan was asked what the difference was between sahaja and nirvikalpa samadhi. He replied, “You are probably meaning kevala nirvikalpa samadhi, which is temporary, while this type of samadhi lasts. Sahaja samadhi is permanent and in it lies liberation from rebirths.”

Bhagavan once said that there were two nirvikalpa: the internal and the external. In the former, the mind completely merges in one’s inmost Being and is aware of nothing else. He compared this to a lamp protected from the wind. However, in the latter type, although the mind is absorbed in the Self, one’s sense of the world still prevails without a reaction from within and has the calm vastness of a waveless ocean. He said that in both types, the Self is realised in its nakedness and the essence of bliss is experienced. When the waveless ocean of the external nirvikalpa and the steady flame of the internal nirvikalpa

6 *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, p.77.
7 Ibid., p.78.
8 Ibid., p.78.
are realized as identical then the ultimate goal of life, *sahaja samadhi*, is said to have been reached.

On another occasion Bhagavan compared both *kevala* and *sahaja samadhi* as cases wherein the mind is immersed in the bliss of the Self. However, in the former physical movements may cause a disturbance to the meditator because the mind has not yet completed been eliminated and can, as after a deep sleep, at any moment become active again. He compared this to a bucket that, although completely submerged under water, can yet be pulled out by the other end of a rope that is tied to a pulley. Whereas, in *sahaja*, the mind, having sunk completely into the Self, like a bucket that has become drowned with its rope into the depth of the well, there remains nothing in it to be disturbed or pulled back into the world.9

Thus, according to Bhagavan, it may be said that *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* can be compared to a glimpse of the Self. It is a prelude to Self-realisation. On the other hand, *sahaja samadhi* is permanent and the natural state of Self-realisation. Sankaracharya, in his *Vivekacudamani* stated the same.10 There, he says, that even were a man to be immersed in *nirvikalpa samadhi* for years together, when he emerges from it he will find himself in the environment that he was before entering that state. Sri Ramana used to tell the story of a yogi who, just before entering into *nirvikalpa samadhi*, asked for a glass of water. The yogi then entered into that state and many, many years passed. When he finally came out of that state, he asked, “where is my glass of water?”

Annamalai Swami told the story of the time when Bhagavan noticed a man who had been sitting motionless in the hall for at least an hour, apparently in deep meditation. Bhagavan called to Kunju Swami and others who were present, “Shout at him, shake him, and when he wakes up, take him on giri pradakshina! This is no better than sleep. This state is not good for him. He is just wasting his time sitting like this.”11

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9 Ibid., p.80.
10 *Talks*, §54.
Verse 3. “If one associates himself with the sages, of what use to him are all these rules of life? When the comforting cool south wind blows where is the need for a fan?”

Commentary

Ritualistic practices and exercises such as japa (repetition of holy name), pooja (ritualistic worship) and dhyana (meditation) are methods prescribed as means for purifying the mind; and in this way they serve as aids to an aspirant for attaining salvation. However, by means of contact with the sage, the same can be reached much more quickly. Hence, it is advisable to renounce ritualistic observances in
MOUNTAIN PATH

order to be able to remain all the time in the Holy Presence of the Sage. This can be done mentally even if the aspirant is at a great distance from the Sage as we have already seen that the Sage transcends time and space.

The core idea of the verse is that if one gains the grace of the jivanmukta (a realised soul) there is no need to strive in any other way to acquire purification of the mind and wisdom. The purpose of all the observances is to focus and purify the mind. Association with a jivan-mukta is the best and quickest purifier.

In the Guruvachaka Kovai, Bhagavan says, “The Guru’s looks bestows Light destroying and surviving all these else.” While Self-enquiry or atma-vichara is the direct-path prescribed by Bhagavan, the association with sages can be called the straight-path, as by instilling the sense of surrender, it stills the mind, leading to ananda (bliss) straight away on the aspirant without going through the steps of yama and niyama. When one worships the guru, he will make the aspirant cross the ocean of samsara through his grace, as Sankara observes in verse 37 of Vivekachudamani.¹

Bhagavan laughs at the foolish action of the sadhaka who still observes rituals after having had the blessings of the company of sages; he is as foolish as the one who continues to fan himself with a palm-fan when the cool southern breeze is blowing. The sadhu-sanga is as natural and gentle cooling like the southern breeze. When one enjoys the cool southern breeze, his mind naturally calms down. So is the natural effect of satsanga which plunges the aspirant into silent repose.

In Day by Day with Bhagavan, Devaraja Mudaliar records a beautiful incident. Bhagavan here says, quoting two verses from Vedanta Chudamani. “Four classes of people are benefitted by the jivanmukta. By his faith in the jivanmukta, the disciple attains mukti (liberation); the bhakta who worships his guru attains merit; the

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¹ Good and peaceful, great men living for the good of all, and having themselves crossed the fearful torrent of becoming, with no ulterior motive help others to cross too.
indifferent who has seen the sacred life of the jivanmukta acquires desires for righteousness; and even the sinners (i.e, the hostile) get rid of those sins by the mere fact of having darshan of such saints.”

Verse 4: The moon can only allay scorching heat; the celestial wish-fulfilling tree (Kalpaka Vriksha) can only relieve poverty; the holy Ganges can only remove sins. But all these three (heat, want and sin) will be removed by the mere darshan (sight) of the Holy Ones, who are beyond comparison.

Commentary
The verse states that the grace of the jivanmukta is unparalleled. The moon, the wish-fulfilling tree and the Ganges can confer only a single benefit each. Each cannot substitute the benefits conferred by the other two, whereas, the jivanmukta through his mere glance will not merely bestow the three benefits of coolness, prosperity and sinlessness on the person, but will also remove the ego — the primary problem of the seeker.

How does the darshan of the jivanmukta remove poverty? Leaving aside the beneficial effect of the Sage’s benevolent look, the physical challenge of heat can be removed by his cool-glance. But the meaning conveyed is deeper than this. Poverty is the mental anguish due to the thought of not being prosperous enough. The predicament is basically in the mind, which feels frustrated due to non-fulfilment of desires. The vision of the Sage has the potency of calming or cooling the mind, and uproots the desire, thereby stilling the thoughts. It is like the cool radiance of the moon. Further, the darshan of the sage confers an abiding sense of perfect adequacy or fullness in the mind of the aspirant. He is in need of nothing else now. Thus like a Kalpaka-Vriksha, the jivanmukta satisfies us completely. Nay, he is far superior to it. He ensures no further desires crop up in the mind.

Similarly, a person experiences the consequences of deadly sins, takes tirtha yatra to holy places like the Ganges to absolve himself of the effects of his deeds but while it is true that a pilgrimage to the Ganges may wash away his past sins, the proclivity of the mind
is not washed away and it can prompt him to commit further sins. The darshan and proximity of the jivanmukta extinguishes the very ego that propelled him to commit sinful acts. Hence to bathe in the graceful looks of the guru is far-superior as the guru’s glance washes away the proclivities of the mind themselves.

Bhagavan says that even if one be a great sinner, he should not worry and weep, ‘Oh! I am a sinner, how can I be saved?’ One should completely renounce the thought, ‘I am a sinner and shall concentrate keenly on meditation on the Self;’ then one would surely succeed.

**Verse 5:** The sacred bathing places are merely collections of water; the images of god are merely stone or clay. They are not equal to the great ones. These sacred waters or images may purify a person after countless days. But by a mere glance of their graceful eyes, the sages bestow matchless purity.

**Commentary**
The holy waters and the symbolic icons of deities in the temples become efficacious by the strong faith and devotion of the devotees. But since the effulgence of the Supreme Being shines in its fullness in the jivanmukta, even an ill-qualified sadhaka of weak faith is attracted and becomes a devotee and thus in the end is saved. Wherever a jivanmukta lives in the world, the appropriate thing to do is to go and be close to the strong field of his grace. Since he is the visible form of god, it is possible to become the recipient of Divine grace by practising devotion to him.

Lord Siva Himself promises that the look of a jnani will bestow grace on the devotees. He tells His consort Parvati: “O Queen among women, know that for one who practises the discipline of jnana and is graced by a jnani, bathing in holy waters, repeating holy mantras, performing daily homas, pujas, yajnas like offering oblations in fire with tongues of flame, as well as other sadhanas that warrant knowledge from lengthy studies are not required.”
Paul Brunton, the English writer who, through his writings, brought the attention of the Western world to Ramana Maharshi, liked to describe himself as a ‘spiritual researcher’. It was a choice due to both his modesty and his wish to remain somewhat hidden. And it was typical of his rather wry sense of humour that he chose such a seemingly dry appellation, researcher.

For his research was anything but dry. It was active, deep, adventuresome, and – most importantly – grounded in experience and study. He not only received or observed spiritual transmissions from practitioners of the world’s wide range of inner traditions, he also explored and researched his own inner depths and the truths that underlie us all. His research was experiential, tested, and truly vast.

The power of what he found was undeniable to those who knew him – and to many readers who met him only through his words.

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MOUNTAIN PATH

We have spoken with quite a number of people who knew him in his later years. Many of them experienced deep mystical states either during or after their contact with him. “Unlike anything I’d ever experienced before” – or some variation – was a common description. Silence, the Void, and samadhis of various types were frequently mentioned.

The many readers of his eleven books published during his lifetime are mostly unaware that those books were just a small part of his work. His spiritual research resulted in over 40,000 pages of notes. They detail everything from the appropriate diet for spiritual seekers to the stages of mysticism and the deep enlightenment beyond mystical states. Other topics include the dangers of occultism, healing meditations, and extraordinary passages on the nature of Truth and the Real.

He wrote daily thoughts in little notebooks, interviewed hundreds of teachers, fakirs, ‘fakers’, and saints around the globe. While he discouraged people from becoming his followers, inevitably many who encountered him became students of his. For those fortunate individuals he offered his counsel and guidance when and where it was appropriate. (For example, when someone asked him to bless his new restaurant, his response was, “I can bless your enterprise, which will help you learn a spiritual lesson from the endeavour, but if you want it to be a success, I suggest you ask the advice of a businessman!”).

But Brunton could hardly be defined by these intellectual studies. His basic drive was to search out, know, and love the Truth, and thence to re-search the how of sharing his understanding and experience with others, regardless of their ‘advancement’ along the spiritual path.

In every case, Brunton wanted to inspire and stimulate his readers to deepen their own search and to think for themselves. He did not wish to have disciples or establish a ‘Brunton movement’; he preferred that his readers maintain focus on the ideas and issues of philosophy, not his own (truly) charismatic personality.

As much as he disliked ‘the cult of personality’, he treasured the free and open circulation of the deepest, most precious teachings the
world has to offer. To this end he committed his life to the task of presenting a spiritual path suitable for the fast-paced world of the 21st century a path that he detailed in his many books.

Throughout his life, PB (as he came to refer to himself later) gave out his birthday as 27/11/1898; a brief search of the Internet will produce a second date: 21/10/1898. Privately PB said that there were two reasons he gave out a false birthday: political and occult. During the end of the British Raj both the British and Indian governments suspected him of spying for the other side an activity in which he had no interest. He therefore took the measure of traveling under his ‘nom-de-plume’ including a new birth-date. The other motivation has to do with the dangerous meddling with magic and the occult prevalent amongst seekers during his early years as a well-known figure in mystic circles. He little cared about the biographical significance of his birthday, but cared very much indeed that his horoscope not fall into unfriendly hands; to this end he continued to refer to his November birth-date throughout his life. Nonetheless, when his son and literary heirs asked his birth-date, he stated that it was October 21, 1898.

He grew up in the Cockney section of London fortuitously near the British Museum, its library, and the occult bookstore of J.M. Watkins. He lost his mother while he was still quite young; his father remarried, and his new wife brought her sister and the ideas of Christian Science into the family. PB later commented that one of them was a very successful practitioner who was able to heal herself and other people as well, while the other suffered health problems her whole life. Perhaps this clear evidence of the power of mind over matter, and also the obvious failure of this same “law” contributed to PB’s interest in the occult and in gaining a deeper understanding of the truth of the laws that govern our existence.

“Before I reached the threshold of manhood,” writes PB, “and after six months of unwavering daily practice of meditation and eighteen months of burning aspiration for the Spiritual Self, I underwent a series of mystical ecstasies. During them I attained a
kind of elementary consciousness of it. If anyone could imagine a
consciousness which does not objectify anything but remains in its
own native purity, a happiness beyond which it is impossible to go,
and a self which is unvaryingly one and the same, he would have
the correct idea of the Overself.” This was around his sixteenth year,
which would have coincided with the commencement of WWI in
1914. By the time he was in his early twenties he had become actively
involved with like-minded souls interested in exploring the obscure,
the occult, and the mysticism of the far East.

It was during this time that Paul Brunton met his three early
teachers: Allan Bennett, also known as Bhikkhu Ananda Metteyya; the
unnamed Indian who PB refers to in the opening chapters of his
A Search in Secret India as ‘the Rajah’; and an American painter named
Thurston, who was also involved with the occult. Characteristically,
PB never spoke much about ‘the Rajah’ or Thurston very probably
at their own request. We do know that his son, Kenneth, was given
his middle name, Thurston, in honor of this mysterious painter.
Scattered throughout PB’s notes made from or about this time period
are references to an ‘M’; when queried as to who this was, PB firmly
stated that this person was neither Thurston, nor the Rajah, nor Sri
Ramana Maharshi, nor anyone else named in his books or notes.
There is some indication that he was a Native American.

Over the course of his life he lived on every continent, camped
in well-worn tents, dined with kings and rajahs in their palaces, and
chatted with common folk across the globe. Notably, he spent a
night alone in the King’s chamber of the Great Pyramid. A man of
boundless energy and infinite curiosity, he crafted a peripatetic life
like no other. We know that he lived in Mexico, Bolivia, New York,
California, Ohio, Hawaii, Japan, China, Greece, New Zealand,
Australia, India including Tehri Garwhal, Egypt, Austria, Spain,
Italy and finally Switzerland; but, since he kept no record of his
whereabouts, it is likely that this is only a partial list. He travelled to
many of these places before the invention of the ‘areoplane’ and other
modern conveniences; staying as comfortably in tents in the wilds of
jungles as he was at ease in his cummerbund taking tea with a Indian Prince or the Pope in their palaces.

PB briefly joined the Theosophical Society, and during and immediately after WWI he attended many gatherings in London held by various occult groups. Through his apprenticeship with Allan Bennett, he was aware of the activities of the (Hermetic) Order of the Golden Dawn, of which Bennett was a significant member.

At the age of 24 Brunton married Karen Tottrup; his only child, Kenneth Hurst, was born the next year, in 1923. That was the year that he lost Allan Bennett, who died after a lifelong battle with poor health. A few years later the marriage came to an end. PB stayed on amicable terms with the family, and, as Hurst's book *Paul Brunton: A Personal View* indicates, in due course his son became one of his students. It was during this period and hardly surprisingly, given the external changes in Brunton’s life that the allure of the purely occult soon faded and he journeyed into the deeper waters of mysticism and from thence into philosophy. This search led him away from England and into the then-uncharted world of the Sacred East.

As he travelled through the Mid- and Far-East, Paul Brunton interviewed literally hundreds of mystics, gurus, teachers, fakirs, and magicians; basically anyone involved with exploring the worlds of spirit and mind. He did so in a spirit of open enquiry, but was critical of those full-fledged mountebanks that fed upon the gullible and innocent. Gradually his attention came to rest upon India, where he undertook to find a spiritual master from whom he could learn the path to enlightenment. That journey is largely chronicled in his popular book *A Search in Secret India*, which describes his arrival at the doorstep of Ramana Maharshi and his time at the feet of that revered sage.

Through his studies with Ramana, Paul Brunton mastered the ‘Who am I’ meditation and thereby achieved a deepened degree of self-awareness. He was not satisfied with the experiential aspect, however, and wanted to further the philosophical understanding of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ behind this technique; this led him to the
experts of Vedanta such as V. Subramanya Iyer with whom he studied the classic literature of Hindu philosophy such as the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Mandukya Upanishad*. It was during his conversations with Iyer that PB began to develop his own non-sectarian vocabulary for basic spiritual principles. Thus he began to write about the ‘Overself’ in lieu of *Adhyatman* and Soul, ‘World Mind’ instead of God or *Isvara*, and ‘Mind’ instead of Brahman or The One.

This change marked the end of PB’s apprenticeship and the beginning of his own truly independent journey. That journey took him deep within himself and continued to lead him all over the world. A sample of these years can be found in his two remaining travelogues, both published in 1936 (as was *A Message from Arunachala*): *A Search in Secret Egypt* and *A Hermit in the Himalayas*, as well as in his notebooks, where he continued to chronicle his interviews in the West as well as in the East. Three years later, in 1939, PB wrote *The Inner Reality*, later named *Discover Yourself*, as a bridge between Eastern and Western faiths. Then he turned his attention fully to the task of presenting the fundamentals of a genuinely spiritual philosophy in a modern language – and in the first language to have a nearly worldwide presence: English.

At a certain point PB withdrew from the world to fulfill his inward journey. This required his isolation from nearly all who knew him and took him to Australia and New Zealand for a few years. He achieved that extraordinary state called *sahaja* by the Hindus. As he himself put it, the state of *sahaja* is not one of knowing reality, but one of being reality, in other words, of being realised.

With his increased impersonality, it became more natural to refer to him as PB rather than ‘Paul Brunton’, for there was little of what we commonly experience as a person or personality present in him. Indeed, when in the presence of the powerful silence around him, this abbreviation seemed only natural, as there was an overwhelming air of ‘other’ around him, a remoteness that was sometimes quite unsettling. At other times he radiated a kind of benign peace that
drew strangers to him. For example, when he was once in the hospital for a week, recovering from minor surgery, each evening at sundown the room would become packed with nurses, orderlies, and other hospital personnel who “just liked being around him” as he sat in contemplation of the setting sun.

As he travelled externally and internally, the driving force of his life became the call to deliver the hidden mysteries of mysticism and philosophy into the hands of modern seekers, stripped of unneeded hyperbole, jargon, obscuring esotericism and outworn requirements.

As he says in his notes, “The age of esotericism has come to an end, and the age of open teaching is upon us.” To this end, PB translated the elaborate teachings of India, Tibet, and China into a streamlined collection of central points and practices designed to give spiritual seekers a solid foundation for all their seeking. He took the ancient meditation practices of the ashram and modified them to suit the schedules of the modern life.

Some ancient practices were designed to open a sensitivity to surroundings – which may be advisable if we are living in seclusion, but is hardly viable in today’s nerve-jangling urban landscape, so Brunton wrote about those meditation techniques that soothe the nerves and protect us from the extroverted world that most of us inhabit. These meditation practices can be found in The Quest of the Overself and in Volumes 4 and 15 of The Notebooks of Paul Brunton.

PB was one of the first authors to subject Eastern doctrines to the methodology of science while also challenging science to look beyond its technology and into the true mysteries of life. He wanted to link science and mysticism, and generally integrate the accomplishments of Western Philosophy with the insights of Hinduism and Buddhism. The first result of this effort was The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga, published in 1941, which addresses the issues of epistemology through the double lens of modern science and the reasoned enquiries of the ancient East. He then completed this project two years later with his metaphysical opus, The Wisdom of the Overself. His later thoughts on these topics are to be found in Volume 13 of his Notebooks series.
Curiously, he once again found himself sharing space (if not time) with another author: in this case, the apartment in which he wrote these texts had once been occupied by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky when she was writing her great work *The Secret Doctrine*. “So PB was following after HPB,” he once half-jokingly quipped.

The three books, *The Quest of the Overself*, *The Hidden Teaching*, and *The Wisdom of the Overself*, cover mysticism, mentalism, and metaphysics and thus lay the groundwork for one’s independent inner journey towards – and beyond – the Higher Self, the Overself. Starting with the requisite understanding of ourselves and how our minds work, PB then guides us into the full mysteries of Absolute Mind and its outward, creative aspect, the World-Mind. To those familiar with the great thinkers of Hinduism and Buddhism, many of Brunton’s points will be quite familiar; their value, then, is in their dogma-free presentation. They are meant as ‘users manuals’ to the immediate and transcendent Reality of which we can and may be a part.

After completing these books, PB continued to travel the globe for the next two decades. During that time, he continued to write, lecture, and give personal interviews throughout America, Europe, Asia and Australia. His final book, *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*, was published in 1952, after which time he reserved all further notes for posthumous publication. He married Evangeline Young that same year, and they remained married until his inner work once again required a period of near-absolute solitude. Even so, once that work was complete, PB maintained an active relationship with Evangeline and her family, right up until the last days of his life.

Although PB had standing invitations to live in America and other parts of Europe, he eventually settled in Switzerland, which was due in part to his love of the countryside and in part also to its political significance. Even after he retired from the public eye, PB continued to keep close watch on the events of the world, and his choice of Switzerland allowed him discrete access to various politicians and world leaders as they came and went from Geneva.

He also continued to receive his students and write in his notebooks. His other work, his inner researches, he was reticent
to speak about. While PB continued to employ simple terms for deep teachings in his later writings, he also pursued his studies and investigations into the many traditions and doctrines of the world. Even in his last years he was in contact with both His Holiness the 69th Sankaracarya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, while his bedside reading consisted of Plotinus, scientific journals, occult quarterlies, Jesuitical articles, Tibetan texts, and the Upanishads.

PB died on July 27th, 1981 with his son Kenneth Hurst as well as Paul Cash, a student, by his side. He died as he lived: peacefully, privately, and with an ironic smile on his lips. His literary effects, several shelves of notebooks, were willed to his son Kenneth Hurst, while responsibility for deciding what to do with these writings was given to Paul Cash and Timothy Smith (both of whom had functioned as secretaries for PB in his lattermost years). At first the task of sorting through these notebooks was guided by PB’s central student, Anthony Damiani; sadly he died only a few years later himself, but did survive long enough to see the publication of Perspectives. A few years later the Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation was formed to ensure the complete publication of *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*, and to generally present the public with the ideas found in PB’s writings.

For more information about Paul Brunton and his work: [www.paulbrunton.org](http://www.paulbrunton.org)
Old Hall, Sri Ramanasramam
The concept of ‘I’ plays a crucial role in the theory and practice of Advaita. In the context of sadhana (spiritual discipline), ‘I’ could be looked upon as the ‘scent’ of the Self that assuredly leads us to the Self, the way the scent of its missing master leads a dog unfailingly to him. Adhering to ‘I’-awareness is therefore the only effort needed of us in sadhana, and it is also the limit to which our effort can go.

The Mandukya-upanishad speaks of two levels of ‘I’ – the individual and the cosmic. The ‘I’ at each level is conceived to manifest in three forms or sub-levels – gross, subtle and causal, corresponding to the waking, dream and sleep states respectively. The three forms of individual ‘I’ are called Vaisvanara, Taijasa and Prajna, and those of the cosmic ‘I’, Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Isvara, respectively. Bhagavan has expressed certain views in respect of these entities, at variance with scriptural teachings. These lead to interesting possibilities in the interpretation of intermediate reality, as we shall see in the following.

N.A. Mohan Rao is a septuagenarian with a long stint in engineering teaching. Since younger days, he took interest in the study of traditional Vedanta. He turned to Bhagavan’s teachings in early nineties.
Meaning and Significance of ‘I-I’
One of the most intriguing aspects of Bhagavan’s teachings is the use of the term ‘I-I’. In traditional literature, we find it mentioned but rarely.\(^1\) Bhagavan revived its use. In verse 15 of *Upadesa Saram*, he uses it apparently to mean the state of a *jnani* (realised being). Elsewhere, however, he expounds it as a state preceding jnana.\(^2\) Judged from its context, the latter meaning would appear the more acceptable.\(^3\) We find here a clue that helps us investigate the nature of intermediate reality in an altogether new direction.

In a very detailed exposition on *avastha-traya*, Bhagavan has made these uniquely significant observations:

1. “In it [waking state] … the *jiva* [individual] in the *Visva* [Vaisvanara] aspect and the Lord in the *Virat* aspect, abiding together in the eight petals of the Heart Lotus … ”

2. “… the dream state in which the jiva in the *Tajasa* aspect and the Lord in the *Hiranyakarabha* aspect, abiding together in the corolla of the Heart-Lotus … ”

3. “… the state of deep sleep in which the jiva in the *Prajna* aspect and the Lord in the *Isvara* aspect, abiding together in the stamen of the Heart-Lotus … ”\(^4\)

The statements make one thing clear. The *Mandukya* teaching that the individual ‘I’ at each level is identical with the respective cosmic ‘I’ is not to be taken in its literal sense, as else Bhagavan could not have spoken of them as coexisting in the heart. It is valid only in a futuristic sense, i.e., at the absolute level.\(^5\) Bhagavan’s statements mean also that during *sadhana*, when the cosmic ‘I’ is realised, say, at the gross

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\(^1\) An instance of its occurrence (as *aham-aham*) may be found in Sri Sankara’s *Vivekachudamani*, v.135.


\(^3\) David Godman favours this view in *The Mountain Path*, June 1991, pp.79-88. A subsequent web version of the article can be seen at http://davidgodman.org/rteach/iandii1.shtml. It has provided the trigger for the present article.


\(^5\) ‘This Atman is Brahman’, *Mandukya*, 2. Bhagavan does not deny this identity at the absolute level.
level as *Virat*, the corresponding individual ‘I’, *Vaisvanara*, does not become merged in it (as interpreted in Part One in its context), but is found coexisting with it. We may visualise this somewhat as follows: let us suppose a person is walking through a forest, and sees a tiger’s tail jutting out of the bushes. The tiger itself is not seen at first, but upon looking carefully, the man notices it through the bushes. The tail was together with the tiger even when it alone was seen, and also after the tiger was spotted. Similarly, *Vaisvanara* was together with *Virat* before and after *Virat* was realised.

It is a similar case with the realisation of *Taijasa* and *Hiranyagarbha* at the subtle level, and *Prajna* and *Isvara* at the causal level. They always existed together as pairs.

We shall therefore offer it as a hypothesis that it is this coexistence of the two ‘I’s at the intermediate levels of reality that lay implied in Bhagavan’s use of the term ‘I-I’. We shall see presently how it may possibly be substantiated.

Bhagavan has once observed: “the Reflected Light … must shine forth as ‘I-I’, unbroken by ‘this’-thought [thought of world or body]. This pure state momentarily intervenes between sleep and waking. If prolonged, it is cosmic consciousness [*Hiranyagarbha*], or even *Isvara*. This is the only passage to the Realisation of the Self-shining Supreme Being.” Here, the term ‘If prolonged’ implies that ‘I-I’ occurs even prior to the stage of *Hiranyagarbha*. It is only later that it ‘involves’ to *Hiranyagarbha* and then to *Isvara*. It stands to reason from the *Mandukya* analysis that this prior state (occurring before *Hiranyagarbha*) is *Virat*. We may therefore conclude that ‘I-I’ alone appears as the three cosmic states (*Virat* etc.) successively. But, as we had observed earlier, the cosmic states when realised are not found single, but in co-existence with the respective individual states – say, as *Vaisvanara-Virat*, *Taijasa-Hiranyagarbha*, and *Prajna-Isvara*.

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6 *Hiranyagarbha* is understood to be the cosmic subtle principle, and is referred as ‘cosmic mind’, ‘cosmic intelligence’ etc. Cf. http://www.dlshq.org/glossary.htm.
7 *Talks*, §323 of 07.01.1937, p.288.
8 See Part One of this article in the April 2014 issue, under ‘The Dawning of Jnana’. See also *Talks* as at footnote 9.
respectively. So, our present conclusion that ‘I-I’ appears as the three cosmic states, would actually mean that it appears as these paired entities. Our hypothesis thus stands verified.

The entity ‘I-I’ is thus at first revealed to our consciousness at the gross level as Vaisvanara-Virat. Later it appears at the subtle and causal levels as Taijasa-Hiranyagarbha and Prajna-Isvara respectively. By saying ‘even Isvara’, Bhagavan implies that Prajna-Isvara is the last stage in this progression of ‘I-I’. This shows that the absolute Self, which is realised later, does not fall within the domain of ‘I-I’. Bhagavan’s emphatic assertion that ‘this is the only passage to the Realisation of the Self’ puts a seal of finality to this sequence of unfoldment of reality.

One or two points remain to be settled. Bhagavan, in his canonical works like Upadesa Saram and Ulladu Narpadu, apparently uses the term ‘I-I’ for the state of a jnani. The pairs Vaisvanara-Virat etc. are commonly understood to belong to the stage of sadhana only. Why then would Bhagavan have used ‘I-I’ apparently to denote a jnani?

A talk of Bhagavan reported by Suri Nagamma may be recalled here. Describing the condition of one who had attained aparoksha jnana (‘direct knowledge’), Bhagavan said, “When one feels the Self within oneself, he is like a naked lamp [oil lamp without a chimney] in a windless place; and when one feels it to be all-pervading, he is like a waveless ocean.” It is clear from the terms ‘within oneself’ and ‘all-pervading’, that the two descriptions of the jnani’s state relate to the individual and cosmic perspectives respectively. It means his state is one of ‘I-I’ – i.e., describable by the terms Vaisvanara-Virat etc. The conventional notion that these terms pertain to sadhana is apparently misconceived. A sadhaka who has attained any of these states is a jnani, as also one who had attained the absolute Self.

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9 Talks, §579 of 15.11.1938, p.536. (‘Causal’ in columns 2, 3 and 4 of the table may be read as ‘Cosmic’.)

Incredible, though, the above may seem, we find it in close agreement with the scripture. The Nrisimhottara-tapaniya-upanishad identifies four degrees of ‘jnana’ or ‘turiya’, called ota, anujnatr, aujna, and avikalpa. The first three of them are said to pertain to the gross, subtle and causal planes respectively (as are the pairs Vaisvanara-Virat etc.), and are not the absolute Reality. Avikalpa alone ‘is devoid of even the least distinction’, and stands for the Self, spoken of as Turiya in the Mandukya-upanishad.11

Be that as it may, the question yet remains: how do we justify use of the term ‘jnana’ (or turiya) for the gross, subtle and causal realms, which are always taken to be partial truths? In answer, we have this Talk from Bhagavan: “It is on the gross body that the other bodies [subtle and causal] subsist. … And destruction of the false belief of selfhood in the gross body is itself the destruction of the false belief of selfhood in the other bodies.”12 Since, as depicted in Part One, we are freed of our gross body when we attain the cosmic state of Virat (i.e., Vaisvanara-Virat), it must be agreed that we are rid of the other two bodies as well at this stage itself. It means we are freed of all ignorance at the individual level, and may in that sense be deemed a ‘jnani’. The states of Taijasa-Hiranyagarbha and Prajna-Iswara, that come later, must therefore also be of a ‘jnani’.13

A question arises: If the individual ignorance is eliminated by the stage of Vaisvanara-Virat, why does not sadhana end there itself? The answer is evident: the cosmic level ignorance is yet to be overcome. Its elimination at the gross, subtle and causal levels leads to attainment of the states of Taijasa-Hiranyagarbha, Prajna-Iswara and the Self respectively. Together with the first stage of meditation that led to

11 Gaudapada, T.M.P. Mahadevan, University of Madras, pp.107-8, 1975. Interestingly, the Yoga-Vasishta too speaks of four levels of a jnani, as pointed out by Bhagavan in ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. IV, §2-5, The Collected Works, pp.69-70, (2002). It, however, differs in many points of detail from the present account.
13 The ‘destruction of the false belief’ in the three bodies does not mean that Vaisvanara, Taijasa and Prajna (forms of individual ‘I’) cease to exist, but only that their association with the respective bodies ceases.
Vaisvanara-Virat, there are thus, conceptually, four stages of sadhana, as implied by Bhagavan. (See footnote 9)

Here, yet another quote from Bhagavan will be found pertinent: “... the moment you get into a movement of quest for the self and go deeper and deeper, the real Self is waiting there to take you in and then whatever is done is done by something else and you have no hand in it.”14 This would seem to suggest that the ‘jnani’ (at the stage of ‘I-I’) does not have to do any sadhana, and that the cosmic processes originally responsible for ‘evolution’ will now take care of ‘involution’ as well to enable the soul to return to its source, the Self.

Bhagavan describes this effortless, inexorable surge towards the absolute Reality thus: “with Self-Realisation, real and incessant tapas results. With the maturing of such tapas ...”15 The reference to ‘maturing’ in the second sentence shows that the ‘Self-realisation’ referred to at first is not the final Realisation, but only a state of ‘I-I’ which also passes for ‘jnana’. This is further corroborated by Bhagavan’s teaching elsewhere that the true or fully-realised jnani does not undergo any further change in his state.16

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, the overall transformations from the ego to the absolute Self may now be summarized thus:

Ego → ‘I’ (Vaisvanara) → ‘I-I’ {Vaisvanara-Virat → Taijasa-Hiranyagarbha → Prajna-Isvara} → Self
‘I’-thought → ‘I’-feeling → ‘I-I’ {in three stages} → Self

The sadhaka needs to put in his effort only for the attainment of Vaisvanara and then Vaisvanara-Virat. The individual ego ceases to exist thereafter as all the vasanas at the individual level are destroyed by then. And so there can be no further effort beyond this level.

**Meaning of Aham-sphurana**

Bhagavan describes the crucial step in Self-enquiry this way: “The sadhaka must remain as the Self. If he cannot do so, he must ascertain

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15 Talks, §57 of 24.06.1935, p.62.
16 “That alone is Real ... which is eternal and unchanging.” Maharshi’s Gospel, Book II, Ch. III, p.51, (14/ed., 2007). See also Talks, §609 of 18.01.1939, p.563.
the true meaning of the ‘I’ and constantly revert to it whenever other thoughts arise. That is the practice.” There are thus two ways of practising Self-enquiry. One is to abide in the ‘Self’ directly. It is obviously meant for ripe sadhakas, and apparently those who practise pranayama by breath-regulation mode. The other way is to abide in one’s ‘I’, and is meant for normal sadhakas. We shall examine the meaning of sphurana separately in each case, starting with the second.

When we say ‘I’ in our everyday conversation, often we inadvertently imply in it the idea ‘I-am-the-body’. Such associated ‘I’ is called the ‘I’-thought. The ‘I’ part of it, as directly experienced by us, is what Bhagavan means by the ‘true meaning’ of ‘I’ above. Self-enquiry consists in holding on to this experience constantly.

But, then, we have for long been habituated to mistaking our ‘I’-thought for our ‘I’. As a result, we have lost acquaintance with the real sense of ‘I’. So, even when we experience it at times of great devotion, fear, excitement, etc., we do not recognize it. And, when we seek it in Self-enquiry, it does not readily present itself in our active consciousness. We keep trying, and face a dead-end repeatedly. Then, suddenly at some moment, the ‘I’ (aham) flashes forth (sphurana) on its own in our consciousness. This ‘flashing forth’ of ‘I’ is the natural meaning of aham-sphurana, or sphurana in short. Further sadhana would now consist in merely holding on to that sphurana as Bhagavan stated above.

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17 Talks, §647 of 15.03.1939, p.608.
18 Talks, §307 of 27.12.1936, p.267. (‘Self’ here is to be read as ‘self’, which is the un-associated ‘I’).
19 See articles on ‘Self-enquiry’ in Mountain Path, October 2010, pp. 10-13, and July 2011, pp. 67-70.
21 ‘Sphurana’ is used in two senses by even common people in Sanskrit-based languages like Telugu, outside the present context: viz., ‘sudden recollection from the subconscious’ of something forgotten, or ‘sudden occurrence of an idea’ in answer to a problem at hand. The former meaning applies to ‘aham-sphurana’ here.
22 Sanskrit allows another meaning here for ‘sphurana’: ‘shining in the mind’ (on a continuous note).
Let us now consider the practice of Self-enquiry meant for ripe sadhakas. Bhagavan explains it further thus: “[After arresting the breath by pranayama], if one now keenly enquires, ‘What is it that rises as ‘I’?’, then in the Heart a certain soundless sphurana, ‘I-I’, will shine forth of its own accord. It is an awareness that is single and undivided, the thoughts … having disappeared. If one remains still without leaving it, even the sphurana … will itself in the end subside … . This alone is said to be liberation.”

It is clear from the above that what Bhagavan means by the term ‘Self’ in regard to the practice of ripe sadhakas, is not really the Self, but the entity ‘I-I’. Hence the sequence of Realisation in their case may be represented as:

‘I’-thought (or ego) → ‘I-I’ (sphurana) → Self

whereas in the case of normal sadhakas, it involves an additional step as follows:

‘I’-thought (or ego) → ‘I’ (sphurana) → ‘I-I’ (sphurana) → Self

Bhagavan often says that when we awake from sleep, the above processes are reversed in quick succession. With some practice, we can learn to hold on to the state of ‘I-I’ or ‘I’ that occurs momentarily, and retain it long. It provides us a head start in Self-enquiry.

Sahaja-samadhi in Contradistinction to ‘I-I’

Bhagavan develops the concept of sahaja-samadhi in a unique way. He at first identifies two kinds of nirvikalpa-samadhi – the internal and the external. The internal nirvikalpa-samadhi is likened to a steady flame in a windless place; and the external nirvikalpa-samadhi to a waveless ocean. Sahaja-samadhi is said to result when both these states are realised to be identical. We regard this as the final state of Realisation.


24 Talks, §196 of 09.06.1936, p.162; §323 of 07.01.1937, p.288; and §314 of 03.01.1937, p.275, respectively.

25 Guru Ramana, S.S. Cohen, Ch. XII, p.90, (9/ed., 2009); and Talks, Table accompanying §391 p.359 (last line). The same may be found summarised in ‘Facets of Self-enquiry’, Part Three, Mountain Path, January 2012, pp.14 & 16.
The term ‘I-I’ is, as we have seen, descriptive of a ‘jnani’, who is rid of his ignorance at the individual level. When he is turned inward, his state is said to be like a steady flame, and when turned outward, like a waveless ocean. He sees these states as different from each other, unlike one in sahaja-samadhi who perceives them to be identical.

Although sahaja-samadhi is explained in terms of identity between two states as above, it does not seem that Bhagavan means it to be taken literally. What all he wishes to convey is possibly that sahaja-samadhi is transcendent to the state of ‘I-I’. In numerous talks, he reiterates the upanishadadic view that the final Reality is beyond speech. If some description is to be given at all, it can be attempted only in negative terms – neti, neti (‘not this, not this’). The Mandukya-upanishad captures the futility of and contradictions involved in other kinds of descriptions, saying: “[The Reality] is not conscious of the internal world, nor conscious of the external world, nor conscious of both the worlds, nor a mass of consciousness, nor conscious, nor unconscious; is unseen, beyond empirical dealings, beyond the grasp (of the organs …), uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable; … in which all phenomena cease; and which is unchanging, auspicious, and non-dual.”

Bhagavan says as much: “Reality is that which transcends all concepts.” “Reality … is as it is. It transcends speech, [is] beyond the expressions [such as] existence, non-existence, etc.” “However much one may explain, the fact will not become clear till [one] oneself attains Self-realisation.” It is perhaps best to regard Realisation or sahaja-samadhi as an awakening from the ‘dream’ of all that had preceded it, including ‘I-I’.

**Spiritual Study in the Cyber Age**

Analytical study of spirituality is fraught with many problems. The ancient scriptures do not give us a coherent and systematic account

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26 *Brihadaranyaka*, III.ix.26. A little elaboration may be seen in II.iv.14 and III.vii.23.  
of Reality or sadhana. We find well-recorded teachings of modern sages, particularly those of Bhagavan, to be of greater appeal to us for their contemporary idiom and freedom from distortion. Even here, we meet with an unexpected problem. The teachings of a sage are mostly tailored to individuals, who hail from different backgrounds, and so often happen to be inconsistent and mutually contradictory. The sage is focussed more on throwing his influence on his hearers, rather than adhering to too rigorous a system of nomenclature or building a system of philosophy round his teachings. Besides, he does not normally encourage inquisitiveness beyond what is suited to the individual concerned and the society of the time, while inquisitiveness and capacity for rational thinking grow from generation to generation.

So, when we try to piece together a system of understanding such as the above, the question arises whether it could be too arbitrary. We have here certain epistemological guidelines that are well established in science and rational thought in general. If there are two theories proposed to explain a given phenomenon, that theory is considered more valid that explains a larger number of known data (or is based on fewer starting axioms). In respect of spirituality, we may say that that system of understanding is more acceptable, which logically links together the greater number of teachings on the subject. The present articles stake their claim for legitimacy based on this principle. Any teachings that fall outside their scope may be considered to be special cases, or simplifications.

Spiritual study can never be complete since the final Reality can only be approached but never exactly reached by logical means. The purpose of study is only to point the direction in which Reality lies, and the possible means of attaining it. It must suffice if the analytic account is developed to the extent of satisfying the rational, inquisitive mind, so that the individual concerned can go ahead with his sadhana unperturbed by further questions. Alternative systems of understanding, if any, must be welcome, if they can serve the same purpose. It is the goal that is important, not the means.
Kumbha Mela

Savithri Krishnan

Kumbha Mela, a sacred Hindu pilgrimage and the greatest religious festival remains an enigma, given the colossal turnout, and is undeniably the largest religious congregation on the planet! Though the population of the Hindus is one-third of the other two major faiths, namely Islam and Christianity put together, it is mind boggling to note that the pilgrims at the mela in 2013 were about a hundred million, a whopping thirty times more than the Haj, as per reliable reports. Kumbha Mela has been celebrated since time immemorial and finds mention in the Vedic literature. Its earliest history can be dated back to 3500 BC. In more recent times, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang records his visit to the erstwhile city of Prayag (modern day Allahabad) in the seventh century, during Harsha Vardhana’s reign. His diary mentions a celebration of seventy five days during the Hindu month of Magha (January-February), which witnessed the

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presence of half a million devotees from all walks of life - commoners, the rich and the famous, sages, philosophers, scholars and kings.

The Legend

‘Kumbha’ or ‘Kalasha’ is a Sanskrit word for ‘pitcher’. It is also a zodiac sign for Aquarius in Indian astrology under which the festival is held once in twelve years to commemorate the well-known ‘Samudra Manthan’ episode, where the devas (demigods) and the asuras (demons) churned the primordial ocean to get the elixir of immortality. ‘Mela’ means a gathering or a fair. Kumbha Mela thus literally means a ‘Pitcher Fair’. The legend associated with the Kumbha as per the Bhagavat Purana dates back to the very era when the Universe was created. The devas who had lost their strength due to the sage Durvasa’s curse, approached Lord Brahma (the God of creation). In order to regain their lost strength the devas were advised to acquire *amrita* or the divine nectar which lay under the depths of a mighty ocean in a ‘kumbh’ or pitcher, by churning the ocean. Since unearthing it required a supernatural effort, a task impossible for the Devas to accomplish on their own, they lured the asuras into giving them a helping hand with the assurance that they would share the ‘treasures’ that emerged out of the ocean. The churning that went on for a thousand years began with Mount Mandhara used as the churning rod, the king of serpents, Vasuki, as the churning rope, and Lord Vishnu, in the form of a tortoise, as the platform. The devas positioned themselves at Vasuki’s tail and the asuras at his head.

Among the host of treasures that emerged were the divine elephant Airavath, the celestial horse Uchhaishravas, the wish-fulfilling cow Kamadhenu, the Vedas, and the goddess Lakshmi. Then emerged the deadliest of all poisons ‘Haalaahala’, which was capable of destroying the entire universe. Lord Shiva benevolently offered to swallow it in order to save creation. The churning continued, and finally the eagerly anticipated Amrit Kumbha, the pitcher with the elixir of immortality. Both the demons and the gods rushed to claim it. Lord Vishnu in the form of Mohini, the enchantress seized it and handed it over to his mount Garuda the king of birds, instructing him to take it to
Heaven. On his way to Heaven Garuda is stopped at four places by the demons and in each of these places some of the divine nectar spills. These places, later named Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain, thus became immensely sanctified, acquiring mystical powers. On his flight to heaven, Garuda was guided by the Sun, Moon, Saturn and Brihaspathi (Jupiter) who was at that time transiting through the sky. Garuda’s flight took twelve days (twelve human years), and since then Kumbha Mela is celebrated at the time of the same astronomical and planetary combination every twelve years at Prayag.

Types Of Kumbha Melas
Kumbha Mela is also observed in each of the other three pilgrim cities. It is celebrated four times every twelve years, with the site of the observance rotating between Hardwar on the Ganges River, Ujjain on the Shipra, Nasik on the Godavari, and Prayag at the confluence (known as Sangam) of the three most holy rivers – the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati which exists only on ethereal or spiritual plane, invisible to the human eye. The Kumbha Festival at Nasik and Ujjain is celebrated in the same year. The Ardha Kumbha (occurring every six years) and Poorna Kumbha (occurring every twelve years) are always held at Prayag. Prayag is hailed in the scriptures as Teerthraj, the holiest of pilgrimage centres. The Prayag Kumbha Mela is the largest and holiest of all melas and is believed to be the most auspicious. It is celebrated in the Hindu month of magha when Jupiter enters Taurus, and as the sun and moon enter Capricorn as summarised in the following verse. Amavasya (the new moon day) in particular is considered to be very auspicious.

Makare cha diva naathe Hamajage cha Brihaspathau |
Kumbha yoge bhaveththatra prayaage hayathi dhurlabaha ||

For every twelfth entry of Jupiter into Taurus, the Poorna Kumbha at Prayag is called the Maha Kumbha. That is, after twelve Poorna Kumbhas (144 years), a Maha Kumbha happens and 2013 was one such Maha Kumbha (though some sources aver it to be the one in 2001). More details on the astrological analyses are available in the myths in the Brahma Purana, Shiva Purana and Naradeeya Purana.
Ritual/Spiritual Significance
A ceremonial immersion in sacred water is considered the most important ritual. It is believed that the planets and the heavenly bodies at the time of the Kumbha sanctify and medicate the waters of the Ganges with nectar-like properties and charge the waters of both the Ganges and Yamuna with positive healing effects. A holy dip is thus believed to cleanse the pilgrims of all their sins, bestowing on them liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

The esoteric or spiritual significance of the Kumbha Mela is along the lines of the myth where Garuda was guided by the sun, moon and Jupiter. In Hindu tradition, the sun and the moon represent the human rational intellect and mind. Jupiter known as Brihaspathi or Guru is the spiritual master. When the Sun (intellect) is in a particular conjunction with Jupiter (Guru) guides the moon (mind), the result is the realisation of the immortality (amrita) of the Self. Thus the scriptures lay stress on the importance of being at specific locations and having a dip in the sacred waters during the Kumbha Mela.

The Importance Of Kumbha In Hinduism
Incidentally the Kumbha or ‘Kalasha’ is synonymous with holy activities. In Hindu culture, it is an integral part of all sacred activities.

Kalashasya Mukhe Vishnuhu kante Rudraha samaashritthaaha|
Moole thathra sitthitho Brahma Madhye maathruganaaha smruthaaha|
Kukshau thu saagarah sarve saptha dweepa vasundhharaa|
Rgvedho cha yajurvedho saamavedho atharvanaha|
Angaishcha sahithaah sarve kalasham thu samaashritthaaha ||

The scripture proclaim that the mouth (opening) of a Kumbha or pitcher symbolises the presence of Lord Vishnu, its neck, that of Lord Siva and the base, that of Lord Brahma. The centre of the kumbha is the abode of all goddesses, oceans, mountains, Earth and the four Vedas.

The kumbha therefore has a tremendous religious and spiritual significance. It is a well-known fact that a kumbhabhishekam is performed in order to consecrate a newly constructed temple or reconsecrate an existing one. One is reminded of the Kumbhabhishekam
of Matrubhuteshwara temple at Sri Ramanasramam observed on a grand scale in the holy presence and under the guidance of Bhagavan in 1949. Interestingly, the sixth Mahakumbhabhishekam at Sri Ramanasramam coincided with the same year as that of MahaKumbha at Prayag in 2013. On 25th Aug 2013, the Kumbhabhishekam of both Sri Matrubhuteswara and Ramana shrines were performed.

The Mela – 2013
Reverting to the topic of Kumbha Mela, a Poorna Kumbha mela is usually more than a month long and starts in the Hindu month of Capricorn (January/February) and ends in the month of Aquarius (February/March). In 2013 it was a fifty five day event that commenced on Makara Sankranthi (14th January) and concluded on Maha Sivaratri (10th March). I was blessed to be a part of this mela on the last two days. Though taking a dip in the Sangam at Prayag at anytime is very auspicious, its influence is manifold during the mela and all the more so during the few days earmarked as the main bathing dates. There were six such dates that year – 14th January (Makara Sankranthi), 27th January (Paush Poornima), 10th February (Mauni Amavasya), 15th February (Basanth Panchami), 25th February (Magh Poornima) and 10th March (Maha Sivaratri).

Endorsement by Great Saints
The most striking feature of the Kumbha is that it is invariably marked by the participation of Mahants. The hermits of the Himalayan caves, who almost never leave their secluded haunts, come out once every twelve years to take part in the mela. In the past, several saints of the likes of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mahavatar Babaji and a host of other great souls, who go undetected in the crowd, have graced the mela with their divine presence. Paramahamsa Yogananda mentions in his book, The Autobiography of a Yogi that his guru Sri Yukteshwar Giri first met his

1 Full moon during the month of Capricorn.
2 New moon in the month of Aquarius.
3 5th day from the new moon of Aquarius.
4 New moon during the month of Aquarius.
paramaguru (Guru’s guru) Mahavatar Babaji at the Allahabad Kumbha Mela in January 1894. Sri Yukteshwar was apparently not happy with the mela as he didn’t think that the saints and the commotion of the large crowds at the mela gel with each other. The master quelled his wrong notion thus – “For the faults of the many, judge not the whole. Everything on earth is of mixed character, like a mingling of sand and sugar. Be like the wise ant, which seizes only the sugar, and leaves the sand untouched. Though many sadhus here still wander in delusion, yet the mela is blessed by a few men of God-realization.”

The eighth century Advaitin Jagat Guru Sri AdiSankara popularised the Kumbha Mela among the common people. He strongly encouraged the masses to take part in the mela and laid great emphasis on the benefits of associating with saintly persons. One of the verses of his *Bhajagovindam* explains the benefits of association with the wise: *Satsangatve nisangatvam, nissangatve nirmohatvam, nirmohatve nishchala tatvam, nischala tatve jeevan muktihi* meaning: In the company of sages, attachment vanishes; and with attachment illusion. Freed from illusion one attains stability and thence liberation while yet alive. Therefore, above all, seek the company of sages. A similar sentiment is echoed in the *Bhagavatham* too which Bhagavan Ramana has included in the *Forty Verses on Reality – Supplement*. It says, “Holy rivers, which are only water, and idols which are (only) made of stone and clay, are not as mighty as the sage. For while they make one pure in the course of numberless days, the sage’s eyes, by a mere glance, purify one immediately.” Though one may not be able to recognize the genuine saints in the mela, just being amidst them is highly beneficial.

**Akhadhas**
Adi Sankara grouped the ascetics into ten sects or orders called *Akhadhas* at Prayag. They have since remained a major attraction for the pilgrims visiting the mela, the most prominent among them being the Naga Sadhus who remain naked with long knotted hair and bodies smeared with ashes. They adorn themselves with thousands of rudraksha beads and carry swords. Some of the ascetics at the mela practise severe physical disciplines and display superhuman feats.
The present day Akhadhas are more than ten in number and they represent the Saiva, Naga, Vaishnava and Sakta cults.

**Mela Atmosphere**

At the mela, a religious atmosphere pervades the place. Ascetics belonging to different Akhadhas stay in their designated camps and the pilgrims have free access to them. Vedic chants, yagnas, prayers, and discourses by ascetics mark the routine activities during the mela. Some of the pilgrims reside on the banks for most of the mela performing traditional rites and rituals and partaking of meals only once a day. This stay, known as ‘Kalpavaas’ has special religious significance, and such pilgrims are called *kalpavasis*. The mela has a surreal ambience on the main bathing dates with the traditional, colourful and magnificent procession of ascetics belonging to various Akhadas on elephants, horses, palanquins and chariots amidst the sound of musical instruments and the beat of drums at sunrise. The ascetics take their dip called the *shahi snan* or the ‘royal bath’ with each group proceeding to the Sangam in a particular sequence. The Naga Sadhus marching towards the Sangam with their swords for the *shahi snan* are a spectacular sight! After the ascetics belonging to the various orders have bathed, others get their turn to take a dip. Though I missed most of the pomp and pageantry of the mela, the fact that I could be a part of it was gratifying and the experience is truly exhilarating and mesmerizing! All through the day, people from nearby villages kept pouring in, carrying decorated flags on a mast, accompanied by raucous music, dancing all the way to the Sangam, as in the Kavadi performed in south India in worship of Lord Subrahmanya during the Thai-Poosam festival.

**My Impressions**

A few strange instances that I encountered at the mela reminded me of the dream of Bhagavan’s devotee Shantammal. She recounts that once during Karthigai festival, it was decided to abandon distribution of food to the beggars flocking Sri Ramanasramam due to their unruly

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behaviour. That night she had a vivid dream where Bhagavan told her that as soon as the flags were hoisted at Arunachaleshwara Temple for the Karthigai festival, devas come down to partake in the celebrations. They join the crowd in the human garb and some even mix with the beggars at the ashram gate. And hence feeding the beggars during festivals should never be abandoned. It is my strong conviction that at the mela too, innumerable gods take part, in the garb of ordinary human beings, and that probably accounts for such an inexplicable turnout of pilgrims!

What leaves one amazed is the sense of serenity and orderliness that permeates the entire mela area. It is impossible to imagine how such an ocean of people congregating at the river banks, can each manage to have the holy dip and return. There is no beginning or end to the numbers of people taking holy bath, yet there is absolutely no confusion, no chaos, and all this without any rigid supervision by police or volunteers. One comes back thoroughly convinced that it is a divinely ordained event that has to be seen to be believed.

Kudos
Last but not the least, the government of Uttar Pradesh deserves accolades for the exceptional arrangements made for the mela. An entire temporary city springs up from nowhere along the banks of the Sangam well equipped with accommodation facilities, electricity with thousands of makeshift electrical poles, sanitation facilities, markets, purified potable water, eateries with pure vegetarian food, provisional health care centres, announcement kiosks for lost and found pilgrims, transportation services to shuttle pilgrims in and out of the mela area spread across a sprawling fifty square kilometre area, sweepers and sanitation employees working around the clock to maintain hygiene, regular sanitising of the entire area with fogging and spraying of DDT to prevent any epidemic breaking out, firemen, policemen, home-guards and the Indian Defence personnel keeping a constant vigil with closed circuit TV to guard against any possible disorder and commotion. To conclude: the very conduct and success of the mela is a grand testimony to the coordination of the human and divine.
Introduction

A common man’s life is beset by contradictions, complexities and conflicts, while the conceptual levels of Vedanta that we study are replete with puzzling paradoxes. The two sets of baffling conundrums are, however, as different as chalk and cheese in their scope, depth and consequence. The former keeps one in bondage whereas the latter is not just a series of static tenets but a living tradition that beckons the aspirant (mumukshu) intent in unshackling himself from the fetters of samsara and guides his intuition to feel his way towards freedom.

The purpose of spiritual sadhana is to primarily address a person’s seemingly insoluble predicament in the face of contrary forces characterising our inner and outer worlds and show him the way to self-integration with a harmonious alignment of body, mind and Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati received Vedanta siksha from Swami Tejomayananda, and later sannyasa diksha from Swami Virajeshwara Sarasvati of Anusoni. In his purvashrama, he was a professor of metallurgical engg. in IIT Madras. He lives by the western slopes of Arunachala.
speech, that is, the purification of physical actions, thought processes and verbal expressions (trikaranasuddhi).

Such a conscious self-disciplining process heals all inner divisions and brings order to our everyday life. It promotes a stable life of relative happiness, poise and equanimity.¹ This component of sadhana constitutes the essence of yoga marga. It makes the seeker a wholesome personality, who is well-prepared for the next and the final level of jnana vichara and its eventual consummation in Enlightenment. The latter alone delivers the jiva (individual) once for all, from the thralldom of the cycle of birth and death, samsara.

**Yoga Sadhana and Vedanta Vichara — A Blend in Harmony**

In the realm of yoga sadhana, there is zero tolerance for conflict, contradiction or confusion. Every step is well-delineated and the path is laid out with great clarity and scientific precision. This approach is action-oriented and our predilections for philosophical concepts and nuanced deliberations are minimised. These are not dismissed outright but postponed till the requisite eligibility or competence is acquired.² It is essential that we first get our priorities right. The emphasis at this stage is on outright practice, with theory placed on the back burner (kriyapradhanam, siddhanta-gauNam). Lord Krishna therefore exhorts an impatient Arjuna who wants to by-pass karma yoga and to plunge headlong into jnana marga, to first become a yogi,³ before tackling the final challenge of jnana prApti. The Lord prescribes renunciation of all actions (karma sannyasa) only for an adept in yoga, who has already gained purity of mind (chita suddhi).

In stark contrast, in the domain of Vedanta vichara, the emphasis is completely reversed (siddhanta-pradhAnam, kriyA-sunyaam). Gaining

¹ For example, see Bh. Gita: v.6.17, “yuktAhArasya. . . yogo bhavati duhkhahA”.
² Brahma Sutras: 1.1.1, ‘athAto brahma jijnAsA’- “Thereafter, therefore, (arises) the desire to know Brahman (through inquiry)”. Here, the word ‘thereafter’ implies ‘after acquiring the sadhana chatushtayam, viz. viveka, vairagya, six-fold inner wealth and mumukshutvam’. This represents the ideal situation, whereby the teaching of mahavakyas will bear fruit quickly in terms of realisation.
³ Bh. Gita: v.6.46, ‘tapasvibhyo adhiko yogi….tasmAt yogi bhavArjuna’ and v. 6.3, ‘….yogAruDhasya tasyaiva samah kAraNam uchyate’.
conceptual clarity through learning from a master\textsuperscript{4} is here mandatory while all ‘doing’ is generally dismissed, except for ‘upAsana’ which is accorded auxiliary importance for the acquisition of mental tranquillity (chitta naischalyam) and one-pointedness of intellect (ekAgrata). Attaining a correct and balanced vision hastens the evolutionary process and deepens the quality of sadhana. Without the necessary intellectual clarity in grasping the guiding corner-stone principles of the philosophical system, all our so-called ‘doing mode’ of sadhana may well be a deviation from the main pursuit. For example, Sage Gaudapada cautions those seekers who spend many hours every day purportedly in dhyana and who, not knowing its dangers, might unwittingly slip into an addictive stupor-like trance (laya), and as a consequence, stagnate without gaining precious Vedantic clarity.\textsuperscript{5}

Therefore, as one proceeds to the higher echelons of understanding, hard-core texts of Vedanta like Ozhivil Odukkam denounce adherence to chariyai, kiriyai etc. (being riddled with karma) as tenacious obstacles. Vedanta starts with questioning the utility of action and concludes that actions (karma kANDam) cannot lead to moksha.\textsuperscript{6} One must necessarily resort to vichara,\textsuperscript{7} if he/she aspires for liberation. Bondage is experienced due to lack of enquiry and it can be removed only through self-enquiry.\textsuperscript{8} This does not however, mean that yoga and jnana margas are mutually antagonistic; they are merely sequential, much like high school studies that must precede higher scholastic pursuit in universities.

Yoga marga aims at the conquest of the body-mind-sense conflicts, which leads one to self-mastery. Jnana marga is solely concerned with educating the intellect at the highest possible levels of enquiry. It does this through the systematic process of shravaNa (listening)

\textsuperscript{4} ChAndogya Up.: 6.14.2, ‘AcharyavaN purusho veda....’.
\textsuperscript{5} MANDUkya KArikA: 3.45, ‘laye sambodhayet chittam ....sama prAptam na chAlayet’.
\textsuperscript{6} Upadesa SArah: v. 1-3 and MuNDaka Up.: v.1.2.6, ‘plavA hyethe adruDhA yajnaruupAh... avaram yeshu karma....’.
\textsuperscript{7} VivekaChudAmaNi: v.11, ‘chittasya suddhaye karma, na tu vastu upalabdhyae, vastu siddhih vichareNa, na kinchit karmakotiibhih’.
\textsuperscript{8} Panchadasi: v.10.5, ‘avichAra kritobhandah, vichAreNa nivartate....’.
and manana (contemplation) of the Upanishadic teachings from a competent acharya or a great guru. In the nididhyAsanA stage, the yoga virya/balam acquired in the preceding preparatory phase, blends perfectly with the intellectual conviction and finesse gained in the jnana marga and catapults the mind to the transcendent plane, resulting in final enlightenment.

To sum up, yoga sadhana aims at integration of personality and the conquest of the forces of prakriti, while jnana vichara achieves transcendence of personality through seeing its falsity. M.P. Pandit, a great exponent of Sri Aurobindo philosophy, expressed this truth succinctly when he wrote in a booklet on Bhagavan Ramana that all great personalities bow before Bhagavan as the latter was a mighty Impersonality. The purification of one’s personality through yoga sadhana quickens its subsequent sublimation in pure knowledge.

Maharshi Ramana consistently taught that Self-realisation is not a matter of acquiring anything new but merely the loss of ego, around which are spun all the erroneous notions regarding one’s personality. Annihilation of this fundamental notion of a separative ‘I’, the finite individuality (vyaktibodha nAsah) alone is Enlightenment. This is the supreme achievement any human being can hope and work for.

Paradoxes in Vedanta
Unlike the path of yoga which lays bare everything through clear-cut manuals of instruction, the seeker treading the path of inquiry (jnana marga) often confronts situations bristling with paradoxes. That is why one must invoke the Grace of the Lord to reach the feet of an accomplished guru who can safely guide the seeker through the many baffling situations that can come up till the very end, where everything falls in place, and all paradoxes are resolved. In the Zen tradition, this is graphically described as, “In the beginning, the mountains are...”

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9 MuNDaka Up.:v.1.2.12, ‘parikshya lokAn….tadvijnAnArtham sa gurum evAbhigacchet, samitpANih srotiyam brahma nishtam’ and Bh. Gita: v.4.34, ‘tat viddhi praNipAtena…. jnAninas tattvadarsinah’.
10 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, 2000, Talk §146, p.130, “Reality is simply the loss of the ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity.”
Mountains and the rivers are rivers; as one advances further, mountains are no more mountains and rivers are no more rivers. Finally as the summit of attainment is climbed, the mountains once again become mountains and rivers again appear as rivers.”

The jivanmukta may then seem like any other ordinary person and though his appearance is perfectly normal, his inner vision is so extraordinary. This has been illustrated time and again in Maharshi Ramana’s amazing life. In Zen monastic training, this is expressed in so many ways such as ‘Eat when hungry, sleep while tired’, ‘chopping wood and carrying water’ and ‘sitting quietly, doing nothing’ – these are sufficient to manifest one’s inherent Buddha-nature. These sound simple but carry the profound message of ‘summa iru’ (i.e. rest in Self-abidance without the doership sense).

In the Isavasya and Kena Upanishads, there are paradoxes galore – some are delightful and some mind-blowing. Mainly they serve to demonstrate the limitation of words in their attempt to point out what is admitted as beyond their capacity to illumine. This propels a quantum leap into an intuitive apprehension of Truth. It is for the same purpose that Zen masters often present their disciples with puzzles, called koans that serve to stun and stop the feverishly preoccupied mind. The koans are intended to blast the mind from its habitual dwelling in the realm of words and concepts and trigger the glimpse of Truth in a sudden flash, called satori. Referring to such glimpses, Swami Chinmayananda said that ‘the essence of Vedanta is really not taught by the Guru (though clothed in words) but caught by the alert disciple’ who is able to see through the spoken word, what lies beyond.

In other words, words are employed to show that words cannot directly reveal the supreme Reality but can only indicate It through their lakshyaArtha. They are, however, a necessary indicator of the Truth that dwells beyond their ken. Swami Chinmayananda also

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11 See, for instance, the delightful incidents in Bhagavan’s life in Purushottama Ramana by V Ganesan, Ramanasramam, 2013.
13 Taittiriya Up.: 2.4.1, ‘yato vAcho nivartante aprApya manasA saha’.
gave a lucid definition of meditation as, ‘Silence the mind and listen’! Bhagavan gave a fuller and more explicit advice, “Drop all thoughts and pay attention to the soundless, pulsing current of ‘I’ (aham sphurти).”

**Enlightenment – the Great Paradox**

The mother of all paradoxes in Vedanta appropriately revolves upon Enlightenment itself and the ineffable state of a jnani, who is a jivanmukta. Bhagavan sings in *Akshara MaNamAlai*, “You unravelled the Great Knot which held the mystery of the limitless Self that has no beginning or end (like Arunachala); should Thou not complete the task, Oh Arunachala?”

In all branches of knowledge concerning the non-Self (*aparA vidyA*), knowledge empowers the knower and enriches his personality. The experience of Self-knowledge (*parA vidyA*), on the other hand, dissolves the very knower once for all.

In fact, the very triad of knower, known and the instrument of knowledge (*pramAtA, prameyam* and *pramANam*) disappear in the wake of *kaivalya jnanam*, leaving only the pure Knowledge, the Consciousness that shines in all its splendour. Until this happens, all our knowledge of the Self gathered from the scriptures would still remain academic and intellectual, however well-assimilated. Such a conviction born of mediate knowledge (*paroksha jnanam*), can no doubt, transform one’s life (in terms of true values, *purushArtha nischaya*) and thus refine and elevate the personality. But it falls short of discrediting it, which is a *sine qua non* for enlightenment.

Therefore, the Upanishads assert that the intelligent disciple, after a thorough study of the scriptures and the assimilation of their message, should thereafter be intent on gaining the experiential knowledge (*aparoksha jnanam*). He must focus only on the Self (in *nidadhyAsAna*), leaving behind the scriptures without any residue, like the farmer who after pounding the paddy, winnows away the chaff and gathers the rice grains. For a serious seeker, Bhagavan has

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14 v. 80, ‘MuDiaDi kANA muDi viDutthanai, ner muDiviDak kaDanilai Arunachala!’
15 *Sat Darsanam*, v.14, ‘nidrA na vidyA grahaNam... chideva vidyA vilasanti asunyA’.
16 *Amrita Bindu Up.*: v.18, ‘grantham abhyasa medhAvi jnAna vijnAna tatparah, phalAlam iva dhAnyArthi tyajet grantham aseshatah’.
said that all work lies within, never outside.\textsuperscript{17} In his earliest teaching
*Who am I?,* Bhagavan advised that once the purport of the *sastras* is
ascertained as to ‘turning within’ (*antarmukhatA*), the seeker should
not endlessly wander in the maze of textual erudition and research.
He further said that “there would come a time, when one has to forget
all that one has learnt” (*after it has served the purpose*).

**Resolution of the Knower in Pure Knowledge**

Thus in True Knowledge, sublation of the ego is sought, not its
embellishment in scholarship or oratory and literary skills. In
Self-knowledge, pure *Jnanam* alone permeates one’s awareness and
there is no *jnani* as such, surviving as a personality. That is why
it is laughable to claim oneself as a *jnani*,\textsuperscript{18} even after a genuine
glimpse of Truth. Until complete erasure of the latent tendencies of
mind (*vAsanAkshaya*) is achieved by constant abidance in the Self,
the personality can again rear its head and blithely claim it is dead!
In *manonAsa*, the ‘claimant’ ego is extinguished for good and one
then abides in *sahaja sthitih*. Others may call him or her a *jnani* (in
*vyAvahAra drishti*) but in his own vision, everything including himself
is resolved into one limitless *jnana svarupam*. There is no *ajnani* at all
(or even a *jnani*) in his perspective.\textsuperscript{19}

Avidya itself has ceased to exist for him, just as there is no darkness
in the light of the sun. Likewise, he abides as the embodiment of bliss
(*Ananda svarupah*) and not as *Anandi*, the possessor of happiness.
In the classic novel, *Alice in Wonderland* – a brilliant allegory of the
spiritual journey, full of cute paradoxes – the little Alice after changing
into many forms (symbolising the constantly changing identities of

\textsuperscript{17} op. cit., Talk §227, p.195, “For the worthy disciple, the work lies within himself
and not without.” Also see Talk §398, p. 384, “What should we do now? Only
act up to the words of the master, work within.”

\textsuperscript{18} *Sat Darsanam* v.35, ‘na vedmi aham mAm uta vedmi aham mAm, iti pravAdo
manujasya hAsyah, drgdrsyA bhedAt kimayam dvidhAtmA?....’.

\textsuperscript{19} op. cit., Talk §48, p.54, “If I am Bhagavan there is no one besides the Self –
therefore no *jnani* or *ajnani*.”
the ego), starts wondering who she truly is. When the Cheshire cat eventually vanishes out of her sight, it leaves behind a huge grin long after it has gone! This mystifies Alice, just as ajnanis cannot imagine a state wherein the knower disappears in the wake of Knowledge. For them, knowledge cannot reside without the locus of the knower. But for the enlightened sage, Ananda alone remains as his very svārupam; he is not ‘around’ as Anandi, the enjoyer of bliss! Acharya Sankara says that the one whose intellect is dissolved in the bliss of Brahman becomes verily Brahman and cannot be called as a ‘knower of Brahman’ who stands apart from Brahman. Such Knowledge is truly experiential as it swallows the very knower.

To claim oneself as a jnani simply betrays non-awareness of one’s limitless nature and a lack of the ultimate vision of division-less unity (akhaNDa ekAtma bodham). For any exclusive claim to the status of a jnani immediately delimits the infinite Self into a finite personality. As the famous Zen saying goes, ‘The moment you express, you miss the mark’. Thus wherever there is division, there is de-vision, i.e., no vision of Truth. Such indeed is the paradox of enlightenment, succinctly summed up in the Tamil saying, ‘kaNDavar viNDilar, viNDavar kaNDilar’.22

All Waters are One – the Seer becomes Non-dual

Consider the above famous Upanishadic example, in the context of waves in an ocean. Among countless waves perpetually rising in the ocean, suppose one wave has realised its nature to be water. This ‘enlightened wave’ looks around and sees only water in all waves. It knows water to be the very stuff and essence of itself as well as all other waves. There is nothing other than water. Can this wave ever feel it is made of ‘superior water’ compared to the other ‘ignorant waves’, just

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20 ManishA Panchakam, v.5, “yasmin..sukhambudha galaśadbhih brahmaiva, na brahmavit…”

21 That is, differential notions in one’s understanding such as ‘jnani-ajnani’ etc. – in short, any kind of bheda drishti.

22 ‘Those who have seen the Truth fall silent; those who wax eloquent about it, have not seen.’

23 BrhadAraNyaka Up.: 4.3.32, ‘salilah eko drashtA advaito bhavati…’.
because it is a ‘jnani wave’? The very ‘jnanam’ it now has, destroys all the previously held differential notions (bheda drishti), and denies any special, exalted status that the other ‘ignorant waves’ proffer in reverence to this wave. All waves are but One Water.

Therefore the ‘enlightened wave’ wonders, when all there is, is water alone, why make any fuss about this particular wave, with its fleeting form? Water is forever, but the ‘wave form’ is here now but soon gone. So, the ‘jnani wave’ deprecates all the personality cult that develops around it and constantly hammers the teaching to other waves, ‘Listen, you and I, all of us are children of the same water,24 not just me alone’, ‘you are also water’ (tat tvam asi), ‘wake up to your water-nature and be free’.

The ‘jnani’ wave’s all-encompassing ‘water vision’ does not allow even the residual differentiation of ‘jnani and ajnani’ waves. The above example (drshtAntam) deploys the inert sea waters bounded by the sandy shores and the sky, which have the in-built limitations of an analogy. This may unwittingly permit an adjectival distinction among waves as ‘wise’ and ‘unwise’. But in the original context (dArshtAntam) concerning absolute reality, one deals with the absolutely limitless ocean of Consciousness itself (bodha samudram).

So as we carry forward the message from the above illustration into the paradigm of ultimate Reality, all jivas (corresponding to the ‘waves’, enlightened or ignorant) are seen to be constituted of the same consciousness only (svarupa jnanam), a boundless and seamless entity. This effectively erases even the adjectival distinctions among the waves, as Reality does not countenance any distinctive fragment or mosaic in its wholeness. The jnani’s mind also, having attained merger with Reality correspondingly does not and cannot envision anything other than pure consciousness. The ‘seeming separation’ from this wholeness is an issue for the ignorant only, not for the jnani to whom it is not a real separation at all.

24 *ShvetAsvatara Up.*: v.2.5, “shrNvantu vishve amrtasya putrAh, Aye dhAmAni divyAni tashuh”.

July - September
Therefore the absence of a unique \textit{vritti jnanam} in the ‘ignorant waves’ is a trivial issue, as far as the ‘enlightened wave’ is concerned. The function of this \textit{vritti jnanam}, also called \textit{aham sphurti}, is to eliminate this seeming separation born of ignorance (manifesting as \textit{dehAtma buddhi}). After destroying ignorance, \textit{aham sphurti} resolves itself in \textit{svarupa jnanam}\textsuperscript{25} just like the fire that subsides after the exhaustion of its fuel. Bhagavan avers that Realisation is synonymous with this \textit{akhaNDakAra vritti jnanam} and has nothing to do with manipulating \textit{svarupa jnanam} which is eternal, changeless and all-pervasive.

The Paradoxical Nature of Vichara Sadhana
For sincere seekers, total acceptance of the ultimate Truth expressed by the sages\textsuperscript{26} is itself sufficient to practically ward off the ills of \textit{samsara}. So Bhagavan repeatedly advises the seeker to give up the thought that one is not realised (and certainly not to think that one is realised either, because paradoxically both these mutually opposing positions are but two sides of the same coin of ignorance) but simply abide as the Self, constantly shining as the substratum (\textit{svarupa jnanam}). Whether you know it or not, you are the perfect Whole (\textit{purNam}) and you have no lack whatsoever.\textsuperscript{27} To accept this and be at peace as in deep sleep (\textit{J Agrat sushupti}) is the \textit{raison d’etre} of Bhagavan’s teaching. You are only pretending to be unenlightened, says Bhagavan, advising us to give up this great game of pretension.\textsuperscript{28}

Bhagavan assures us that this seemingly simple practice itself (of identifying with the \textit{svarupa jnanam} and remaining as such) will eventually clear all the obstacles to the arising of the \textit{akhaNDakAra vritti jnanam}, which destroys the primal ignorance. Thus in advanced sadhana, even the intense yearning for liberation (\textit{mumukshutvam}) gets resolved in the revolutionary clarity of \textit{vichara marga}. Here, this unique path to Truth is indeed paved with tiles of deep peace.

\textsuperscript{25} This is brought out clearly in \textit{Sat Darsana Bhashya and Talks with Maharshi} by Kapali Sastri in the Section ‘Realisation and Bodily Experience’, 2006. p.19-21.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ulladu NArpadu}: v.32, ‘adu nEyendru ammaraigal ArthiDavum…tAnAi amarvadAl’.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid. v.37, ‘sAdhakatthile duvidham….tAn dasaman andri yAr tAn?’.
\textsuperscript{28} op. cit., Talk §146, p.134.
The Paradox of Jivanmukti Vision as Revealed by Bhagavan

The Upanishads further proclaim, “There is no plurality whatsoever here” (*neha nAnAsti kinchana*) and ‘Whosoever sees differences here, goes from death to death’ (*mrtvoh sa mrtvum Aṇoti ya iba nAnA iva pasyati*). Thus the slightest of differential vision (*bheda drishti*) militates against true enlightenment. This is the *advaita drishti* that Bhagavan lived every moment of his life, as he consistently refused even the slightest special treatment extended to him. From his own standpoint, he waived any differentiation between him and others,²⁹ including the ‘guru-sishya’, ‘bhagavan-bhakta’ hierarchy,³⁰ which has legitimacy only in *ajnana drishti*.

With this unifying vision of jnanam, there is yet a paradoxical twist that only a jnani can truly recognise a jnani, indicating that in spite of the perceived differences in the relative plane of reality (*vyAvahArika bhumi*) a jnani never loses sight of the absolute Truth. Bhagavan’s special love and respect for his contemporary sages Seshadri Swamigal and Ganapati Muni bear witness to this strange dual mode of operation. Thus when required for transactional purposes, the jnani’s vision can straddle the empirical plane without violating his illumined inner vision, in which jnanam alone prevails in all. The glory of a jnani is indeed inexplicable as Bhagavan extols, “The one who has devoured the ego and shines with the knowledge of the Self, having nothing else to know or to achieve; his inconceivable state of being, who can ever fathom?”³¹

The Nature of Mind and its Extinction by Tracing its Source

Bhagavan Ramana has clarified with great precision in *Upadesa Undiyar* the nature of mind and the annihilation of its divisive activity as the essence of enlightenment. First, Bhagavan defines mind as nothing but an aggregate of thoughts, as there is no entity called mind

²⁹ op. cit., Talk §258, p.225, “People call me Maharshi and treat me like this. But I do not see myself as a Maharshi. On the other hand, everyone is a Maharshi to me.”

³⁰ *Dasashloki*, v.7, ‘na sAstA na sAstram na sisyo na sikshA.....suarupAvabodho vikalpAsahishNuh tadekovasishtah sivah kevaloham’.

³¹ *Ulladu NArpadu*: v.31, ‘tannai azhitthezhunda tanmayAnandarukku ..avar nilaimai innadendru unnal evan?.’
when bereft of thoughts, just like no onion is left over when its layers are peeled off. Thus adopting the reductionist approach of a thoroughbred scientist, he reduces all thoughts to one fundamental \textit{aham vritti} (‘I’-thought), upon which the rest are strung like beads on a thread. This ‘root thought’ is a non-verbal, \textit{experiential feeling}, which ties up the Spirit with the confines of the body (\textit{chit-jada granthi}). This is called as \textit{dehAtma buddhi} (‘I am the body’ consciousness). When this fundamental thought subsides in dreamless sleep, the entire subjective world (\textit{prAtibhAsika jagat}) collapses into the causal state. Thus the world of perceptions is first reduced to the mind, which in turn is stripped to its essence, the ‘I’-thought.

Bhagavan says, by enquiry into the source of this ‘\textit{aham vritti}’, one reaches the land of ‘\textit{aham sphurti}’. Here pure Consciousness alone shines unremittingly as ‘I-I-I’. Holding on to this objectless awareness of oneself destroys \textit{aham vritti} and bestows the true knowledge of the Self (\textit{aham bodhah}). The extinction of \textit{aham vritti} is called \textit{manonAsa}, which is synonymous with enlightenment; it is not to be confused with the absence of the functional mind as in a coma. Bhagavan avers that only by turning within through self-enquiry, can this pseudo-I (\textit{ahamkAra}) be quelled\textsuperscript{32} and not by any other means.

\textbf{Self-enquiry Culminates in Erasure of All Self-images}

Ego is nothing but a self-descriptive thought and it thrives by holding onto myriad forms of self-image, one after another without end.\textsuperscript{33} For a seeker, in the sadhana stage, it takes the form of ‘I am an ajnani’. If one is not careful in discrimination, after one or two glimpses of Truth, he may glibly fancy oneself to be a jnani. ‘I am a jnani’ is as much a self-image as the former and a greater delusion inasmuch as it is a subtler variant of the ego. (This is a typical case of \textit{vidyA Maya} whereas the former comes under \textit{avidyA Maya}). At the tollgate of

\textsuperscript{32}Upadesa UndiyAr: v.19, ‘nAn endru ezhumiDam yedena nADavul nAn talai sAindiDum undeepara….’ and Ulladu NArpadu: v.27, ‘…nAn udikkum tAnamadai nADAmal, nAn udiyAt tannizhappiacchAravadu evan…’.

\textsuperscript{33}Ulladu Narpadu: v.25, ‘uruppattri uNDAm uruppattri nirkkum…thedinAl Ottam piDikkum…’. 
moksha, the ego must be paid without fail as the toll tax if we are to gain entry (sungacchĀvadi tappĀdu in Bhagavan’s words). Acharya Sankara exhorts his sannyasi disciples, ‘Renounce the ego finally, with whose will power all desires are renounced first’ (yena tyajasi, tat tyaja).

Self-enquiry then consists in relentlessly pursuing the ‘Who am I?’ enquiry till all such ‘I am so-and-so’ images disappear, leaving only the pure Self shining as ‘I AM’. The paradox of a jnani is such he can never claim himself to be one! Self-knowledge indeed terminates all self-descriptions. If at all a jnani is forced to answer in words the question ‘who are you?’, he can only say “I AM THAT I AM”, the profound Biblical quote that Bhagavan Ramana was fond of citing.

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Dayamurtih,
you are the highest mercy,
waylight in the dark;
you who raise us up, again,
each time we fall into night.

Daityahantri, you,
mounted huntress of evil
in the surreal dream;
scarlet queen of labyrinths,
who rides the mystic tiger.

Long as the inked/blind wind,
Darandolitadirghakshi,
your restless eyes;
and they never blink tonight,
as she scans the sky for him.

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.
Despite the fact that Guénon and Ramana Maharshi never met in person, they did however have vital and interesting points of contact through two individuals, Arthur Osborne (1906-1970) and Henri Hartung (1921-1988). And while Ramana Maharshi’s role was dominant in the lives of both Osborne and Hartung, a lesser known fact is the principal influence of the work of the French metaphysician René Guénon upon both of these writers.

Osborne was an English writer, who travelled to India in September 1941, for a family holiday while living in Siam (present-
day Thailand). Although he needed to return to Siam as he was lecturing at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, his wife Lucia Osborne (1904-1987) along with their three children (Catherine, Adam and Frania), stayed on in India, to reside in the cottage of a friend by the name of David McIver (who was also familiar with Guénon’s writings) in Tiruvannamalai in close proximity to Ramana Maharshi. Osborne’s destiny did not allow him to return to be with his family, let alone have his first in person darshan with Sri Ramana, until four years later due to his detainment in a Japanese detention camp because of the war.

In 1964 he served as the founding editor of The Mountain Path, which centered on the perennial wisdom: “The aim of this journal is to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.” Osborne was pivotal in making Ramana Maharshi’s teachings known to wider audiences around the world through the following books: Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge (1954), The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi (1959) and The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words (1962), consequently Osborne was also a biographer of Shirdi Sai Baba (1838-1918), who in many ways was a precursor along with Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) to the Maharshi.

In 1947, while Hartung was in India on business, he was approached by Raja Rao (1908-2006), an Indian writer in a café, who was consequently a disciple of Sri Atmananda (Krishna Menon, 1883-1959), yet suggested to Hartung that he go to see Sri Ramana Maharshi. Hartung’s encounter with Ramana Maharshi was decisive. Along with Paul Brunton (1898-1981) and Jean Herbert (1897-1980), Hartung became instrumental in making Sri Ramana Maharshi’s teachings known to the French speaking public. In 1977, Henri Hartung and his wife Sylvie Hartung, established an Ashram in Switzerland named Centre de Rencontres Spirituelles et de Méditation (spiritual meeting and meditation centre), which also brought awareness of Ramana Maharshi’s teachings. While Hartung’s initial encounter with the Sage of Arunachala occurred in 1947 he
returned thirty-years later in 1977 and then in 1988 to be once again at Ramanasramam and this was his final darshan.

In the case of Osborne, he was introduced to Guénon’s writings in the summer of 1936 through a personal friend that he knew from Oxford University, Martin Lings (1909-2005). “It was through Martin [Lings] that my wife and I were drawn to Guénon and thereby indirectly to Bhagavan.” Osborne was thirty years of age at the time and was living in Poland with his wife and his newly born daughter. Lings had come to stay with them on his way back to Lithuania where he was an English lecturer at University of Kaunas. Osborne informs readers that from a young age he had very strong reservations regarding the modern world: “I intuitively rejected modern civilization.”

One can see how this early intuition lead to his affiliation to a group that formed around Guénon’s work; with Guénon’s approval each had selected one of his works to translate. Lings translated Orient et Occident (1924) or East and West (1941) under the pseudonym William Massey and Osborne translated its sequel, La Crise du Monde Moderne (1927) or The Crisis of the Modern World (1942). Osborne in fact had a lot of correspondence with Guénon about the translation that he undertook. Guénon’s work brought into focus the essential errors underlying the contemporary era with such precision and clarity which had never before been articulated. Osborne speaks of the extraordinary role that Guénon played in reclaiming the sacred origins of the premodern West: “He [René Guénon] probably did more than any other person to awaken Western intellectuals to their lost heritage by reminding them that there is a Goal and there are paths to the Goal.” He additionally adds: “The one person who was instrumental more than any other in the restoration of traditional wisdom to the West was René Guénon.”

While Guénon’s function was not that of a spiritual master his books were not without a certain barakah or spiritual influence as Osborne confirms: “[H]e [Guénon] himself was not a guru and did not give initiation. Nevertheless, I am convinced that some spiritual influence flowed from him to those who read his books and re-directed their lives accordingly.”
Hartung is said to have encountered the works of Guénon around 1938, when he was seventeen years old, through a friend named Olivier de Carfort. He recalls the tremendous impact of encountering Guénon’s oeuvre: “A discovery, experienced as a revelation, of René Guénon, of metaphysics, therefore of Hinduism, and of the transformation of oneself.” Hartung affirmed in a book dedication that he: “owes much to René Guénon who represented, for him, through what he had been and all that he had written, a permanent inner force.” Hartung had met Michel Vâlsan (1911-1974) in Paris and began corresponding with Guénon through Vâlsan’s recommendation; incidentally Vâlsan was also closely associated with Schuon.

It was through Guénon’s insistence on participating in an orthodox spiritual path that both Osborne and Hartung entered Islam. It is important to note that Martin Lings, who was a friend and correspondent of Osborne, was also a close associate with both Guénon and Schuon, and he acted as a secretary to the former while he lived in Cairo, Egypt and was a disciple of the second. Martin Lings incidentally later became widely known throughout the Islamic world and was recognized as an immanent exponent of authentic Islam and Sufism. Osborne even discloses that: “If it had not been for the war we should probably have gone far enough West to seek initiation from Martin’s [Lings] guru [Frithjof Schuon], but under the circumstances this was impossible.” It is probable that Osborne had written correspondence with Schuon and that Hartung had met Schuon.

In August 1939, on a journey to India, Schuon accompanied by two English disciples, one of whom was John Levy or Premanandanath (1910-1976), who later became a disciple of Sri Atmananda and was by and large responsible for making his teaching known in the West was also highly influenced by Guénon. On a side note, Atmananda had a strong influence on Jean Klein (1912-1998), musicologist and doctor, who later became a spiritual teacher, who was influenced early on by Guénon. Klein’s work continues on today through his student Francis Lucille (b. 1944).
Unfortunately for Schuon the trip to India was cut short as World War II had broken out, but they were able to stop in Cairo to visit Guénon en route. Levy wrote the following regarding the impact that Guénon had on his formative outlook that will resonate with many seekers:

“I owe to Guénon the sudden understanding that I and the universe are one and that this essential unity can actually be realized…. [H]is writings opened my eyes then and gave me a foretaste of the truth. His expression, ‘the Supreme Identity’, by which he referred to this essential oneness of the individual soul and the universal soul, struck the deepest chord in my being. It was this and one other thing that really gave me my direction. That other thing was the need of finding a competent personal guidance, without which absolute knowledge cannot be attained.”

Tibetan Buddhists, Marco Pallis (1895-1989) and Richard C. Nicholson (1905-1995), who revised Osborne’s initial translation of The Crisis of the Modern World, along with Ananda K. Coomaraswamy were responsible for pointing out Guénon’s errors with regard to Buddhism, which Guénon accepted. On a slightly tangential note, yet no less relevant, Pallis was an early associate of Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987), and provided the introduction for his book Born in Tibet (1966). It was Trungpa who in many ways was responsible for introducing Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism to the West. While Guénon’s perspective was firmly grounded in Sankaracharya’s traditional point of view and true in and of itself, it did not allow for the Buddhist view of anatta or no-self and its complimentary expression of atma or Self to be validated in its own right. This was something that prompted Osborne to write Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism (1959). Incidentally Osborne also took issue with Guénon’s rejection of reincarnation, yet Guénon again was only adhering to Sankaracharya’s dictum: “Verily, there is no other transmigrant than the Lord” (BrSBh 1.1.5). In 1947, Pallis and Nicholson accompanied by the son of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Rama P. Coomaraswamy (1929-2006) on a trip to India visiting...
Guénon along the way in Cairo, also made a trip to Tiruvannamalai and received darshan from the Maharshi and circumambulated Arunachala known as giri pradakshina.

At Your Feet

Sharada Bhanu

At your Feet, Ramana,
My work at your feet.
But the work’s not mine
And where are your feet?
Where everything begins
Where you and I meet

Your work, then at your feet;
But where are your feet?
Listen to your Self
Your own heart beat

The work well done, and the work done ill
The work that saves and the work that kills
The work undone (I can’t pay the bill)
I’ll place all there if I can find out where

Ramana, I’ll cast all my cares;
But where are your feet?
In the cave of the heart
Where everything starts

Ramana,
Where are your feet?
Where the ‘I’ repeats
Where the word retreats
Listen to your Self
Your own heart beat
Nandi statue in the Matrubhuteswara Temple
How I Came to Bhagavan

The Quest for Immortality

Sundararajan Mohan

Sarva Rupa Dharam Shantam/Sarva Nama Dharam Shivam/
Sath Chith Anandam Advaitam/Sathyam Shivam Sundaram

The premeditated purpose of a human birth is said to be merger with the Divine Principle. This releases the soul from re-birth and is thus considered to grant ‘freedom’. It is called salvation or mukti.

When one attains the awareness of this strategic purpose of human life, then one’s perspective undergoes a total transformation. How does this awareness happen? Is it through some form of effort on one’s part or does it occur spontaneously as an act of Grace? Is it a mere intellectual shift of viewpoint or is it a catharsis of the soul?

Sri Sankara, who was blessed with this awareness as a spontaneous insight, probably from birth, states in the Bhaja Govindam:

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MOUNTAIN PATH

_Satsangatve Nissangatvam/Nissangatve Nirmohatvam/ Nirmohatve Nischalatattvam/Nischalatattve Jeevanmukti_

Through the company of those who are seekers of Truth,/ An awareness evolves of one’s individuality./ Through such awareness of one’s individuality,/ One develops detachment from all delusion./ Through such detachment from the illusory world,/ One attains to a firm understanding of the Truth./ Through such firm understanding [and the consequent discrimination],/ One attains total freedom [and merges in the Divine].

Thus the starting point of the journey to achieve the true purpose of human life is the company of elevated souls, fellow travellers on the path, those blessed souls who have already attained freedom, those who are veritably Divinity Incarnate.

Such, indeed, is the experience of every soul that is born on earth, be it a bird, or an insect, an animal or a human being. Of them, the human form is considered to be incomparably superior, because it has been bestowed with the faculty of intellectual discrimination, which is superior to plain instinct, and gives the human being the freedom to ‘choose’.

Divinity appears in various forms at every stage of one’s life and blesses and guides one on the path to the ultimate realisation of the Truth of Existence, the _Sat-Chit_, and bestows the Bliss of Mergence, _Ananda_. Such indeed has been my experience as I edge warily through the eighth decade of this lifetime.

The Sankaracharya of Sringeri
When I was lying in the cosy comfort of the placid waters of my mother’s womb, I was bestowed a blessing from Sri Chandrashekara Bharati of Sringeri. The Sankaracharya was the guru of my maternal grandfather, Rajamantrapraveena Sri A V Ramanathan of Bangalore. My grandfather was apparently deeply concerned that my mother’s pregnancy should be normal and fruitful. The Sankaracharya, on his last visit to Bangalore in 1938, sat facing my grandfather at the
Sankara Matham and my mother sat behind a lace curtain, as the Sankaracharya was deep in austerity. On grandfather’s anxious query, the Sankaracharya spontaneously quoted a text from Sri Sankara’s *Tripurasundari Vedapada Stotram* (Sloka 76) and in transmitting the mantra akshadai, asked mother to repeat the stotram. It was with that benediction that this soul emerged into the objective world in March 1939.

Such is the emanation of Grace that flows when one is blessed to be born in the lineage of people who have trod the path of Dharma and who repose the utmost faith in the Divine.

**The Benediction of Parents and Sri Rama**

My grandparents, my parents and my aunts were my earliest preceptors. My mother was deeply attached to the *Avatara Purusha*, Sri Rama, most probably because her father, her closest friend, was himself named Ramanathan and possibly because he daily performed puja to the figures of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. She bestowed on me a number of slokas extolling Sri Rama.

\[
\text{Sri Ramaya Ramabhadraya Ramachandraya Vedase} \\
\text{Raghunathaya Nathaya Seetayaha Pataye Namaha}
\]

If I had a strange dream and suddenly woke up in the middle of the night, my father was immediately there and would teach me the *sloka* that Sri Hanuman sang, praising Sri Rama, perched on the branch of the Ashoka tree in Lanka to establish his credibility with Mother Sita:

\[
\text{Namostu Ramaya cha Lakshmanayacha/Namostu Daivyacha} \\
\text{Janakatmajai}
\]

Or

\[
\text{Apadama prahartaram/Dataram Sarvasampadam/Lokabhiramam} \\
\text{Sri Ramam/Bhuyo Bhuyo Namamyaham}
\]

My earliest years were thus immersed in the sound of the name of Sri Rama. When I sat for my Senior Cambridge High School examination and was tremulously awaiting the results, which in those days had to come from the UK, a friend of my father advised me to forget everything and read the *Sundara Kandam* from the
Srimad Valmiki Ramayanam, in which Sri Hanuman leaps across the ocean and discovers Mother Sita in Lanka and gives her courage and fortitude to await Sri Rama’s arrival. That was the very first spiritual text I read. It took a long time for me as mother had only a Tamil version. I was a typical child of the British era and only knew English. But I learnt to read Tamil and successfully completed reading the text over about two months. Somehow when the results finally came and I stood first in the school, I was not so much elated by a sense of victory or success as a deep feeling of gratitude for God’s blessings.

Such is the power of our scriptures to transform mundane worldly achievements into Divine blessings.

Brahmopadesam and the Lord’s Grace.

I moved to Chennai for the first time on my own, in 1954, to Madras Christian College at Tambaram. The college was close to the heart of my grandfather who was an alumnus.

The climatic change from the hills and dales of Kolar Gold Fields where I had grown up and the overwhelming heat and humidity of Madras was quite a challenge. But the college was a haven of virtues, with boys from many parts of India and Ceylon. It was an exhilarating experience and while one became conscious of one’s limitations in sports, in studies and in the knowledge of the world, it was at the same time an opportunity to discover oneself and try to learn and change. Those years were a close introduction to Christianity, particularly of the Protestant school.

It was towards the end of my first year that I got involved in an interaction with a convert who felt I was ripe for conversion. It shattered the dream of universality that I was moving towards, exposed my utter ignorance of spirituality and raised questions about my identity.

When I came home for the vacation that first summer, I accosted my father and entered into a heated debate about the utter lack of spiritual guidance at home. It was my personal trauma and my ego had been hurt by my inability to enter into a dialogue on religion and my abysmal ignorance of matters of the spirit. I had no answers to
questions such as ‘Are you not a sinner?’ or ‘Have you seen the light?’ Theology carried no meaning for me. Under the benign influence of Lloyd C Douglas, I saw the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ as a process of self discovery not as a sacred text. Jesus was a proponent of the Truth, no different to Sri Hanuman.

My father’s response was initially defensive, as like most career-bound fathers, he had probably been busy with his own mining career in a fierce competition with British colleagues. However, he took two decisive steps; he introduced me to the writings of Swami Vivekananda in his personal library; and he proceeded to seek the help of his elder brother, Sri V M Ramaswamy Iyer, earlier of Salem, and now in Madras, for initiating me into the mysteries of the brahmacharya ashrama. My elder uncle, in fact, had been a close friend and associate of Sri B V Narasimha Iyer, a leading advocate of Salem, who had renounced his career and home, and moved to Tiruvannamalai, seeking solace from Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He had stayed for several years there and had written the definitive biography Self Realisation.

Weeks later, as the sacred thread was invested on my body and my parents crouched under a silk cloth and whispered the sacred gayatri mantra into my ears, Sri B V Narasimhaswami personally attended the function and blessed me.

Divine Grace works in wondrous ways and as I stood, lean and lanky, seeking the blessings of the Sun and the elders, God’s Grace dropped on me, as the gentle rain from heaven’ to quote Shakespeare.

In what way did this sixteen year old deserve such Grace? What had he achieved in this short span of life? Did the Sundara Kandam have such power as to cause Grace to flow? Did his brief acquaintance with Jesus merit the gayatri mantra as a reward? I have no answers to these questions.

I can only declare that for reasons that are utterly unfathomable by logical reasoning or by conventional tradition, there was a shower of Grace. It would have probably happened in some similar manner wherever I would have been born. It just so happened that it occurred in Madras in 1955 and I stood transfixed, gazing up at the noonday
sun in all its glory in June in Madras, with all the ideas of the Sundara Kandam, the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, the prayers to Sri Rama and the Lord’s Prayer, revolving in my mind.

Such is the power of Grace.

**Swami Vivekananda, Swami Chinmayananda and the Four Yogas.**

I was immensely fortunate to get admission into the newly established Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur, south of Calcutta. I sat for the entrance examination, persuaded by my father that the era that was unfolding in independent India was meant for an engineer.

I had no pretensions to technical expertise. I was more of a dreamer, an aesthete, wrapped up in his own thoughts and vaguely thought I would attempt entry into the Indian Administrative Service. Father was against it as he had suffered failure when he attempted the Indian Civil Service. My maternal grandfather had sponsored his trip to the UK as his guardian. The British, however, fathomed out that his own father, my paternal grandfather, Sri Pasupathy Iyer of Vangal, a village near Karur in Tamil Nadu, was a staunch Gandhian. Indeed my eldest uncle, under whose benign eye, I had performed sandhya vandanam, was a leading advocate and had given up his legal profession in 1930 inspired by Gandhiji’s call for Non-cooperation. In the event, my father performed brilliantly in his written ICS papers but was failed in the viva voce interview. It was much later that he realised that while he was being interviewed in London, his father was incarcerated as a political prisoner in Tiruchi jail.

When I reached Kharagpur, I fell immediately in love with the brand new institution. There was an air of patent nationalism with students coming from all parts of India. The Third Five Year Plan was in the making, a feeling of freedom, of inspiration, of adventure pervaded the atmosphere. I got caught up in that spirit. My innermost self responded to the opportunity. It was in that hallowed atmosphere, that I discovered Swami Vivekananda and his brilliant treatises on the various yogas. A visit to Belur Math was inspirational.

Later, during a summer vacation in my native Kolar Gold Fields, I could attend the entire Geetha Jnana Yagna, conducted by Swami
Chinmayananda on ‘Karma Yoga’. I sat in awe and wonder as he introduced me to Sri Krishna and the _Bhagavad Gita_, and in particular, to the third chapter on Karma Yoga.

When I passed out and secured a scholarship for training in the UK, it was natural that the place I sought for and visited in London was the Ramakrishna Mission. I had the pleasure to hear and meet the person in charge of the Mission, Swami Ranganathanananda, who would later become the President of the Mission in Calcutta. Years later, in Bombay, I took _mantra diksha_ from Swami Vireswarananda, the then President Maharaj of the Mission.

**Grihasthasrama and Sri Venkateswara**

After two years of training, on a visit to India prior to taking up a new job in the UK, I found my grandfather introducing me to one Sri V N Srinivasa Rao, a barrister and advocate in Madras, and the son of a close friend and classmate, Rao Bahadur Sri V N Viswanatha Rao.

He, in turn, bestowed the hand of his daughter Nirmala in mine. I entered the _grihasthasrama_ to the piped strains of Thyagaraja Kritis and Nirmala entranced me with her beauty and cultural attainments and in fact, introduced me to the _bhakti marga_. With her I visited Tirupathi and had the darshan of Sri Venkataramana with the background of the _Venkateswara Suprabhatam_ which exhorts the _bhakta_ to keep remembering the Lord.

We set up our first home in England. She was an educationist and we visited Europe seeking the benediction of Devi in Her manifestation as Notre Dame de Paris. We were blessed with our first daughter whom we named Sheela in 1965.

The opportunity to return to a job in India presented itself very soon afterwards. A promise I had made to the Director of the IIT at Kharagpur in 1960 to return to India and work for its development resounded in my mind and I was very keen to avail of the opportunity.

Nirmala was indeed a realist and suggested that, in material terms, life in the West would perhaps be more comfortable. She came from a large joint family and knew India better. I was an idealist, wedded to
serving India and inspired by Nehru. I finally managed to convince Nirmala and we reached Bombay and set up home.

It was during those years that we discovered the Ramakrishna Mission at Khar and the lovely temple dedicated to Sri Krishna at Santacruz. We were blessed with the birth of our second daughter, Chitra, who delighted, transformed and beautified our life in Bombay. Amidst the apparent turmoil of Bombay with all sorts of challenges we clung to the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

Although there are invariably challenges in life, if one dares to ponder and observe, there are all sorts of reliefs that God provides us, if only we have the patience, the perspicacity and the perseverance to look for them. God seems to hide behind every nook and corner and it is only our ego which prevents us from discovering Him.

**Sai Baba and Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi**

That first decade of our married life in India was not without tribulations, health problems, anxieties and challenges, both financial and in terms of day to day life. Professional life posed its own challenges although the progression of career was generally satisfactory. Work life was often filled with clashes of ego in boss-subordinate relationships, the challenge of new technology in manufacturing and unknown terrains in marketing. It was a great learning experience in the midst of steady expansion and growth. It was in the midst of this milieu that I was transferred to Delhi.

The transfer meant an upheaval for the family. However, Delhi was a pleasant change in terms of environment, culture and climate. Nirmala found opportunities to hone her Carnatic music skills and learn Devi Stotras like the Lalitha Sahasranamam and the Soundarya Lahiri.

Change and challenge seem to go hand in hand. We had hardly settled down than strange new challenges appeared in my career, in our health and in all sorts of anxieties relating to our parents and their welfare. It was in the midst of this often bewildering contradictory scenario that Divinity decided to intervene.
During 1978, two interesting developments took place. Sri Sathya Sai Baba visited Delhi and through a series of ‘accidental’ incidents, I found myself in front of the gate of the residence where he was staying in Golf Links. As he approached the gate, as part of his normal *darshan* routine, he glanced at me with such a look of recognition that I was bowled over. I had never met him before, yet his look of recognition seemed to indicate that he knew me. It was a remarkable, if slightly unnerving, experience. I truly believe my spiritual unfoldment at a very deep level in this life, the onset of ‘Awareness of the Supreme’ commenced that day.

The second experience was a call from my wife’s uncle Sri A.R. Natarajan to attend the inauguration of the library at the Ramana Kendra at Lodhi Road at the hands of the then Sankaracharya of Sringeri, Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Swamigal. The Sankaracharya knew my grandfather as a fellow disciple of Sri Chandrashekara Bharati and made kind enquiries of my aunts. When we visited the Ramana Kendra, we saw the picture of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi for the first time. There was a peace, an aura of love and sanctity, which cannot be expressed in words.

The Ramana Kendra at Delhi became a centre for renewing oneself. We visited it several times and on one such occasion we took my father-in-law, Sri V N Srinivasa Rao there. It was that evening that he shared with us his youthful encounter with Bhagavan in 1948 at Sri Ramanasramam. He was visiting in his legal capacity in connection with the travails of a devotee called Smt Ranganayaki Ammal. She had approached my father-in-law, a practising advocate in Madras, to file a suit against the Asramam as the authorities were alleged to be disallowing her presence on the grounds of what was termed ‘madness’. My father-in-law, recently returned from Oxford and Lincoln’s Inn, refused to take action without meeting the head of the asramam, in this case Bhagavan himself.

Arrangements were accordingly made for him to travel to Tiruvannamalai where he was welcomed with great affection by Bhagavan. In the course of a discussion with senior disciples in the Old Hall, where Bhagavan reclined, Sri Srinivasa Rao was confronted
with the question, ‘Have you come to represent Mrs Ranganayaki Ammal who is mad?’ It was at that moment that Bhagavan intervened to enquire where she was. On being informed that she was waiting at the gate of the Ashram on the specific instructions of Sri Srinivasa Rao, Bhagavan simply asked him to bring her in. The question of her admission into the Ashram having been disposed off elegantly, Bhagavan proceeded to bestow his love and grace on Sri Srinivasa Rao. Bhagavan blessed Sri Srinivasa Rao with the opportunity to have his evening meal with him, just prior to his departure for Madras. During the conversation that ensued, Sri Srinivasa Rao recollected asking Bhagavan, “Is Mrs Ranganayaki Ammal really mad?” To this, Bhagavan replied, “Some people come here quarter mad, and return half mad; some come half mad and return three quarters mad. Some come three quarters mad and return fully mad! It is all so wonderful!”

What did Bhagavan mean by the term ‘madness’ (payithiyam) when he addressed the young man? It was surely madness for the Divine; a loss of conventional reasoning, a transcendence of the mind to a realm of consciousness that is full of light, bliss and total awareness. In which category did the young woman fall?

When Sri Srinivasa Rao related this incident to my wife Nirmala and me, I cannot truly say we understood the deeper implications. But I believe that the ‘madness’ that had taken Srinivasa Rao to Tiruvannamalai to question whether Bhagavan truly refused to accept the devotee Mrs Ranganayaki Ammal’s bhakti, was indeed a sign of Srinivasa Rao’s own devotion to Bhagavan. The wonder is that it was the Law of Karma that took him there. Life produced the opportunity for it to happen.

Over time, it has become apparent to me that nothing happens in life that is just ‘accidental’. Many events may appear so, especially because the human mind involved had not been intellectually exercised.

Why did these accidental meetings and the revelation of my father-in-law so profoundly affect Nirmala and me? Who was Baba and who was Bhagavan Sri Ramana and who were Nirmala, and her father and who am I?

This multilateral relationship does not belong just to this life and to these forms. For one thing, we have all closely interacted many
times before in past lives, hence the looks of recognition and the automatic attraction and devotion. For another, our relationship is ‘heart-to-heart’, so to speak, in the realm of Pure Consciousness, in the aura of Arunachala Siva or Brahman.

The Visit to Virupaksha Cave
The intervening years saw us grow in maturity as a family. The exigencies of work transferred us to Bombay in 1980 and then Nasik in 1984.

During those years we came close to Sai. We visited Shirdi with the Tarkhad family, where his grandparents had been deeply devoted to Sai Baba of Shirdi. We came to terms with the concept of cultural and spiritual unity that Baba had taught.

Retirement from active life is inevitable and we settled down in Bangalore. It was then that we felt the urge, prompted probably by the Ramana Maharshi Shrine set up by Sri A.R. Natarajan at Bangalore to visit Tiruvannamalai.


The all pervasive nature of Truth slowly took hold of our life. We celebrated Mahasivarathri solemnly in the house we had constructed in Bangalore. We consecrated a silver lingam in the puja room and my first jottings were accepted by the Mountain Path magazine.

My father-in-law had passed away in 1993 and all his writings had been transferred to Bangalore. As we pored through them we discovered that he had enjoyed a rare degree of internal peace and had even recorded his experience of what he called ‘Self Realisation’.

In December 2010, my dear wife gave up her body. In the midst of my grief and loneliness, I felt that she had moved somewhere close to her father and so to Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

My understanding of Bhagavan’s teachings, particularly the Upadesa Saram, had clarified to me the essential unity of Brahman, our innermost Self.
When a young man from Bangalore suggested I join him on a trip to Tiruvannamalai, I initially resisted, as the prospect of going anywhere alone appeared impossible. But, moved by his exhortations, I yielded and joined him.

Travelling without the company of Nirmala seemed strange. I felt disoriented and clumsy. But my companion’s friendly chatter and his own experiences with Bhagavan gradually wore me down until I began relating to the experience afresh, from a totally new perspective.

At Tiruvannamalai, I was relating to him about our *giri pradakshina*, when he firmly told me we were climbing the hill. I baulked at the prospect, as, over the years, any feat that was going to be strenuous for Nirmala had been given up as undesirable. My life had been conjoined to hers and I had sacrificed all vestiges of personal preferences at the altar of her comfort. Thus the challenge to climb the hill was daunting. All sorts of protestations rose in my mind. Then suddenly I found myself thinking, “Nirmala, shall we go up the hill?” And I was astonished to receive an answer, “Why not? I am ensconced in your heart now, and I do not need to climb. I can go wherever you go!”

It was with a smile, then, and a firm resolve that I took my very first step on the hill. It was a remarkable experience. My spirit seemed to soar as we rose higher and higher, until we reached Virupaksha Cave. It took me time to collect my thoughts, to realise that where the will is anchored to the Lord and driven by Divinity, nothing is impossible.

I bent low and entered the cave. In the half darkness, relieved by a small lamp, I could discern an empty spot and sat down. I was amazed to notice that there was no sign of laboured breathing or discomfort of any sort. I closed my eyes and sent up a personal prayer directed to apparently three different entities, viz, Sai, Ramana and Nirmala, who are all beloved to me and on whose guidance I have ever lived and shall ever live or exist.

At that instance, a sloka appeared in the mind:

*Nirbhayatvam Nirmohatvam/Nirmalatvam Niranjanam/Nirakaram Nirgunatvam/Parabrahmatvam Namo Namaha!*
This happened on 10th February, 2011. I have pondered over it a lot in the years since. Is it a prayer? Is it an exhortation? Does it prescribe Sadhana?

To be frank, over the last few decades, there have been several instances when I have experienced voices. I have received guidance, some strict instructions and some startling revelations.

The most memorable time it happened was 1991, after I had discovered Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I had experienced darshan and sparshan but not yet sambhashan. The voice spoke in the early hours of the morning. I was alone in our flat in Bombay. It gave detailed instructions on what I would have to do. My wife and daughter were in Bangalore while I awaited the right moment to retire. The voice advised me to note down the instructions. I again thought I was going mad. I travelled to Bangalore and thence Puttaparthi. I sat in front of the Mandir, clutching the notebook with the instructions in my hands and praying for a confirmation from Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

He emerged from his room in the Mandir and came slowly along, blessing some devotees, accepting some letters and occasionally materializing Vibhuti as he often did. He came and stood in front of me. I sat shocked into immobility. As the people on either side of me reverentially touched his feet, and he continued to talk over my head to someone in Telugu, I tremulously raised my book up. He swiftly tapped the book, turned sharply round and started going back to the Mandir. Suddenly he turned back, gave a brilliant smile and raised his hand in blessing.

Today, in Virupaksha Cave, a voice had spoken a prayer. I hastily scribbled it down in my pocket diary in the half darkness of the cave. What did this mean? From whom did this prayer emanate?

As I have thought over this during the intervening years, I have realized that all these are in the form of revelations from the One Divine Source. Such were the emanations that appeared in the hearts and minds of the great Rishis of yore. They were in the form of prayers as well as instructions. They came to be known as the Vedas.

At this juncture in the evolution of humanity, the instruction or Upadesam appears both as a prayer as also an instruction.
This particular prayer can be said to describe the nature of *Parabrahman* and celebrates It as being free of fear, that is, warding off or destroying fear; as eliminating all attachment, attraction, expectation and delusion; as being immaculately pure and blemishless; as being formless, all pervasive and immanent; as being free of all qualities, limitations, descriptions; of being nothing but *Brahman* the Self.

At the same time, the revelation can be construed to be an instruction, an *upadesam*, a description of sadhana and the steps that will take you to the awareness of your *Brahman*-hood. To be free from fear or any form of conditioning, or inhibitions; to be free from attachments, expectations and delusion; to be free of all impurities, karmas, traces of ego; to be blemishless in thought, word and deed; to realize that this body is not ‘Me’, these thoughts and intellectual peregrinations are not ‘Me’ and all feelings of ownership or ‘Mine’ are not true; to realize ‘Who am I?’ that is ‘I am I, the Self!’

**Conclusion**

Life is a journey from birth to death, from creation to dissolution. The span will vary; at the human level it may be about a hundred years; at the level of a dog it may be twelve years; in the case of a moth it may be a few hours. The span does not matter. For all other species, repeatability, which is re-incarnation or re-birth in one form or another is certain, barring very few exceptions. For human beings, repeatability or re-birth is avoidable if the Divine *upadesam* is followed; self purification leads to self realisation.

In all humility, I felt impelled to share the experiences of this fairly unworthy soul, on whom the Divine Principle has showered so much of Its Love and Grace. I trust this experience will inspire all readers to unquestioningly repose faith in Bhagavan, to progressively give up attachments and expectations, to orient the mind to all that is auspicious and good, to perform one’s duties with no thought of the outcomes and to be guided by the Inner Voice which is often called ‘Conscience’. I pray to Bhagavan to bless all with Bliss always!!
The great saint Nabhaji, imbued with much enthusiasm said to his avid audience, “O great siddhas, further listen to the fascinating events in the life of Tulasidas.”

After this great event, Tulasidas remained in the Ashram and composed many exquisite slokas and songs in praise of the Lord. He also composed Tulasi Ramayana, the great work on devotion based on the Sanskrit work ‘Valmiki Ramayana’ and propagated it among the masses in northern India. This work brought great joy to thousands and put them on the path of devotion and service to the Lord.

As a result of the company of sadhus, constant contemplation on the Lord, restraint of the senses, disdain for mundane existence, merits of feeding others, chanting of scriptures, yearning to attain inner stillness in the waking state, the pre-eminence assigned to jnana over karma in scriptures and the dominance of a sattvic nature in him, a keen desire for the path of jnana was evoked in Tulasidas. He
was convinced that Brahma-jnana alone would silence the activity of mind once for all.

He became remorseful, “Ah…ah…! Though the Lord advised me to seek Sri Hanuman’s initiation, out of my stupidity I have remained indifferent. I am the loser. I am doomed.”

With a heavy heart, fixing his mind on Sri Hanuman, he implored him thus, “O incarnation of Siva! Son of the wind-god! Darling of Anjana! Messenger of Lord Rama! Dispeller of Sita’s sorrow! Self-effulgent One! You strode across the battlefield like a colossus and were verily the god of death to the demons! Inferno of Lanka! Carrier of Dronagiri mount, which sheltered the sanjivini herbs! Protector of devotees! Light of wisdom! The one who carried Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders! You, who removed the tusks embedded in Ravana’s chest, are matchless in bravery! The one who crossed the ocean as if it were a mere puddle! The one who obtained boons from Sita Devi! The one who bit the pearl necklace of Lord Rama into pieces and flung it away as worthless, as it contained not the name of Rama! The one who learnt the mysteries of jnana from Sita Devi and became submerged in bliss! The one who learnt the scriptures from the sungod, traversing the sky backwards while facing the sun with the same speed as the sun! The one who achieved eternal fame and immortality! Saviour of Bharata-Shatrughna! The one who dived within to revel in the bliss of Brahman! The one who destroyed the pride of Tumburu-Narada in the art of music! The one who broke the chains of bondage and attachment! The one who challenged Bhima and then bestowed his grace on him! Please shower your grace on this servant of yours.”

Sri Hanuman appeared before him with a luminous countenance like a million suns and said, “O beloved of my Lord Rama! O lover of saints! O great one who has written the Ramayana in ever-new and fascinating ways!” Praising him affectionately, Sri Hanuman bestowed his blessings on him.

Tulsidas’ joy knew no bounds at the sight of Sri Hanuman. With matchless devotion and love, he made obeisance at the feet of Sri Hanuman and said, “O my supreme Guru! Awakener of souls having
lotus-like feet! Unparalleled renunciate! Eternal celibate! Please make me your slave!”

Sri Hanuman, whose love for Tulasidas poured out in no small measure, looking at him tenderly asked, “O lover of Hari! O liberated one! Why did you remember me now, after a long spell of forgetfulness? Can I fulfil any of your wishes? I bless you to vanquish all your desires and to remain steadfast in knowledge! Transcending the wakeful and sleep states, seek out the bliss of the Atma!”

Tulasidas, revering Sri Hanuman, the foremost among the learned and taking the dust of his feet and touching it to his eyes answered, “O Swami, is there an exalted state in which the mind and its associates are silenced once for all, worldly inclinations are subdued, anxieties are quelled, infatuation perishes, the wayward mind becomes steady, the sense of ‘I’ is extinguished, the darkness of ignorance flees, the ray of light appears, undiminishing joy prevails and the heart remains ever-full; in which an inexpressible condition exists without a beginning, middle and end, everlasting effulgence is beheld, wonder overwhelms one at the non-dual, eternal, true, blemishless, auspicious, all-permeating, attributeless, formless, transcendent and changeless Brahman? If there is such a supreme state, deign to bless me with the knowledge to realize it.”

Dispelling all his anxieties with a single gracious glance, Sri Hanuman said, “O treasure-house of jnana! Your quest is a very worthy one! However, the story of the Ramayana which you rendered in your previous incarnation is the key to the highest knowledge you have sought from me. Liberation is a certainty for him who knows this truth. Many have attained the highest state in this city of Varanasi by coming in contact with the Ramayana, like the renowned pauranik Uddhavdas. He was a man of wisdom and discernment and could therefore see the difference between the real and unreal as clearly as an amala fruit [Indian gooseberry] on his palm. After learning about the esoteric truths contained in the Ramayana, Uddhavdas renounced all worldly ties, took to severe austerities and destroyed his egoism and the inclination of ‘I and mine’. Losing awareness of his
body and all dualities, he established himself in the Transcendence. Similar was the impact of the Ramayana on me too. It broke the mirror of delusion in me, raising me to the state of the superlative bliss of Brahman. I remained oblivious of the body and the world, submerged in the all-forgetful self-oblivious transcendent state within. It is your adoration and pleas that have pulled me to the surface of consciousness once more.”

Placing his head at the holy feet of Sri Hanuman, Tulasidas said in supplication, “I am afflicted by worry, which, gnawing into my soul, has dried up the sap in me. O my Sadguru! You have accorded your approval to my prayer! Your bewitching form, your presence, is like a herb that alleviates even terminal suffering; you are like a fragrant plant. You are also the formless undivided Essence, the bestower of auspiciousness, the repository of all virtues! Please enlighten me on the mysteries of the Ramayana, the nectar of which was partaken by you and the exalted sages and thus draw me under your protective shield.”

“O pure being! Servant of Hari!” said Sri Hanuman, “Hail to the exalted city where the Divine Mother Visalakshi with long tresses abides, uplifting souls who seek Her vision! Sage Vasishta incarnated in this holy city of Varanasi as a noble brahmin by the name of Uddhavdas. When he started expounding on the sacred Adhyatma Ramayana, the great ascetics who had left for the seclusion of forests for tapas hastened back to drink his nectarine commentary at his feet; for he elaborated on the spiritual implications of the Ramayana. He presented not only a great personal Ideal of dharma in Sri Rama, but related the entire story in a sublime spiritual context. The mundane story with its intrigues of the palace was lifted to a sublime level of spirituality by his narration. Learning of this sensational event in the city, I too rushed here. On listening to his commentary on Adhyatma Ramayana, all my mental impressions of eons were set on fire in a trice, taking me to the dizzy heights of spiritual rapture and to the transcendental realm of Brahman. Now, I will recount the essence of the same to you briefly. Please listen to this attentively and be inspired by the great truths.
“The kingdom of Ayodhya is indeed the realm of mukti and king Dasaratha is the parallel of Brahman. The king was wedded to three wives, Kousalya representing the jnana-Sakti, Kaikeyi, the ichha-Sakti and Sumitra, the kriya-Sakti.

“In the womb of Kousalya, was born Rama, the Atma or wisdom. When jnana-Sakti awakens in a person, wisdom is born in him or her.

“During childhood, a state akin to avyakta or the unmanifest, being subject to self-forgetfulness, Rama looked upon himself as an ignorant jiva, bound by the mind-senses.

“Approaching Vasishta, who personified the knowledge gained by sravana, Rama learnt of the scriptures and the spiritual truths.

“Under the brief tutorship of Viswamitra, who symbolized the mind, Rama’s training and his adherence to discipline continued.

“In the company of Lakshmana, who was the embodiment of renunciation or dispassion, and guided by Viswamitra, Rama overcame the five-fold heinous sins.

“Whetting the arrow of awakened Intellect, Rama killed the evil forces like Tataka and trampled on the rock of greed and frightened away Maricha, a symbol of desire.

“Restoring Ahalya back to the human consciousness, Rama praised her for the austerity she had performed by withdrawing into herself all her senses and remaining motionless like a stone to the outer world.

“On reaching the city of Mithila, which signifies solitude, Rama met the king Janaka, a perfect symbol of equanimity and tranquillity.

“Rama shattered the bow of Siva, that is, crushed the evil propensity of jealousy.

“When a person proves his mettle vanquishing his evil tendencies, he courts solitude and abides in equanimity. Then, bliss seeks him out of its own accord, just as Sita, the daughter of Janaka was presented to Rama in wedlock by her father on His breaking the bow.

“Rama defeated Parasurama who stands for pride and returned to Ayodhya like a jiva’s reuniting with Brahman.

“When arrangements were afoot for Rama’s coronation, (the efforts made at freeing the jiva from jivatva, the sense of individuality)
Kaikeyi’s mind wavered and all efforts at jubilation were thwarted. Thus in life, when the jivatva, the sense of individuality is about to be dropped, an unsteady mind brings everything to nought.

“Separated from Dasaratha, Rama left Ayodhya, just as when one is distanced from Brahman, Mukti also forsakes him.

“The threesome – Rama, Sita and Lakshmana – reached the forest after crossing the river Sarayu and meeting Guha. The river of mind is negotiated with the aid of intellect personified here by Guha.

“In the forest of Chitrakut (which signifies tapas), Rama slayed Viradha (who symbolizes egoism); destroyed Jayanta’s eyesight and later once again restored his sight out of mercy. Through the power of penance, which crushes egoism and the evil propensities of the mind, the jiva obtains a purified vision.

“Rama encountered the sage Agastya (who symbolizes heroism) and obtained the divine weapons (signifying an indomitable will) from him.

“Lakshmana disfigured Surpanaka (who symbolizes lust) and Rama annihilated Khara-Dhushana who represent agamiya – the heaps of karma or impressions made in the present life which become the seeds for future births. When wisdom and dispassion join together and overcome temptation, the evil forces (our evil tendencies) do not stand any chance of survival and the jiva is no longer under the bondage of karma.

“Rama was separated from Sita, when he was drawn afar by the lure of a golden deer, a decoy whose shape was assumed by Maricha. Thus desire waylays a jiva in so many beguiling forms and colours. When he succumbs to it, he loses peace and bliss. However, Rama killed Maricha, metaphorically killing desire, which would never raise its head again.

“Afflicted by the abduction of Sita by Ravana (symbolising the ego), Rama became distraught. When the ego becomes dominant, all bliss is lost.

“While wandering in the forest (which symbolizes vikshepa or projections of the mind) accompanied by Lakshmana (symbolising dispassion), Rama killed Kabanda (who signifies despair and worry).
“Then he recovered joy and hope in the form of Sabari.

“Rama met Hanuman (who symbolizes contemplation on spiritual truths, namely Nidhidhyasana, which helps to regain the paradise lost) and sang the glories of Sita (who is bliss) to him.

“Rama felled the seven trees (namely births) and killed Vali (who signifies fear), making friends with Sugriva (namely, courage).

“Mobilising the army of monkeys (our positive tendencies), Rama inspired Hanuman to cross the ocean of moha, the worldly attachments.

“Hanuman destroyed the demonesses (symbolising evils) and upon finding Sita (who signifies bliss) in Lanka (namely the worldly mire of miserable existence), was overwhelmed by joy and inexplicable wonder (the Self-experience).

“Hanuman plundered the Ashoka Vana of its charm and beauty, which is a metaphor for the bewitching realm of mind or thoughts, killing Malyavan and Akshaykumar who symbolize ignorance and doubt.

“On encountering Indrajit (namely, infatuation), Hanuman allowed himself to be caught pretending to be unconscious. So too, infatuated by the spell of transient pleasures, the jiva is unconscious of his divine nature.

“Recovering from the spell of Indrajit’s missile, Hanuman defied Ravana in his court and set fire to Lanka; just as the jiva, upon being freed from attachment and the attraction to sense-gratification, subdues rajas and silences the sense-clamour and the resulting torment.

“Restraining the waves of the ocean, a solid bridge (symbolising steadfastness) was laid across the sea of worldly existence. So too, the jiva sails across the turbulent waves of samsara sagara smoothly when the mind becomes steadfast.

“Rama befriended Vibhishana, thus symbolising harmony (sattva) and slewed ignorance in the form of Kumbhakarna (tamas), bringing victory within sight.

“When Indrajit disabled Lakshmana with the nagastra, Hanuman brought the sanjivini herb and revived him. So too, when Maya
dazes the soul with its venomous fangs, threatening to sap its life, resoluteness aided by introspection saves it, just as Hanuman rushed to the succour of the jiva.

“Accompanied by Hanuman and Vibhishana, Lakshmana defeated Indrajit, thwarting his renewed attempts to gather more demonic powers. In the final struggle, the divine forces rally and deal a crushing blow to the forces of evil.

“When Ravana released the vast army of demons from their inexhaustible source, the moolabala, Rama struck at its root with the mohanastra. Similarly, the huge stock of sanchita karma, namely the accumulated past tendencies, which keep the cycle of birth and death revolving for a jiva, are reduced to nothing by intrepidity coupled with divine grace.

“Then the vast of army of monkeys (namely, our virtues) defeated the multitudes of demons (signifying our vices).

“Infuriated by the misdeeds of Ravana (namely, the ego), Rama held the Kodanda firmly and aiming His infallible arrow of jnana, destroyed the crown of Ravana (symbolising the ‘I’ sense) and felled his ten heads (signifying the ten senses) and released Sita who was held captive by the demonesses (namely, our negative propensities) in Ashoka Vana in Lanka. In the final struggle of the spirit against matter, the intrepid soul is roused to towering heroism, and holds fast to jnana. In other words, a steady unwavering attention that remains aware of the phantom of the ‘I’ sense automatically destroys the ego and its mercenaries. This brings the drama to the grand finale of releasing the soul from the granthi of ahamkara or the knot of ego into the vast sky of Brahmic bliss.

“Sita’s fire-ordeal signifies a complete bonfire of all our impurities, enveloping the soul in the peace that passeth all understanding and giving us unalloyed bliss without the least trace of sensuality.

“With this ultimate victory, Rama marched into Ayodhya (symbolising mukti), went through the coronation (signifying the attainment of non-jivahood), himself becoming the king of Ayodhya (namely, the state of abidance in Brahman) and revelling in the
company of Sita (signifying bliss) shone forth as the transcendent Reality."

Listening to the spiritual import of the Ramayana, Tulasidas was thrilled to his core and danced through sheer bliss. Other listeners were also overcome by wonder. It melted their hearts, dissolving them in the essence of Brahma, rejecting all duality. The Trinity sang praises of Sri Hanuman, the celestials rained flowers, kettledrums were sounded from heaven and sages gathered around Sri Hanuman and sang hymns of praise to him. Siddhas and sages proclaimed the exposition of Adhyatma Ramayana as the key to liberation. Celestials descended on Varanasi, Tumburu and Narada played on the lutes and the damsels of heaven danced gracefully. Then Tulasidas and Sri Hanuman became absorbed in the transcendental state, and so also the entire assembly. On regaining the dual state, all of them worshipped at the feet of the sages and spoke of the scriptural truths, eulogising the state of the undivided formless Brahma. Sri Hanuman and others took leave of Tulasidas.
We may refer to our Lord Sambandhar, who gave to us the four paths, the first of which is ‘The Way of Truth’ [jnana], and the last of which is ‘The Way of the Servant’ [cariyai], as an ascetic, a king, a blissful one, a yogi, a hedonist, a virtuous one, or as Death itself. (57)

The terms canmarkkam, Sanskrit sanmarga – the way of truth, and tatamarkkam, Sanskrit dasamarga – the way of the servant refer, respectively, to the paths of nanam and cariyai, the highest and

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.
lowest of the four stages on the spiritual path according to Saivism, which were discussed in the notes to v. 14. In this scheme the second highest of the paths, yokam, is referred to as cakamarkkam, Sanskrit sahamarga – the way of the friend, companion, and the third highest, kiriyai is referred to as carputtiramakkam, Sanskrit satputramarga – the way of the good son.

TCS glosses that the jnani is a poki, Sanskrit bhogin – hedonist, epicure, voluptuary in that he swallows up the personal consciousness. As the slayer of the disciple’s ego, or, in Saivite terms, the three malams which afflict him, the jnani is referred to as maravan – Death.

The holy form of the jnani, he who has attained mastery over the conjuring trick of the tattvas, he who is free of the personal self, he who is without anything that is his, is the place where perpetual bliss burgeons forth. All the delight experienced by his divine body, which resembles the trunk of the elephant [in its twofold nature], is puja to the Lord, and it is through this puja that the world flourishes. Consider this.

The tattvas are likened to a conjuring trick – caalam, Sanskrit jaala, because they create the appearance of a reality which is in fact entirely illusory. Taking caalam in the sense of multitude, company, assemblage, which is also one of its meanings, the phrase in question would mean mastery over the host of the tattvas.

The actions of the jnani whose consciousness is established in the Self, whilst appearing to resemble those of a normal body, are experienced by the jnani as the pure bliss of the Self, and indeed constitute unbroken worship of the Self. In a similar manner the elephant’s trunk combines the outer, visible function of touch with the more subtle inner sense of smell in the one organ. See also v. 20 where the same simile is used.

Bodily unguents, chaplets of flowers, jewellery and garments embroidered with gold are suitable for royal consorts, greatly
desired by their kings, but not for widows bereft of all gold and jewels. Enjoyments are for the jivan mukta only, and not for those who are like oxen [toiling on the paths of cariyai, kiriyai and yogam].

This verse states that bokam, Sanskrit bhoga – fruition, enjoyment, pleasure, delight are only for the jivan mukta, in the sense that the only true delight is the bliss of the Self. For those who have not realised the Self, all pleasures are worldly pleasures, which can only lead to pain and hamper them in their search for the divine, and must therefore be avoided at all costs.

The elephant is considered glorious in must, but when a dog goes mad, is that the same thing? Similarly when a jnani transgresses the accepted limits, it is considered to be decorous, but this is not the case when one bound by karma transgresses those limits.

The elephant is a noble and powerful beast, whose imposing nature is only exaggerated by its ferocious behaviour during the must or musth. By contrast the dog, which at the best of times is considered by many as a base and inferior creature, is even more despised and reviled when it becomes rabid.

The words ‘one bound by karma’ are a translation of the word kanmi, Sanskrit karmin, meaning literally the performer of an action. In Tamil it typically has the meaning of sinner, perpetrator of crimes. Here it has the sense of someone who, not being realised, an ajnani, believes himself, and not the Self, to be the performer of his actions. The greatest of sins is that of believing that one is oneself the originator of one’s own actions, since that misapprehension is the source of all crimes.

For those of the highest spiritual attainment, the holy scriptures are not sufficient to bestow upon them the wonder of divine
grace. It is a blessing which words cannot describe. It assumes countless forms, and those who come to receive it are of countless different types. (61)

One who has attained the highest level of spiritual maturity is described here as adapakkuvattaan. He possesses adapakkuvam, Sanskrit atipakva – extreme maturity. Compare v. 15, tivirataram.

The Tamil word translated as blessing in this verse is the noun peru from the verb peru – to obtain. It has a variety of meanings including receiving, obtaining; the thing obtained, a boon, blessing; and also worth, merit, desert. Here of course it refers to the attainment of realisation of the Self. It therefore conveys the triple sense of the merit which leads to the gaining of realisation, the attainment of that realisation, and the blessing conferred by attaining it.

Those who dwell as knowledge upon the abolition of ignorance; who, upon the abolition of both [knowledge and ignorance], do not know even that knowledge, and hence are not separate [from the Self], have attained absorption in true knowledge (jnana samadhi) through the loss of their personal self, and in that very instant are liberated whilst in the body (jivan muktas). (62)

To the unwitting onlooker the thousand eyes of Indra have a noble aspect, but to him, [knowing them as they once were] as vulvas, they possess the quality of unending shame. Of what use are the austerities of those who merely wear the bright ascetic’s garb, even if they endure for countless eons of time? They are like courtesans [who feel their own shame] even as the world honours them. (63)

Indra, the king of the gods, is here referred to as makavaan, Sanskrit makhavaan, as the performer of many sacrifices (makha). He was cursed to be covered in a thousand vulvas by the rishi Gautama for
the sin of seducing his wife. Gautama later commuted the punishment to a thousand eyes instead. The story is told in the first book of the *Ramayana* and elsewhere.

Having given in the first chapter a general account, in no particular order, of the themes to be treated in the work as a whole, Vallalar now proceeds to give a largely sequential account of the stages leading up to realisation of the Self, Sivam. Chapter 2 discusses the attributes pertaining to aspirants of the various degrees of spiritual maturity and discusses the role of the guru in this process. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are dedicated to a discussion of the first three of the paths to liberation mentioned below, particularly in terms of their inability in themselves to confer nanam, final liberation.

When the jiva reaches the requisite degree of ripeness, the shakti—energy of Sivam turns from its role of tirotai—veiling to one of the granting of arul—grace. This is called catti nipatam, Sanskrit shakti nipada, which has been translated as ‘The cessation of the veiling aspect of Sivam’s energy of grace’. The uttamar—superior ones are those who will now embark upon the four paths of cariyai, kiriyai, yokam and nanam, which lead to realisation and union with Sivam. The word nipada means falling down, descending upon. The meaning given by the Tamil Lexicon for catti nipatam is accordingly, ‘Settling of the Divine Grace in the soul when it is ripe.’ However this alternative translation has been preferred since according to Siddhanta Sivam’s grace is never absent from the jiva. It is only its function that changes:

“Thus Shakti nipada is not a new and unfamiliar Shakti coming to the soul, but the same Shakti that was there all the time, but is now behaving differently; though this may give the impression that the former hostile Shakti has gone away, and a new and kindly disposed Shakti has taken its place.”

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1 *Saiva Siddhanta, An Indian School of Mystical Thought*, H.W.Schomerus, p.257.
Chapter 2

The extinction of the superior ones’ [attachment to the world] through the cessation of the veiling aspect of Sivam’s energy of grace.

The benefactor and king of gurus [Jnanasambandhar] taught me the way in which the four states beginning with calokam correspond to the four paths beginning with cariyai. He also imparted to me the teachings [suitable for], and the qualities [characteristic of], the [corresponding] four degrees of spiritual maturity found amongst disciples. (64)

The four states referred to in this verse describe the spiritual state of the disciple on each of the four spiritual paths. The state of calokam – dwelling in the realm of god corresponds to the path of cariyai and is the state in which the disciple has freed himself from the thirty-six tattvas through the operation of grace; the state of camipam – nearness to god corresponds to the path of kiriyai, and is the state in which the disciple merges with grace, so that the personal consciousness is suppressed; the state of carupam – bearing the likeness of god corresponds to the path of yokam, and is the state of parai in which the personal consciousness is almost entirely eliminated, and the state of cayucciyam – identity with god corresponds to the path of nanam, in which the state of parai is succeeded by bliss, and ultimately the state beyond bliss, as it merges with Sivam.

These four states correspond respectively to the four paths of cariyai, kiriyai, yogam and nanam, the four stages on the spiritual path in Siddhanta, which are described in the notes to v. 14. cariyai, Sanskrit carya, in which the initiate worships the deity with mantras and performs various external religious duties, is the first and least spiritually advanced of the four paths. As v. 14 itself makes clear, none of the first three paths is considered by the author suitable for the conferring of true realisation. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this work are accordingly devoted to describing the inadequacies of these initial paths and indicating the means for transcending them.
At the end of the verse a further fourfold classification indicating the disciple’s degree of spiritual maturity is mentioned. These correspond to the four paths and states listed in the first part of the verse, and were described in the notes to v. 15; these four degrees are as follows: mantataram – exceedingly slow, mantam – slow, tiiviram – swift, tiivirataram – exceedingly swift.

The words of our master were not simple replies, made in the manner of a kinnari player, matching his accompaniment to the measure of what he hears. His words were like the pure notes that rise from the golden lutes in the hands of those who remain lost in bliss whilst beholding the divine dance of Lord Siva. (65)

Unlike the false guru, who answers questions from the same standpoint as that of the disciple who asks them, that of the ego veiled by the three malams, the true guru, in this case Jnanaśambandhar, lost in the bliss of the Self, speaks only from the standpoint of the Self. His words are spontaneous and unfailingly true. The answer that is tailored to a question can only raise more questions. The reply of the true teacher annihilates the questioner along with the question. The kinnari is an Indian lute, of which twenty-two varieties are listed in the Tamil Lexicon. It is described there as ‘A musical instrument smaller than the vinai (the most well-known type of Indian lute), having two steel strings.’ The spontaneous and involuntary outpouring of the words of grace or upadesha from the guru who is merged in the bliss of the Self is compared to the notes that pour spontaneously from the lutes of heavenly minstrels who are lost in contemplation of Lord Siva’s divine dance.
Among the many saints that arose in the land of Bharat there are some who left an indelible mark which has lasted over the centuries and influenced an increasing number of admirers, devotees and scholars who study their extraordinary world and legacy. Two such women saints who command such admiration and influence were Andal, the 9th century saint of the Tamilnadu Srivaisnavite tradition and Akka Mahadevi, the 12th century Kannada saint of the Virasaivite tradition. Andal and Akka Mahadevi had very different paths, challenges and personalities but both were united in their intense, one-pointed devotion to their istha-devata. Both left behind them a rich literature that continues to inspire us today and profoundly influences the way people approach spirituality in their respective traditions. Like those two other great saints of legend, Lalla and Mirabhai, they transcended their social patterns and local history. In some ways they are just as much alive today as when they traversed the earth seeking union with the Lord.

Andal lived within the religious system and accepted its conventions without question while Akka Mahadevi fought against the prejudices of her times to be her own person. Andal was recognised as an Alvar, the only woman among the eleven Alvar saints. Alvar means “one who dives deep or drowns (into the Divine).” Her foster father Visnucitta, better known as Perialvar, also an Alvar, was the head priest of the Srivilliputtur temple and it was he who nurtured her poetic gifts and initially guided her on the bhakti path and stimulated her knowledge of the Puranas and the love, particularly of Lord Krishna, for which she is now famous among Tamils. It unique that her image or murti is worshipped in Tamil Vaisnava temples and her statue is generally found next to that of Lord Visnu. Andal’s world was centred on her
childhood temple but at the end of her life she worshiped at the Srirangam temple and was absorbed into Lord Ranganatha.

Andal composed two poems \emph{Tiruppavai} and \emph{Nachiar Tirumoli}. The first is a single narrative which focuses on the common bond between gopis who suffer for their longing for union with Lord Krishna. The later poem is a much more complex song-sequence of fourteen poems. It celebrates the intense personal love of the gopi.

Akka Mahadevi on the other hand fought against the pressures of patriarchal conformity to the point where she discarded her clothes and walked naked, her modesty hidden by her long tresses. Unlike Andal who lived in an orderly and sheltered world of tradition, Akka Mahadevi was not compliant or sweet, but rebellious and sharp in a turbulent political time and wished to be free of stifling social and religious mores.

Married at a young age to the local king, she walked out of the marriage (a shocking event in a time when family was the one security a woman had), and sought the company of Basavanna and Allama Prabhu, the leaders of the Virasaivite movement at Kalyana in Karnataka. Eventually she left the relative safety of that enclave of bhaktas and spent the rest of her short life at Srisailam, worshipping Lord Siva in the form of Cennamallikarjuna.

Her world is concentrated on an exclusive love for Lord Siva and her \emph{vacanas} (literally, ‘sayings, things said’) are short incisive admonitions and insights into spiritual life. She often uses the imagery of marriage and ritual worship to reveal the soul’s journey and absorption into the Divine. Akka was fierce and uncompromising in her devotion.

The author succinctly notes the difference between the two saints: “As we move from Andal to Akka, we move from \emph{saguna} to \emph{nirguna}, the exoteric to the esoteric, the dualistic to the monistic, from the mythical to the mystical, from sanctification of space to that of the self.”

The author, who is obviously a bhakta herself, has written a splendid introduction to their lives. It is comprehensive, easy to read and learned without being weighed down by needless scholarship. For those who wish to know more about these two singular personages, the book will inspire with its affectionate spirit of enquiry and perceptive appraisal in the light of scriptures. — Christopher Quilkey
The 64th Aradhana of Sri Ramana Maharshi

On the 27th April the 64th anniversary of Bhagavan’s Maha Nirvana was observed at his shrine. The rituals began at 5.30 am with the nadhaswaram of Sri T. R. Pichandi & party, as devotees filled Bhagavan’s Samadhi Hall, which was decorated with cooling natural vettiver (khus) fibres. They started the Tamil Parayana as the temple priests gathered in the Mother’s Shrine for Mahanyasa Japam. The abhishekam began at 8am and the final arati took place at 10.30am. During the arati different groups of devotees sang songs on Bhagavan. More than 2,000 devotees joined for Bhagavan’s prasad served from five separate biksha areas, two in the special pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories and a fifth in the Korangu Thottam compound set aside for Narayana Seva.

In the evening there was a Carnatic music performance by Smt. Ambika Kameshwar at the New Granathalaya Auditorium. On the following day, 28th April, the RMCL hosted a Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam with selected verses of Siva Prakasam Pillai set to the ghana ragas of St. Thyagaraja’s Pancha Ratna Kritis, arranged by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan. On the evenings of the 25th and 26th, there were recitals including Bharatanatyam by Ms. Shruthi Lakshmi and Ms. Raagini and of Carnatic music by Sri Narayanan Namboodiri.

Mahapuja

Mahapuja celebrations started on the evening of the 21st May with a new video titled ‘Venkatoo 100’ in anticipation of his centenary celebrations on the 26th May.

The official program began on the 22nd early morning with mahanyasa japa in the Mother’s Shrine which was profusely decorated in her honour. Live online streaming allowed devotees around the globe to view the celebrations, which culminated in Deeparadhana around 10.30am. That afternoon at the Granathalaya Auditorium, bhajans were sung by RMCL, Bangalore, led by Smt. Radha & Dr. Saradha, the latter offering prefatory comments on each song. In the evening
the video of the 1995 Sri Ramanasramam Mahakumbabhishhekam and on the next evening, the video on the 1996 Advent at Arunachala of Bhagavan, were shown in the new library auditorium. All the three videos were made with professional competence by Ram Mohan who gave up legal practice in Delhi in 1989 to settle down near the ashram.

**Birth centenary of T. N. Venkataraman**

This year marks the birth centenary of T. N. Venkataraman, the nephew of Bhagavan, who succeeded his father Swami Niranjanananda, and became President of Sri Ramanasramam in 1953. After Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana in 1950 the ashram experienced great hardship which was compounded three years later by the passing of Chinnaswami. It was T.N. Venkataraman whose boundless optimism, conviviality, tenacity and unfailing courage held the ashram together through grave financial, legal and social pressures that threatened the very existence of the ashram. The ashram today is a monument to his unceasing efforts, devotion and unshakeable faith in Bhagavan. He safeguarded and maintained the Ashram through some of its greatest trials.

Born 26th May, 1914, ‘Venkatoo’ as he was known by all, was blessed as a boy by being cared for by Bhagavan at Skandasramam. He spent much of his early life in Bhagavan’s presence and later resided for seventy continuous years in the Ashram until his death in December 2007.

In the ashram his centenary birthday celebrations began in the Mother’s Shrine with Mahanyasa Japam at 5.30am. Rudram continued at Venkatoo’s Shrine at 8am as family members and devotees gathered to sing songs. Swamiji’s great-grand-daughter, Aryamba, narrated remembrances of ‘Swamiji Tatha’, who always gave her threptin biscuits when she came knocking at his door as a youngster. Sulochana Natarajan recalled her memories of TNV and his constant friendship with A.S. Natarajan, whom he called his right hand. After first arati, Ramananjali led by Ambika sang a new song by KVS on the life of Swamiji followed by daughter Alagu who sang along with others, a hymn of her father-in-law, Narayana Iyer. After puja, mango, coconut and bauhinia saplings were planted to mark the occasion.
Ramanananda Matalayam Kumbhabishekam at Desur
Desur Akilandammal born in 1871 first had the darshan of Bhagavan in 1899 at Sadguruswami cave. Since then she was a regular visitor from Desur serving food to Bhagavan, Seshadri Swami and Vithoba Swami of Polur. In her service to the sadhus, Mastan Swami helped her as a bullock cart driver in which they used to carry all the provisions for cooking. They started Sri Ramanananda Matalayam in Desur village in 1914 to serve the devotees of Bhagavan and the locals. Complete renovation to the Ramanananda Matalayam at Desur was done by the president in charge Dr. Ravi and his family, to commemorate the centenaries of the Mutt, the composition of Aksharamanamalai of Bhagavan on Arunachala and the birth centenary of T.N. Venkataraman.

Kumbhabishekam was performed on the 8th June 2014 with the guidance of Siva Jnana Desika Swami of Ulundurpet Appar Swami Mutt. On the 7th June Devotees of Bhagavan from the ashram and elsewhere performed full day chanting of Tiruvachakam, Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, Aksharamanamalai and other devotional songs.

Ashram in May
Soon after 4th May agni nakshatra (21 days under the fire star, Cirius) began, which is usually the hottest time of the year, rain clouds appeared over the Ashram. The following three weeks brought regular showers punctuated by searing sunny days. On the 23rd evening it reached a crescendo as the atmospheric pressure mounted and dark thunderheads appeared. Cool strong winds roared and buffeted the Ashram as evening Vedaparayana was in progress. Crashing of trees could be heard in the distance when at 5.30pm, the main branch of one of the two badam trees near the Old Hall snapped and fell onto its veranda. The very large old gulmohar tree next to Chadwick’s cottage also broke and landed on top of the sturdy dwelling. All that remained was the stump of the tree with all its impressive buttress roots. Another gulmohar tree was uprooted near the back gate as was the punghai tree at the rear of Morvi cottage. The ashram has initiated a tree-planting programme to replace the losses.