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Ramana Ashtottaram

95. ओं हार्दविद्याप्रकाशकाय नमः

om hārdavidyāprakāśakāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Revealer of the light of the Heart, Revealer of Inner Awareness.

From very ancient times, the inner light, *Purusha* or Person, the 'I-I' shining in and as the Heart, had been identified as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss. But the teaching was not precisely understood, nor was it widely taught or applied in practice.

In the *Ramana Gita, Supplement to the Forty Verses*, and in many sections of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Bhagavan has clarified, simplified and driven home the teaching that the Heart, Being-Awareness-Bliss and the 'I' are three concepts standing for one sole Reality. Bhagavan is the great and wonderful Teacher of this *Vidya*. He was an *avatar* who came into this world to reveal once more the simple, direct path of self-enquiry that discloses the identity of the *sphurti* of 'I' and the *Hridaya*, the Heart, as the seat or source of Being-Awareness-Bliss.



Justice

Justice is a question of balance. It is the restitution of that which was out of kilter. It is the principle of symmetry. Just as we all normally have a sense of balance that makes standing and walking possible so we are all born with a natural sense of justice. Who has not heard a child cry out: 'It's not fair,' when they have been, in their eyes, unfairly treated. It is no accident that justice is graphically represented by the image of a pair of scales. The goddess of justice is represented holding the scales while her eyes are blinded by a cloth. In other words, justice is impersonal and acts with neither anxiety nor partiality. Truth cannot be either denied or bought. It is to be in tune with the universal harmony.

The law is a concept that is not necessarily the same as justice. If we were to live entirely by the law it would be akin to the ethos, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' Such an instrument effectively governs by fear and can become an interminable spiral of cruel acts, be it on a domestic scale or on the world stage where people can rage against each other for countless generations. It has no end and all needlessly suffer. In the *Mahabharata* we see an obvious difference between justice and custom or the law of the land. Yudhishthira was obliged by the honour of his *kshatriya* caste to play dice with



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Sakuni, the devious uncle of Duryodhana. The dice were loaded and Yudhishthira lost his kingdom. This injustice is central to the story of the epic. It shows how custom or law can be manipulated but never justice, which whatever the circumstances will eventually triumph.

The process of justice is the way to bring to an appropriate resolution to conflict. There is an underlying principle declaring the sanctity of life. To traduce that sanctity is to commit an injustice. This applies not only to the external world but as well to our internal psychological and spiritual world.

If we are rigid in our beliefs and adhere to a strict regime of do's and don'ts we become blind to the spirit and lose our sense of perspective. We are subject to fear rather than love of the truth. Every molehill becomes a mountain, every perceived slight a gross insult. We in effect judge by our own standards. This can be a frightening thought where we consider how casually we can disparage others on a single, slanted observation, a mere whim or a group bias based on a blind emotional reaction. We confuse opinions or customs with the truth.

Bhagavan acted with neither fear nor favour. The sense of equality towards all (*ekadrishti*), the consideration he spontaneously gave to all creatures, human and animal, the equanimity in all states whether happy or difficult, all reveal his innate harmony and poise. There was a palpable atmosphere of immense grace in his presence. It hummed in the air like the sound of industrious bees seeking delicious nectar. This is not to say that the ashram is a perfect sanctuary where one could idle away the hours. The ashram is not just a physical site but a state of mind. It is the place of the intense inner quest for truth that demands one's complete self-attention. It is our good fortune to gain access by sincere prayer, *prarabdha karma* and grace.

The difference between the apparent ruthless outside world and the ashram is that there is abundant mercy in the ambience of Bhagavan's throne (*gaddi*). He gives us the strength to face our actions and act responsibly. Justice is dispensed not as deliberate retribution but as a compassionate judgement followed by release through conscious suffering. We come to Bhagavan not just to be forgiven and comforted

but to recognise a way out of our predicament of ignorance so that we never fall into despondent unconsciousness again.

We now understand that justice is a principle that contains the qualities of fairness, equality, mercy, and just as important, the attitude of benevolence. It manifests in our gross world as the application of law with its powers of correction and retribution. Justice and fate can be considered synonymous. What we sow we reap.¹ It is the law of karma.

The important question for us is how do we act in a just manner? For act we must.² Refusal to act is stubbornness, which is also an act.

When we first step on the path and promise ourselves that we shall direct all our efforts towards finding release from the cycle of *samsara*, we are confronted, after the initial euphoria of hearing the 'good word', by our past deeds, good and bad. The recognition that we are accountable for our deeds is an important act of redemption. We have no one to blame but ourselves. Only then is it possible for grace, that divine active mystery, to operate and transform us.

Our attitude is thus vital. We can embrace our destiny with joy declaring, 'Now I can begin living the true purpose of my life', or we can fall into depression at the thought of the enormity of our task. The right choice before us is obvious. And even when we are inevitably downcast at the inordinate challenge, all we need do is take one step at a time. When we are faced with the task of clearing an untidy and dirty room, we start with what is easiest and slowly work our way through to that which is most obdurate. We do what we can based on truth, not a fantasy of who we think we are.

At what point do we stop and consider then whether what we do is right? In that moment when we are on the critical edge of making a decision, are we fully aware of the ramifications? Is our judgement tempered with clarity and some degree of mercy or are we of the school that implacably says, "Let justice be done though

¹ "According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action." *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.5.

² "Indeed, no one can remain even for a moment really inactive, for one is driven helplessly to action by the gunas (qualities) of Prakriti (Nature)." *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.3, v.5. English Translation by Arthur Osborne & Prof. G. V. Kulkarni.



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the heavens fall.”³ Greek tragedy plays are about the workings of nemesis, the punishment that cannot be avoided for actions deliberate or thoughtlessly performed. The most wrenching tragedies are those that happen as if by accident. We all know about the consequences of our own carelessness and the suffering that ensued.

Carelessness is caused by the lack of attention. To be aware entails discrimination between what is true and what is untrue. Hence that wonderful prayer,

“Lead us from the Unreal to the Real,
Lead us from Darkness to Light,
Lead us from Death to Immortality,
Let there be Peace, Peace, Peace.”⁴

Quite often our decisions are split-second especially if we are a parent faced with the demand from a child of an immediate response; a child whose sense of what is just can be acute. But in major judgments we do generally have some time to consider the choices. The question is how do we create a positive climate where we do what is naturally right?

In the New Testament of the Bible there is a famous line: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”⁵ In other words, the way we behave and act towards others will be entirely reciprocated one way or the other, if not now then some day in the future. So we need to be prudent and exercise caution because nobody wishes ill on themselves. This gives us a clue as to how we should behave.

In the best of all possible worlds the virtue of justice reigns supreme. All beings are happy because they spontaneously do what is correct. Society and the world are in harmony and all beings are happy. But this obviously is not the case in our world. No matter how much society creates laws and conditions for justice to exist either by education, inducement or coercion, there is inequality.

³ First cited in Watson, William, *A Decacordon* (1602).

⁴ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28.

⁵ *The New Testament*, Luke, 6, 37.



We have seen how we can act positively, but what happens when we are the victims of injustice? The injustice can be physical deformity; being the target of erroneous slander made with malice; deliberately passed over for justified promotion; one's personal valuables stolen; or one not given due respect for one's achievements. The feeling inside rankles whichever way one tries to shrug it off. The temptation to feel sorry for oneself is great and from that brooding comes resentment, which is a disaster for one's sense of equanimity. It poisons our minds and hearts.

Patience is the best antidote as the following story illustrates:

"The Zen master Hakuin was praised by his neighbours as one living a pure life.

"A beautiful girl, whose parents owned a food store, lived near him. Suddenly, without warning, her parents discovered she was with child.

"This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin. In great anger the parents went to the master. 'Is that so?' was all he would say.

"After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbours and everything else the little one needed. A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth — that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fish market.

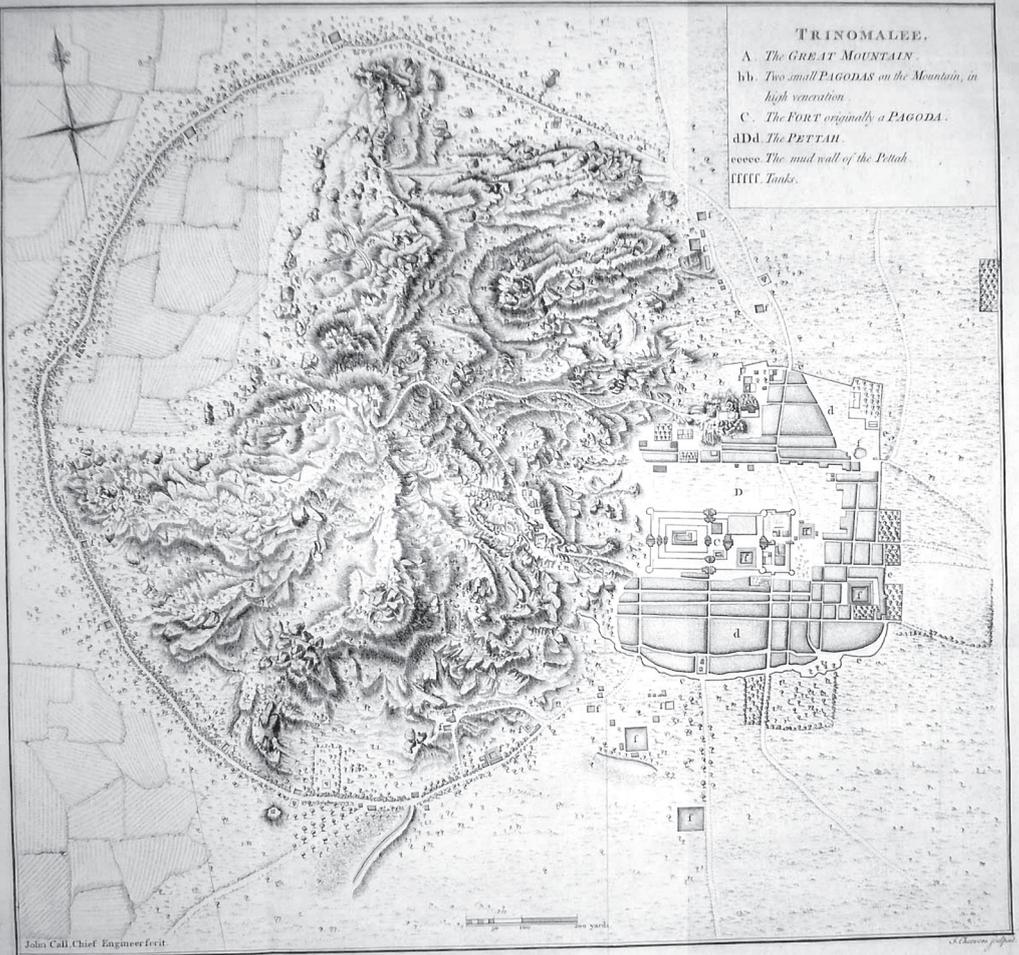
"The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologise at length, and to get the child back again.

"Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: 'Is that so?'"⁶

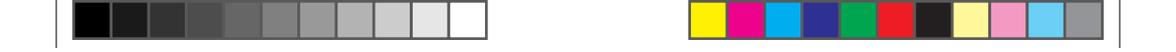
From an understanding of justice we learn forgiveness. The Zen master understood the predicament the girl was in and without a murmur of protest at his innocence forgave her. Unmoved he allowed the natural course of justice to unfold.

So too with Bhagavan who in his mercy forgives us if we commit a wrong but repent with all our heart. Justice has been done. ▲

⁶ Reps, Paul, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, Penguin, 1978. p.19.



Survey Map from 1755 showing Arunachala and the town of Tiruvannamalai or 'Trinomalee' as spelt by the British surveyors



Aksharamanamalai

The Great Song of Adoration

NOCHUR VENKATARAMAN

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Arunachala are inseparable. Sri Bhagavan is the moving Arunachala and Arunachala is the still Ramana. Arunachala is the spiritual heart of the earth. Sri Bhagavan is the manifestation of Arunachala's heart. *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* is the heart of Sri Bhagavan. In this moving and magnificent hymn Sri Bhagavan has revealed his heart and in the ecstasy of his inner experience has expressed his gratitude to Arunachala for His overpowering Grace. This article is an attempt to explore the divine beauty of *Aksharamanamalai*.

The only Tamil word in the title *Aksharamanamalai* is *manam*; the other words, *aksharam* and *mala* are Sanskrit words. *Akshara* means 'indestructible'. It also means 'letters'. But the implied meaning is the 'Self' or 'Atman'. *Manam* in Tamil is 'fragrance' and also 'marriage'.

Nochur Venkataraman is a noted speaker who regales audiences with his spiritual discourses on Ramana Maharshi, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanisads*. He gave his first speech on Bhagavan in 1991 at the age of 18 in the Ashram during Bhagavan's Jayanti.

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Mala is garland. So the title has generally been translated as ‘A Marital Garland of Letters’, but actually it is a garland made of the fragrance of *Atmanubhuti* (Self-experience). Fragrance is usually associated with flowers. Nothing is more fragrant than the Self-experience of Sri Bhagavan. Many great sages who met Bhagavan have remarked that the sweet perfume of Bhagavan’s Self-experience permeated the whole ashram. Satyamangalam Venkataramanayyer, a mystic who came for a few days during Virupaksha days of Sri Bhagavan, sang thus; “From a great distance I got the sweet fragrance of your experience of the Self (*‘swaanubhoothi taraiyellaam manakka’*) and seeking its source I found you !”¹

So *Aksharamanamalai* is not simply a song made in the conventional order of Tamil letters, it is not simply a garland of letters. It is a poetic expression of Bhagavan’s inner experience, the Grace of Arunachala, which caught hold of him and bestowed the divine experience of the Self.

Written in the most mellifluous, crisp and profound Tamil, the transcendental nature of the song makes it difficult to translate. A devotee’s heart singing the glory of the *lila* (play or sport) of divine grace, while at the same time it contains the entire teaching of Vedanta.²

Bhagavan sings the glory of Arunachala. Externally it is in the form of a hill but whoever looks at Arunachala even from a distance, will be benefitted spiritually. Tirujnanasambandhar, the great Tamil saint who saw Tiruvannamalai from Tirukkivilur, some thirty kilometres distant, sings that he did not see a hill but *jnanatthiral*, i.e. the mass of Self-knowledge.

Sri Bhagavan says in the second verse of *Arunachala Pancharatnam* that the real Arunachala is shining within the Heart as ‘I’.³ So we are all always carrying Arunachala within, wherever we are. You cannot be without Arunachala as Arunachala is your very Self – *‘taane taane*

¹ *Ramana Stutipanchakam*, Part III, verse 1.

² *Aksharamanamalai* v.99. *Vedantathe verara vilangum vedapporul arul Arunachala*. “Grant me the essence of the Vedas, which shine in the Vedanta, one without a second, O Arunachala!”

³ *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, v.2.

*tattuvam idanai, taane kaattuvaai Arunachala.*⁴ In Tamil there are two words for ‘I’ – ‘naan’ and ‘taan’. Bhagavan usually uses ‘naan’ for the ego and ‘taan’ for the Self. He says Arunachala dances in the heart as ‘I-I-I’ ‘*nrityasi bhoh*’.⁵ Bhagavan has given us the entire essence of Vedanta in the smallest letter of the English alphabet: ‘i’.⁶

Arunachala, the hill, is the solidified form of Grace while within it is the Self, the Heart, the Consciousness. Hence everyone experiences Arunachala without exception. Everyone experiences the Self without recognising its nature. This is the essential import, the heart of *Aksharamanamalai*. Bhagavan says, “O Arunachala! Unaware, I was carrying the great treasure within me (*tiruvarulnidhi*).”⁷ In spite of that I suffer. Remove that suffering caused by ignorance. “Manifest before me as the Guru, and declare ‘You are That’ (*athuve nee*).”⁸ The *mahavakya upadesam* in Vedanta is ‘*tattvamasi?*’⁹ (You are the Truth; You are the Self; You are *Brahman*). Bhagavan is asking Arunachaleswara to give him that teaching. Open your ambrosian mouth (*Amuda vayai tira*) and declare the *mahavakya* which can bestow the immortal experience – the recognition of the deathless Self. *Arulmati* – O Arunachala! You are the cool moon of grace.¹⁰

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is not one who attained realisation after performing some special sadhana. He is the manifestation of the whole Upanisadic tradition, the manifestation of all the Vedas, in fact the entire spiritual tradition of the whole world. ‘*Vedame uruvaanavan*’ sings the mystic from Satyamangalam in *Ramana Stutipanchakam*. Bhagavan is not giving you any new teaching. He just makes you recognise that what you are seeking is already there within you. The

⁴ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.43.

⁵ *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, v.2.

⁶ Remark attributed to Arthur Osborne. See ‘Nine Stray Verses’, *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. “One syllable shines forever in the Heart as Self. Who is there anywhere who can write it down?”

⁷ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, v.43.

⁹ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.8.7

¹⁰ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.29.



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very experience of your existence as pure 'I' is expressed by the self-luminous light of Arunachala. 'Existence is realisation', 'I is realisation', 'What 'IS' is God', 'Freedom is the very nature of the Self', are some of the implosive-explosive statements of Bhagavan. They are actually not statements but 'states'.

Sankaracharya says in *Brahmasutra Bhashyam*, "Everyone has the experience of Brahman [*sarvaanubhuh*], still they seek it without knowing." Bhagavan constantly reminds us, "You're already That." He has no special teaching and looked at everyone as complete, as *purnavastu* (Whole). Bhagavan never saw anyone as ignorant and answered most questions of devotees by saying that "You are already That." When the questioner insists and says, "Bhagavan, I am not getting it", then he more often than not would reply, "Find out who says this, who is ignorant? Who is the person who doubts?"

"Once when Bhagavan was asked what his central teaching was, he replied that the Centre itself was his central teaching. By the Centre he meant the Heart, the Source of everything."¹¹ Ignoring the centre and allowing the mind to go out, is the greatest loss. The entire teaching is to make you withdraw and abide in the centre. The Death experience that occurred to Bhagavan in Madurai was exactly that. It was in reality the experience of Immortality. That experience dealt a deathblow to death itself.

Bhagavan says that Self-realisation is the result of guru's grace more than of sadhana or learning. When someone pointed out that Bhagavan had no personal guru, Bhagavan remarked, "I might have had at some time or other. And didn't I sing hymns to Arunachala? What is a Guru? Guru is God or the Self. First a man prays to God to fulfil his desires, then a time comes when he does not pray for the fulfilment of a desire, but for God Himself. So God appears to him in some form or other, human or non-human, to guide him as a Guru in answer to his prayer."¹² Bhagavan addresses Arunachala as his guru,

¹¹ Viswanatha Swami, Editorial. *The Mountain Path*, 'The Central Teaching of Bhagavan'. Vol.11, No.11, April 1974. p.65.

¹² Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, 1970. p.131.

the beloved guru. *Guru uruvaayolir Arunachala*.¹³ It was the Grace of Arunachala, which drew the boy Venkataraman from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai putting the final stamp of Self-realisation on him.

Bhagavan on one occasion says how the *gurutattva* (the guru principle) works. When a person becomes ripe enough to realise, the Self or God appears in the form of a guru and makes him go inward through his teaching; and when the mind becomes introverted, the same force from within pulls it towards the centre, and makes it subside in the heart. So from outside the guru gives a push, and from within, he pulls the mind and makes it abide in the Self.¹⁴

Bhagavan's entire life is a demonstration of this divine *lila* (sport) of grace. Once Kanakammal told me this as narrated by Muruganar; "Arunachala wanted a devotee to sing about Him, so He spread out the web of His grace to catch a ripe soul. In that web, He caught this boy of Madurai and brought him to His abode. But this boy instead of singing about Arunachala's grace remained absorbed in profound silence. It was so profound that the hill itself became ashamed."¹⁵ Then Arunachala himself came as a yogi and sang the glory of Ramana in *Ramana Stutipanchakam*. Only after that Bhagavan sang *Aksharamanamalai*.

Bhagavan was not seeking any spiritual experience; he was not seeking God or realisation. He had not read any spiritual books; he had no idea about *Brahman*, atman or jnana. Bhagavan himself says, "I had no idea then that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything, and that myself and Isvara were both identical with it. At Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to the *Ribhu Gita* and other works, I picked up these facts and discovered that these books were analysing and naming what I had previously felt intuitively without analysis and name."¹⁶

¹³ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.19.

¹⁴ Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §547.

¹⁵ *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. 'Tiruvanda Paguthi'. Lines 221-222. *ammaa athisayam achalamum naana, summaa vaditalor swaroopam*.

¹⁶ Narasimha Swami, B.V., *Self-Realisation*. 2013. p.20.



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Venkataraman was born in a Brahmin family who held to the orthodox convention at a time when the Brahminical tradition and the *vedapathasalas* were virtually in decline. Many of the Brahmins who had taken to western education left their traditional lifestyle. They were satisfied with the government jobs they got. Venkataraman's father was a pleader.¹⁷ Venkataraman did not follow any spiritual practice. He had not read anything spiritual, except some poems in Tamil and attendance of the compulsory Bible classes at a Christian school in Madurai.

When Bhagavan was being awakened at Madurai in 1896 that was the time when news of Swami Vivekananda's address to the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 had already spread like wildfire especially in Madurai. Bhagavan had seen a small book of the swami in his house but could not even read the name Vivekananda properly and mispronounced it as 'Vyvekananda'.

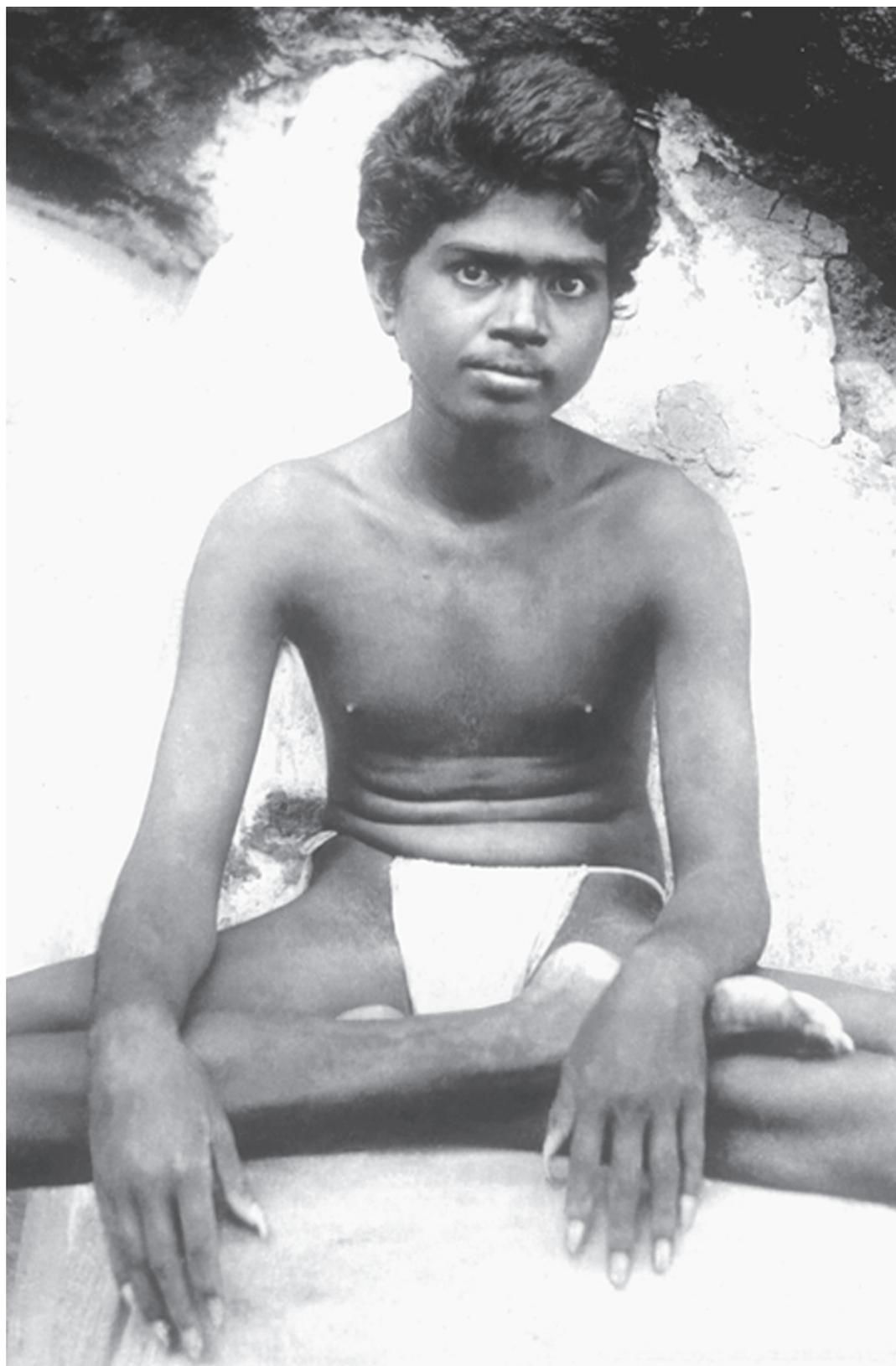
In 1896 when the great event occurred Venkataraman was only sixteen years old. One of his relatives came to his house in Madurai. The boy asked him, "Uncle, where are you coming from?" The rest of the story is spiritual history! In *Arunachala Ashtakam*, Bhagavan has sung about this incident, the way in which it entered his heart, penetrated into his life, and how it swallowed him alive. Bhagavan says, "This appears as an insentient hill but Lo! Behold the divine operation of it!"¹⁸

"Ah me! What a wonder! This Arunachala stands as an insentient Hill of rocks to [our] physical perception. But its mysterious acts of grace are extraordinary and beyond human comprehension," writes Bhagavan.¹⁹ Many of us who visit Tiruvannamalai recognise the divine majesty of Arunachala only because Bhagavan has told us of it. When Bhagavan says it is 'Siva', we see it as Siva; we see it as God Himself. In *Aksharamanamalai* Bhagavan says, "I was an ordinary boy leading an uneventful life going to school in Madurai for *pizhaippu* (livelihood).

¹⁷ An advocate without an official legal degree who represented people in the courts.

¹⁸ *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*, v.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Arivaridaarkkum.'



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Then Arunachala, You came and put mud in my mouth, (*en vaayil manninai atti*).²⁰ That is, Arunachala finished him off.

So, consider the scene: a relative had come to Madurai after visiting Tiruvannamalai and Venkataraman asked where he came from to which he replied, "Arunachalam".²¹ The five lettered word A..RU..NAA..CHA..LA..' reverberated in his heart and the boy was transfixed! In the Tamil Saivite tradition, the *panchakshari* (five letters) na..ma..si..va..ya is very important. Bhagavan was initiated right here into the *Arunachala panchakshari*. He stood still under the spell of the divine name Arunachala, not aware of the danger that was soon to overtake him, the flood that was about to swallow him up. Like those who were playing on the beach without being aware of the impending tsunami this boy was standing there and asking the uncle where he was coming from!

This is spiritual initiation. A real initiation is not somebody giving you some new mantra; it is giving voice to something divine that you have always been carrying silently within you. See what Bhagavan says in *Arunachala Ashtakam*, "Right from my childhood, I was inexplicably aware of Arunachala as a very great object and unattainable. Where and how it is, was a mystery beyond my comprehension for quite some time."²²

In *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan uses this expression '*karuvaam abantai*'.²³ The ego is the actual basic germ of life. '*Karu*' means embryo or foetus, the first germination of life. Right from that stage, even before this body or mind or personality was formed, Arunachala was already there in his heart, and he had a vague recollection of something inexplicable, divisionless, *purna*, ineffable, something that cannot be voiced. And now here is a person who comes and says that he has come from Arunachala. It is like a cotton doll coming and telling you that it has come after

²⁰ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.88.

²¹ Op.cit., Narasimha Swami, pp.12-13.

²² *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*, v.1.

²³ Link words between verses 25 and 26.

embracing fire! How is it possible for a person to visit Arunachala and come back again with a body?

But all this logic came later. Only the essence intuitively flashed through him in that instant. The young Venkataraman could not understand how a person could claim that he saw Arunachala and could return.²⁴ Actually for a seeker a realised sage is like that. He appears in a body and reveals the bodiless, mindless reality. Through him you glimpse *Brahman*, the infinite. It is just like seeing the entire *akasa* (space) in a bubble. It is seeing the infinite in a speck; the entire cosmos in a particle of dust. Bhagavan has expressed this in *Aksharamanamalai* where he sings, “Who can gauge your depth, your full significance; only your limited physical form is here. But you are spaceless, timeless; you spread out and pervade everywhere. Who can ever know what you really are?”²⁵

A devotee once asked me about Bhagavan and *namajapa*. I was then reminded of this verse: ‘*Peyar ninaittidave pidittizhuttanaiun perumai yaar arivaar Arunachala*’. That is, “The moment I listened to your name you pulled me into the heart, O! Arunachala! Who could ever know your glory!”²⁶ In this song Bhagavan has indicated the profound benefit of listening or recollecting the name of the Lord. Japa was always within him as Arunachala, not as the word ‘Arunachala’, but as a globule of divine experience – an un-worded, formless vibrancy of the divine, the *sabdabrahma*. Usually one has to do tremendous austerity to enter the stream that connects one to the limitless reservoir of this divine sound. In Bhagavan’s case the moment he listened to the name Arunachala he was pulled into the whirlpool of grace. Bhagavan said that everything can be reduced to *sabda* (sound) and *jyoti* (light).²⁷ The word ‘Arunachala’ is *sabda*,

²⁴ Op.cit., Narasimha Swami, pp.12. “In great surprise that someone should have actually seen and returned from such a holy place, the youth exclaimed with evident excitement – ‘What! From Arunachalam! Where is it?’”

²⁵ *Aksharamanamalai* v.13. ‘*unai yaar arivaar Arunachala*.’

²⁶ *Aksharamanamalai* v.70.

²⁷ Talk §215. “In the course of conversation, Maharshi said that the subtle body is composed of light and sound and the gross body is a concrete form of the same.”

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the form of Arunachala is nothing but pure effulgence. That is why we say *agnilingam*, *angikundru*, *jyoti pizhambu*. These Sanskrit and Tamil words mean fire.

So when this boy heard the name 'Arunachala' he stood without any movement. It was like catching a big fish using bait. This nama was like the bait and Venkataraman's mind was swallowed up by a giant Being from within. He was sucked within never to return. Arunachala's name went deep inside him and made him recognise the incessant dance within him as 'I-I-I'; the implied meaning of the name. After a few minutes this boy Venkataraman came back to the mundane plane and asked the visitor, "Arunachalam? Where is it, what is it?" The uncle said, "Arunachalam is Tiruvannamalai."²⁸ Listening to this the spiritual fire cooled down temporarily. A glimpse was given – just a peep into the infinite. The next moment, a shutter of ignorance dropped down, only to soon open fully the floodgate of light in the Death Experience at Madurai.

Thus the initiation was given first in the form of *nama diksha* – 'Arunachala'. The Buddha says when a person becomes mature for liberation and he listens to the news or *varta* that there is liberation, it is like the falling of a seed into the fertile soil. To Bhagavan the moment the message came in the form of *nama*, the inner current – that *dhara* was unlocked. Venkataraman recognised the divine force operating behind his usual awareness and promptly surrendered unconditionally to it allowing that *sakti* (power) to complete the process that it had started.

After the first experience of Grace, one day he happened to read the *Periapuranam*. Full of stories of saints, the book might appear childish to worldly ears. There are accounts of God Himself coming to our level and playing with us! Many of these saints were not *sannyasis*, but ordinary worldly people with desires. *Isvara* comes down and helps them; at times enslaves them, and infuses them divine grace. Bhagavan says, "After I opened the book, I could not take my attention away from that book, I became one with it, I could not believe that such

²⁸ Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, 1997. p.4.

display of divine *lila* is ever possible on the physical plane; on this earth. Isvara comes in solid form, gets involved in your life, catches hold of you, and makes you experience the divine madness!”²⁹ Bhagavan describes the love of the devotees as ‘bone-melting love’ (*enburuganbu*).

The *Puranas* are not mythology. Etymologically in Sanskrit, we say *puratanam adhunapi navam*, most ancient, yet it is new even now. It is not history, it is His Story. The story of Lord’s *lila* or the story of Grace. *Periapuranam*, means the great *Purana*. It is called so because while other *Puranas* relate stories about God, with which we cannot directly connect ourselves, the *Periapuranam* narrates stories about the devotees thereby filling a gap between the Infinite and oneself. Somewhere you find someone who experiences the infinite, and that someone will be very much like you. So you can find a direct connection with the stories. You can feel the oneness and identify yourself with them. Bhagavan says, “It made a great impression on me. Before that, the sixty-three images of the Nayanars in the temple were mere images and no more. But afterwards, they gained new significance for me. I used to go and weep before those images and before Nataraja that God should give me the same grace He gave to those saints. But this was after the ‘death’ experience. Before that, the bhakti for the sixty-three saints lay dormant, as it were.”³⁰

All these saints have sung about Lord Siva. Bhagavan says in *Aksharamanamalai*, “You have heard the great devotees sing about you; they were not ordinary devotees; their love can melt the bones (*enburugu anbar*). Their songs are sweeter than honey. And now let my poor strains also be accepted.”³¹

Every Siva temple, including the Arunachaleswara temple, has the idols of the sixty three Tamil saints installed in the inner temple *prakaaram* (circuit). There is a system of worship according to which a devotee has to first go and worship the saints and take their permission to enter the inner sanctum. It is fondly believed that Lord

²⁹ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.106.

³⁰ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. 06.10.46. p.323.

³¹ *Aksharamanamalai*, v.106.



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Siva does not admit anyone inside without their permission. Once upon a time a great devotee Sundarar went straight to worship Siva without worshipping the saints. Viranminda Nayanar, another ardent devotee, saw this and felt angry. So the Lord Himself told Sundarar, that he should worship the saints first. Then Sundarar sang about all the sixty three saints.

Bhagavan's story is similar. First he heard the name Arunachala, and then he read the stories of devotees. One cannot directly come to *jnana*, without devotion. For devotion purifies our heart and makes it fit to realise the Self. With great reverence for these devotees, Bhagavan would go to the temple, stand before Isvara with tears flowing, and pray to the Lord to give him devotion like that of the sixty three saints. Bhagavan wanted to be suffused with bhakti. Sometimes even that prayer was swallowed up by the profuse tears that overwhelmed him.

Finally the ultimate fire of Arunachala descended. Siva in the *Vedas* is the god of death and inviting Siva means inviting death. In fact, Self-realisation is nothing but death. Usually what we call death is not death; you continue to live as the ego. Bhagavan refers to the ego that lives in this body as a ghost. So we call this embodied ghost a 'man', a man without body we call a 'ghost'. Real death is the death of the ego – the dawn of the fire of *jnana* – which will give you the ultimate freedom from death. ▲

Knowledge Spellbound

N.A. Mohan Rao

I have an insurmountable problem;
You have an unsurmountable problem;
Flustered, I run to the online OED for help;
Insurmountable is unsurmountable, says it;
I is the same as u;
Fool that I was;
Didn't realise I is the same as You.



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Eleven

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

3rd February 1978

Sadhu Om: In 1949, when Bhagavan received a telegram from Manikkam Pillai informing him of the death of Sivaprakasam Pillai, he said with a twist of his hand, “Sivaprakasam has become *Sivaprakasam* [the light of Siva].”

4th February 1978

Sadhu Om: When the reality is the truth of our own being, how can training the mind to attend to any second or third person (anything other than ourself) help us to attain that reality? Someone whose mind is thus attached to any name or form will not be able to understand even intellectually what self-attention actually is. Even if he can enjoy

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



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the company of the name and form of his beloved God, how does that help him? Ramakrishna once said that even if God wants to take us to self, he cannot unless we want him to. Only by our own liking and effort to practise self-attention can we attain true self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*).

The aim towards which the whole universe is striving is nothing but the subsidence of thought, because happiness is experienced only to the extent to which thought subsides. The complete subsidence of thought is experienced by all beings in sleep, and hence everyone is perfectly happy in that state, but because we attend only to second and third persons in the waking and dream states, we fail to discriminate properly and thereby to understand that what we are seeking is only the subsidence of thought. Bhagavan points out our mistake and tells us that we should try to experience in the waking state the happiness which we experienced in sleep. How can we do so? In sleep we did not attend to any second or third persons, but experienced only ourselves, so we should try to do the same now.

Even scientists are only looking for happiness, but they wrongly discriminate and believe that happiness will be increased if the whole of mankind is able to enjoy more pleasures through the five senses. But once we are convinced that self alone is our goal, why should we attend to anything other than ourselves? An independent and careful reflection on Bhagavan's teachings should convince anyone that self alone is our goal, and will thereby give them the love to attend only to self.

All other spiritual practices (*sadhana*s) require blind belief in something that we do not know, because they need us to believe that something other than ourselves can lead us to ourselves. The practice of self-attention is the only path which is clearly charted and scientific, because it is the only path in which the [causal] connection between the practice (attending to self) and the goal (knowing self) is self-evident.

All religions and philosophies tell us that sleep is a mean state, and they all expect us to believe something other than ourselves, but one Sri Ramana alone stands to say that we shouldn't believe anything but self, 'I am', because we who exist unchanging in all the three

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states are alone the real substance (*mey-porul* or *sat-vastu*). Once we have been convinced by Bhagavan, we should cease to be concerned whether this person or that person is a jnani. We should have faith in ourself, and should therefore press on towards our goal without being concerned about others.

If you doubt whether you can be one of the few who will reach the goal, remember that the *Vedas* assure us, 'You are that' (*tat tvam asi*), so you are the one who will succeed, because you are already that.

5th February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan does not ask us to believe anything new. He simply points out the obvious truth that we love only ourself, and that our love for other things (body, mind, God, and the things of the world) is a mere pretence, because we love them only for the sake of ourself. He says that if we want to be happy, we should stop pretending that we love anything other than self, and we should let our love for self be whole and not partial.

In the ninth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* ('Who am I?') Bhagavan says:

Just like breath-restraint (*pranayama*), meditation upon a form of God (*murti-dhyana*), repetition of sacred words (*mantra-japa*) and regulation of diet (*ahara-niyama*) are mere aids for controlling the mind [but can never by themselves bring about its destruction]. By *murti-dhyana* and *mantra-japa* the mind gains one-pointedness (*ekagra*). Just as when a chain is given to an elephant to hold in its trunk, which is always wandering [here and there trying to catch hold of things], that elephant will go along holding only the chain instead of trying to catch any other thing, so also when the mind, which is always wandering, is trained to hold on to any one name or form [of God], it will cling only to that. Because the mind branches out into innumerable thoughts, each thought becomes very weak. As thoughts subside more and more, one-pointedness is gained, and for the mind which has thereby gained strength, self-enquiry (*atma-vicara*) will easily be accomplished. [...]

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There is a break here in the sequence of ideas between the sentence ending 'it will cling only to that' and the sentence beginning 'Because the mind branches out', because the first of these two sentences is specifically about the practices of murti-dhyana and mantra-japa, whereas the second is a general observation. If the meaning of this paragraph is carefully considered in comparison with what Bhagavan teaches us in *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu*, it will be clear that he is not saying that if the mind becomes one-pointed through *nama-japa* or *rupa-dhyana*, it will thereby gain strength to abide in its source.

That is, in verse eight of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says that rather than *anya-bhava* (meditation upon anything other than 'I'), *ananya-bhava* (meditation upon nothing other than 'I') is the best among all forms of meditation. What he means by *ananya-bhava* is only *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry], because *atma-vicara* is the practice of meditating only on 'I', whereas every other practice involves meditating on or attending to something other than 'I'. Therefore though he says, '*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*', which means 'otherless meditation in which he [God] is I', he does not mean that meditating on the thought 'He is I' (*soham bhavana*) is *ananya-bhava*, because that thought is something other than 'I'. If we are really convinced that God is 'I', we should meditate only on 'I' and not on any thought about God. However, though *soham bhavana* is not *ananya-bhava*, it is at least based on the conviction that God is not other than 'I', so from this verse we can infer that it is superior to any meditation in which God is considered to be something other than 'I'.

However, in verse 32 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says that practising *soham bhavana* instead of *atma-vicara* is 'due to lack of strength' (*uran-inmaiyinal*). Therefore, since practising even *soham bhavana* is due to weakness, practising meditation on God as if he were other than 'I' must be due to even greater weakness, so how can any such meditation be said to give our mind the strength it requires to practise *atma-vicara* and thereby to abide in its source?



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Even in the case of Ramakrishna, his attachment to the name and form of Kali proved a hindrance, and only because of his exceptional maturity and the grace of Kali was he able to cut that name and form with the sword of knowledge (*jnana*). If one meditates upon a name and form, the mind will gain strength to see God in that name and form, as Bhagavan teaches us in verse eight of *Ulladu Narpadu*, but that is not the mental strength that we require to abide in our source. If our mind becomes one-pointed in concentrating on any second or third person, that attachment will hinder us for many lives, preventing us from coming to the path of atma-vicara. Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri had trained his mind so well in attending to *mantras* and other second or third person objects that he was unable to practise self-attention, so Bhagavan remarked that he was like a racehorse that can gallop forwards at great speed but is unable to take even one step backwards.

However, if anyone practises nama-japa with genuine love for God, believing that it will take them to him, their effort will not be wasted, because after a number of lives the God whose name (*nama*) they have been repeating with love will appear to them in the form (*rupa*) of guru, who will tell them to leave such futile practices and to practise instead only self-attention. Therefore after we have come to Bhagavan, why should we train our minds in any practice other than self-attention? If anyone nevertheless wants to practise some sort of *japa* (repetition), Bhagavan suggested that the best japa is only to repeat 'I, I'. If you do japa of God's name, you will see God, whereas if you do japa of 'I', the name of yourself, you will know yourself alone.

12th February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan is performing a delicate operation which will radically change our long-accustomed outlook of mistaking a body to be 'I' and the world to be real, into the outlook that we alone are. If this change were to occur too fast, it would put too much pressure on our mind, upsetting our mental balance, and could either make us insane or even drive us to commit suicide. But Bhagavan is a very skilled surgeon, and so he knows the right speed at which to change our outlook. If we are going too fast, he sometimes has to disconnect



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the current for a while, which he does by making us feel disinterested in practising self-attention. Therefore we should not be disheartened by such experiences, because they happen for our own good, and he can sometimes use such periods of apparent disinterest to push us right up to the boundary. Even Muruganar had a similar experience, feeling that he was a helpless case.

We should always have faith in Bhagavan's assurance that we are like the prey in the jaws of a tiger, and that we can never escape. If we strain too much, we might be obstructing Bhagavan in his work, so he sometimes even has to put an end to this life and make us take a new body. Death, suicide and insanity seem to be big things to us, but to him they are minor events which he uses for our own benefit.

The culture in India provides Hindus with many outlets when the pressure becomes too great. Even before I knew Bhagavan, I used to take days off work just to go to a lonely place to weep for God. To have *sat-sanga* with the right friends can also be a great help during rough periods. *Sravana* and *manana* (studying and reflecting on Bhagavan's teachings) are also very important at such times. They are like a protective fortress.

When I say that intermittent attempts at self-attention are important, remember that the rests in between are as important as the attempts. Even if you attend to self for only a few seconds at each attempt, these attempts will have their effect unknown to you. Because of these attempts, occasionally at other times – say in the middle of some work – you will feel that you are being automatically reminded of your mere being, 'I am', but it is not the mind that is reminding you. It is similar to pricking a banana with a pin: you do not know how close the pin has come to the other side until you prick your hand.

Doing japa of 'I' is helpful for those beginners who are not able to recognise that our awareness of 'I' (that is, our awareness that I am) is something that is distinct from our awareness of our body or any other mental image. By practising japa of 'I' they can begin to experience for one moment now and then the awareness of 'I' alone. Once they recognise this awareness of their mere existence, they can give up their japa of 'I' and instead practise simple self-attention.

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'*Summa iru*', which means 'just be' or 'be still', is the correct way of describing self-attention, because self-attention is simply not attending to anything other than 'I', so it does not involve our attention moving anywhere away from its source, which is 'I'. The Tamil adverb *summa* implies not doing anything, because any 'doing' or action always involves attending to something other than 'I'. When we attend only to 'I', our attention remains in its source, as its source, 'I am', so self-attention is not an action but a state of just being. In one of his verses Arunagirinathar sings that when Lord Muruga told him '*summa iru*', he ceased knowing anything, which means that he ceased attending to any second or third person.

When you correctly attend to self, then no doubts about it will arise, for your self-attention will then be as clear to you as is your present knowledge 'I am'. On the other hand, we can also say that you will never know when you correctly attend to self, because from that moment all knowing will cease, and being alone will remain. Bhagavan once said that not only is self (*atman*) that which does not know other things, it is that which does not know even itself as 'I am this'.

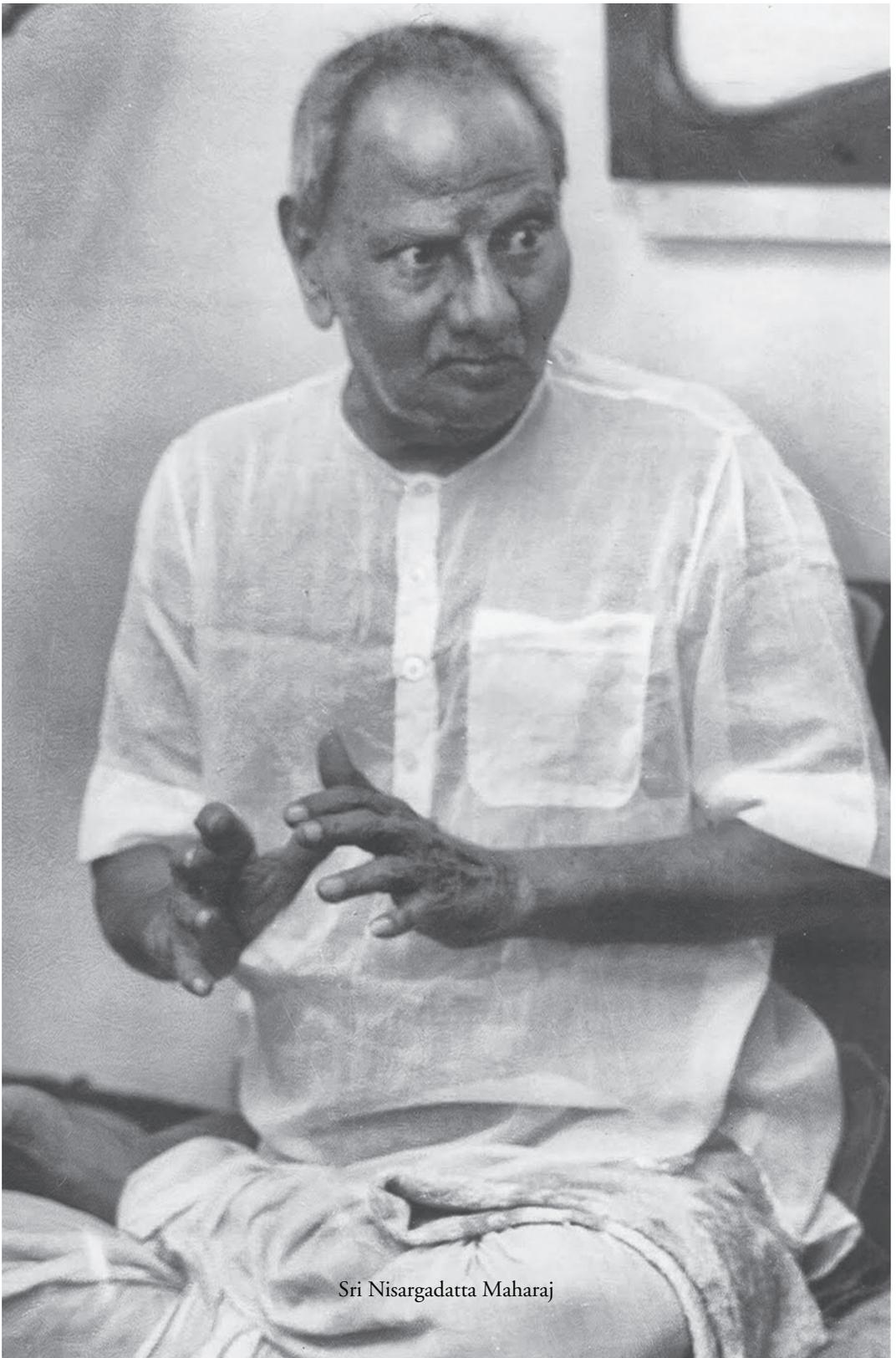
This idea was recorded by Sri Muruganar in verse 831 of *Meyttava Vilakkam*:

Self does not know not only its own nature but also anything else. Such a knowledge alone is the real 'I'.

That is, self-knowledge is a knowledge quite unlike any other knowledge, because not only does self not know itself as an object of knowledge, but also its knowing itself is not an action or 'doing' but only being. Knowing anything else is an action, whereas self knows itself just by being itself. Therefore in verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says:

Being self alone is knowing self, because self is that which is devoid of two [a knowing subject and a known object]. This is *tanmaya-nishta* [abidance as 'that', the absolute reality called *brahman*]. ▲

(*To be continued*)



Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



The Navnath Sampradaya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Part One

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

The following is the first of four articles based on a long piece about the Navnath Sampradaya which was available for a number of years on the Internet at http://nisargadatta.net/Navnath_Sampradaya.html

The article has been revised and enlarged by the author for the Mountain Path.

In January, 1978, I stepped off a plane in Bombay and entered another world. As my taxi raced through the streets at three o'clock in the morning, past the street sleepers, I felt as though I had entered the city of the dead. The next day, Mr. Hate, the guru's son-in-law came by to pick us up (I had come with a friend.) He told us stories

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author's spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.



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about his guru, Sri Nisargadatta his father-in-law, and about his wives, the first was the daughter of the guru, who had died, and the second was the one that his guru had picked out for him. Sri Nisargadatta's daughter had died suddenly, but before she did, she laughed with her father. His second wife was picked by Sri Nisargadatta and now they were happily married with a new baby. We went to the market place to buy some fruit as an offering for the guru. Finally, we arrived at 10 Khetwadi Lane, kitty-corner from the Alfred Cinema and awash with the cacophony of the street. Inside was a small bronze man with burning eyes. He was about to have a shave from an itinerant barber and was lathered up to his cheekbones. He glared at me and I wondered if I was insane to have come all this way. His intensity was simultaneously frightening and captivating. Since we were about the same height, I could look directly into his eyes, the eyes I had travelled more than half way around the world to meet, the eyes of an enlightened being. Although I had a spiritual teacher in California, I wanted to meet a *bonafide* Indian Enlightened Guru. He wasn't angry, he was just pure intensity. What I was to learn on other occasions was that he was also pure Love.

In 1976, I had discovered Sri Nisargadatta's book, *I Am That*, in the book review section of *The Mountain Path*, put out by Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram. Upon receiving the book it was obvious to me, that this teaching was similar to that of the Maharshi, pure non-duality, but in a style unique to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. *I Am That* is a book of recorded dialogues, predominantly with Western spiritual seekers. I had written to the translator of the book, Maurice Frydman in 1976-77, to express my appreciation for bringing this teacher to light. Maurice Frydman wondered if I could find a publisher for *I Am That* in the United States. I said I would try, and promptly sent copies of the book to three publishers of spiritual books. Two of the publishers did not express any interest in publishing *I Am That*, the third, Steven Levine of Unity Press expressed that he really liked the book, but said it fell outside the scope of Unity Press which was dedicated to Insight Meditation.

Stymied for a while, I waited to hear from Maurice again and instead got the news that Maurice had died. I decided then that I wanted to meet Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in person.

After the initial meeting, with shaving cream, I felt shook up, not knowing if coming to meet Sri Nisargadatta was the right thing, but I was determined to go forward. Returning to the house on Khetwadi Lane, I was struck by how much this place was in the midst of the chaos which is Bombay. Stepping inside, into the dark house, going up the steep steps to his mezzanine, brought expectancy and fear again on my part. It was customary to prostrate before him and I could feel certain 'American' resistances within myself to bowing down before another human being. Yet once I did it, I had a taste of bliss well up within myself. The translator explained that the prostration meant, 'none of me, only you'. Prostration became increasingly blissful the more I did it. But this was only my first time and I was anxious and uncomfortable.

The room was long, dimly lit and painted with a green colour that looked like the colour of rusty copper. Around the room were drawings and photographs of ancient men that I did not recognise. Each one had a dab of red paste on their foreheads. At the far end was a massive silver altar with a painting of Sri Siddharameshwar (Sri Nisargadatta's guru) above it. Flower garlands hung over the portrait, as they did on many of the other pictures in the room. Maharaj was sitting on some kind of animal skin, beneath a mirror, which faced another mirror. Slightly to the side was a photograph of Sri Ramana Maharshi. On the other side of the mirror was a portrait of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. People were already sitting on the ground in front of Maharaj who was already engaged in a dialogue with a young woman from Germany, who had recently come from Sri Ramanasramam.

Maharaj was talking about Vithoba and Tukaram, and the play of devotion. As time went on in this little room, I realised that Maharaj had a very direct way of pointing out our self nature, that he had practical instruction. He also was part of a lineage. We Westerners were eager for the instruction which was so direct. Maharaj had



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little patience for Western intellectualism, spiritual concepts and marketplace mentality and over the time I was there, he threw some people out. He was famous for throwing people out of his house. This was a method of instruction, however on my first day of Satsang, he was involved in the play of guru and disciple, and he was encouraging the woman disciple from Germany, to take mantra initiation. I was both jealous (I thought that I would be the one getting this kind of attention) and puzzled. *I Am That* had no hint of devotion as part of his instruction. Yes, he spoke devotionally about his guru, Sri Siddharameshwar, but not much else. Perhaps he knew that we Westerners were not really attuned to such feelings; that our form of non-duality was more about discrimination, Self-Knowledge. We all were coming for the no-nonsense, rapid fire approach we had read in the book, and yet, here in front of me was a sweet divine reenactment of the play between guru and disciple and I did not quite get its implication. I am not trying to say that devotion is necessary for awakening to the truth of one's self nature, however, I believe it has figured in Maharaj's lineage.

One morning I came early, early enough to catch a glimpse of Maharaj in his morning puja and devotional preparations. After reading from a holy book (I do not know which one), he carefully cleaned and re-anointed each picture in Satsang room. He was very deliberate in placing the garlands around the pictures as well. I began to wonder who these personages were to command such love and respect from Maharaj himself.

Later, during my visit, I was 'assigned' a translator for the duration of my visit. Suamitra Mullarpattan, became my translator and friend. He regaled me with stories about Sri Nisargadatta, and when I asked him about the lineage he told me that Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj had been a householder and his guru, Bhausahab Maharaj, had been one too. Somehow, this made an impression on me because I had the image that most gurus were swamis or monks; the idea that anyone could become enlightened, if they looked within, in earnest, became most compelling. Certainly, the immediacy of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's transmission had caught the attention of many



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seekers treading the spiritual path in the 1970's. Although, for the entirety of the past twenty four years my attention has been focussed on the liberating teachings of Sri Nisargadatta, in the last five years, the whole context in which he lived and the lineage from which he sprang, became more relevant to me. I became curious whether part of his relevance to us as Westerners (he had Indian disciples, too, but his mode of transmission was different), had to do with the fact that he was a householder in the midst of a modern metropolitan city. Although many of us might consider a spiritual genius like Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj an anomaly, I believe that it is no freak of nature that a practically illiterate cigarette seller from the back lanes of Bombay became awakened. This miraculous occurrence has to do somewhat with his lineage.

I learned that the lineage which Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was part of – in fact, the full flowering of – what was called the *Navnath Sampradaya*, the lineage of the nine gurus. For the last twenty-four years I have been confused as to who the nine gurus were and what significance they had in the Maharaj's teaching. Maharaj himself did not stress his lineage with most of his Western devotees. However, he does speak about it in *I Am That*:

“Question: I see here picture of several saints and I am told that they are your spiritual ancestors. Who are they and how did it all begin?”

“Maharaj: We are called collectively the ‘Nine Masters’. The legend says that our first teacher was the Rishi Dattatreya, the great incarnation of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Even the ‘Nine Masters’ are mythological.

“Question: What is the peculiarity of their teaching?”

“Maharaj: Its simplicity, both in theory and in practice.

“Question: How does one become a Navnath? By initiation or by succession?”

“Maharaj: Neither. The Nine Masters’ tradition (*Navnath Parampara*) is like a river — it flows into the ocean of reality and whoever enters it is carried along.



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“Question: Does it imply acceptance by a living master belonging to the same tradition?”

“Maharaj: Those who practice the sadhana of focussing their minds on ‘I am’ may feel related to others who have followed the same sadhana and succeeded. They may decide to verbalize their sense of kinship by calling themselves Navnaths. It gives them the pleasure of belonging to an established lineage.

“Question: Do they in anyway benefit by joining?”

“Maharaj: The circle of satsang, the company of saints expands as time passes.

“Question: Do they get hold thereby of a source of power and grace from which they would have been barred otherwise?”

“Maharaj: Power and Grace are for all and for the asking. Giving oneself a particular name does not help. Call yourself by any name — as long as you are intensely mindful of yourself, the accumulated obstacles to self-knowledge are bound to be swept away.

“Question: If I like your teaching and accept your guidance, can I call myself a *Navnath*?”

“Maharaj: Please your word-addicted mind! The name will not change you. At least it may remind you to behave. There is a succession of gurus and their disciples, who in turn train more disciples and thus the line is maintained. But the continuity of tradition is informal and voluntary. It is like a family name, but here the family is spiritual.

“Question: Do you have to realize to join the *sampradaya*?”

“Maharaj: The *Navnath Sampradaya* is only a tradition, a way of teaching and practice. It does not denote a level of consciousness. If you accept a *Navnath Sampradaya* teacher as your guru, you join his *sampradaya*. Usually you receive a token of his grace — a look, a touch or a word, sometimes a vivid dream or a strong remembrance. Sometimes the only sign of grace is a significant and rapid change in character and behaviour.

“Question: I know you now for some years and I meet you regularly. The thought of you is never far from my mind. Does it make me belong to your *sampradaya*?”

“Maharaj: Your belonging is a matter of your own feeling and conviction. After all, it is all verbal and formal. In reality there is neither guru nor disciple, neither theory nor practice, neither ignorance nor realization. It all depends on what you take yourself to be. Know your self correctly, There is no substitute to self-knowledge.”¹

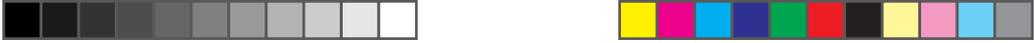
We must take Maharaj’s stance of abiding beyond all manifestations of outer guru, all beliefs in dualisms when we look at his *sampradaya*. This abidance in Self knowledge is imperative as we look at events that can only take place in the ephemeral passage of time.

With this as our perspective, we can delve into what the *Navnath Sampradaya* really is and was. The *Navnath Sampradaya* refers to the original nine gurus that came from the transmission of Dattatreya. As Maharaj has said, there is a definite mythological quality to these stories and many of them are quite miraculous.

Dattatreya’s parents were both extremely pious and practised austerities for a long time in the hopes of gaining a boon, the birth of a son. His mother wanted a child who would be the incarnation of *Nirguna Parabrahman* (the formless infinite). As it is impossible to make the formless take form, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva all agreed to take incarnation as their child. Dattatreya was an *Avadhut*, one clothed in space, he was perceived as a naked ascetic. Dattatreya did not claim to have a traditional guru, he claimed to have twenty four gurus, such as water, the seas, an arrow maker, etc. He learned different kinds of virtues such as “Forbearance from the Earth, Luminosity from the fire, Unfathomableness from the Ocean, Seclusion from a forest, and so on until he ultimately synthesizes all these different virtues in his own unique life.”² He could find spiritual instruction in these and other naturally occurring phenomena. Dattatreya is considered the epitome of the renunciate. His *Avadhut Gita* considered so essential that *sannyasins* (renunciates) who have thrown everything else away

¹ Frydman, Maurice,(trans.), *I Am That*, Part II, chapter 97, p.271.

² *Srimad Bhagavata*, XI. 7 as quoted by R.D. Ranade in *Mysticism in India: Poet-Saints of Maharashtra* 1983. p.9.



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are reported to have a copy of his *Gita*.³ Yet, Dattatreya's approach of using every possible thing and experience, for one's meditation is totally appropriate for those who tread the path of the householder. The *Avadhut Gita* itself is one of the clearest expositions of non-dual truth. Although the entire *Avadhut Gita* is of value in this study, there is not space enough to share all of it. In Chapter II, verse one, Dattatreya says, "Hold not the immature, the credulous, the foolish, the slow, the layman and the fallen to have nothing good in them. They all teach something. Learn from them. Surely we do not give up a game although we have mastered it?"⁴

In keeping with Dattatreya's use of all kinds of gurus, we find all these usually derogative are categories given some deference and value. This theme is carried further in Chapter II, verse two, "Think not lightly of thy guru should he lack letters and learning. Take the Truth he teaches and ignore the rest. Know well that a boat painted and adorned, will carry you across the river; so also will one that is plain and simple."⁵ Neither the guru nor the disciple need be erudite. They only need to be situated in the truth. It is interesting to find this teaching of Dattatreya as it perfectly describes Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who was a simple and illiterate man, whose transmission was largely based on direct experience, not scriptural reference nor book knowledge.

In Chapter IV, verse 19, Dattatreya says, "When Atman, the absolute existence alone is and It is I, then where is transcendental Truth, where is bliss, where is knowledge, secular or spiritual?"⁶ Truth beyond all dualities is for those who have spent time practising and have an experiential grasp of what these words truly mean. The *Avadhut* is definitely encouraging us to go beyond our fondest spiritual concepts. To further stress this he says in Chapter IV, verse 21. "Renounce, renounce the world, and also renounce renunciation, and even give

³ *Avadhut Gita* by Mahatma Dattatreya. Translated by H.P. Shastri, p.2. Retrieved February 28, 2002, from www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/avadhut-gita.html.

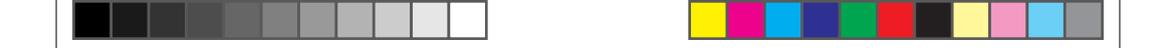
⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.



Rishi Dattatreya



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up the absence of renunciation. By nature all-pervasive as space, knowledge absolute art thou.”⁷ This takes us beyond any dualism we can image about our station of life, whether that of a renunciate or householder-detachment, and situates us in the Absolute.

Dattatreya is depicted as an ascetic with the heads of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He encompasses the designation of god as creator, preserver and destroyer. He holds in his six hands various spiritual objects, the *japa mala* (rosary), the water pot, the *damaru* (the drum of creation), the trident, the conch, and the discus. The damaru and the trident are always the accessories in Shiva’s hands; the conch and the discus are usually Vishnu’s. The water pot is one of the few possessions of an ascetic, as is the japa mala. Dattatreya is also depicted with four dogs who represent the four *Vedas*.⁸ Although the *Navnath Sampradaya* begins with a great ascetic sage, Dattatreya, his transmission transcends any designation, renunciate or householder.

Dattatreya supposedly instructed Patanjali. There is a reference to this on a web site, ‘Biographies of Indian saints’. “Regarding the works by him, probably the most controversial is that it is mentioned in the *Markandeya Purana* that he taught the *asthanga yoga* to Patanjali, who then wrote the yoga sutras.”⁹ This may be apocryphal but it does show the stature of Dattatreya that his name is invoked to give authority to the school of yoga enunciated by Patanjali. Dattatreya is said to have initiated Matsyendranath (or Matchindra Nath), the first in the lineage of the so-called nine gurus.

The fundamental purpose of the *Navnath Sampradaya* is resolutely practical. Though dynamic metaphysical enquiry was encouraged as a means to the realisation of the truth of *Brahman*, it was but one part of the yoga discipline necessary for the ultimate transcendental experience. We see this thread running through the *sampradaya*, which in the 20th Century found its fulfillment in Nisargadatta Maharaj.

(To be continued) ▲

⁷ Ibid., p.13.

⁸ <http://swamisamarth.com/parampara/datta.html>

⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.angelfire.com/indie/saints/bio1.html>



KEYWORD

Saranagati

JOHN GRIMES

To put into question the one who is seeking liberation is to put into motion an enquiry that will end in the veritable destruction of the seeker. Somewhere, behind the walls of one's ignorance, concealed within the labyrinths of one's mind, lies Reality, waiting to be revealed. Each path is unique. Standing at the crossroads, how to know which path is truly yours?

Bhagavan said when asked which is the best method of spiritual practice, "That depends on the temperament of the individual. Every person is born with latent tendencies from one's past lives. One method will prove easy to one person and another to another. There can be no general rule."¹

Tradition states there are two ways to reveal Reality. The analogy presented is of a person bound in chains. On the path of knowledge one identifies with the Absolute thereby becoming larger and larger

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §580.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.



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until the chains snap. On the other hand, on the path of Surrender, one declares, 'not-me, O Lord, but you' and thus one becomes smaller and smaller until one is able to slip through the links of the chains. Either the seeker becomes everything or becomes nothing. In the end both are the same.

Sri Ramana said: "The 'I' casts off the illusion of the 'I' and yet remains 'I'. This is the paradox of Self-realisation. The Realized do not see any paradox in it. Consider the case of the worshipper. He approaches the Lord and prays to be absorbed in Him. He then surrenders himself in faith and by concentration. And what remains afterwards? In the place of the original 'I', self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the 'I' is lost."²

Religious theistic traditions acknowledge a personal God with devotion/surrender to God as a means of salvation. A basic presupposition of theirs is that there is posited a gap between the human and the Divine. Somehow, they must find a 'bridge' which will enable these two separate entities to commune with each other. If one sets up God as an 'other', remote and estranged, a link must be found that will somehow unite the physical to the supra-physical. This link is devotion or surrender. Devotion is called the path of love, an intense love of God wherein the devotee says, 'Let that constant love which the ignorant have for objects of the senses, let me have that constancy in my love for Thee.'

In Sri Vaishnavism of South India, a distinction is made between *bhakti* (devotion) and *saranagati/prapatti* (surrender). Devotion is said to be 'formal'. It is like a ladder with a gradual movement upwards toward communion with God. It has qualifications and is dependent on external aids. Formal devotion begins at birth and culminates at death. Thus, the devotee must have an unflagging will to undergo all the disciplines needed and a patience to endure. It is described as a long, step-by-step, moment-to-moment, path to God. It is a long hard path, full of pitfalls, and not open to everyone as rituals, mantras, and temple worship are required and mandatory, and such

² Ibid., Talk §28.



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are not open to everyone. This path of devotion is called the 'way of the monkey'. A baby monkey clings to its mother's chest as she moves about the forest. If the baby monkey lets go at any time, the little monkey will fall and die. Thus, in this path, the devotee must exert continual self-effort as well as having faith in God.

The path of surrender, on the other hand, is a path open to everyone. The only prerequisite needed is a complete change of heart, an absolute confidence in the saving grace of the Lord. It has no rules. It is said to be a direct and easy path for once taken, all is then left in the hands of God. It is known as the 'way of the kitten'. A baby kitten puts forth no effort when the mother cat moves it from place to place. In fact, it just goes limp and if it were to struggle, this would actually make the mother's efforts much more difficult. This path preserves the essentials of formal devotion, but dispenses with its conditions and non-essentials.

The path of surrender implies abiding by the will of God in all things. There will be no grievances about what may or may not take place. Even when things turn out differently from the way one would have once-upon-a-time, before surrender, wanted, everything is left up to God. Surrender means abiding by God's will whether God appears or not. One awaits His pleasure, at all times, in all circumstances. To ask God to do as one pleases or desires is not to surrender, but to command. One cannot demand that God obey you and still think you have surrendered. God knows what is best and when and how to do everything. Surrender means leaving everything, everything inclusive, entirely up to God.

Sri Ramana said: "There are only two ways in which to conquer destiny. One is to enquire who undergoes this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by it and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realizing one's helplessness and saying all the time: 'Not I, but Thou, O my Lord', and giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what He likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee



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wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and for nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through bhakti-marga.”³

Bhagavan recommended two distinct versions of the doctrine of Surrender: i) Holding on to the ‘I’-thought until the one who imagines that s/he is separate from God disappears; ii) Completely surrendering all responsibility for one’s life to God or the Self. For such self-surrender to be effective one must have no will or desire of one’s own and one must be completely free of the idea that there is an individual person who is capable of acting independently of God.

Sri Ramana avers, “There are two ways [to surrender]; one is looking into the source of the ‘I’ and merging into that source; the other is feeling ‘I am helpless by myself, God alone is all-powerful and except for throwing myself completely on Him there is no other means of safety for me,’ and thus gradually developing the conviction that God alone exists and the ego does not count. Both methods lead to the same goal. Complete surrender is another name for jnana or liberation.”⁴

The first method partakes of the nature of self-enquiry. The second method, of surrendering responsibility for one’s life to God, is also related to the path of Self-enquiry since it aims to eliminate the ‘I’-thought by separating it from the objects and actions that an individual is constantly identifying with.

Bhagavan proposed surrender as a path with his particular definition of what surrender entails. He remarked about surrender:

“All talk of surrender is like pinching jaggery from the jaggery image of Lord Ganesa and offering it as naivedya to the same Lord Ganesa. You say you offer your body, soul and all possessions to God. Were they yours that you could offer them? At best, you can only

³ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002.28-6-46. p.266.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-3-46, Morning. p.162-3.

say, 'I falsely imagined till now that all these which are yours (God's) were mine. Now I realise they are yours. I shall no more act as if they are mine.' And this knowledge that there is nothing but God or Self, that I and mine don't exist and that only the Self exists, is *jnana*." He added, "Thus there is no difference between *bhakti* and *jnana*. *Bhakti* is *jnana mata* or mother of *jnana*."⁵

He also stated: "To say that one is apart from the Supreme is a pretension and to add to it that one divested of the ego, the 'I'-thought, becomes pure and yet retains their individuality only to enjoy or serve the Supreme is a deceit. What duplicity this is. First to appropriate what is really the Supreme and then to pretend to experience or serve this Supreme! Is not all this known to Him?"⁶

To conclude, Sri Ramana replied to the theists who advocated surrender to the worshipped by the worshipper, who staunchly advocated the reality of the subject-object relationship, "Whoever objects to one having a God to worship, so long as he requires such a separate God? Through *bhakti* he develops himself, and comes to feel that God alone exists and that he, the *bhakta*, does not count. He comes to a stage when he says, 'Not I, but Thou'; 'Not my will, but Thy will.' When that stage is reached, which is called complete surrender in the *bhakti marga*, one finds effacement of ego is attainment of Self. We need not quarrel whether there are two entities, or more, or only one. Even according to *dvaitis* and according to the *bhakti marga*, complete surrender is prescribed. Do that first, and then see for yourself whether the one Self alone exists, or whether there are two or more entities."

Bhagavan further added, "Whatever may be said to suit the different capacities of different men, the truth is, the state of Self-realisation must be beyond *triputis*. The Self is not something of which *jnana* or *ajnana* can be predicated. It is beyond *ajnana* and *jnana*. The Self is the Self; that is all that can be said of it."⁷

⁵ Ibid., 22-11-45 Afternoon. p.49.

⁶ Talk §208.

⁷ Op.cit., *Day by Day*, 22-3-46, Afternoon. p.181-2.



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A seeker asked Bhagavan, “How can it be said that the end of both these paths is the same?”

Sri Ramana replied: “Whatever the means, the destruction of the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is the goal, and as these are interdependent, the destruction of either of them causes the destruction of the other; therefore in order to achieve that state of Silence which is beyond thought and word, either the path of knowledge which removes the sense of ‘I’ or the path of devotion which removes the sense of ‘mine’, will suffice. So there is no doubt that the end of the paths of devotion and knowledge is one and the same.”⁸ ▲

⁸ *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter One, Answer to Question Eleven.

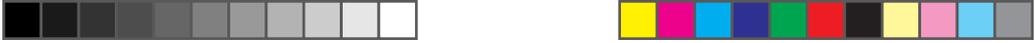
The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

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

You, the primordial
power from which time blazed down,
and the stars kindled;
Adisakti, you are the
mother of darkness and light.

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.



Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verses Six, Seven & Eight

S. RAM MOHAN

Verses six to eleven deal with the truth of the Self and the means of realising It. The experiential awareness of the Self is discussed here.

The sixth verse of the *Anubandham* starts with the query 'Who or What is God?' This is similar to the opening statement in *Brahmasutra*: '*Athato Brahmajignasa*' (Thus the enquiry into the *Brahman* starts). It is stated that the Self is the conscious-Light by which both the mind and the world shine, a truth verified and experienced by the ancient sages.

Verse 6

'Who is God?' 'He that knows the mind' 'My mind is being known by Me, the soul', 'Therefore, thou art thyself God, also since the Vedas (sacred Revelation) declare that God is Self in all'.

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.

Commentary

The verse consists of questions and answers. The first question asks what is the distinguishing mark of God? The answer is That which knows the mind. That is, it is the radiance which lights up the world which includes the body; that light is God and by which the mind is conscious of the world. The disciple objects by saying that he, the soul or jiva, (being a finite soul and therefore not one with God), is the knower of the mind. The guru ignores the objection and says that what the disciple looks upon is really God, because it is not the individual soul but the Infinite Self. What we term God is the conscious Light by which the mind is illumined.

Here, 'knowing' should be taken as meaning 'causing to shine', since the Self is not affected by the triputis (triads of knower, knowledge and the process of knowing). Authority for the conclusion is given from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* which declares in many of its verses that there is one light of Consciousness that is concealed, as the Real Self, in all the creatures. The self is the witness that knows the mind. It is that which shines without the aid of any other light. It is that which does not depend on anything else. It is that which is indicated by the notion 'I'.

We can recall the beautiful poem by Van Dyke:

'In every being there is Christ, hinted or hidden,
To be hurt or healed,
In every being, if you lift the veil,
You can see
A Christ there, without fail.'

Verse 7

'What serves as your light?' 'In the day time the Sun and in the night, the lamp' 'By what light do you know these?' 'The eye', 'What is the light that enables the eye to know this?' 'The intellect', 'By what light is this known?' 'That is I'. 'So you are the light of all lights said the Guru. 'Yes, I am That' [said the disciple].

Commentary

In traditional texts, light is employed to delineate figuratively Consciousness as the Self. We can recollect the three verses in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, where the first three Azhwars, Poygaiazhwar, Bhooththazhwar and Peyazhwar sing of the self-shining light of God.

There is an interesting story behind it. Once, these three Azhwars were stuck together in a small utterly dark room at the temple of Thirukoilur while outside heavy rains poured down. Suddenly they felt the pressing presence of a fourth person in their midst. They wanted to find out who he was. But in the total darkness, he could not be seen. (He is none other than the Lord Himself, who wanted to enjoy the company of the three Alwars, but they did not know it). To create a light so they could see the intruder, Poygaiazhwar sang the verse, “The whole world is the lamp; all the waters of the ocean are the ghee for the lamp; the effulgent Sun is the light. I have lit the lamp here today at holy feet of Lord Vishnu with the shining disc in his hand, so that all the darkness around me is removed.” Then bright light shone in the room; but still they could not see the fourth intruder. To see God, external light is not enough; what you need is the inner light, the light of consciousness.

Hence the second Azhwar, Bhooththazhwar, sang for the gift of grace. “With my love to Him as the lamp, my longing to know Him as the ghee and my mind melting in love for Him as the wick, I have lit the lamp of Consciousness in me, with my whole ego dissolving in the process of knowing Him.” Immediately, the presence of God in their midst was revealed.

Then the third Azhwar, Peyazhwar sang in rapturous terms about the brilliant vision of God as revealed to them. It can be seen that the external light helps us to reveal the objective world, yet this is inadequate. The sense-organs must be purified to capture this supremely subtle light. The sense organs first are illumined by the mind and finally, the mind by the Self. During the waking state, the same organs see with the help of external sources of light. In the dream state, the mind creates its own objects and the light with which



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they are seen. In the deep sleep state, the mind is non-existent: Yet we have the experience of deep sleep which is witnessed by the self.

The next verse is celebrated by Sri Ramana devotees for it states the truth of the identity of the self with the supreme Self and also pithily delineates the practice for experiencing this truth.

Verse 8

In the centre of the cave of The Heart, the One *Brahman* alone shines as the Self, in the form of 'I' resort to the heart; abide in the heart by diving with the mind therein, either by the quest of the self or by holding the breath and sinking in the heart with the breath. You will become one with the self thereby.

Commentary

The 'I' consciousness is the ray of the *Brahman* that is erroneously identified with body. It has to be separated from the body by the mind which turns inwards by self-enquiry. The aspirant should dive into the Heart where the source of the 'I' consciousness, the Self, resides. Once this is done, the ego or the mind is liquidated and then the Self in its true resplendence shines.

Diving into the heart is the means. Here two distinct methods are given for this. One is fixing the mind on the Self with firm resolve to locate the source of the 'I' consciousness. The other is breath control or suspension of the breath, as indicated in Verse 28 of *Ulladu Narpadu*. By this, the ego and its expanded form, the mind, become extinct and thereafter the Conscious Light of the Self will shine. ▲

(To be continued)

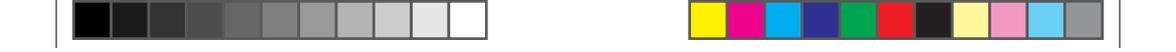


Discerning the Real through the Writings of Paul Brunton

JEFF COX

The previous *Mountain Path* featured a biography of Paul Brunton. Unlike many of us who appreciate the teachings of Ramana Maharshi but were born too late to travel to see him, Paul Brunton (“PB”) had the good fortune to meet the Maharshi in the 1930s. The reverence that PB felt for the Maharshi is evident in what he wrote after Maharshi left his body: “One night in the spring of 1950, at the very moment that a flaring starry body flashed across the sky and hovered over the Hill of the Holy Beacon, there passed out of his aged body the spirit of the dying Maharshi. He was the one Indian mystic who inspired me most, the one Indian sage whom I revered most, and his power was such that both Governor-General and ragged coolie sat together at his feet with the feeling that they were in a divine presence.

Jeff Cox was formerly the president of Snow Lion Publications which specialises in books by the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism. Since retiring, he now enjoys volunteering as a Board member of the Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation, and sharing more time with his wife and partner Christi.



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Certain factors combined to keep us apart during the last ten years of his life, but the inner telepathic contact and close spiritual affinity between us remained — and remains — vivid and unbroken. Last year he sent me this final message through a visiting friend: ‘When heart speaks to heart, what is there to say?’¹

During the years following his initial trip to India, PB first wrote *A Search in Secret India* and went on to create an impressive body of work on spiritual life. This *Mountain Path* issue offers a brief overview of some of the key ideas found in PB’s numerous books. If you would like to learn more, recommended is PB’s remarkable two volume work: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* and *The Wisdom of the Overself*. The first volume is a masterful and reasoned presentation of the reality of Mind and the unreality of an external ‘material’ universe — and describes the training needed for successful pursuit of philosophic yoga. Volume Two is an in-depth presentation of the nature of the Self, God, and the Universe. PB conveys traditional wisdom in a form that speaks to the heart and mind of the contemporary aspirant. He also discusses practices for self-realisation and philosophic insight, including the seven ultra-mystic exercises, and previews for practitioners something of the role of the sage in the world.

Mind

Mind, the Void, and Mind-in-Itself are ways that PB refers to reality. Words used for it (the Real, Absolute, *Brahman*, etc.) sound deceptively simple yet seem unattainable, perhaps because the Real is conceived as infinite and is beyond the reach of the usual ways of knowing. However, it is intimacy itself — what we are in the most fundamental sense of the term — and often termed the Self. Mind is concealed in our experience as the substance of all forms, or, using a movie analogy, it is like the screen, itself present but undetected so long as the superficial images mesmerise the unenlightened viewer. It is approached in mystical yoga by stripping away everything that is not purely it, and through this discrimination (sometimes referred

¹ <http://paulbrunton.org/notebooks/15/2#453>)





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to as *neti, neti* — not this, not this) the meditative process is brought to the threshold of Mind and rendered quiet and receptive. The unripe person often recoils in the face of its voidness; the ripe person surrenders and dissolves into it, never to be the same.

However, it would be incomplete to view the featureless Void in the negative sense only, for it is All. Everything that ever manifests is prefigured in its formless nature. Mind is the essence of the changing universe — all finite beings and things are its fleeting expressions. In Mind alone we find the unity which underlies and contains everything, because it is everything. Only in this way is non-duality truly non-dual.

Mind is pure awareness. Everyone experiences Mind at every moment in its limited forms as the states of consciousness: waking, dream, and deep sleep. These states are the activity of Mind, or in PB's language, 'ideas or thoughts', which term includes sensations, feelings, concepts, emotions, intuitions, images, actions, and visions — anything and everything conceivable or perceivable can be understood as thinking or the functioning of Mind. In the example of dream, the dreamer's mind remains unmoved and undisturbed no matter what scenes it unfolds for the persons who appear within it and who are captivated by the drama. Similarly, these ever-shifting movements of thought occupy the whole of a person's wakeful life — and the exclusive attention to the variety of these idea-images keeps one from becoming aware of their source, the Mind.

When we become more interested in the source of thought than in the thoughts themselves, we begin the journey home. The undifferentiated Mind, as it is 'prior' to its activity that appears as the manifest universe, is accessed through both mystical trance and philosophic insight. If through trance, the ego and the world appearance will be temporarily annulled so long as the trance lasts. Once it is over, the mystic will be confronted once again with the ego/world dichotomy which, by comparison, will seem illusory to what was realized in the trance. But his or her life will remain challenging in many ways, for the advanced mystic is still not fully enlightened. It is not that the unchanging nature of Mind is the real and the world

appearance is illusory. The illusion is not seeing that the world is Mind. The true philosopher (PB's term for a sage) knows directly that the so-called illusory world is the form taken by reality itself — it is the activity of Mind made manifest. This is the insight of the sage, and he or she permanently lives the realisation that Mind alone is and all appearances are appearances of the real. As the Maharshi said when asked, "It [the world] is unreal if viewed as apart from the Self and real if viewed as the Self."²

It follows that the sage has a compassionate and creative orientation to the world that is very different from the post-trance behaviour of the mystic. For when we realize that the world is the incarnation of the Real, when we realize that the vast universe is a presentation by the Mind to the Mind, the tendency to leave the world leaves us. If a sage should choose to teach the illusory nature of the world rather than its reality, it is to help aspirants break their bondage to appearances, especially their identification with the body-thought as something externally and independently real or material. It is a method to encourage practitioners to shift their attention to the unseen reality.

PB begins his central teachings by demonstrating the reality of Mind. The aspirant then understands that if something is believed to be other than Mind, this is the mistake to be corrected through philosophic training. First one must comprehend that so-called 'matter' (something external and other than mind) is thought and then realize THAT which thinks the world-ideas into appearance. Duality is the illusion that dissolves for the philosopher/sage. When we are able through this path to liberate all dualistic conceptions, however subtle, which put spirit in contrast to matter or to illusion, we transcend the greatest fallacy that has ever dominated humankind, and thereby attain permanent peace.

World Mind

Nothing lacks value in the philosophic view of experience. At the very least, the people, places, and things we experience, being thoughts,

² Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1996. p.499. Talk §516.



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point to the eternally present Mind which thinks them into existence, however fleeting they may be. And at the very most, our experiences each play their part in educating us during our multi-lifetime journey from darkness to light, from unconsciousness of our reality to full enlightenment as to our true nature. It is incorrect and irreverently dismissive to view the world which is the intelligent appearance of Mind as illusory and thus divest it of the remarkable value and education it provides the individuals evolving within its great school — a system that teaches wisdom, love and compassion, and skillful action.

Mind-in-Itself is incomprehensibly vast, anything and everything that manifests has its ultimate origin as Mind. In the ocean analogy, every wave, no matter how it is formed or how large and powerful or small and ripple-like is, after all, water. However, just as the kind of waves possible depend on many factors, such as the size and depth of the body of water, the force of the wind, etc., so too the kind of world-ideas that appear depends on many factors. Indeed, to move in thought directly from the Void-Mind to the keyboard under my fingers is too dramatic a step down from the all-powerful formless infinite. It is easy to see that in life there are many levels of intelligence and laws of manifestation operating, the higher more universal principles giving order to the lower more complex dependent arrangements. That activity or function of Mind-in-Itself that is the causal basis of all experiences, PB refers to as World-Mind. It is the ordering principle or God of this universe and its eternal vision of the World-Idea includes all pasts, presents, and futures for all beings in one inconceivable contemplation.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna has so many doubts about himself and his duty as a warrior. After receiving some teachings, he begs Krishna to reveal His true cosmic form. Krishna complies and gives Arjuna the overwhelming spiritual vision which enables him to see Krishna in His fullness — as the magnificent and awe-inspiring universal manifestor, prefiguring in its great being everything that appears in the universe. Arjuna is

overwhelmed as he sees that Krishna is the all-powerful determinant of all outcomes. Having thus granted Arjuna the grace of the cosmic vision, Krishna then urges Arjuna to accept his God-given destiny and do his duty and fight his foes — since “they are already put to death by my arrangement.”³

In PB’s language, the World-Mind knows all because it envisions all, and beneficently cares for the infinite multitude of beings according to its wisdom. It guides our development, wakes us to its Truth, opens our hearts fully that we lovingly surrender to its will, and teaches us to become clear expressions of its divinity. The World-Idea is what Arjuna was shown; it gave him the courage to do his duty as he could clearly see that his destiny and salvation were in Krishna’s hands. “The World-Idea contains the pattern, intention, direction, and purpose of the cosmos in a single unified thought of the World-Mind. Human understanding is too cramped and too finite to comprehend how this miraculous simultaneity is possible.”⁴

When we understand World-Mind to be the functioning of Mind, we also see that our manifest world is the self-externalisation of the World-Mind’s Ideas in the same way that our dream world is the externalisation of our own mind’s ideas. As PB writes: “The infinite World-Mind sees the universe in itself and itself in the universe. It is not unaware of what is happening here below. Its consciousness is perfect, which means that it embraces all possible time-series. Every event is indeed present to it but not in the way in which it would be present to a finite mind. For World-Mind grasps its World-Idea in what to us is an all-timed fixity. The accomplished world, not less than its countless tiers of evolutionary change, suffering and joy, is simultaneously and infinitely present to this inconceivable consciousness. It is erroneous therefore to believe that what is now dead past to us is the same to the World-Mind. The latter views the universe not only in succession but also simultaneously. Such a state, such a higher dimension in which past, present, and future time are

³ See Chapter 11 of the *The Bhagavad Gita*, ‘The Universal Form’, verse 33.

⁴ <http://paulbrunton.org/notebooks/26/1#87>



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coequal can of course no longer be called time in the human sense of the term.”⁵

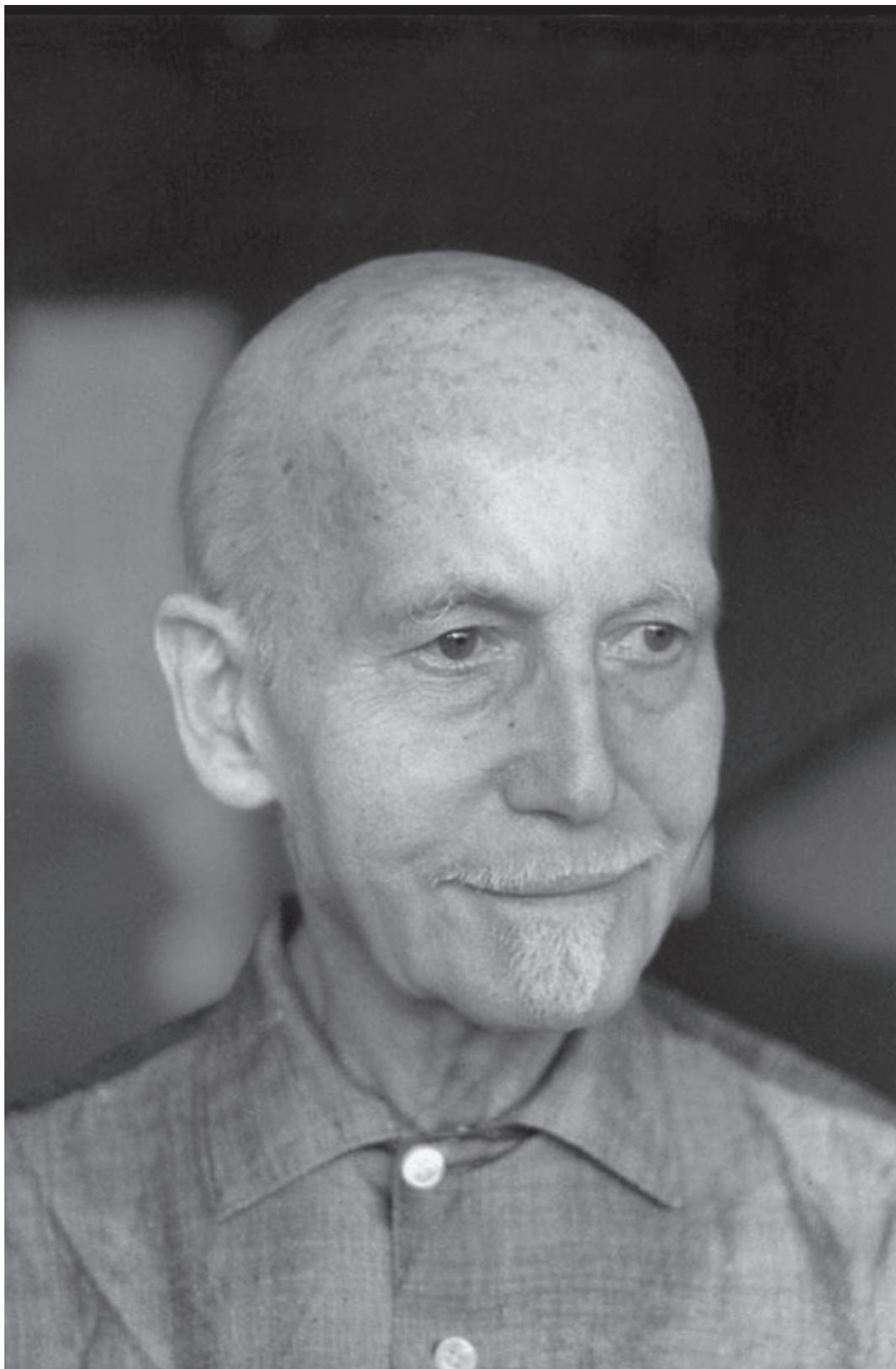
Mind is timeless, for it is beyond any reference to time at all. World-Mind is eternal in so far as its contemplation contains the universe of experiences for all creatures in an ever-present now. As we become more intuitively aware, the sense of the presence of a guiding perfection grows. The experiences of interconnection and synchronicity also give hints to the vast workings of World-Mind. There is an inconceivable intelligence, love, and power at the heart of each being that brings us the lessons we need to learn as we evolve.

The World-Mind’s all-inclusive Idea of the universe may be perfect and all-accomplished from its standpoint, but for the individual centres of consciousness within that great Idea events must unfold sequentially in space-time according to the nature of each individual. The World-Mind’s vision has to include the variety of space-time frameworks in order to manifest experiences for the beings within it. Thus we live a double life: there is the eternal being that we are in the World-Mind, and there is the evolving personality that is unfolding the World-Idea’s vision for it. As finite beings, prior to awakening to our eternity, we feel the reality of these experiences like mesmerized subjects, or like characters in a dream. PB writes: “Earth life is but a dream, lived out in a dream physical body amid dream environment. Dream experiences are only ideas; during sleep-dream man sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells exactly as he does during waking-dream. Hence waking is but materialized ideas, but still ideas. God’s cosmic dream: all universal activities are but different ideas of God, divine ideation made material and thrown upon the screen of human consciousness. The cosmic illusion is impinged upon man’s sense and seen from within by Mind through consciousness, sensation, and bodily organ.”⁶

There are two forces in the World-Mind responsible for the unfoldment of the universe and of the lives within it: karma and

⁵*The Wisdom of the Overself*, ‘The World-Mind’.

⁶<http://paulbrunton.org/notebooks/21/3#23>





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grace. The karmic impressions of all things and beings in the universe are latent within the World-Mind until they are self-activated and externalised as the space-time world for individual creatures. It is karma that maintains the form, energy, habit of anything, and each has its own individual character as it arises, persists, and dissolves. Beginning with human stage, the laws of karma also determine the consequences of actions, whether they are moral or immoral. Additionally, there is the ever-present, ever-shining power of grace that inspires the karmic processes to change and evolve forms so as to better express the World-Mind's own perfection (though perfection in manifestation is not fully achievable). Grace may be thought of as active in a number of ways. One important way is as the intuitions that guide, evolve and transform karmic habit patterns into creative expressions and thereby promote our growth as human beings. It may seem like an endless, often painful process, but happy results — our spiritual awakening — are guaranteed by the World-Idea.

Overself

All beings are rooted in the World-Mind and each has its own unique evolutionary path to unfold, each has its own slice of the World-Idea pie, as it were. As beings within the World-Mind, we are divine children of the World-Mind and partake of the divine qualities and grandeur of the World-Mind but not its amplitude, scope, and power. Each individual is like a ray of the Sun, and serves to complete in form a part of the World-Idea. PB calls this ray the Overself. On the one hand, the Overself is unchanging and eternally part of the World-Mind and on the other, it presides over the reincarnational series from unconscious creature to divinely inspired sage. The Overself of each person is distinct from that of another in the sense that each presides over a different series of reincarnations, presides over distinct destinies. It holds in latency the memory traces of the innumerable incarnations that in a sense distinguish one Overself from another. Each Overself reveals different divine possibilities and manifests a unique genius. Like a single ray, it shines on a particular person, and can be thought of as and experienced as presiding in the heart though

it is also the consciousness that encompasses the entire panorama of each person's experience — whereas the World-Mind is like the Sun and shines on all equally.

When we consider self, we find it to be three-fold: the physical body; the personal consciousness which consists of feelings, thoughts, emotions, desires, images, impulses; and the impersonal observer which knows the first two categories as contents of consciousness. The body and personality are ephemeral, shifting phases of the self and by themselves give no sense of an unchanging identity. The persistent and permanent sense of 'I' that accompanies us throughout our life is a testament to the presence of the impersonal observer. Its presence gives us the illusion that we will live forever, because, the Overself exists in eternity. While the series of reincarnations is a kind of immortality, it lacks the conscious unbroken continuity that comes with Overself realisation — this is true deathlessness and is achieved by transcending the transient parts of self. The personal consciousness that has evolved after so many incarnations, with so much effort, is not swept away in realisation. It becomes subordinate to the Overself and exists in its awareness. It is one's identity as the Overself that supplants the former mistaken ego identity. The Overself is the divine element in humans. It is our 'place' in the Real, one in essence with World-Mind and Mind but distinguishable in function.

The answer to the inquiry 'Who am I?' awakens us to our nature as pure awareness, Mind. This is the completion of the mystic quest. The answer to 'What am I?' is the complementary realisation that the ego/world are the temporal and spatial unfolding of the Overself's function as part of the World-Mind. Just as World-Mind is the eternal activity of Mind, so too is the person/world we experience the everlasting activity of the eternal Overself. We are, from this perspective, divine participants in a divine drama. With this realisation, one moves beyond mysticism and becomes a philosopher/sage. Freed of egotism, the personality remains as a servant of the Overself. Instead of blocking the light that we are, the personality is now a vehicle of enlightened living.



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The Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation was formed after the passing of PB to publish and preserve his writings. Although PB ceased his publishing efforts in the early fifties to lead a more retired life, he continued to write almost daily. There is a vast archive of unpublished material in addition to the sixteen posthumously published volumes of *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* that were compiled and edited by the Foundation with the help of many volunteers. This work is a treasure house of teachings on almost every aspect of the path. Please visit www.paulbrunton.org to explore a digital version of these volumes or to acquire them through our publisher, Larson Publications. ▲

Nightwatch

Upahar

Gurudev,
heart's light and timeless treasure,
a flood of beauty in the night's ancient desert,
 accept these fragile offerings:
this boundless dome, a crown of inner stars,
this constant, tender fire of adoration,
the circling, unanswerable prayer,
 this wandering, homeless joy;

 accept this sleepless wish:
for the unbroken Name in every ruined temple,
for grateful heartsong never ceasing to flow,
for quiet love at every step prevailing,
and the bright dark flame of knowledge to consume,
 now and forever,
all that is not simply, infinitely You,
 Gurudev.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

My Spiritual Journey with Bhagavan

R. RAVINDRAN

Introduction

Like many people I was not concerned about spiritual matters for many years until I married my caring wife Srikumari, became father to my two fine sons Suman and Sajan and had reached my forties. As a scientist I was engaged in conducting seminars and classes in IT Quality Management in my office. Over a period of time the number of training days increased so that I landed in a situation where I spent almost every night thinking about the next seminar or about office problems. This resulted in sleepless nights which created health problems and I would become giddy while conducting the courses during the day. Suddenly in the middle of a lecture, I would feel a jerk in my head, as if I was about to fall down. Somehow with great difficulty I would manage to continue the lecture by standing before a table, using it as a back rest or holding on to it for support. When I tried to force my mind to sleep, the number of thoughts increased



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and completely affected my ability to rest. When my mind was creating unlimited problems for me I thought, “Oh God! Why have you created the human mind? Have you not made a great blunder by doing that? You should have left human beings too without minds.”

Then I started interesting myself in the peculiar nature of the mind. I realised that our hands or legs can be moved or stopped at will, but our thinking is not under our control and cannot be stopped at will. This was a fascinating discovery and I started reading about the mind.

My First Acquaintance with Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

At this time some visitors came to our house. They were devotees of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and were family friends of my in-laws. When they talked about Bhagavan, I vaguely remembered his name, as I had heard about him in my school days. They told us about their recent visit to Ramanasramam and said that visiting Tiruvannamalai and Ramanasramam gave a lot of solace and peace of mind. They said that when people who were mentally distressed because of the death of close family members or because of disastrous business losses went to Ramanasramam and sat in the [Old] Meditation Hall before Bhagavan’s photo, their agitated minds automatically calmed down and they slowly recovered from their distress.

I listened keenly to them and immediately felt a strong urge to know more about Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi as I too felt mentally disturbed, because I was not able to calm my mind even when desperately wanting to sleep at night. Seeing my interest, my mother-in-law Mrs Premleela Arunagiri brought me a book on Bhagavan Ramana borrowed from their friend. I was very happy and started reading it.

Sri Ramana Maharshi says that the straight path to mind control lies in finding out what the mind is. His famous book *Who am I?* contains the first set of instructions given by him. I immediately felt confident that the answers to all my questions would be found with Sri Ramana.

Great Respect for Sri Ramana

The book gave a lot of details about his life history and his important teachings. This information about the Maharshi developed a great deal of respect for him in my mind. His life history itself is a powerful message to mankind. He lived as he taught and knowing this brought me solace. It took me almost a month to read that book. Every day I used to tell my wife about what I had read and we used to wonder how a human being could combine such simplicity and divinity and be able to stay in one place for 54 years after renouncing normal life at the tender age of sixteen. We felt that he must be a divine being, who incarnated as a human being in order to help mankind. I started thinking about going to Tiruvannamalai and Ramanasramam at the earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile one day I had a dream, that I was sleeping on my bed and that the Maharshi was sitting on my bed facing me and trying to wake me up with his hand, saying, like a command in Tamil, '*Thoonginathupothum, yezhundiru!*' ('Enough of sleep, wake up!'). I woke up with a shock, taking some time to come to my senses. I then realised that I had been dreaming, and, looking around, saw that it was early morning. But I still felt the touch of Sri Ramana on my shoulder. I could hardly believe that this had been a mere dream, because it felt so real to me.

My First Visit to Tiruvannamalai

After a few days, one morning when I got up, I felt very strongly that I must go to Tiruvannamalai that day. It was a holiday and also my birthday. I told my wife that I was going to Tiruvannamalai that very day. She was surprised but agreed. Normally on a birthday we would all go to some local temple and spend the time together with our family. However, my desire to go to Tiruvannamalai was so strong that day that I could not even consider doing these things. I took a bus from Thiruvanmiyur to Saidapet.

At Saidapet bus stand I got another bus, bound for Tiruvannamalai. When I got a seat near the window I felt so happy, knowing that my journey to Tiruvannamalai had started. While travelling to



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Tiruvannamalai I had a strange feeling that is difficult to explain: I felt as if I was going to see my beloved after a long time. When the bus was nearing Tiruvannamalai, now and then I got a glimpse of the hill standing majestically like Lord Siva himself. After some time I saw the full and grand view of the hill. My throat choked and I felt like crying. I reached Tiruvannamalai around noon and was in a dilemma about whether to go to Ramanasramam first or to the Big Temple. I decided to go to the temple first, as Sri Ramana himself had done when he came to Tiruvannamalai. So I took an auto and reached the Arunachaleswarar Temple.

While there I also went down to Patalalingam cellar to which the young Sri Ramana had moved to escape the harassment of the young boys who had thrown pebbles at him, probably thinking that he, who was their own age, was just pretending to be a sadhu.

My First Visit to Ramanasramam

Next I took an auto to Ramanasramam which is at the foot of the hill, on its other side to the town. As I entered the Asramam a strange feeling overwhelmed me: I felt as if Sri Ramana could see me entering and said to me, "Come, my dear son! It took you so long to come to me! But I am happy that you have come at last." I sat in the big meditation hall [the Samadhi Hall], where I saw many foreigners sitting with their eyes closed. I did not know how to do meditation, so I sat there with my eyes closed and reflected on Sri Ramana's life history and wondered how a young boy of 16 years, from a normal family, could leave his home suddenly and attain to such a level of Divinity, attracting so many devotees from across the world while maintaining silence.

Then I went to the ashram book shop and told the counter head that this was my first visit to the ashram and that I was interested in knowing more about Sri Ramana. He gave me a large photo of Sri Ramana that could be displayed in the hall of my house. He also gave me some books, including *Who am I?* and an audio cassette of the song *Aksharamanamalai* composed by the Maharshi. He advised me to listen to this song whenever I found the time. He also gave me a book containing all Sri Ramana's poems and their meaning.

I then sat outside on the ashram veranda for some time. It was a peaceful scene — peacocks, monkeys and dogs wandered about there, living in harmony through the blessing of Sri Ramana. I realized that I had at last found my spiritual home and left Tiruvannamalai that evening entirely satisfied. I reached home before dinner. My family was waiting for me. I narrated my trip to Tiruvannamalai to them. Everyone listened with great interest and they all agreed that we should make a trip to Tiruvannamalai together at the earliest opportunity.

Visit to Tiruvannamalai with my Family

Within the next two weeks we all went to Tiruvannamalai. I took them to all the places associated with Sri Ramana. This time we also visited Virupaksha Cave where Sri Ramana had stayed for several years. I sat in the same cave where Sri Ramana used to sit and my sons took a photo of me there.

Bhagavan enters our House and becomes also our ‘Thatha’

My wife laminated the photo of Sri Ramana that we had bought in Tiruvannamalai and hung it on the wall in a prominent place in our front hall. So Sri Ramana became our Bhagavan. Our sons’ friends who were not familiar with Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi thought, at first, that this was a photo of our sons’ ‘*Thatha*’ (Grandfather) and that this was why it had been given such a prominent place in our hall. So Bhagavan Ramana also became our ‘Thatha’. I also took another laminated photo of Bhagavan to my office and placed it opposite my table, and I looked through his eyes and listened for (his) inner voice whenever I needed some help in taking some important decisions.

We started listening to the song *Aksharamanamalai* from the cassette we had bought. It was so nice that we would listen to it very often. I started reading Bhagavan’s books one by one, and tried my best to understand their meaning. I also read a book giving the meaning of each verse of *Aksharamanamalai*. By then I had totally surrendered to Ramana. I slowly began developing an inexplicable calmness in my mind and my anxieties gradually started to fade away. The feeling evolved that I should do whatever was my duty with



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complete concentration and with utter detachment. I had developed a strong feeling that if we could work without ego then Bhagavan Ramana would guide us and with his Grace all good things would happen to our family. Then, one by one many significant phenomena, at least for me, started happening in our life. The following are a list of fortuitous events where I truly felt it was Bhagavan's silent presence which helped us overcome a distressing situation in our family.

Many of my colleagues used to buy flats from different housing schemes. They also persuaded us to try to buy a flat. As our priority was to educate our sons we did not have any interest in buying a flat initially. Later we saw the advantage of buying a flat: we could get a significant income tax reduction if we were repaying a housing loan instead of paying rent. After some time we came across an advertisement for flats for sale by Central Government Organization. We applied for one. All the conditions were favourable. But suddenly at the last minute, because of an entirely unexpected obstacle, we could not buy the flat. All my family members became very upset about this. I too was very depressed for some time. We felt that we had missed a great opportunity and that we would not get another chance like that again. Slowly, by Bhagavan's Grace, we all recovered our equanimity. Some years passed.

That my sons gained admission to their chosen Engineering courses was the first wonder as they both were given seats at the last moment from their preferred colleges. We felt that the seats had been reserved for them. By joining the engineering college, our sons had fulfilled our dreams for them. My wife and I were very happy. But, as we had to pay the heavy college fees for 'payment seats' for both sons, we were not able to even think of buying a flat for another ten years. All my relatives who had already bought their houses, pitied me, saying, "Poor Ravi alone has not bought a house so far!" because all my sisters and brothers had. It was very humiliating, but we bore with it all. It was a teaching in patience that kept us going during this hard time.

Added to that when my sons were doing their Engineering in Chennai I had to face three transfers from my office, from Chennai

to Bangalore, from Chennai to Trivandrum and again from Chennai to Mumbai. In every transfer I had moved alone, but I felt that the guiding presence of Bhagavan Ramana was always with me. I had two photos of Bhagavan and put one photo in my residence and the other one in my new office room opposite to my seat, so that I could always look at him. Each time I completed the given assignment in the new place, I asked for a transfer back to Chennai which I eventually got. All the three transfers were managed without being frustrated, and I attribute this to Grace. In one way I was so lucky to be alone on assignment as it gave me the opportunity to think of Bhagavan often. Whenever I was uncomfortable I would think of Bhagavan and chant *Aksharamanamalai* for some time and my mind became calm.

After some years my sons completed their education and became engineers. Within a short time both my sons got suitable jobs in a good IT companies. I attribute this to Bhagavan's Grace but with the prerequisite that the Grace was available so freely because our family were focused on his Grace. Did not Bhagavan say if we take one step towards him, he will take nine steps towards us? When I was on transfer my wife had stayed alone with my sons in Chennai and managed all the affairs during our sons' studies. I would pray to Bhagavan Ramana to guide her in every one of her actions. I would feel internally a quite deep confidence that Bhagavan will take care of everything in my family, though I am away from them on transfer.

After some time unexpectedly another opportunity arose for buying a home and this time we were able to buy a very nice modern flat in a pleasant and familiar location. It was far better than the flats that we had missed buying. We therefore felt that the devotion to Bhagavan had given us the patience and equanimity to wait for the right moment whatever the 'facts' to the contrary. It has taught me that those opportunities will keep coming if we are in the right frame of mind and heart throughout our lives, so that if we miss an opportunity there is no reason to despair: it only means that something better is waiting for us. Our duty is to keep making the efforts as best we can, and when the proper time comes Bhagavan will give us whatever he feels we deserve.

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During this period another marvel happened because of Bhagavan's Grace that both of our sons got married one by one within a period of three years. My wife had made lots of effort in getting both our sons married, but we strongly felt it was because of Bhagavan's Grace that everything went on well. Both my sons got one son each and made us Thatha and Patti (Grandfather and Grandmother) and we are all happy.

My Spiritual Journey with Bhagavan has been a Blissful Journey

I retired on 31 January 2012. After my retirement I had a lot of time at my disposal, I observed that without any effort on my part my mind very often thought about Sri Ramana, his teachings and about other spiritual subjects. I am so grateful to Bhagavan for his Grace for helping us face life and its inevitable challenges in a peaceful manner. I realised that the question "Who am I?" definitely stops the thought stream and helps us to think about the real nature of our "I". I still find it difficult to subdue the thoughts in my mind if disturbed by some incident. So I know that I need to practise more and progress further. But Bhagavan has assured us that if we continue the practice of subduing the thoughts and feelings in our mind every day, then our mind will gradually become more tamed and we will be able to subdue our thoughts and feelings even in very difficult and stressful situations. We therefore need to practise constantly, in a sustained manner, but of course Bhagavan's Grace is a must. ▲

Aksharamanamalai Commentary

The ashram has started serialising the English translation of Muruganar's commentary on *Aksharamanamalai* on Facebook. This is the first time an English translation of Muruganar's commentary is being made available to the public.

Please go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaMaharshi>



Hidden Door To Healing

The True Value of Disappointment

PHILIP PEGLER

When we accept our disappointment at our failures,
God immediately returns to us.

— St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Those devout members of the provincial convent community in France, who cared for a certain self-effacing, young Catholic nun, named Thérèse during her final illness towards the close of the nineteenth century, had already begun to become aware of the radiant qualities, which would rapidly earn her world-wide recognition as a great saint soon after her premature death.

So much so that Thérèse's attendants in the infirmary, including three of her own sisters, had begun to record her every utterance for posterity — and these last talks in English translation make for inspiring yet harrowing reading. They give us a sober glimpse of the great suffering entailed in facing up to grave illness at that time,

Philip Pegler first encountered Bhagavan's teachings in England in 1966. Three years later he visited the ashram for the first time and was resident there until 1974. He recently published a book on the English mystic Clare Cameron, *Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace*.



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supported by little more than solicitude and the most rudimentary health care, which proved powerless to stem the remorseless progress of Thérèse's disease of tuberculosis.¹

Here are fragments of conversation, which pierce our indifference and leave us cleansed — stripped of complacency as if we have received the gentle reproach of a most profound Love, which created us and knows far better than we do of what we are truly capable of enduring.

All Thérèse's sayings during this critical period are telling and poignant, but the single sentence chosen to introduce this article, moved me particularly when I first saw it. These few words were murmured by her in a spirit of great fortitude in the midst of her indescribable ordeal during the month of September 1897 when she died at the age of just twenty four.

That one simple sentence somehow expressed the essence of the devotional spiritual path I had been endeavouring to follow all my adult life. As such it resonated deeply with a long struggle to release my own stubborn self-will in years gone by, but it also connected with my present experience in a more distinct and immediate way.

The saying by Therese strongly reminded me of a similar piece of sound advice I had found in an inspiring essay written by an English spiritual writer I knew well, who had been my friend and mentor when I was growing up. Much to my dismay, I had mislaid her article just when I needed to refer to it — but then it turned up unexpectedly in a book of all places where it had been put for safe-keeping only to be lost none the less. Finally I had been granted another chance to explore this perceptive teaching anew, and I was only too glad to be helped in the task by this further wise insight from a courageous French saint, who I had long admired for her single-minded dedication in the face of hardship.

Word of the young prodigy had spread far and wide following her death and later I was intrigued to discover that even Ramana Maharshi in far-off India had come to know something of young Therese's remarkable life.

¹ *St. Thérèse of Lisieux — Her Last Conversations*, translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke (Washington: ICS Publications 1977).

Delicate as a child, she had been afflicted by a mystery illness marked out by seizures and delirium so severe that her anxious relatives had despaired of her recovery. Sri Ramana heard a brief account of the miraculous healing that had come to her when a statue of the Madonna by her bedside became animated to her inner sight seeming to bless her with *a ravishing smile*; Bhagavan indicated in his inimitable way that this phenomenon was due to the depth of her devotion and although such a rapture would bring temporary joy, it would not lead to *abiding peace*.²

With a spiritual maturity astonishing in one so young, Thérèse subsequently wrote that when we accept bitter disappointment at the heedless manner in which we may have fallen short in our own estimation, then God returns to us. In other words when we no longer sit in harsh judgement upon ourselves for our faults, we find a natural sense of deep peace restored in the blessed relief of forgiveness, which is none other than our own. Somehow this simple gesture of self-acceptance is enough suddenly to open some hidden door to allow the grace of healing to flood through our inward being — or else to fall silently over time upon our most obscure suffering like merciful rain.

It may seem surprising to envisage the stern fact of disappointment as offering any healing potential whatever, but the hard experience of failure can indeed provide the better way, according to my late mentor, the fine nature poet, Clare Cameron.

In a thoughtful essay with that title, indicating the true value of those frustrating setbacks we inevitably encounter in daily life, she offered a sensible explanation, which tallies entirely with Therese's wise insights.

It seems curious how I simply could not find this valuable piece of advice when I urgently wanted to include it in a biography of Clare I was writing, yet discovered it easily enough once the book entitled *Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace*, was completed in 2013. Such a salutary lesson in timing and patience has not been lost on me.

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §393.



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When we are prevented from doing the things we so much like to do, we feel frustrated and may brood over these denials. But though we do not see it then, there is a very good reason.

When our dear ones are taken from us; when we are obliged to give up our homes for just one room; when there are so many calls on our time and thought that we have to lay aside our gifts – for painting, music or writing – there are very good reasons.

When some rough awakening shocks us out of our comfort and security, out of our tranquil days “– and we have begun to re-make our own little world, there is good reason.

Most of us pass our lives away eating the husks of life. Within them, beneath the rind, is a sweeter fruit than ever we have tasted. How shall we find it unless the rind is peeled away by Wisdom greater than our own, by a Love whose ways are strange and bewildering to us, but knows very well what It is about.

Until the outer fails us, we may never have to seek for That which not only abides through all change, all disappointment, all sorrow, but takes us safely through these deep waters and teaches us as It does so.

Disappointments point to our attachments with unerring accuracy and they are also closely linked to our intimate sense of self-esteem, which is why they are so hard to acknowledge and accept. It is a strange fact furthermore that human beings generally learn far more through failure than success. This is because when we find the strength and courage to accept the unacceptable, we grow immeasurably in inward stature, whereas when we bask in the glow of personal satisfaction, our self-concern increases — and we are more likely to drift into complacency.

Actually it is quite normal to feel disappointment from time to time, but it is our attitude to such painful experiences that is altogether more crucial. Disappointments may be superficial, but more often they run deep because they are closely linked with ideals and aspirations we have long cherished. Sometimes too our hopes and dreams are bound to be denied if they are unrealistic and it takes genuine humility to admit that is the case. We are redeemed by our own honesty because whenever we are courageous enough to admit

our own limitations, the strength of truth surges up unexpectedly to remind us of our innate nobility. In this way we become renewed in hope and find fresh will to meaning, bringing us the tenacity of purpose to proceed upon our life's journey with a deeper degree of trust.

St. Thérèse – this dedicated nun, who was to be elevated so soon to sanctity within the Catholic Church – found her true vocation in following the path of divine love. In so doing, she showed supreme devotion to her spiritual ideals made manifest in the figure of Jesus Christ and also the Virgin Mary, from whom she was convinced she had received such a miraculous healing as a child. But she was also gifted with the universal vision of a born mystic, for whom it was natural to perceive the mystery of God's providence, expressed in minute details of daily life.

It is for her 'little way' of simple obedience in small matters — showing the unassuming virtue of a childlike humility — that she has perhaps become best known and loved.

By simply linking together a few generations, one can clearly go back in time to visualise the quiet, unfolding drama of Thérèse's life. My own teacher, Clare was also a remarkable, natural mystic, whose life coincided with that of the French saint — but only just. Clare was born in London's East End in 1896, the year before Therese passed away in the small Normandy town of Lisieux, just across the English Channel. Always physically fragile, Thérèse's sojourn on earth was all too brief, but Clare lived on in sprightly vigour to the ripe old age of 86, dying only relatively recently in the early 1980s.

It is fascinating to contrast these two pioneers of profoundly authentic feminine spirituality in successive eras — both sensitive figures sweet of disposition, but heroic in their daring exploration of the interior, spiritual landscape. Such an exploration is not at all an escape from the responsibility of daily life, but a divestment of all that would hinder the light of Truth. Hence it is a thorough process of purification, but often an experience bare of consolation and requiring great resilience.

Thérèse and then Clare in her turn were resolute and uncompromising in quest of the wholeness of spiritual perfection.



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The French nun strictly followed her impassioned vocation in the tranquil but austere obscurity of the cloister, while the English poet was drawn to a life of unstinting service in an entirely different way — in the midst of the tumultuous activities of a rapidly changing world torn by the bitter conflict of two world wars.

A mood of intense religiosity prevailed in late nineteenth century France and from a tender age, Thérèse fervently longed to embrace sanctity and even the prospect of martyrdom to be realised in an early death, in a manner inconceivable to modern sensibility. Yet, within the strict enclosure of her convent, she remained totally unpretentious as well as modern in the utterly fresh and spontaneous way she broke free of traditional religious constraints. With penetrating insight and humour, she sought to dispel the notion that saintliness was the unattainable privilege of a special elect. The power and quiet authority of her utterances in her last illness are unmistakable and incisive.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux's radical message that 'small is beautiful' was echoed by Clare Cameron, who always emphasised the hidden beauty of ordinary things. In her unabashed and unconventional way, this wise woman, who as a prolific writer and magazine editor in the Buddhist as well as the Christian mystical tradition was destined to complete a long life close to Nature, never tired of reminding her loyal readers of the vital importance of recovering a sense of the sacred.

Clare was generous of spirit and endeared herself to her many friends and admirers, while she placing no limits on the manner in which noble qualities may be expressed by different individuals with varying gifts. She once said memorably that when life is lit by love and shaped by wisdom, it becomes an art open to all. It is the unforgettable essence of her spiritual teaching.

Most of our anxiety and distress come through resistance to change.

Relief and freedom come through flowing with it.

Let us remember these things, in the frustrations and disappointments, in crises and sorrow. They can be keys to open up the Kingdom of God within us, where there is neither limitation nor discord, nor hurt of any kind – but a most tender Love that meets our deepest needs and fills our hearts with joy. ▲



Going Back the Way We Came

SRIRAM ANANTHANARAYANAN

An amusing incident took place a few years ago during one of my visits to Ramanasramam. Late one evening, a small frog entered my cottage through the bathroom window. Inadvertently, I went rather close to him. It is difficult to say which one of us was more surprised. The little one expressed his surprise by leaping off the wall and onto the floor below. I made a rapid exit out of the bathroom. A little later, the small frog found his way into the living room. I had to find a way to evict this visitor from my room. By tapping a stick close to where he sat, I hoped to coax this unwelcome guest to make an exit through the main door. He moved a couple of feet in the

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correct direction, but then he reversed course and jumped right back, barely avoiding me! I had to come up with a better strategy. There was a plastic dustbin in my room. If I could succeed in placing the dustbin over the little one, then I could drag the dustbin across the room and evict the visitor through the main entrance. With dustbin in hand, I approached him. With one quick movement, I placed the bin over the spot where he was seated, but he was quicker with an agile jump that would be the envy of an Olympic athlete. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I had to abandon this strategy as well. Somehow I managed to get him back into the bathroom, closed the bathroom door and retired for the night.

As I awoke early next morning, I gingerly stepped inside the bathroom. There he was, sitting inside a bucket! I took a doormat and covered the bucket in one quick action. Ha, he was still inside! However, my exultation was short-lived as this modern-day Houdini escaped from the bucket in no time, and sat nonchalantly on the bathroom wall! I had to throw in the towel! May Bhagavan's Will be done! With this prayer, I closed the bathroom door and went into the living room. After a few minutes, I entered the bathroom once again, hoping to take my bath somehow. To my amazement and great relief, the little visitor had disappeared! I thanked Bhagavan for his grace. The frog had gone out through the window. Although I had made many attempts to catch him and send him out through the main door, *he went back only by the way he came!*

Later, I read about an incident that had taken place in the physical presence of Bhagavan.¹ In the hall, where Bhagavan used to sit, there was a chimney, which was closed on all sides with a steel mesh except at the bottom. One day, a small bird entered into this chimney through the bottom. Forgetting the way it came, it made desperate attempts to escape through all the closed routes. Taking this as an example, Bhagavan stated that the efforts of this bird for freedom are unsuccessful because they are directed upwards, the way of bondage, instead of downwards, the way it came. Similarly, a man's efforts to

¹ 'The Bird in a Chimney', *Bhagavan Ramana – The Friend of All*, p.201.

attain freedom are unsuccessful because they are directed outward, the way of bondage, *instead of inward, the way he came*.

On another occasion,² a young man, having travelled a long distance to reach Ramanasramam, requested Bhagavan to tell him the path to moksha (liberation). With a smile, Bhagavan said, “All right then, *go the way you came*.” Bhagavan then left the hall. The perplexed young man turned to the others in the hall in obvious discomfiture. One of them explained to the young man that Bhagavan’s words meant that if one investigates and pursues the path from which the ‘I’ arises, one will attain moksha. The book ‘Who am I?’ was then given to the young man, who was astonished at this interpretation. He then left taking Bhagavan’s words as *upadesa* (teaching).

Bhagavan’s emphasis on *atma vichara*, the quest to know one’s true nature, can be supported by scientific observation and reasoning. The body is ever changing. Science reveals that the average lifetime of cells in the human body is about seven years. The body of a young man is entirely different from that of his childhood even at the level of cells in the body. Therefore, one cannot be the body. What about the mind? The mind is only the flow of thoughts. Thoughts are fleeting and can be observed. So, thoughts are also objects, though subtle and not the subject. Therefore, one cannot be the mind. The question then arises quite naturally, “If I am not the body or the mind, then who am I?” In *Upadesa Saram* (The Essence of Instruction),³ Bhagavan points out that the ‘I-thought’, the limited notion of a separate self, is the root of all thoughts, and states:

When one turns within and searches
Whence this ‘I’ thought arises,
The shamed ‘I’ vanishes.
And wisdom’s quest begins. (19)

Sustained attention directed at the source of the ‘I-thought’ results in turning inward and realising one’s true nature. Bhagavan

² Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 2nd Dec 1945.

³ *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001. p.108.



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has provided a path that makes no assumptions and is based on direct and firsthand investigation. This approach appeals greatly to the scientific temperament of the skeptical modern mind. The path is also universal, as it is totally independent of religious belief, caste, language, gender, economic status, nationality or any other superficial label. To attain freedom from suffering, the only requirement is to turn inward and realize one's true nature. This can happen in an instant. However, many of us discover that turning inward is not so easy due to our deep-rooted conditioning. A flash of intuition into one's true nature is called *satori* in the Zen Buddhist tradition. If such a glimpse is bestowed by the grace of Bhagavan, as many have recounted,⁴ it serves as motivation for pursuing the spiritual journey. Turning inward to the source of the 'I-thought' can be compared to taking a U-turn while driving a car. If the car is travelling at a high speed, a certain amount of preparation is necessary before the car can take a smooth U-turn. So also, turning inward may require adequate preparation and happen gradually. It is for this reason Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* begins with *Karma Yoga*.

Disinterested action
Surrendered to the Lord
Purifies the mind and points
The way to *moksha*. (3)

Activities that are driven by selfish desire and the craving for specific results keep the mind turned outward. When actions are done as an offering to the Lord and results are accepted with equanimity, the mind is gradually prepared to turn inward. This is the rationale for *Karma Yoga*, discussed in detail in Chapter Three of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The repetition of the name of God or a mantra is called *japa*. Bhagavan's teachings regarding *japa* are discussed in a recent article in the *Mountain Path*.⁵ By starting with hymns of worship and

⁴ Godman, David (ed.), *The Power of the Presence*, Three Volumes.

⁵ Grimes, John, 'Japa', *Mountain Path*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Jan-Mar 2014, p.37.

proceeding to *japa* and *dhyana* (meditation), the mind gains devotion and the strength to turn inward. *Pranayama* (regulating the breath) is one of the steps of *Ashtanga Yoga*, the eight-fold path of Patanjali Maharshi.⁶ Bhagavan points out that mind and breath are like two branches that fork out from a single root. Therefore, regulating the breath is useful as this naturally helps to regulate the thoughts. The practice of Karma Yoga, *japa*, *dhyana* and *pranayama*, succinctly described in the first half of *Upadesa Saram*, may be regarded as preparation for the extroverted mind to take the U-turn to the Self. The suitability and the need for these practices depend on the *samskaras* (innate tendencies) of the individual. When the U-turn is completed through the practice of *atma vichara*, the mind dissolves in the Self.

Where this 'I' notion fades,
Now there as I, as I, arises
The One, the very Self, The Infinite. (20)

Here we must speak in hushed tones, as this ineffable state is beyond the reach of words. Words can at best serve as pointers to that which is beyond verbal description. Bhagavan put it thus: "The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation."⁷ The spiritual journey is now complete as one realizes one's true nature, which is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). The Jnani transcends the false identification with the body-mind-intellect and abides as the Self. About the necessity of *atma vichara*, Bhagavan said, "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. Having realised the Self, nothing remains to be known, because it is perfect Bliss, it

⁶ Swami Venkatesananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Divine Life Society.

⁷ Venkataramiah, M (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §28.

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is the All.”⁸ From the highest standpoint, even the journey is only an illusion. Bhagavan said, “Seeing God or the Self is only being the Self or yourself. Seeing is being. You, being the Self, want to know how to attain the Self. It is something like a man being at Ramanasramam asking how many ways are there to reach Ramanasramam and which is the best way for him.”⁹

One of the principal *Upanishads* is the *Mandukya Upanishad*. The Sanskrit word ‘*Manduka*’ means ‘frog’. So the name of this *Upanishad* may be translated as ‘through a frog’. It is said that studying the *Mandukya Upanishad* alone is adequate for liberation. For me, the encounter with a frog at Ramanasramam served as inspiration to reflect on the marvellous *Upanishad* of modern times, the *Upadesa Saram!* ▲

⁸ *Maharshi's Gospel*, Bk. 2, Ch. 1, 2000. p.38.

⁹ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17-10-46.

Learn How to Chant *Aksharamanamalai*

Aksharamanamalai was born from the divine love Sri Ramana Maharshi experienced towards Arunachala. This new android app will patiently teach English and Tamil speakers how to correctly chant the verses one by one. The meaning of each verse is included so that the prayerful intention behind each verse is clear.

The new app ‘Learn to chant *Aksharamanamalai*’ is available at <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ramana.learn-to-chant-aksharamanamalai>

Both android and iphone app are available from the ashram radio station ‘Voice of Arunachala’ at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/voice-of-arunachala/id908681555?ls=1&mt=8>
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ramana.voiceofarunachala>



Spiritual Experiences and Collections of Concepts

Part One

JAMES CHARLTON

A man sits on a rock by the track to Arunachala's summit. He says: 'You can relax now.' Later, a woman says: 'You've come to the right place.' The passage of words through the mind slows down. Ideas and concepts gradually fall away.

As I climb, I'm still thinking, but observing the thoughts more, and noting that they're merely thoughts. I feel less enslaved by the mind-maze. There seems to be an increased clarity of – of something. A book tells me to call it 'an expansion in mind and heart.' Another book advises me to call it 'an expanded consciousness'.

Too many descriptive words, in the mind or on the lips, could limit the experience of expansion, reducing it to self-reflection.

Dr James Charlton's latest book is *Non-Dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne: A Theopoetic Reflection*. It is now available in paperback from Bloomsbury Publishers, New York. Dr Charlton's address is PO Box 13, Blackmans Bay, Australia 7052.



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The form of Arunachala has a way of evoking devotion. Yet, in itself, the mountain remains a form. The Divine One has lured me, through Arunachala, to seek That which is beyond all forms. What a mystery of concealed influence! This blackened, waxy pinnacle beneath my feet points to That which is beyond all rocks, indeed all places. What a trick, so well suited to the human attraction to matter!

The sign of Arunachala is entwined with that which is signified. Truthful interpretation is always entwined, interactive or dialogical. The truth can never be purely 'from above', because no-one has a fully Divine view of what constitutes Reality in all its facets.

How many Western-born people move from a conservative Christian background toward a devotion to Sri Ramana Maharshi? The answer will remain unknown; indeed, the question is perhaps pointless.

Christianity is frequently surrounded by the dualisms of a materialist ideology. Missionaries to India frequently assumed the truth of these dualisms. As a consequence, many missionaries chose to remain ignorant of the spiritual riches of Hinduism. Few consulted the Vedas. Many felt spiritually superior to Hindus. In addition, they tended to interpret the Bible in literal terms. Some evangelical missionaries managed to persuade minority groups to abandon their heritage.

Fortunately, many Hindus were able to accept the narratives about Jesus without betraying Hinduism. They taught the Westerners to begin to 'see' the Divine Consciousness in all things, including all living religious systems.

If the Western problem is to push distinctions too far, a potential problem in the East is to blur all distinctions. Westerners who 'go East' can allow monism to dominate their thinking. They might then feel justified in violating the local moral code. I've felt this temptation myself, thinking that my knowledge makes me an exceptional person. But we all know intuitively that knowledge is not the same as wisdom.

There's a saying which runs as follows: 'What you're capable of grasping gives you knowledge. But what grasps you can make you wise.' Knowledge of what Western culture calls 'God', when grasped

in concepts, can become an idol. By this I mean that 'God' becomes an abstract construction which blocks a person from awakening to the Real.

Much of Christianity lacks an advaita experience and is wary of putting forward any teaching that resembles monism. Therefore it might be conjectured that the majority of Christians are comfortable with a wide array of dualisms. The most prominent of these is a duality between 'God' and 'humanity' and between 'spirit' and 'matter'. But this is not strictly accurate, inasmuch as Christmas Day comes around each December, celebrating the story of the Incarnation of Jesus. So then, at the heart of Christianity is a non-dualistic narrative. It's a story which pinpoints the paradox of all humanity: frailty is conjoined with divinity.

Oddly, there are Christians who seem to feel possessive towards the divine and superior to the people of other religions. Yet the story of Jesus would transcend, in its own outrageous way, all narrow self-satisfied ways of 'solidifying' religion. The Divine, which Jesus is said to incarnate, belongs nowhere. It is the one No Thing, the Source of Being. The Divine transcends human faculties and every human effort to describe it.

People sometimes say, or think: 'I don't care for doctrine. All I want is a spiritual experience!' Perhaps most of us can resonate with that. Who wants to collect a list of concepts, without any concomitant experience? Yet a structure of doctrine is necessary, whatever our religion. There is a middle course to be found between subjective experience, on the one hand, and absolutist doctrinal statements on the other hand. This middle, balanced approach could be framed as 'divinely-oriented subjectivism'.

But subjectivism requires grounding. A foundational, absolute statement upon which subjectivism can be grounded would run as follows: the Divine is the subject, the One subject, before which the entire phenomenal world is comprised of objects. To completely avoid such a foundational statement of faith is perhaps to risk becoming an 'experience junkie' and a moral relativist. We have hints in the



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writings of Ramana Maharshi that he could not ultimately endorse the behaviour of those who chased after special experiences.

If I drift into 'experience addiction' at the expense of 'grounding statements' a discrepancy arises between my experiencing self and my evaluating self. The delights of an elevated, but transient experience, are placed in perspective by cogent evaluation.

It's often said that we are mirrors of each other. No-one is an isolated 'experiencing self'. We find our truer selves in each other. If what is called 'enlightenment' can partly be described as 'profoundly significant growth beyond my little ego', this will itself require the framework of a set of spiritual symbols. Otherwise there will be no meaningful communication to anyone else.

The spiritual symbols employed by the Buddha, the Christ, and all the other enlightened teachers were historically and culturally conditioned. That's to say, when they spoke they used the word-structures of their own era. By nature of the case, these included abstract concepts. Engagement with a religious tradition should involve both spiritual experience and a willingness to understand the doctrinal lexicon in which the tradition is grounded.

I was raised in a Christian sect known as 'The Open Brethren'. My parents denied that we belonged to a sect; they and their peers differentiated themselves from an even narrower sect, which was known as 'The Exclusive Brethren'. Unusually, for children from a sect, we all attended Church of England schools. We were regarded as religious freaks. Our parents wouldn't allow us to participate in activities such as school parties or dances, or events held on a Sunday. Decades later, when I arrived at Ramanasramam, those of my family who were still evangelical Christians said that I'd 'gone off the rails'. They assumed I'd lost the way, abandoned 'the Word of God', perhaps even turned against the Lord.

When I meet friends who remain in evangelical churches, they often unconsciously reveal their dualism between 'matter' and 'spirit'. At this point, I should note that the word 'evangelical' today denotes a more diverse and nuanced group of Christians, than was formerly the case.

They are no longer a monolithic group. The Western media might choose to portray them as politically 'far Right' and as 'ultra conservative' but this is by no means accurate. What remains true of Evangelicalism is this: it prefers a hard-and-fast boundary between 'believers' and 'non-believers'. On this point, it remains uniformly dualistic.

My ancestors left the Church of England because they detected the approach of 'theological liberalism'. In Evangelical circles, to be labelled 'liberal' was tantamount to being consigned to outer darkness. But the clergy were becoming educated and more aware of the dishonesty of announcing so-called objective statements, without regard for the complexities of interpretation. My ancestors on both sides of the family grew uncomfortable with 'so much interpretation'. They decided to join what was originally called The Plymouth Brethren Movement.

To accept, realistically, that all texts are already interpretations is not a way of discrediting those texts. It's a recognition that the original, lived experience is primary, and that as soon as the experience is put into words, those words become 'a second order truth'.

The Open Brethren are among the smallest of the Evangelical churches. All such churches place an emphasis on sermons rather than sacraments. The Bible is often treated, in effect, as a collection of objective statements which possess a unique Divine authority. No other holy texts are recognized as valid.

A considered viewpoint would be that no religion possesses a magic book which necessarily has a direct correspondence to today's circumstances. Three factors need to be remembered when studying a sacred text: its history, context and intention. To say there are no magic texts is not the same as down-playing them. They are often testaments to direct, lived experience, within particular traditions which have particular guiding assumptions.

A Christian with an eye to interpretation would acknowledge that the Vedas are pointers to the Divine, and that the *Bhagavad Gita* distils these pointers. Similarly, Hindus might accept that the Bible contains pointers to the Divine and that, from a Christian perspective, the four Gospels distil these pointers.



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In the Brethren Movement, laymen did all the opinionating, commentating and preaching. Women were required to be silent, except in gatherings for women only. Growing up, I observed that women were less dualistic than men, and less bothered by doctrinal niceties. Behind their obligatory silence, the women didn't particularly care for the strings of absolutist views promulgated by their menfolk.

Together with most of my siblings I have an anxious personality. As a child I felt that my life's purpose was to conform to the religious expectations of my parents and their small group. I undertook many religious activities which I found uncomfortable, just to gain others' approval. Bad events had occurred at secondary school, so that, eventually, I was accorded the 'official label' of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). According to the Bureau of Statistics, I share this with almost ten per cent of other Australians.

Part of anxiety is a feeling of being separate. This often includes a feeling of isolation, and of excessive nervousness in unfamiliar social situations. We can become more reactive than responsive in our relations with others. To use the famous analogy, anxiety sees the harmless coiled rope on the ground as a snake. But the rope is what is real. It symbolizes the natural state of mind which is aware, compassionate, vibrant yet calm. ▲

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(To be continued)

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Why Am I Happy?

I.S. MADUGULA

“...to be happy is natural: all else is unnatural.”
—*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §633.

Happiness is my birthright and nobody is going to take it away from me.

I have no use for happiness engineers, happiness consultants, chief fun officers, or ‘fungineering’ departments that are becoming popular in big business. You cannot mandate happiness or force someone to smile.

John Stuart Mill’s ‘paradox of hedonism’ says, “Ask yourself if you are happy and you cease to be so.” So I am not asking myself if I am happy; instead, I am analysing why I am happy, as any rational person might be curious to do as he sees so much unhappiness all around him.

Indusekhara Sastri Madugula, who formerly taught English at various universities and colleges, is a frequent writer for the *Mountain Path* and lives in Austin, Texas. He has written a book on AdiSankara and is convinced that all life is a self-evident affirmation of advaita.

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The ability to be happy is inherent in all of us. The Dalai Lama says, “The purpose of our lives is to be happy.”¹ Referring to the easy accessibility of happiness, Einstein asks, “A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin; what else does a man need to be happy?”² He means that, since happiness resides within us all the time, why look for it on the outside in all kinds of possessions? Even a basic setup is enough.

What is true happiness?

Apte’s The Student’s English-Sanskrit Dictionary translates ‘happiness’ as *anandah* and *santoshah* among other things. Both these terms are very significant for their deeper import: *ananda* implies bliss that is Brahman, and *santoshah* means ‘contentment’ which Patanjali says leads to extraordinary happiness.³

Now check out what Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi says: on the very first page of *Talks* the topic is discussed:⁴

If a man thinks that his happiness is due to external causes and his possessions, it is reasonable to conclude that his happiness must increase with increase of possessions and diminish in proportion to their diminution...

In deep sleep the man is devoid of possessions, including his own body. Instead of being unhappy he is quite happy. Everyone desires to sleep soundly. The conclusion is that happiness is inherent in man and is not due to the external causes. *One must realise his Self in order to open the store of his unalloyed happiness.* (Emphasis mine)

Happiness as we know it

It is not hard to figure out what makes us happy on a daily basis. Most of the time, it is the simple pleasures of life that make us happy. For instance, a dyed-in-the-wool Hyderabadi will be immensely pleased if he can get an order of mirchi bajjis when he is starving. An automobile buff like me would be happy to get behind the wheel of the \$200,000

¹ www.brainyquote.com

² Ibid.

³ *Yoga Sutra*, II.42. *santoshah anuttamah sukhalahbah.*

⁴ Venkataramiah, M., (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1996. Talk §3.

2014 Mercedes-Benz S-Class sedan just for a short spin. A petty thief working the streets can feel he is on cloud nine if he can pick a bus rider's pocket for a couple of 100-rupee bills. A little kid is elated when someone gives him a piece of candy.

In abstract terms, happiness is the state of mind that we experience when:

- we obtain the object of our desires. The more we obtain, the happier we tend to be;
 - we have a pleasant experience of some sort;
 - we visit an exciting new place;
 - we achieve fame and fortune;
 - our physical needs are satisfied;
- and so on.

On second thoughts

But re-read the above to comprehend what we are really saying. What is the highest common factor of these statements? How long is each of those kinds of happiness likely to last?

The answer is that each of these 'happineses' lasts only as long as the experience that triggers it lasts. And there will be breaks in our happiness whenever there is a break in the experience.

Therefore it is clear that happiness of this kind is very ephemeral and shaky at best. Is this the kind of happiness we want for which we bust our chops all our lives? Does it make sense to do so?

Obviously, most people are content with this kind of temporary happiness. But then the equally obvious question as we have been indicating is: will they be happy once those triggers are absent? Will they remain contented once their toys are taken away from them and adversity overtakes them in some form or other?

So what's the way out?

We asked above what is the highest common factor of the different kinds of happiness we experience during the course of our ordinary lives. The answer is that we think we are happy or unhappy based on external circumstances and events. Once we use the word 'think', our



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mind comes into the picture. In other words, the recipient of all the information at the basic level is our mind, which is a material faculty. Then the functioning of the mind is witnessed by the inner I, the Spirit, which is present through all different kinds of experiences and states of mind and through the three states of consciousness.

That being the case, the remedy for our ultimate dissatisfaction with temporary moods of joy is to eliminate moods altogether from the happiness-equation. Eliminating moods implies the suspension of the mind where moods arise. That's a good beginning. But total elimination of mood swings involves the total annihilation of the mind, so moods will never ever arise thereafter. When the mind is shut down and its functioning is scorched at will, what remains is the I, the witness, which has no interest in status, pomp, or circumstance. It just remains a bystander, ever happy, ever contented, ever blissful because it has no desire to possess or enjoy anything that the mind (along with the senses) throws at it. That's after all the definition of I, the 'unalloyed happiness' that Bhagavan speaks of above, and the 'Ananda', the bliss that the *Veda* extols as *Brahman*. In this process moral laws and ethical commandments help us by banishing desire in the first place. Patanjali has a trick to deal with deviant thoughts: if immoral thoughts rise in your mind as you practise the *yamas* and *niyamas*, counter them with the opposite thoughts to cancel them out. It works better as your practice intensifies, according to yoga.⁵ This is all well and good initially, but how do we get rid of the mind totally, when it interferes with our I-focus?

What to do when you don't know what to do?

The answer is simple, direct, and effective: Nothing! This is Bhagavan's favourite instruction to his questioners.⁶ Doing nothing implies thinking nothing and training the mind to be still and eventually to get lost. A still mind that fosters self-awareness leads one to their primordial state of being which, of course, is happiness.

⁵ *Yoga Sutra*, II. 33. *vitarkabadhane pratipakshabhavanam*.

⁶ *summa iru* (in Tamil), 'keep quiet', 'stay still' (not just outwardly, but silence the mind).

Bhagavan explains not only the metaphysics of happiness but also the mechanics of unhappiness:⁷

Ego's perfection is suddenly broken at a point and want is felt giving rise to a desire to get something or do something. When that want is cured by the fulfillment of that desire, the ego is happy and the original perfection is restored. Therefore happiness may be said to be our natural condition or nature. Pleasure and pain are relative and refer to our finite state, with progress by satisfaction of want. If relative progress is stopped and the soul merges into Brahman — of the nature of perfect peace — that soul ceases to have relative, temporary pleasure and enjoys perfect peace — Bliss. Hence Self-Realisation is Bliss; it is realising the Self as the limitless spiritual eye (*jnana drishhti*) and not clairvoyance; it is the highest self-surrender. *Samsara* (the world-cycle) is sorrow.

So eliminate unhappiness in the above manner and what remains is pure happiness, which can only be experienced and not described. Since we are all God's children at the very least, if not part and parcel of the Godhead, His DNA is in us leaving no room for unhappiness.

Let me leave you with this definition of happiness, one that works for me: happy you are, if you *know* so.⁸ ▲

⁷ Talk §28. p. 31.

⁸ With apologies to the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) who wrote the famous play, *Right You Are (If You Think So)*.



Maha Nirvana Room Verandah

D. Thiyagarajan



René Guénon and Sri Ramana Maharshi

Two Remarkable Sages in Modern Times

Part Three

SAMUEL BENDECK SOTILLOS

Cecil Bethell (b. 1934) assisted in the English translation of numerous of Guénon's books.⁴² He learned about Guénon's work through Swami Narikutti or Barry Owen Windsor (1930-1994), who he had

⁴² Paul Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, trans. Cecil Bethell (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), René Guénon, *Miscellanea*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, Cecil Bethell, Patrick Moore and Hubert Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr., Cecil Bethell, Hubert and Rohini Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), René Guénon, *Studies in Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, Cecil Bethell and Michael Allen (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), René Guénon, *The Esoterism of Dante*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, Cecil Bethell,

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met in 1980 when visiting Arunachala.⁴³ This unfolds an interesting story regarding Swami Narikutti, an Australian by birth and architectural student who met a fellow architectural student named Adrian Snodgrass (b. 1931), known also as Swami Punaikutti, who was well versed in the wisdom of the East, Advaita Vedanta and the traditionalists' works. Both of them became disillusioned with the architectural programme which they were attending at Sydney Technical College (now University of Technology, Sydney), leading them to take a leave of absence.

They left for India on 18th of April, 1957; however, an interesting change of fate awaited them when the boat docked in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). They were approached by a mysterious monk who asked them to accompany him to the sacred city of Katirkama (Kataragama). In Ceylon they both met Swami Gauribala Giri (Peter Joachim Schoenfeldt, 1907-1984), named 'German Swami' who was known to be an eccentric figure.

Swami Gauribala was highly influenced by the Traditionalist school and had regular correspondence with Schuon for nearly three decades and went to Lausanne, Switzerland to meet him.⁴⁴ It is reported that upon Swami Gauribala's meeting with Schuon, Swami Gauribala said he wanted to pitch a tent in his yard and spend the rest of his life there. While it is likely that several of Schuon's disciples had met Swami Gauribala, we might mention in particular Donald Macleod Matheson (1896-1979) and William Stoddart (b. 1925). One of Gauribala's students, Manik Sandrasagra (1947-2008), well-known Sri Lankan village folklorist and film producer, who while travelling in the United States in 1981 went to meet Schuon in Bloomington, Indiana where Schuon had made his permanent home the year before.

ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001). Bethell also assisted with the proofreading and index for at least fifteen other René Guénon books. He has done so with quiet industry and humility which is an example to us all of a dedicated scholar and lover of tradition. He was a crucial link in translating Guénon's works into English.

⁴³ Cecil Bethell, "René Guénon (1886-1951)," *The Mountain Path* (January 2005), pp. 95-102.

⁴⁴ Jean-Baptiste Aymard, "A Biographical Approach," in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 37.

An interesting note on Swami Gauribala is that he was initially called to the Buddhist tradition, and sailed to Ceylon in 1936 where he was ordained into Theravada Buddhism by the Venerable Nyanatiloka Thera (Anton Gueth, 1878-1957),⁴⁵ taking the name Nyanakhetto. Swami Gauribala had contact with many figures that have aided the modern West in understanding Eastern thought. For example, he knew an expositor of Tibetan Buddhism, Lama Anagarika Govinda (Ernst Lothar Hoffman, 1898-1985) and Nyanaponika Thera (Siegmond Feniger, 1901-1994), cofounder of the Buddhist Publication Society and author of numerous books on the Buddhist tradition.

Swami Narikutti met and became a disciple of Sri Yogaswami (1872-1964), a renowned mystic of Jaffna, who had spent time in the company of the Maharshi. It was after Yogaswami's death that Swami Narikutti went on an extended yatra to India walking the length of the country in the mid-1960s. He later visited Arunachala in 1968 and eventually settled there in 1970, where he resided on the sacred Arunachala until his ill-health forced him down the mountain in the last years of his life.

Snodgrass incidentally was a friend of Australian poet Harold Stewart (1916-1995), who for some time worked at the avant-garde bookshop, the Norman Robb Bookshop in Melbourne, Australia. Stewart was highly influenced by the Perennialist or Traditionalist works; notably the articles found in the French journal *Etudes Traditionnelles* (1936-1992), which he first encountered in the 1940s. Stewart was also influenced by his father who had lived in India for thirty years and read books on the Maharshi as a young man. Stewart organized a small Traditionalist study group that met weekly at the bookshop.

We could also mention here that Swami Narikutti had stopped in Melbourne en route to India in order to meet Stewart and the others associated with the works of Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon.

⁴⁵ See Bhikkhu Nyanatusita and Hellmuth Hecker, *The Life of Nyanatiloka Thera: The Biography of a Western Buddhist Pioneer* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008).



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Snodgrass was a member of this Traditionalist study group, which concentrated more or less on the theoretical ideas of Perennialism for some time until Schuon instructed the study group to belong to a particular religion. As several of this groups members were attracted to Buddhism, Schuon suggested that Pure Land Buddhism, especially in its Jodo-Shinshu form, was most accessible to Westerners given that it was “the decadent age of the Dharma,” known as *mappo*. In 1963, Snodgrass accompanied Stewart to Japan in order to enter into Buddhism and had extensive introductions and recommendations by Pallis. When they arrived in Kyoto they had intensive training with Bando Shojun (1932-2004), Japanese scholar and priest who additionally had correspondence with Schuon and went to personally meet him on one occasion.⁴⁶

Another interesting encounter took place in Pallis’s home in London, in October 1954, when Swami Ramdas met Frithjof Schuon. It was an important meeting in which many of Ramdas’s reflections on Schuon were included in his book *World is God* (1955). In a similar connection, we can note that Swami Ramdas was in the presence of the Maharshi for only five minutes in 1923 but it was enough to provide an illumination which directed the rest of his life: “The few minutes that Ramdas spent in his [Ramana Maharshi] holy company meant a momentous impetus in his spiritual career.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Michael Ackland, *Damaged Men: The Precarious Lives of James McAuley and Harold Stewart* (Allen & Unwin, 2001); Alex Minchinton, “The Exiled Immortal: Reconsidering Harold Stewart,” in Harry Oldmeadow (ed.), *Crossing Religious Frontiers: Studies in Comparative Religion* (World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 183-93; Peter Kelly, *Buddha in a Bookshop* (Australia: Ulysses Press, 2007); Harry Oldmeadow, “Book Review: Buddha in a Bookshop,” *Sophia*, Vol. 46, No. 43 (December 2007), pp. 315-16; Harry Oldmeadow, “R.H. Blyth, Harold Stewart and Adrian Snodgrass,” in *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (World Wisdom, 2004), pp. 178-80.

⁴⁷ Susunaga Weeraperuma (ed.), ‘Ramana Maharshi was a Saviour of Souls’, in *The Essential Swami Ramdas: Commemorative Edition* (World Wisdom, 2005), p. 129. See also Swami Ramdas, ‘My Beloved Bhagavan’, *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (January 1979), p. 22; Swami Ramdas, ‘Bhagavan’s Grace and Name’, *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 32, Nos. 3 & 4 (December 1995), pp. 106-107.

Taking a slight digression, we recall Arnaud Desjardins (1925-2011), the French writer and filmmaker, who first had darshan with Sri Anandamayi Ma in 1959, and also had notable contact with Swami Ramdas, including a host of other eminent spiritual figures such as Kalu Rimpoche (1905-1989) and H.H. the 16th Karmapa (1924-1981). Although he was too late to meet the Maharshi, he did visit Sri Ramanasramam and was influenced early on by the work of Guénon. Desjardins recalls an interesting account during his travels in the East in the 1960s, while guided by the personal interpreter of H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), to interview numerous spiritual authorities confirming Pallis's authentic understanding of the Buddhist tradition:

"I remember a conversation, one evening in Sikkim, when the question which arose was of Westerners who had really come near enough to tantrayana to understand something more than words and formulas. One such person, of whom those present spoke with the greatest regard and deference, was repeatedly referred to in this conversation by the English word 'Tradition.' 'Tradition' had spent some time with such-and-such a guru; 'Tradition' has visited such-and-such a monastery. And all of a sudden it became apparent to me that this Mr 'Tradition' was Marco Pallis, (under his Tibetan name of Thudben Tenzin). . ."⁴⁸

Doyen of the world's religions Huston Smith (b. 1919), makes this assessment on Pallis's work, "I find no writer on Buddhism surpassing him."⁴⁹ Furthermore, it would be worthwhile for readers to know that H.H. the Dalai Lama paid the following homage to the Maharshi on the 5th November 1965, "The heritage of India is enriched with numberless saints and yogis. Ramana Maharshi

⁴⁸ Arnaud Desjardins, "The Mystery of the Tibetans," in *The Message of the Tibetans*, trans. R.H. Ward and Vega Stewart (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1969), p. 20. See also Joseph Fitzgerald, "From Marco Pallis to Thudben Tenzin: A Son of Tibet Returns," *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 22 (Winter 2008), pp. 39-61.

⁴⁹ Huston Smith, "Book Review: A Buddhist Spectrum: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Autumn 1982), p. 145.



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represents that tradition and his spiritual greatness is guiding millions of people. Such masters light the path and bring solace to suffering humanity.”⁵⁰ Desjardins was a disciple of Swami Prajnanpad (1891-1974) and has become a highly renowned spiritual teacher in the French-speaking world.

Swami Ramdas regarded Frithjof Schuon as: “a very prince among saints.”⁵¹ Another central point is the unique relationship that Schuon had with H.H. the 68th Jagadguru of Kanchi (1894-1994), one of Indian’s most revered spiritual teachers that was facilitated by Mudumbai Ramachandran (d. 2006), a Hindu devotee who had associated for more than forty years with Schuon and also met the Maharshi.⁵² It would also be relevant to mention the 68th Jagadguru of Kanchi’s acceptance of Schuon’s dedication of his book *Language of the Self* (1959) that was mediated by Matheson when he visited the 68th Jagadguru of Kanchi in February of 1959. The following underscores the importance of this gesture:

Nothing is perhaps more significant or has climaxed this effort [of publishing Schuon’s writings for the first time by an Indian publisher specifically for Indian audiences] in a more befitting manner than the fact that His Holiness Sri Sankaracarya, Jagadguru of the Kanci Kamakoti Pitha, has been pleased to accept the dedication of this book [*Language of the Self* (1959)] to him; the orthodoxy and authenticity of Schuon’s exposition stand in need of no further testimony.⁵³

⁵⁰ H.H. the Dalai Lama, ‘A Tribute’, *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 1966), p. 67.

⁵¹ See Swami Ramdas, ‘Visit to Sufi Saint’ and ‘Hindus at Heart’, in *World is God* (Kanhangad, Kerala: Anandashram, 1955), pp. 103-105.

⁵² See Mudumbai Ramachandran, ‘Frithjof Schuon: A Small Word of Homage and Celebration’, *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1998), pp. 47-55.

⁵³ Venkataraman Raghavan, ‘Forward’, to Frithjof Schuon, *Language of the Self*, trans. Marco Pallis and Macleod Matheson (Madras: Ganesh, 1959), p. x; See also William Stoddart, ‘Spirituality in Hinduism: A Visit to the Jagadguru’, in *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, eds. Mateus Soares de Azevedo and Alberto Vasconcellos Queiroz (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. 115-120.

An additional facet in this interweaving narrative is that it was Schuon who sent Joseph Epes Brown (1920-2000) to find Hehaka Sapa or Black Elk (1863-1950), an extraordinary sage of the Lakota Sioux to learn about the traditional ways of the Lakota.⁵⁴ Both Schuon and his brother, Father Gall (Erich Schuon, 1906-1991), a Trappist monk, corresponded with Black Elk through Brown. After the Jagadguru read the chapter 'The Sacred Pipe of the Red Indians' in the *Language of the Self*, he expressed the striking commonalities shared between the shamanic traditions of the First Peoples and Hinduism.⁵⁵ From this metaphysical position, it has been expressed, "Black Elk and the Jagadguru may be considered to represent symbolically two poles of the primordial religion."⁵⁶

In addition, there was a noteworthy relationship that existed between Schuon and medicine man Sun Dance chief Thomas Yellowtail (1903-1993), which lasted from 1953 when they met in Paris until Yellowtail's death.⁵⁷ Upon Schuon's first visit to meet various Native American Indians, he describes a spiritual encounter that took place between — a sage of the shamanic traditions of the First Peoples and a sage within Hinduism — two poles of the sanatana dharma:

"I showed him some pictures I had with me; one was the image of His Holiness the Jagadguru of Kanchipuram. I spoke to the old Cheyenne priest about Hinduism and explained to him who His Holiness was. He took the picture in one hand and raised the other hand towards the sky; this is the Red Indian's gesture of prayer. He prayed a long time, always looking at the picture; and after a while he

⁵⁴ See Joseph Epes Brown, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1953).

⁵⁵ See William Stoddart, op. cit., 'Spirituality in Hinduism: A Visit to the Jagadguru', in *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, pp. 115-120.

⁵⁶ Jean-Baptiste Aymard, "Notes," in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 147.

⁵⁷ Thomas Yellowtail, "Introduction," to *Indian Spirit: Revised and Enlarged*, eds. Michael Oren Fitzgerald and Judith Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. XIII-XVI.

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put his hand on it and then rubbed his face and his breast with the hand, in the Indian way, to impregnate himself with the Jagadguru's blessing. At last he kissed the picture with fervor."⁵⁸

Another influential figure that functioned as a bridge between East and West was T.M.P. Mahadevan (1911-1983), the Director of the Centre for the Advanced Study in Philosophy at the University of Madras. He was a long time devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and was also closely associated with the Jagadguru of Kanchi. It was Swami Rajeswarananda (d.1964), a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi, who introduced Professor Mahadevan to the Sage of Arunachala, in 1929, at the age of eighteen.

Not commonly known is Professor Mahadevan's involvement with the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (Anjuman-i Shahanshahi-yi Falsafa-yi Iran) established in the Spring of 1974 in Tehran by Professor Nasr. The Academy was based on the principles of Traditionalist or Perennialist thought involving leading 20th century scholars such as Henry Corbin (1903-1978), Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993), Raymundo Panikkar (1918-2010), A.K. Saran (1922-2003), Elémire Zolla (1926-2002), Huston Smith, William Chittick (b. 1943), Sachiko Murata (b. 1943), James Morris (b. 1949) among others.⁵⁹ Readers will appreciate the description of the Academy's honourable objectives. Although penned over forty years ago, the Academy's objectives are still exceptionally timely given our urgent need for religious pluralism:

“The goals of the Academy are the revival of the traditional intellectual life of Islamic Persia; the publication of texts and studies pertaining to both Islamic and pre-Islamic Persia; making the intellectual treasures of Persia in the fields of philosophy, mysticism and the like known to the outside world; making possible extensive

⁵⁸ Frithjof Schuon, 'His Holiness and the Medicine Man', in *The Feathered Sun* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1990), p.110.

⁵⁹ See T.M.P. Mahadevan, 'Vedantic Meditation and Its Relation to Action', in *Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action: A Colloquium held at Rothko Chapel, Houston Texas*, eds. Yusuf Ibish and Peter Lamborn Wilson (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), pp.349-359.

research in comparative philosophy; making Persians aware of the intellectual traditions of other civilizations in both East and West; encouraging intellectual confrontations with the modern world; and finally, discussing from the point of view of tradition various problems facing modern man.”⁶⁰

Professor Mahadevan introduced the Queen Mother Frederica of Greece (1917-1981) and her daughter Princess Irene (b. 1942), who traveled to India in order to be in the sagely presence of the Jagadguru of Kanchi.⁶¹ The Jagadguru also had interesting exchanges with the Maharshi through their respective disciples, including the Perennialist writers, and while we cannot explore all of these interconnections within this text, it will suffice to mention their existence.⁶²

A striking example of how one can be true to one’s own religious form and also recognize that same Divine Reality in the other traditions without disavowing the legitimacy of one’s own religion, is clear in Professor Nasr’s own meeting with the Sage of Kanchi arranged in 1970 through Mahadevan:

“To behold the presence of His Holiness the Jagadguru, and to be blessed by the privilege of receiving the refreshing breeze which flows from Him and which extinguishes the very fire of existence separating man from God is to realize that the Divine Freedom manifests itself where It wills. In Kanchipuram one feels the proximity of the light which as a Muslim I have experienced most in the holy sanctuaries of Islam and in the presence of Muslim saints. In the eyes of the Jagadguru, the silence of Eternity of India which is immutable and eternal like the peaks of the Himalayas shines and penetrates into the very centre of the heart where presides the ‘Throne of God.’ Through

⁶⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Preface,” *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1975), p.7; See also Francis Clive-Ross, ‘Editorial’, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol.10, No. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 4.

⁶¹ T.M.P Mahadevan, ‘Meeting with Perfection’, available at: <http://www.kamakoti.org/souv/5-35.html>.

⁶² See Ra. Ganapati, ‘The Maha-Svami and The Maharishi’, available at: <http://www.kamakoti.org/souv/5-58.html>; Marco Pallis, ‘A Buddhist Garland for the Jagadguru’, available at: <http://www.kamakoti.org/souv/5-23.html>.



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his glance the heart becomes suddenly transmuted alchemically from a piece of flesh into a jewel that reflects the inner light and illuminates the whole from within.”⁶³ ▲

⁶³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, quoted in T.M.P. Mahadevan (ed.), *The Sage of Kanchi* (Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1975), pp. 17-18.

(*To be continued*)

The Circumambulation

Ashok

We started off late in the evening
Just as the night was preparing to sing.
The sun had completed its daily stint
Of visiting the hill, the path, and the temple precinct.

The feet touched the earth below
In fond remembrance, not long ago.
Across this path, the holy place
Where saints and seers had felt HIS grace.

The walk went on, without any light
Save the moonless starry night,
The cool breeze too walked with us
As we made our way without a fuss.

The silhouette of the hill in the background
Changing shapes, kept us spellbound.
Encouraging us at every turn
Our tiring steps and aching feet.

We finished the circle before dawn
Refreshed mind, tiredness gone.
We went back to sleep, thoughts emptied
Wide awake within, filled with peace.



Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Ten

The Lord as a Guard in Tulasidas's Ashram

NABAJI SIDDHA

“O beloved friends, courting the august company of saints! Now, let me narrate the miraculous events that took place in the life of Tulasidas and how the scent of the fragrant blossom of his bhakti drew the Lord to serve as a guard in his ashram.”

After Sri Hanuman left, the people of Varanasi gathered around Tulasidas and said, “O enlightened one! You are our awakener! Hereafter, you are our spiritual guide. You are the Lord of our realm! You are the eternal Truth! You alone can purify us of our sins. You are the guardian of our spiritual welfare.”

Tulasidas looked at them with great affection and making obeisance to the sadhus said, “Whatever is in this ashram belongs to you all. Please give away liberally to the needy to your heart's content and you also partake of things for yourselves.” Selecting a solitary place, he became merged in blissful abstraction, a state that transcends charity, self-restraint, contemplation and knowledge of the Self.



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While he spent his days immersed in indescribable bliss, one night four sadhus in the ashram appropriated some of the valuables and stealthily approached the exit gate. Watching their treacherous act, Lord Rama along with His brothers disguised as gatekeepers intercepted them and shouted, “Hey! Don’t move, halt wherever you are. You are betraying your teacher! You are greedy and covetous of his things. What are you doing here at this hour?”

The sadhus were frightened at their tone of authority and believing them to be the night guards on patrol, they scampered away. They approached another exit to escape. Alas! They encountered the same guards there also.

Glorifying Tulasidas, the guards jumped at them and took them to task, saying, “O disloyal fellows, you are full of malice! What have you stolen? What are you hiding in your hands?”

The thieves blaming themselves for the foiled attempt, tried to leave the ashram before the guards could expose them. Unobtrusively they made their way towards yet another gate under the cover of darkness. As ill luck would have it, they were accosted by the same guards near that exit also. Wherever they went looking for an exit to flee, the guards awaited them there!

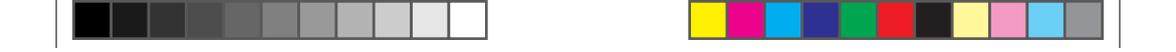
Finding no way out, they thought of a trick to escape humiliation. They said in a conciliatory tone to the guards, “Why don’t you share our booty and cooperate with us?”

Amused at the offer, the guards asked, “Are we supposed to share the valuables or your sin?” The thieves were disconcerted at the rejoinder.

When they renewed the offer, the guards demurred, “We are willing to accept the prized items, but not the sin attached to it.”

“Let it be so!” cried in unison the sadhus turned thieves.

“In spite of being brahmins, you have committed this offence, which we have witnessed. Yet if we ignore your transgression and covet half the treasure, sin will befall us as we would be failing in our duty. Therefore, as a compensation, you must make over to us all the merits accrued to you by serving the saint.”



THE LORD AS A GUARD IN TULASIDAS'S ASHRAM

The thieves agreed to the compromise and hastened the guards to accompany them for the ritual of making the grant of their merits. But the dutiful guards said, "Under the orders of the king of Varanasi, we are in the service of saint Tulasidas as security guards. As we are on night shift, our duty will be over only at dawn and we cannot step out before that. Aspiring ostensibly for a nobler life, you have been serving the saint for a long time. Have you amassed only this much of riches, for you must have been looting him for a long time?"

The thieves replied, "O guards! You must be mocking at us, for you are ascribing higher aspiration to us thieves, like preaching morals to a woman of loose conduct. Let us hasten from this place. If other sadhus wake up, we will be in disgrace."

The guards replied coolly, "You cannot move an inch from here unless you hand over the valuables robbed by you along with all your merits."

The greedy brahmins said in agitated voice, "You are avaricious. Though vested with the responsibility of guarding this place, you act like highway robbers who loot people in broad daylight fearlessly. Since you are also like one of us, it is too much to even share our booty with you. On top of it, you want us to gift to you all our merits!"

Laughing loudly, the guards retorted, "You are turning the tables on us. You volunteered to give a share of the stolen articles. Now you seek to brand us as thieves. We don't want a share of either the riches or your sins. Safeguarding the wealth of the noble saint is our premier duty."

Flabbergasted at the changed attitude of the guards, the thieves pleaded, "It is not fair on your part to obstruct our escape at this critical moment. Please take pity on us and help us to flee from here and save our honour."

Lord Rama, the Wielder of Kodanda said, "Aha! It is said that thieves are the store-house of evils like killing, slander, falsehood and deceit. You are criminals of the worst type and you will cause more trouble if you go scot-free. We can't let you leave the boundaries of the ashram. Don't connive against us, for you will come to great grief."



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“O gentlemen! We want neither these riches nor our merits. Please take both and allow us to disappear from this place,” wailed the sadhus piteously.

The guards went on relentlessly, “The scriptures say that thieves should not be spared.”

The sadhus pleaded, “O Swami, we are brahmins, so do not see fault in us. Please pardon us and save our honour.”

The Protector of devotees said, “Even the Ashtavasus, the eight-demigods who coveted the sage Vasishtha’s cow were not spared. They had to suffer the consequences of their evil deed. Those who condone the acts of thieves also have to go to terrible hell. So we cannot overlook your misdeed and let you escape. This is final.”

The brahmins muttered in a penitent voice, “Out of our ignorance, we yielded to temptation. We will not indulge in such misdeeds in future. Please forgive us our offence this last time.” They prostrated to the guards and pleaded.

The darling of Dasaratha said, “Just as a blind man who cannot see the path, laymen, ignorant of scriptural injunctions, may follow unrighteous ways. But, you are brahmins who are well versed in the Vedas and should know the right from the wrong. The former may be forgiven but not the latter who have a moral responsibility to guide others in right living. So we cannot overlook your lapse. You will be better off to listen to us and walk into the ashram.”

The sadhus were struck down with fear at the prospect. They flung away the stolen articles and started running helter skelter. The guards raced behind them, caught hold of them and placing the stolen articles on their heads marched them towards the ashram. The Lord in disguise said in mock-anger, “You evil men, instead of being brave and owning up to your mistake, you try to run away, throwing dust in our eyes. First, you resorted to the mean act of robbing your benefactor, then you tried to trick us by offering a share of the booty. When you were trapped, you were ready to gift away your merits also. Your nature being what it is, I wonder how can there be any merits in your karmic account!”



THE LORD AS A GUARD IN TULASIDAS'S ASHRAM

The guards caused much commotion, shouting and abusing the thieves, so as to wake up the inmates and then they disappeared. The frightened inmates screamed, "O thieves! O thieves!"

The other sadhus came out and caught hold of the thieves. Bringing a lamp, they looked closely into their faces. They were enraged when they recognized them to be their brethren. They hurled abuses at them, "O ruffians, unfaithful vagrants! Foolish ones! Greedy fellows!" Calling them several names and giving them a good thrashing, they took them to Tulasidas along with the stolen articles.

They reported, "O venerable Swami! These idiots, without asking us for what they need, have resorted to robbing you. While they were fleeing, the guards captured them and left them at our door. We will hand them over to the king's soldier at daybreak."

Tulasidas became annoyed with them for their suggestion. He turned to the deceitful brahmins and said humbly, "O brahmins, kindly forgive these sadhus for their mistreatment of you. Be gracious and take whatever you desire from the ashram."

Taking advantage of this undeserved kindness, the false sadhus lamented, "O Swami, you cannot even imagine the torture we suffered last night at the hands of the guards when we tried to leave the place with these articles. Our heart quakes with terror even to think of the scene." They started crying.

Tulasidas asked impatiently, "When you are free to take away from here whatever you desire, who has the temerity to harass you? They have no right to cause you this trauma. Who are they? Take me to them now."

The brahmins replied between sobs, "O Swami, there were four sentries at the entrance. They abused us with harsh words and obstructed our path and barred us from leaving the ashram. They kept us imprisoned the whole night. They terrorized us, assaulted us and disgraced us in front of all these people. They subjected us to the worst kind of humiliation."

Enraged at the account, Tulasidas exclaimed, "What! The ruffians held you captive, manhandled and shamed you! Now take me to



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the evil doers. I will dispatch them to the world of Yama.” Tulasidas snatched a sword and rushed out in anger.

The thieves set out carrying sticks and torches and searched in all directions, but couldn't find them. They wondered how they could have left so soon. The pseudo-sadhus frantically ran here and there hoping to grab them and settle their scores.

Tulasidas was growing impatient to catch them and teach them a lesson. He instructed the inmates to go around and search for the sentries. He came out and stood in the street. After a long futile search, the inmate-sadhus returned. Tulasidas asked the sadhu-thieves for a description of the guards as to how they looked, what weapons they carried etc.

Lo and behold! The Lord along with His brothers appeared before Tulasidas and said, “O Tulasidas! This is how they looked. We are the ones who restrained them and chastised them last night. Therefore, We are the culprits you are looking for. You may punish us and behead us with the sword you are carrying.” So saying, they laid their bows and arrows on the ground and stood before Tulasidas with their heads bent as if waiting to be struck.

Flinging away the sword, Tulasidas ran to the Lord and fell prostrate at His feet with palms joined. Praising the Lord, he said, “O Hari, Raghava, lotus-eyed Lord! Lord of the universe, Succour to all creation, the Supreme Being! O Master, unaware that it was You, I lost my temper and said unpleasant things about You. I succumbed to anger and lost my head whereby I am afraid I have lost Your patronage. Earlier I was your slave, now I am the slave of anger.” He wept inconsolably.

The Lord held him close and said, “O My most beloved! Wise one! Self-luminous one! Have You forgotten Me on account of excessive bliss of the Brahman?”

Tulasidas replied, “O Lord! Is Brahman separate from You? The merciful Mother Lakshmi abiding in Your chest is indeed the bliss of the Brahman! He who entertains the idea that You are different from Brahman, will such a person ever attain salvation? Any one who has taken refuge in You, will he or she ever come to grief? Can my mind



THE LORD AS A GUARD IN TULASIDAS'S ASHRAM

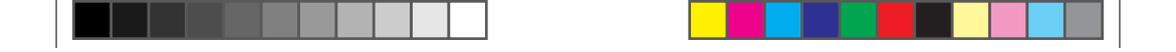
forget You even for a moment? Is there any sword in the world that can cut You? O all-forgiving Lord! Please look upon my offences as vows, my scornful words as hymns and keep me ever under your protection and enable me to be ever Your servitor.”

The Lord said, “O supreme devotee, exalted being! O My dearest! Our intention was only to safeguard your articles from being stolen. We have not done anything wrong! Does one repay goodwill with ill-will and retribution so much so that you rushed to kill Us with your sword? O beneficent one! Should you become so angry with Us for what We did?”

Repeatedly prostrating to the Lord in exceeding joy mingled with tears, Tulasidas said, “O Lord! Lotus-eyed One! Your darshan is rare even for great tapaswis! Yet, You made Yourself easily accessible to these four sadhus. Then, how can these fortunate brahmins who were scolded by You, insulted by You and thrashed by You, be lowly thieves? Don't they deserve these trifles which earned them such great blessings at Your hands. By being the cause of such a sacred interaction between You and these sadhus, have not these trifles also become priceless now? Haven't You made them Your own by touching and talking to them? Indeed, they must have performed great penance to be thrashed with Your divine hands and insulted by Your words? My Master! If Your sports are beyond the grasp of even Brahma and other celestials, how can I recognize them with my puny mind? Won't You hit me at least once with the same hands so that all my karmas will take to flight? While they are highly meritorious to have earned Your divine contact, be it by blows or insults, I am very sinful indeed to be deprived of it.”

When Tulasidas was plunged in remorse, the Lord glanced at him with tender love showering His profuse grace and beckoning him close said, “O My dearest! We rescued them from getting sunk in worldliness even after serving You. Should we let a person invite doom even after he has sought a mahatma's company? Don't you know that all the inhabitants of Rukmangada's city attained the highest realm?”

Tulasidas said with tears filling his eyes, “What a rare penance I must have done for You to deluge me with Your grace? Is there anyone



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more fortunate than me in the world? You are not only the supreme formless blissful Godhead, You also take various forms to fulfil the wishes of Your devotees. There can be no deities without You, the Source of everything, just as there can be no water without the earth. If it appears otherwise to us, it is nothing but the play of Your Maya, O Lord of lords!”

The Lord was charmed by these loving praises and said, “O beloved after My own heart! You can give away your riches to any one as you please. We will not stand in your way.” Then the Lord vanished.

Turning to the brahmins who were thrashed by the auspicious hands of the Lord, Tulasidas prostrated at their feet and praised them thus, “O blessed ones to be touched by the Lord, spoken to by the Lord! O worthy recipients of the richest treasure of His vision! What great and meritorious deeds you must have done to attain this great blessing? O desireless ones! Compassionate ones! Was it in order that I may be blessed with His vision, for which I had been thirsting, that you stooped to this act of thievery? O what a sinner I was to have been unaware of your greatness and thus failed to serve you! From now onwards, I place myself at your command. Be gracious to bestow your compassion on me and take charge of this ashram.” Having said this, he danced in ecstasy and lost himself in inexplicable bliss. ▲

(To be continued)

Solitude

Patrick Roberts

Cherish solitude and silence,
Repose in silence and solitude,
A fresh clearing in the forest.

Let outer silence nourish inner silence
And breathe, breathe and be still
At the foot of the mountain.



TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

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

For the highest degree of seeker, the pure state [of the Self] may be attained through the mere silent glance of the guru. For [the second degree], those who have understood the nature of the personal self, a single word will be as the elixir of life. [For the third degree] a few words [will be enough], like the intermittent call of the owl. [For the lowest degree that state can only be obtained by constant instruction], like the constant humming of a honey bee, drunk on nectar. (66)

The second part of this verse is extremely elliptical. The words in brackets in the above translation are based on the commentary 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>.



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of Chidambara Swamigal. The guru's teaching can be conveyed by a silent look, a single word, a few words spoken at appropriate moments, or a continued series of detailed instructions, depending upon the level of ripeness of the disciple.

The words *highest degree of seeker* translate the Tamil word *uttamar*, which is a plural personal noun based on Sanskrit *uttama* – *uppermost, highest, chief, most elevated*, and is a reference to those disciples who have attained the highest degree of spiritual development, *tivinataram* – *exceedingly swift*. In the title to the chapter it is applied equally to all four grades of seeker, but that is not the case here.

The words *those who have understood the nature of the personal self* references the degree of attainment that corresponds to the path of *yokam*. Chidambara Swamigal defines this state as follows: *yokam is the suppression of the personal consciousness, such that it does not manifest in the least degree*. This state is that of *carupam* – *bearing the likeness of god*, falling short of the highest state *cayucciyam* – *identity with god*, which is characteristic of the *uttamar* mentioned previously.

The Tamil word *tumpi*, here translated as *honey bee*, can also signify a *flying beetle* or *dragonfly*. Chidambara Swamigal gives a pretty explanation of the image, comparing the guru's instruction to the buzzing of a honey bee: *just as a male bee continually flies around a female bee, who is unconscious, humming and buzzing, until she regains consciousness and flies away with him*.

A young girl, as her breasts develop and her sense of modesty grows, becomes reserved and covers herself up, no longer exposing her naked body except in the embrace of her husband. In a similar fashion the reality of the Self will only be known upon the eradication of the personal consciousness, which alternates between suffering from the fruits of its actions, and experiencing bliss when it is brought to stillness. (67)

By *young girl* is meant a girl who has reached the age of puberty, the threshold of adulthood, and can therefore no longer go naked



as young children do. Just as the maturing girl will avoid exposing herself to other men and keep herself for her husband, the mature seeker will turn away from the objects of sense and keep his attention on the Self. In contrast the unstable mind, unable to dissociate itself entirely from the world of the senses, is unable to establish itself in the Self and thus alternates between periods of suffering and happiness. The Tamil word translated here as *stillness* is *tampantai* – Sanskrit *stambhana* – *stopping, restraining, paralysing*; the sense here seems to be that of stilling the mind by such means as *yoga* and spiritual discipline. Such attempts can meet only with temporary success, until the ego once more reasserts its power.

One may learn about the five *malams*, the myriad individual souls, the Lord, the five divine operations, the *avasthas* and the defective individual consciousness; one may follow the path of *cariyai* and the rest. However, the understanding in which the affliction of the ego has not been annihilated will be [useless] like the tiny gold fragments embedded in the wax of the goldsmith. (68)

The first three *malams*, *anavam*, *kanmam* and *mayai* are the three impurities that veil the soul, and are explained in the notes to v. 4. According to the commentary of Chidambara Swamigal the other two are *tirotai* or *tirohana catti*, described by the Tamil Lexicon as ‘Siva’s Energy which provides worldly experiences for the souls, hiding spiritual truths from view’; and *mamayai*, which the Tam. Lex. equates with *cuttamayai* – *pure maya*, the five pure *tattvas*.

No amount of intellectual knowledge and outward spiritual practices can confer realisation unless the personal self of the disciple is eradicated. His knowledge will remain hidden and inoperable like the minute fragments of gold embedded in the goldsmith’s wax. The goldsmith would use a lump or ball of wax called *urai mezhuku* to gather up the tiny particles of gold which remained on the *urai kal* – *touchstone*, after testing its quality. In the touchstone method a line is created by rubbing the gold against a small tablet of a certain type of dark coloured stone; the goldsmith can then deduce the purity of

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the alloy from the colour of the line, technically known as a streak, left on the stone. Clearly these microscopic fragments would be entirely useless as long as they remained embedded in the wax. In the same way the *jiva's* essential nature as Sivam will remain hidden and inoperable as long as it remains masked by the *tattvas* and the three *malams*. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *The knowledge of those who have [merely] learned about and understood the three eternal principals (i.e. pati, pacu and pacam) is not manifest as their personal experience, but remains obscured by the [three] malam[s], just as gold which has been rubbed [on the touchstone] and become embedded in it remains hidden, if [the wax] is not melted and [the gold] extracted. Therefore he says [Like] the gold in [the goldsmith's] wax'.*

Like poverty in an alchemist, like disease in a great physician, or like betel spit on a self-proclaimed war hero, what a degrading thing it is for people to go about saying, 'I am That!' when what they are really doing is totally eradicating in themselves the bliss that comes from true knowledge. Who could save them from such humiliation? (69)

The Tamil word for alchemist here is *vati*, a shortened form of *iracavati*, Sanskrit *irasavadin*. The basic meaning of *rasa* is *sap, juice, essence*, and hence it comes to mean *mercury (paada rasa)*, which was of paramount importance in the science of alchemy, one of whose principal exoteric aims was the transmutation of base metals into gold and silver. Any poor person who claimed to be able to perform this feat would of course be reviled as a fraud.

The word *tambalam*, Sanskrit *tambula*, in the context of this verse, means the red spittle caused by chewing betel. The word can refer either to the betel leaf or its chewed residue. Anyone who claimed to be a great warrior but was so little feared or respected that people would spit their chewed betel on him would clearly be an object of scorn and ridicule. It is a great error to make false claims about oneself in any walk of life. However, to make false claims about one's spiritual attainment is an even greater sin.

In this verse three similes are given to illustrate the fate of the bogus teacher. Such a teacher gives himself away through his inability to give up his attachment to the objects of sense, just as the false doctor, alchemist and warrior give themselves away, respectively, by failing to cure their own sickness, alleviate their own poverty, or command the respect of others. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *not gaining the bliss of jnana through his own experience, but destroying it in the mire of sense objects and remaining there to wallow in this mire of sense objects...*

The joyful words of the *jnani*, spoken before those who are free of delusion, will be fitting instruction to others of lesser attainment also. Remain still and listen, like the herdsman, [who watches over his herd, asleep yet] not sleeping. The malady [of your *karma* in this life] will be expunged, like dirt in cloth. I have said all that needs to be said. (70)

When listening to the words of the guru, the disciple should remain alert and aware, as in the waking state, yet empty and free of thoughts, as in deep sleep. He is therefore compared to the herdsman who cannot afford to sleep, but remains in a state of restful awareness, ready to react to any sound, such as the bells around the necks of his cattle, which might indicate that his herd requires attention. By giving up the sense of doership and remaining in the state described above, the disciple will cease to accumulate any further *karma* to be experienced in future lives. In this state, the *karma* accumulated in previous lives, including that portion of it which is being experienced in the current life, will also begin to exhaust itself and become inoperative.

Those who devote themselves to spiritual practice will have endured birth by egg and the other three kinds of birth in countless different incarnations; finally they will have been born in human births, and, once the effects of their good and evil deeds have been equalised, will embark upon the paths of *cariyai* and the rest in the service of god; these are the people who possess the four kinds of maturity that are hard to attain. (71)

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Those who devote themselves to spiritual practice is a translation of the words *tava càrpil nirpor*, which means literally *those who dwell on the side of tapas* (*spiritual practice*). The word *tavam*, Sanskrit *tapas* embraces religious austerities of all kinds, from bodily mortification to intense meditation. The word *carpu*, here translated as *side*, has meanings like *place, support, help, attachment, dependence*. It therefore refers to people who no longer rely on worldly things for their salvation; people whose allegiance is now to the spiritual.

In the Hindu tradition there are four types of birth: *andacam*, Sanskrit *andaja* – *produced from eggs or spawn*; *cuvetacam*, Sanskrit *svedaja* – *engendered by heat and damp* (literally *sweat*), e.g. insects, worms etc.; *urpiccam*, Sanskrit *udbhijja* – *sprouting from seeds, roots* etc., i.e. plant life; *carayucam*, Sanskrit *jarayuja* – *born from the womb*, i.e. mammals and humans. The living things that are born in the four ways mentioned above fall into seven categories: creatures that live in water; creatures that crawl; creatures that fly; animals; unmoving things (plants and trees etc.); mankind and gods. The total number of species is given as 84 lakhs, that is to say, 8,400,000.

In its journey to Self-awareness over many births, the soul begins to learn from its mistakes, abandoning evil deeds in favour of virtuous ones. At a certain point, the good deeds cancel out the bad ones and the soul becomes ready to receive divine grace. This is what is meant by the equalisation of deeds. Chidambara Swamigal summarises: *For those in whom there is the equalisation of deeds and malaparipakam* (the maturing of the three *malams*), *there will be the four kinds of maturity*. The state of *malaparipakam* is associated with the equalisation of deeds in that this equalisation can only happen at the due time, when the fruits of those deeds are ‘ripe’ for consumption. *Malaparipakam* is defined in the Tamil Lexicon as ‘Stage of a soul when its three *malams* meet with the cause of their removal.’ The respective attributes of each of these four stages, have been referred to previously in the notes to vv 15 and 64. These are discussed again in more detail i vv 80–83.

Feeling revulsion for worldly enjoyments, feeling no desire for the lower worldly pleasures or the higher states of bliss,



OZHIVIL ODUKKAM

rejecting them all as absolutely false, a mere conjuring trick, the disciple will begin to ask, ‘What is this body, who am I, and what is my source?’ and he will say, ‘We shall seek out the one who will reveal to us the truth of these matters!’ Thus arises the longing to make one what formerly appeared as two. (72)

The *inferior state of bliss* – *patha muttikal* referred to in this verse are states of bliss experienced prior to the attaining of *para mutti* – *supreme liberation*. Disciples who are becoming ripe for liberation will experience various levels of bliss as they begin to free themselves from their worldly entanglements. However attachment to such states is no less to be avoided than attachment to worldly things.

The word translated as *longing* in the final sentence of this verse is a translation of the Tamil word *thettam*; it has two main meanings: *earnest desire, appetite, longing* and *seeking, search, pursuit*. We might therefore expand the last section to say something like: *Thus arises the longing to make one what formerly appeared as two, coupled with the quest to find the teacher who can grant that realisation.*

They will perspire; tears will course down their cheeks; their hearts will thump and their bodies will shake; speech will desert them, and their minds will become agitated and confused; their bodies will burn feverishly, churned up like the roiling clouds; and their hair will stand on end. Such are the eight symptoms which mark those who desire [to find the guru]. (73)

An air of distraction; thoughts [fixed on the guru]; sighs [on thinking of the guru]; fevers inexplicable to others [caused by those thoughts]; refusal of all sustenance; reluctance to speak; keeping silence; mental confusion; fainting and death – these ten are the states [of the disciple before he finds his guru]. (74)

These states are variously interpreted by commentators. This translation follows the *urai* of Chidambara Swamigal, the bracketed

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portions in the main text indicating the general sense of his interpretation.

The words *arai nottam* have been translated as *an air of distraction*. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *with a diminished attention due to the mind being turned inward, away from the world*. Commenting on *ariyaa curam* – *unknown fevers*, Chidambara Swamigal says that the disciple, overcome by the intensity of his thoughts and emotions, is overwhelmed by fevers which are inexplicable to others.

The words *reticence in speaking* translate the Tamil *urai torraa maanam* – *a dignity by virtue of which speech does not arise*. Aware that no one else could possibly understand what he is experiencing, the aspirant prefers to maintain a dignified silence in that regard. The words *mental confusion* translate the Tamil word *vikalam* – *delirium, confusion, agitation*. The aspirant is driven to distraction by his quest, which has so far been unavailing.

Know that at the very instant that the guru reveals his holy form, and that which is inner manifests outwardly, as the physical manifestation of their quest, he will grant initiation of the six kinds – three inward and three outward, as prescribed [in the Vedas and Agamas] – to those of highest maturity, who have petitioned him, as [the river of devotion] overflows its banks. (75)

The verse begins with the pregnant phrase *thettam tiranda tiru meni*, which we might translate as *the holy form in which [the object of] his quest has materialised [in human form]*. The sense is that the eager longing of the disciple for the guru at some point brings about the guru's physical manifestation, an event which in turn reveals to the disciple that, unknown to himself, the guru, in the form of the Self, has been within him from the beginning.

The three inner forms of initiation are *tiru nokkam* – *by the holy glance*, *bhavanai* – *by thought* and *yokam* – *by yoga*, and the three outer forms are *parisam* – *by touch*, *vakku* – *by word* and *nul* – *by holy scripture*.

The disciple's *petitioning* the guru would consist of him asking the guru the questions they had found themselves unable to answer in v. 72. However before asking such questions, the disciples would pay homage to the guru in traditional fashion, described by Chidambara Swamigal as follows: *having circumambulated the acarya many times, having made ashtanga prostration and other form of obeisance, then, arising and standing with joined palms, offering many praises....*; only then would they address the guru. A detailed description of such an initiation (as in Lord Siva manifesting as guru to Manikkavacakar), is found in Ch. 2, *Holy Perunturai*, of the *Tiruvadavur Adigal Puranam*.

The bracketed words *the river of devotion* are taken from Chidamabara Swamigal's *urai*, which says: *as the river of devotion surges, rising up and overflowing its banks*. The idea that the inner bliss being experienced by the disciple will well up irrepressibly and manifest in their outer conduct is expressed by the image of a river overflowing its banks.

Through his touch, thought and glance, the guru will drive out all the three *malams*, *anavam*, *mayai* and *kanmam*. Then, bestowing his wisdom through his word, he will remove the illusion of personal consciousness – which leads to involvement in *cariyai* and the other three paths – whereupon that personal consciousness will be no more. (76)

The commentary states that the guru, in touching the disciple with his hands and feet, is like a bird which uses its feathers to hatch out its eggs; in dwelling upon the disciple as his own divine form, he is like the turtle, which protects its eggs with its thoughts; and in looking upon the disciple with his glance of grace, he is like the fish, which watches over its eggs with its eyes. It further states that all six forms of initiation are meant in this verse, *yoga* being considered to be included in *thought*, and *holy scripture* in *word*.

To some disciples the secret of the master's teaching will only be revealed at the appropriate time or in the appropriate situation; or it will require experience, like that of an expert in recognising a gemstone. Others will grasp the truth that



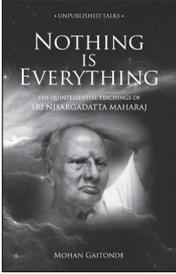
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is being transmitted like the swan, which drinks the milk, leaving the water with which it is mixed; like the oyster, which waits for raindrops to fall into it then closes up; like a heron, which remains motionless, waiting for a fish to pass; like water that vanishes instantly on falling onto red-hot iron, or in the manner of those who can correctly appraise a coin that is presented to them in the space of a flash of lightning. (77)

For some disciples the meaning of the master's teachings will remain hidden from them at first, but will later dawn upon them. Some disciples will not grasp the teaching when presented in a given form, but will be able to do so when presented in another form. Yet others will require the help of fellow disciples to understand that which they have so far been unable to grasp, just as a gemstone might look like a worthless stone to someone until he has received training in the company of those who are skilled in distinguishing them.

The way in which the mature disciple will be able to grasp the guru's teaching is illustrated by means of a series of similes. Like the swan's fabled ability to separate milk from water and drink only the milk, ripe disciples have the ability to grasp the *jnana* essence of the master's teaching, without being caught up in all the paraphernalia which encumber the seeker on the first three paths of *cariyai*; like the oyster, which waits for nourishing rain to fall then closes up immediately, they maintain themselves in an open and receptive state, waiting for a word from the master, and when it does come, they make sure to absorb and internalise it, not letting it go to waste; like the heron or stork which remains absolutely motionless, ready to pounce when its prey comes near, they keep absolutely still, waiting for a word from the master, ready to snap it up eagerly when it comes; just as water falling onto red-hot iron evaporates and cannot be recovered, they will absorb the master's teaching instantly the moment they hear it, not letting it escape them; and just as an expert, due to his vast experience, might be able to appraise a coin, even if it were illuminated only for a brief moment by a single flash of lightning, they will be able to grasp the master's teaching in an instant. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



NOTHING IS EVERYTHING: The Quintessential Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj by Mohan Gaitonde. Zen Publications, 60 Juhu Supreme Shopping Centre, Gulmohar Cross Road, No.9, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai 400049. ₹400, pp.247. Tel: +91 22 32408074 ISBN 13: 978-93-82788-97-3 www.zenpublications.com

Mohan Gaitonde was a translator at the evening satsangs of Nisargadatta Maharaj (NM) at his home at Khetwadi from 1978 to 1981 while Gaitonde's wife, Jayashri operated a tape recorder at these satsangs. The book is a record of conversations visitors had with NM. There is no editorial comment. We have here an authentic record of what NM said which is closer to the bone than some publications of NM's talks well-edited though they be, or for that matter, those who write books about NM's teachings explain to us what he really meant. For those who were fortunate to attend NM's satsangs these recorded dialogues have the ring of legitimacy and evoke the atmosphere, the punchy urgency of NM's method and his fearless ability to shake those present out of their lethargy. There are some forty-one chapters with titles such as 'Consciousness the Primary Illusion', 'Maya is Self-Love', 'How to be Free from the "I Am" Disease', 'Your Parents are God, You are the Ornament'.

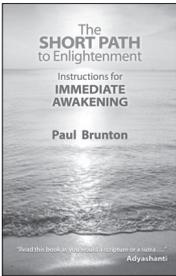
The principal purpose of NM's teachings was to destroy our concepts as to who we think we are. He employs classical Vedantic methodology along with the Marathi Navnath tradition as a razor to slice through our ignorance, or as he would say, reveal how we hang ourselves with our concepts. One can argue that many teachers do exactly the same but in the presence of a tiger such as NM there is a qualitative leap. It is not a friendly cosy fireside chat listening to his words but a fierce take-no-prisoners discussion. "Our sense of being is the quality of food essence made of the five elements. There is only a food body but no individual. This is manifestation, which contains

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everything. When there is no individual, who is born and who dies? There is only an appearance and disappearance, like a flame. Coming and going is a myth.” The radical conviction of his philosophy is arresting: “Your existence is like the appearance of light when a matchstick is struck. There is nothing before and nothing after. With what equipment are you going to begin your search? When the light (consciousness) is extinguished, it is all over — nothing before and nothing after.”

NM enunciates a radical stance concerning the very idea of consciousness. He says: “Consciousness is material knowledge, as it is the quality of *sattva* or food juices. Without *sattva*, the consciousness cannot appear.” “One has to transcend not only the body, but even one’s consciousness. One goes beyond all knowledge.”

This book gives us the opportunity to reflect deeply on our dilemma — our ignorance as to who or what we are. It is not a book through which one accumulates yet more knowledge but a rapier to cut through the walls of our habitual mind. If you are an admirer of Maharaj, let not the opportunity pass.



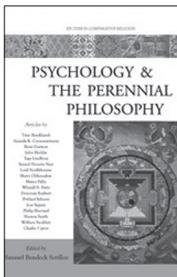
THE SHORT PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT. Instructions for Immediate Awakening by Paul Brunton. Larson Publications, 4936 NYS Route 414, Burdett, New York 14818 USA. \$14.95 pp.160. ISBN -13: 978-1-936012-30-5

www.larsonpublications.com

Paul Brunton needs no introduction to our readers.

This new book is a selection taken from PB’s posthumously published *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* in sixteen volumes. The book’s title indicates that there is a quick route to self-realisation as articulated by PB which places it in the company of esoteric paths that have in recent decades become readily available to seekers. The purpose of the book is stated in the sub-title. The Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation has become increasingly active and influential in the public domain since the passing of PB in 1981 and this book is a reminder of their efforts to make available a ‘new’ teaching that is consonant with the perennial tradition.

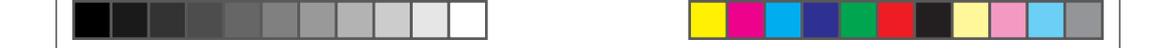
The value of PB's insights is that they come from a long and sustained journey by someone whose intelligence, perseverance and integrity are self-evident. He was a pioneer in the 20th Century when such an aspiration to know the so-called 'secret' higher truths was derided in the mainstream of Western life. There is an element of common sense coupled with a refined fluency in his writing style which is immediately engaging. A gifted writer, his books published in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, are classics and have quietly influenced generations of seekers. Through his books, especially his *A Search in Secret India* many especially in the West came to know of Ramana Maharshi. He has the ability not just to inspire but clarify what is essential. The simplicity of his writing veils the sophistication of his comprehension. These short selections on a wide range of spiritual topics are meant more for meditation than browsing.



PSYCHOLOGY & THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY edited by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos. World Wisdom Inc., PO Box 2682, Bloomington, Indiana 47402-2682 USA. \$23.95, pp.220. ISBN: 978-1-936597-20-8 www.worldwisdom.com

The opening quotation from René Guénon's *Man and His Becoming According to Vedanta* encapsulates the content and purpose of the collection of articles under discussion: "As for modern Western psychology, it deals only with quite a restricted portion of the human individuality, where the mental faculty is in direct relationship with the corporeal modality, and, given the methods it employs, it is incapable of going any further. In any case the very objective which it sets before itself and which is exclusively the study of mental phenomena [of the ego], limits it strictly to the realm of the individuality, so that the state which we are now discussing [*Atma* or the Self] necessarily eludes its investigations."

The editor of this rich volume on the question of psychology and spiritual works is academically qualified in the mental health field and a scholar in mystical literature. Briefly, the collection of articles is divided into three sections: Critique, Theoria and Praxis. There are



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three book reviews, two of which are respectively, evaluations on the modern spiritual authorities, Eckhart Tolle and Ken Wilber.

There are articles by distinguished scholars and academics such as Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Philip Sherrard, Ananda Coomaraswamy among others. It is a judicious mixture and the editor is to be commended for the quality of contributions. It has been lovingly and intelligently put together. The Coomaraswamy article 'On Being in One's Right Mind' is excellent. This brief review focuses on the editor's article which is central to the collection, 'The Impasse of Modern Psychology'. Sotillos delineates the four principal schools of modern psychology, namely Behaviourism, Psychoanalysis, Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology. He presents a succinct but brilliant synopsis of their basic premises and then proceeds to show their inherent limitations in the light of the perennial philosophy. It is the first time I have read such a clear account of these major schools free of woolly jargon and obfuscation.

Science is another dogma and does not control the quest for truth in all its aspects and for this discipline to declare it is the only valid instrument is simply unscientific and untenable. It has affected all the disciplines in our world not just psychology, with the mechanical, deterministic and reductionist assumptions of its own discipline. In its most blatant aspect we see the science of economics define the value of a human being in terms of their monetary worth.

Sotillos writes: "The truth of the Absolute is not awaiting empirical or observable proof that it exists, and this is what modern psychology, and the modern and by extension the postmodern outlook as a whole, entirely fails to comprehend. The integral psychologies of the perennial philosophy, being grounded in metaphysical principles, cannot be reduced *a priori* to empirical or statistical data, as they lie outside the psycho-physical domain which is verified by one of the earliest sapiential traditions of this temporal cycle, known as the *sanatana dharma*."

Though intellectually and technically quite demanding the effort is worth it. A rewarding book. — Christopher Quilkey





ASHRAM BULLETIN



D. Thiyagarajan

Newly Laid Tiles Leading to Kitchen Side Entrance

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Sri Ramanananda Matalayam – Desur

The Matalayam celebrated its hundredth year this month with a *Kumbhabhishekam* sponsored by a local physician-devotee Dr. Ravi with support by Sri Ramanasramam. The Ramanananda Matalayam is the first centre established in Bhagavan's name. It was inaugurated by Desur Akhilandamma and Mastan Swami in June (Vaikasi) 1914. On Sunday 8th June, 2014 the centenary event took place after several months of renovation work. Sri Ramanasramam devotees were in attendance during the *kala puja* in the *yagasala* and the *kumbhabhishekam* which followed. There was also the *mahabhishekam* of the samadhi of Akhilandamma with the sanctified water.

Sathabhishekam

On 13th June Ashram President V.S.Ramanan celebrated *Sathabhishekam* (completion of 80 years), almost twenty years to the day since his father, T.N.Venkataraman's *sathabhishekam* on 10th June, 1994. Dr. Anand Ramanan and other family members gathered with devotees for the *homa* in the New Hall followed by *pujnahuti* at 9.30. All moved out in front of the New Hall for *abhishekam*, followed by *puja* at Bhagavan's Shrine. Many well-wishers approached the President and Sushilamma to present gifts and do *namaskaram* after which birthday cake was cut and distributed.

On this happy occasion, devotees and family members joined in praying to Bhagavan to bless Sri Ramanasramam's President with many more years of health and dedicated service to Bhagavan.

Mahapuja

Celebrations were held in the Mother's Shrine with *Mahanyasa Japam* at 5.30am on 22nd June in praise of the Mother. On this day each year we give honour to an essential aspect of the ashram's existence. It is due to the Grace of the Mother that Bhagavan's teachings are propagated throughout the world.

Centenary Celebrations of Swami Ramanananda

On the 26th June there was *Rudram* chanting at Swami Ramanananda's shrine at 8am as family members and devotees gathered to sing songs.

His great-grand-daughter, Aryamba, narrated remembrances of 'Swamiji Tatha'. Then Sulochana Natarajan recalled her memories of TNV and his friendship with her husband, A.R. Natarajan. After first *arati*, Ramananjali and TNV's family sang a new song by KVS on the life of Swamiji followed by Alagu and others who rendered songs on Bhagavan.

Gurupurnima on 11th July

Gurupurnima was the day when the first guru (adiguru) taught his seven disciples, the *Saptarishis*, who then spread world-wide yogic knowledge. *Gurupurnima* falls on the full moon day during the month of *Ashadh* (mid-June–mid-July) and marks the day when students and disciples honour their gurus. It is also called *Vyasa Purnima* because Vyasa began composing the *Brahma Sutras* on this day, and *sannyasis* venerate their gurus with puja and begin the *Chaturmas*, the four-month retreat from the wandering life during the rainy season. This year's *Gurupurnima* was observed at the Ashram on 11th July with *Mahanyasa puja* and offering new *dhotis* to resident and local *sannyasis*.

Samvatsara Abhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhuteswara

The first anniversary of the Mahakumbhabhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhuteswara Shrines was observed with *homa* on Punarvasu Day, Friday the 22nd August, in the New Hall. *Sankalpa* and *Mahanyasa japa* began around 5.30am followed by *homa* at 8am. Purnahuti at 10am was followed by procession and *abhishekam* in Mother's and Bhagavan's Shrines.

Sri Muruganar's Aradhana Day

To commemorate Sri Muruganar's Samadhi Day, *odhuvars* from Madurai, Thanjavur and Ramanathapuram sang the verses of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* at Sri Muruganar's Samadhi for three days (26th-28th August) following Muruganar's Samadhi Day celebrations on the 25th August.

The 118th Advent Day

This special day in the ashram calendar was celebrated this year with the participation of a group of Ramana devotees from Madurai.

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It was a joyous occasion in the Ashram with so many ardent devotees from Bhagavan's boyhood town. They were with us for two days. There was a special *parayana* full of devotion in the New Hall on Monday afternoon. While here at the Ashram they also did *giri pradakshina* and returned to Madurai hearts full.



Pictorial Postal Cancellation – Special Event

Pictorial Cancellations are provided by the Department of Posts at Post Offices at places of historical importance. It has much value and is sought after by the philatelists all over the world. The India Post has introduced a Permanent Pictorial Cancellation (PPC) at Sri Ramanasramam Post Office to coincide with the 2014 Advent day of Sri Bhagavan. On the first September, the PPC was placed in the Holy Shrine of Sri Bhagavan during the puja on Advent Day and officially released. Mervin Alexander, the Post Master General, Chennai City, explained the significance of the cancellation earlier. The ashram president VS Ramanan expressed his happiness at the India Post gesture. All mail originating from Sri Ramanasramam Post Office henceforth will bear this unique Post Mark.

