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Ramana Ashtottaram

97. ओः नैसर्गिकमहातपसे नमः

Prostration to the One spontaneously blazing forth as Pure Awareness, a great tapasvi by his very nature.

Bhagavan did not deliberately perform tapas, as the Sun does not choose to emit rays. As the last verse of Upadesa Saram declares, egoless living is itself the most excellent tapas. Bhagavan shines as the eternal I, effortlessly and without a thought, now as then. A sthitaprajna, one established in Self-awareness, he blesses the world by his mere presence, which continues even though the body is no more.

98. ओः कमण्डलुधराय नमः

Prostration to the One who holds the water-jug.

The Kamandalu is a symbol of purity, simplicity and firmness. The water flows out of the vessel as Grace from his eyes. Unerringly he pours out on those he chooses the cool, cleansing waters of immortality.
The Written Word

Inevitably, over time, the initial impact and power of a written teaching in any tradition is diminished by changes in the meaning of words. Think of the Gospels about Jesus; the hadiths attributed to the prophet Mohammed. Arthur Osborne once said that any religion starts to disintegrate from the moment of its inception. The high point is when the Master is there.

However well-meaning a commentator may be, there is still a diminution of the original content. The situation is complex enough without the added ingredient of translation into another language. And then there are the usual squabbles as to what the teacher really meant. The history of the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is no different.

Devotees are faced with the challenge as to what Bhagavan meant and what are the implications and consequences of what he wrote and said. Bhagavan was born and raised a south Indian Tamil Brahmin. He grew up with all the perspectives and persuasions that that involves. Yet it would be a mistake to think that if one acted like a Tamilian, spoke the language and wore a kaupina that one would understand the teachings he gave. Quite the contrary, it would be just as much
an impediment as an advantage. We are seeking the essence of what Bhagavan wrote and taught, not the package in which it came.

Nevertheless, to understand the essence we do need some understanding of words, be it in the original or in trusted translation, plus the religious context, and spiritual and cultural understanding of conventions and attitudes. To give but one example, the word jnana, which is fundamental to any understanding of Bhagavan’s teachings, has a wide range of meanings. It comes from the root ‘jna’, to know. It can mean knowledge, wisdom, and comprehension. In Advaita Vedanta it is the absolute prerequisite for liberation. From Nyaya-Vaisesika to Mimamsa to Visistadvaita Vedanta each places a different emphasis on the word and has its own divergent understanding of its implications. It may be mediate, that is, through another or outside agency or it may be direct or immediate; it may be a mode or vehicle to convey meaning; it may be supersensible, that is, it may be above or beyond the senses; it may only be known through inference according to some; in others only through direct experience. In theory, the possibilities are endless.

In order to understand Bhagavan’s teachings we first should be sure of our intention. If it is academic or theoretical because we want to accumulate knowledge so that we can complacently think we know, then that is one possibility. If we want to understand Bhagavan’s teachings with all our heart so that we too may be liberated, that is an entirely different prospect. We should not confuse the two. Our fundamental intention is crucial if we are to absorb correctly what Bhagavan has written or said. It is that primary attitude of humility which will colour and direct our acquisition of knowledge. Unless we use Bhagavan’s teachings to further our own spiritual development we are but like an accumulator of facts and dates and stories that serve no other purpose than to bolster our self-esteem and keep existential anxiety at bay. If we truly want to know then we are first obliged to give up our preconceptions and begin anew. To receive the teaching we are to empty ourselves of all that is irrelevant and contradictory. We must, in short, become simple. That is, open, direct and eager to learn.
To be simple means we exercise discrimination and learn to separate the fluff from the gold. But how can we tell the difference between the entertaining but ultimately useless from the sparks that sharply light up the path in an unforgettable moment? We have several tools at our disposal: Bhagavan’s teachings, the ashram with its influential aura of Grace and the senior devotees who have trodden the path. Let us leave aside the latter two and focus on the teachings which can be read anywhere in the world.

There are three tiers of literature concerning the teachings: Bhagavan’s own writings, the authentic historical scriptures, the words of direct disciples and the commentaries of those who came later who, with mostly the best of intentions, try to explain what Bhagavan actually meant. The timeless scriptures are now easily available both in book and internet access. The words of direct disciples are also available, be it Muruganar, Sadhu Natanananda, Viswanatha Swami, Sivaprakasam Pillai and Kunju Swami among others. The later burgeoning industry of commentaries is there to be seen in all its suitability and, at times, vacuous irrelevancy.

If we really want to know Bhagavan’s teachings why do we not go direct to the source? Why depend on intermediaries? We can do no better than study what Bhagavan wrote. Even Muruganar, arguably the closest devotee of Bhagavan, is not Sri Ramana Maharshi. Though Muruganar’s Guru Vachaka Kovai is a collection of Bhagavan’s statements in verse each of which was examined by Bhagavan himself, they are still a step down, however minuscule, from the pure thrust of the teaching. It is the spirit of jnana, it is the indescribable transformative flash we seek to imbibe. It is not a description though this can help. Bhagavan’s words are paradoxically meant to catapult us beyond words. The fresher the words the easier it is for us to grasp the point.

The ashram has begun slowly to make available through publications a new possibility to study Bhagavan’s teachings in the original with careful word by word translations and explanations of the grammar and as well, convey the heft of significant words. The ashram would like a return back to the simplicity and immediacy
MOUNTAIN PATH

of Bhagavan’s teachings and if we as devotees are serious about our commitment we too should consider revisiting the core of the teaching, not as a limited exercise but as a regular habit.

We can do no better than return to *Self-Enquiry, Who Am I?* and *Spiritual Instruction. The Essence of Instruction* and *Forty Verses on Reality* contain enough spiritual food to last a lifetime. *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* is a precious testimony of Bhagavan’s devotion to Arunachala and the songs can be our vehicle too that dissolves us in ecstatic union with the Beloved.

There is *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* and *Maharshi’s Gospel* which provide an authentic record of Bhagavan’s responses to questions. There is *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* about life around Bhagavan during his physical lifetime. There is *Guru Vachaka Kovai* and *Ramana Darsanam* that are major reliable sources of insight by senior devotees. We have the histories written by B.V. Narasimha Swamy and Arthur Osborne. There are smaller books like *Guru Ramana, Crumbs From His Table* and *The Path of Sri Ramana* which contain nuggets of wisdom.

Why should we seek elsewhere to know and understand Bhagavan’s teachings when there are texts already available? One old devotee was heard to remark some years ago that he did not believe anything that was written and published after Bhagavan’s *mahasamadhi*. This may be a harsh yardstick but it does give us a handy criterion by which to discriminate between what is of value and what is waffle. Once we have that discrimination well-established we can read later literature and distinguish that which is true and of lasting value. That old cliché, ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth’ is so true.

Since Paul Brunton’s time note-taking in the Old Hall in front of Bhagavan was absolutely forbidden by Chinnaswami. Various devotees who reported Bhagavan’s words did so to the best of their memory either when they got home that evening or perhaps, once a week or longer. Bearing this in mind it becomes clear that the gospel of Sri Ramana’s teachings must be filtered through the veil of human memory. Sayings could be attributed to him without the benefit of complete accuracy. This continues to this day with writers and any
number of devotees blithely quoting Bhagavan in order to bolster an idea that they feel that he would have approved of if only he had thought of it. Hence, the importance of the veracity of Bhagavan’s own writings.

As to those who use Bhagavan’s name to bolster their own so-called authority, their motives speak for themselves. The name Ramana has become a brand name not unlike Apple, Rolls-Royce, Samsung, Gucci, Siemens and a host of other brands that instantly elicit a positive response. The words ‘Ramana Maharshi’ connote authenticity, purity, irreproachable authority, in other words, a name one can trust. The consequence of this usage is that Bhagavan apparently subscribes to all types of opinions that in his physical lifetime he would reject as less than sufficient explanation of Advaita’s subtleties or of the challenges and travails a seeker experiences on the path. And as to new age gurus who purloin the name ‘Ramana’ and his statements taken out of context the less said the better.

It is a cause of endless wonder that the teachings or sayings of a genuine teacher shine through regardless of time or translation. Consider the earthy vernacular Hindi of Kabir, the arbitrarily recorded Middle High German sermons of Meister Eckhart, the concise, pristine Sanskrit slokas of AdiSankara, the rich poetic Persian of the Mathnawi by Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi: they are not explanations, they are experiences. Even though time, cultural, religious differences let alone language barriers are apparently insuperable to our comprehension, the ring of truth is there to be seen and savoured. For want of a better description, there is ‘presence’. Likewise Bhagavan’s teachings are distinctive and quite recognisable for those who have the eyes and ears to see and hear. They are direct, subtle and leave a clean taste of rightness. We just ‘know’ that Bhagavan discerns with absolute clarity what he is writing or talking about from his own direct experience.

These teachings we should trust implicitly and follow with all the dedication, perseverance and intelligence we can muster. Let us not dawdle at a second-hand purveyor of wisdom but go straight to the source.
There is a deep rooted kinship which exists between the souls of East and West. As Rudolph Otto has pointed out, “There are strong primal impulses working in the human soul which as such are completely unaffected by differences of climate, of geographical position or of race. These show in their similarity an inner relationship of types of human experience and spiritual life which is truly astonishing.”

When we examine the spiritual experiences of mystics like Sufi saint Rabi’ā of Basra and St. Teresa of Avila we discover similarities. It is the purpose of this study to present these two saints from the perspective of their practical mysticism of divine love, that our own vision and understanding may be enhanced.

Margaret Laulor, an American Quaker, has been closely involved with inter-religious dialogue ever since her first visit to India as an American Friends Service volunteer. In this quest she discovered and established an interactive involvement with Hinduism with a focus on Mother as Divinity. She is author of the booklet: Notes from a Flute based on her experiences of Ma Anandamayi, as her initiated disciple. She passed away in 2014.
Before examining their respective spiritual lives and teachings, it is important to consider certain characteristics of mysticism in general. Common to the mystical state is an experience of God, a practical experience of the most intense and personal form. Mysticism is simultaneously an act of the highest love, an act of surrender and an act of supreme perception. Mysticism is not to be seen as a religion in itself; but rather that which is most vital in all religions, and which revolts against merely formal and lethargic religion. It is not a philosophical system, although it subscribes to a scheme of things. It is an entirely spiritual activity which transcends the world of senses, yet it entails a definite psychological experience.

To achieve the unitive experience, the mystic must pass from the finite to the infinite, from a lower reality to the highest Reality, from a sense of the personality or ego self to become Being itself. “Mysticism claims that the soul can undertake this tremendous journey and pass from that which is temporal to that which is Eternal, and it bases its claims on certain postulates.”

The first one states that “the soul can see and perceive by a spiritual sense,... that inner sense which is called intuition.” In this state one receives direct revelation and knowledge of God. “Mysticism, then, asserts... that knowledge is not attained only by the senses or the intellect or the normal processes of consciousness, but that the highest knowledge is attained... by this spiritual sense of intuition.”

Secondly, mysticism maintains that the soul, in order to know God, must itself be a partaker of the Divine nature. In this context it can be said that there is an inward light or divine spark which seeks to reunite with the Eternal Flame.

The third point makes it clear that unless the soul is “stripped of the veils of selfishness and sensuality” it cannot attain to the knowledge of God. The act of purification requires the seeker to surrender self-will, self-seeking, and also to still the senses.

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2 Smith, Margaret, *The Way of the Mystics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp.4-5. The points that follow immediately are also from this source.
Finally mysticism sees love as the guiding principle and inspiration of the soul journeying to God. “The mystics, throughout the ages, have conceived of the Object of their search as the Beloved, and it is as lovers that they seek for the consummation of their love in union with the One.”

The four points can be thought of as the Mystic Way, to be followed by all who seek the unitive experience. There are stages of the Way; in this study a threefold division, which applies to the religious systems of both East and West, will be examined, particularly in the lives of Rabi’a and Teresa. The three stages are the Purgative life, the Illuminative life and the Unitive life. Through looking at these two mystics in a similar way we may derive a sense of Reality.

We are fortunate in having a well-documented life of Teresa who was born of an aristocratic family of Avila, in 1515. In her thirteenth year she lost her mother, an experience that caused her to draw closer to the mother of Christ. She has recorded this incident in her Life: “When I began to realize what I had lost, I went in my distress to an image of Our Lady and with many tears besought her to be a mother to me. Though I did this in my simplicity, I believe it was of some avail to me; for whenever I have commended myself to this Sovereign Virgin I have been conscious of her aid; and eventually she has brought me back to herself.”

Three years later when her older half-sister was no longer at home, Teresa was placed as a boarder in a convent. She was twenty-one years old when she became a novice in the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation, Avila.

Due to the laxity of the Carmelite orders at that time, she felt a call to restore a stricter rule. An unusually gifted woman, Teresa occupies a permanent place in the church’s history for her successful efforts in advancing the monastic ideal. She was an effective organizer and administrator, an insightful and independent thinker, an enduring writer, a compassionate and practical teacher and prioress, a superb

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judge of human character and human nature. She executed her many responsibilities in spite of serious and time-consuming illnesses. Teresa, who died in 1582, is revered rather for her inner gifts of spirit and authority. She is considered by many to be the most popular Christian mystic and saint.

It is held that Rabi’ā al-Adawiyya, sometimes called ‘a second spotless Mary’, was the first saint of Islam. It is a fact that hers is the first life from the history of Sufism to be introduced into European history. In the thirteenth century the chancellor of Louis IX, Joinville brought her legend to Europe where her story has appeared in Western literature, with her as the model of Divine Love. ⁴

Unfortunately we do not have a biography of Rabi’ā from a writer close to her time. The details of her early life which were recorded more than four hundred years later, taken from sources such as chronicles of an earlier period and treatises on Sufism, may be seen more as legend than pure history. Nevertheless they give us an inkling of her personality and an estimation of the regard in which later generations held her. ⁵

Rabi’ā’s dates are given as ca 99/717 to 185/801. Her birth into a poor but noble family of Basra was said to have been marked by certain miraculous events. On the night she was born there was neither lamp nor swaddling clothes available. Her father was not at liberty to borrow from the neighbours because as a Sufi he could not violate his vow of depending solely on God to provide his needs. It is said that the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him in a dream that night and spoke these words: “Do not be sorrowful, for this daughter who is born is a great saint, whose intercession will be desired by seventy thousand of my community.” ⁶

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⁵ Smith, Margaret, *Rabi’a, The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints*. Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1974. This study, first published in 1928, is a composite of many accounts of Rabi’a not written in English. It has become the source book for most writers in English who allude to Rabi’a, and so it is in this study.
⁶ Ibid., pp.5-6.
Orphaned as a child she was scattered from her older sisters, kidnapped and sold into slavery. Nevertheless she manifested a certain strength of character in her life of faith. She carried out her duties as a slave and fasted during the day and prayed at night. There is an interesting story told about the way through which she earned her freedom. One night her master observed her in prayer and reportedly heard her say the following:

“O my Lord. Thou knowest that the desire of my heart is to obey Thee, and that the light of my eye is in the service of Thy court. If the matter rested with me, I should not cease for one hour from Thy service, but Thou hast made me subject to a creature.”

Her master observed a light or aura above her head which cast a radiance on her surroundings. Pondering this strange phenomenon, he thought of setting her free. Having obtained her freedom she journeyed into the desert. She later settled into a cell, and subsequently built a place of retreat.

She received many offers of marriage but chose the celibate life as best suited to cultivate her single-minded devotion to God. Rabi’ā was known to have a number of disciples of her own and to associate with other Sufi leaders of her time. In spite of the Oriental preference for exalting males, her biographers “are prepared to grant to Rabi’ā a position of equality with, even of pre-eminence above her contemporaries, including those who were accepted as leaders of thought and revered teachers of the Sufi doctrine.”

We turn now to an examination of the lives of the two saints as each one passed through the three stages of the Mystic Way. The first one, the Purgative life, is purification from the fetters of sin, represented by sensuality and self-will. A life of strict asceticism, prayer and self-discipline was seen as the way to purge oneself of sin or weakness.

Both women followed a celibate life, and each was cloistered in her own way. Rabi’ā went into solitude for a number of years in the remote desert. It was physical suffering which helped Teresa to make

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7 Ibid., p.7.
8 Ibid., p.19.
the decision to leave her comforts behind, and to enter a religious order, troubled as she was about the condition of her soul. For a long time Teresa was pulled towards the world, as she admits in her autobiography.

“When I was in the midst of worldly pleasures, I was distressed by the remembrance of what I owed to God; when I was with God, I grew restless because of worldly affections. This is so grievous a conflict that I do not know how I managed to endure it for a month, much less for so many years.”

Prayer was not easy for her; she persevered for fourteen years before she experienced facility of prayer. We are able to follow her journey in prayer because, out of obedience to her confessor, she recorded her life, as well as a classic on mystical theology, Interior Castle, and a practical guide to prayer for her nuns in The Way of Perfection, books that have served to guide others in their own journeys because of the authentic spiritual life of the writer.

In the Interior Castle, written between June and November, 1577, she describes her vision of the soul as “a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendour, illumining and beautifying them all. The nearer one got to the centre, the stronger was the light; outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark and infected with toads, vipers and other venomous creatures.” The soul advances through the mansions, in its quest for perfection and communion with God.

Teresa declares in the first mansion that we are made in the image and likeness of God, but through our own fault “we do not understand ourselves or know who we are.” If we understand ourselves we will “strive to remove the pitch which blackens the crystal.” In order to know ourselves we must seek to know God. That is to be achieved

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through embracing the cross: “let her (him) who is capable of the greatest suffering suffer most for Him.” After much physical suffering in her own life she came to scorn her poor health: “Even if I die it is of little consequence. Rest, indeed... I need no rest; what I need is crosses.”

In spite of, or perhaps because of, her own difficulties in prayer, she readily encourages others to practise mental prayer; it is the means by which one mends one’s life. Although we are always in God’s presence, according to Teresa, prayer is a way of remembering that fact. People who do not practice prayer may not remember for several days.

In these first mansions she urges us to surrender ourselves and our wills, to practise humility through looking at our own shortcomings, to practise obedience and virtues, to obtain mastery over our passions, and to choose companions who are on the spiritual path. Performance of good works should not be made so much of, as one is simply expected to do them as a Christian.

Prayer in Sufism is *du’a* or free prayer, and particularly *munajat* or loving converse with God when the mystic speaks from the depths of the heart. Rabi’a’s personality is known through her devotion to prayer. There is an anecdote which describes the integrated life she followed in order to purify herself.

For seven days she had fasted and given up sleep to spend her time in prayer. When it was time to break the fast she was given a cup of food which a cat upset while she was fetching a lamp. Thinking she would break her fast on water she went to get her jug. Meanwhile the lamp went out, and, in the darkness, she dropped and broke the water jug. “O Lord,” she lamented, “what is this Thou art doing to wretched me?” In response she heard a voice:

“Have a care, if you desire it, I will endow you with all the pleasures of this world, but I shall take concern for Me out of your heart, for such concern and the pleasures of this world cannot dwell together in one heart. O Rabi’a, you have a desire and I have a desire, I cannot combine My desire and your desire in one heart.”

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11 Rabi’a, p.20.
Her response was to cut herself off from others, lest they should distract her, and intensify her prayer. It is an echo of Teresa’s warning that souls become paralysed when we are too caught up in worldly affairs.

Both traditions believed in purgation through purifying the soul of sin which has roots in selfish desires. Sufis held the belief that asceticism need be practised only in the beginning stages, however we are told that Rabi’a continued it to the end of her life, thereby coming closer to the fulfillment of the ideal of Christian sainthood. The Sufi practices of asceticism and pietism at this time were a reaction to an environment of luxury and worldly enjoyment, and legal formalism in Islam. Rabi’a is among the first Sufis to exalt the path of divine love at a time when the mystical path mostly followed self-denial.

When the outward life of the senses has been purified, it is necessary to bring the inward faculties of thought, feeling and will into conformity with the Divine will in order to be transformed wholly into the likeness of the Beloved. The individual soul has no desire or wish, having renounced all save the will of God. Love of God must first be present; then only can the lover obey. It is for this reason that Rabi’a said: “Hadst thou been true in love, thou wouldst have surely obeyed Him. For the lover is always obedient to his Beloved.”

When asked what she desired, she replied: “I am a servant, and what has a servant to do with desire? If I will anything and my Lord does not will it, this would be unbelief. That should be willed which He wills, in order to be His true servant.”

Prayer for Rabi’a was not merely a matter of intercession; rather it was a time of communion with God that she might discover His will for her. She allowed no created thing to distract her from the Creator. Her love, then, went far beyond the love of God which is obligatory of all Muslims.

In Teresa’s example we find that she stressed love of God without the motive of self-interest; one should desire to suffer in imitation of Christ. To be transformed into the likeness of the divine is one way

12 Way, p.221.
to purify the will. Teresa also defined the place of reasoning in this approach to God.

“We should contrive not to use our reasoning powers, but be intent upon discovering what the Lord is working in the soul.... It is best to put a stop to all discursive reasoning, yet not to suspend the understanding nor to cease from all thought.”

In showing how the soul is united to God in prayer she uses the image of the silkworm which, when full grown, begins to spin its silk and build the cocoon in which it will die. Christ is like the cocoon which is attained through weaving and spinning, or the practice of spiritual qualities. When the soul, like the silkworm, has become dead to itself and the world, transformation takes place. A beautiful butterfly emerges which no longer has ties with its former appearance or existence. Similarly the soul is no longer bound by ties of relationship, friendship or possession, yet the soul is in a state of restlessness because experiences of union are very brief.

As the soul advances towards perfection it attains to longer periods of union, but it also has to endure states of aridity, temptations from the devil, infirmities of soul which are sufferings far worse but more precious than those of the body. It seems that the closer one comes to mystical union, the more intense is the inner purification. There is grace, however, as the soul is awakened through means of locutions, ecstasies and visions. When the soul leaves them behind in the sixth mansion, the place of spiritual betrothal, it passes into spiritual marriage. It is in the seventh mansion that the Unitive stage is realized, in the deepest centre of the soul. The butterfly which had come out of the cocoon now dies “because Christ is now its life... it is endowed with life by God.” There are several effects of this marriage in Teresa's mystical theology: self-forgetfulness, desire to suffer if divinely willed, special love of enemies, tranquillity, absence of aridity, fewer raptures, indescribable peace, Martha and Mary working together.

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13 Interior Castle, p.87.
14 Ibid., pp.219-231.
The same kind of all-absorbing love is seen in Rabi’a’s life. As was stated earlier she was among the first to lay stress on the doctrine of divine love, and she combined “with it the doctrine of kashf, the unveiling at the end of the Way, of the Beloved to His lovers.... She was one of the first to teach the doctrine of disinterested love to God, a new conception to many of her fellow-Sufis, who for the most part served God in hope of eternal reward or in fear of eternal punishment.”\textsuperscript{15}

To conclude the examination of Rabi’a’s life, her verse on the two types of love is quoted:

I have loved Thee with two loves,
a selfish love and a love that is worthy (of Thee),
As for the love which is selfish,
I occupy myself therein with remembrance of Thee
to the exclusion of all others,
As for that which is worthy of Thee,
Therein Thou raisest the veil that I may see Thee.
Yet there is no praise to me in this or that,
But the praise is to Thee, whether in that or this.\textsuperscript{16}

We can understand the selfish love as a love which seeks a return through joy in the thought or presence of God. The worthy love is the bliss which comes from seeing God, face to face, and delighting in that revelation.

In this study we have examined two mystics and the doctrine of pure love which they followed. It remains for us to make a few statements about Sufism. What has been said of Sufism often describes Christian mysticism. That is largely true in the following observation: “It stresses the individual rather than society, the eternal rather than the historical, God’s love rather than His power, and the state of [one’s] heart rather than behaviour. It is more concerned that one’s soul be pure than one’s actions be correct. Some Sufis thought the Law unimportant. Most regarded it as a private discipline guiding the

\textsuperscript{15} Rabi’a, pp.96-97.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp.102-103.
person towards transcendent fulfillment, and paid little heed to its function in ordering society in marshaling history into a prescribed pattern.”

It should be remembered that Rabi’a’s dates are very early in the history of Sufism. As was mentioned earlier the environment was one of worldliness, due to the consolidation of the new empire. The new ruling dynasty of the Umayyads displayed a secular attitude in contrast to the piety and simplicity of the four early Caliphs. There was not yet a separation between the Ulama or community, and the ascetics; however there was among some people an emphasis on personal piety and abstinence. Those who were to become what we now call Sufis stressed a deepening of ethical motivation, and developed isolationism in reaction to political controversies, giving to religion a more personal basis in religious devotion. The Ulama were the pure theologians and legists, consequently remaining more impersonal. We have, then, the Sufi challenge of love and pure devotion to the legists’ concept of obedience and observance of the Law.

During the first two centuries Sufism was a spontaneous individual phenomenon, but as the class of Ulama evolved out of the formal disciplines of Islamic law and theology, Sufism became tremendously popular. The challenge of early Sufism to formal Islam was insignificant compared with later Sufism after music and dance were added. The position of the mosque as religious centre was threatened.

Finally, scholars have investigated the influences of Christianity and Gnosticism on Sufism, and of Sufism on Christian mysticism. It seems that there is basis for both beliefs. It is not entirely unlikely that the two saints we have examined in this study followed a tradition that had been influenced by the others. It should be noted that for seven centuries Christians had fought against the Moors to keep Spain a Christian country. After the country had finally achieved military and political power in the early sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the

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Spanish mystical movement, of which Teresa was a part, flourished. Influence of Sufism has been noted in this phenomenon.

Whatever the influences were, we have seen more that unites Rabi’a and Teresa than separates them. It has been said that in the mystical experience of Oneness, the Universal is to be found. It is only in the effort to record that most profound of spiritual experiences those differences sometimes appear, as each mystic uses the language of her/his own faith. The power of that experience cannot be denied.

“Those who could speak like this had a persuasiveness that lay not in their logic, but in themselves and their practice. And the ones to whom they spoke listened not merely with the interest of an observer but with the painstaking attention of the apprentice. The one who taught, taught out of her/his own experience; the one who learned, learned something that s/he would try to do.”


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**The Names of Lalitha**

Ramesh Menon

*Pavanaakriti,*
who have the form of the wind:
sacred, starlit breath;
you are the howling simoom
of unquited memories.

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.
Parallelism between Scientific and Spiritual Reality

Part One: Characteristics of Scientific Reality

N. A. Mohan Rao & D. Samarender Reddy

Science and spirituality differ in what they construe as ‘reality’, and adopt divergent approaches in unravelling it. Science attempts to investigate the reality of the empirical world by objective observation and intellectual analysis. Spirituality, by which we shall mean advaita, considers the reality of the world to be no different from that of God and the individual, the other two entities of the ‘grand trinity’ posited by it. It finds it opportune to arrive at that one Reality by delving into the reality of the individual through a kind of introversion in which the mind plays a progressively diminishing part. What spirituality offers

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to give us in the end is thus an all-inclusive reality transcendent to
the mind, while what science offers is an ‘empirical’ reality accessible
to the mind.

Technology, the practical arm of science, governs very largely the
way we live in today’s world. Our faith in science, therefore, takes
root much before our faith in spirituality secures a foothold. In our
spiritual pursuit, we often wish to convince ourselves about some of
the arguments and dogmas that go into the postulation of spiritual
reality. In such cases, we instinctively like to see if the logicality of these
spiritual constructs stands analogous to, if not on the same footing as,
that we admit in science, which had already won our trust. If we find
some such correspondence, we feel better disposed towards accepting
the spiritual constructs. Not all of us may be in adequate touch with
science. So, we trace below the key features of scientific reality for a
quick refresher.

The First Criterion of Reality: Constancy or Changelessness
Scientific knowledge is often expressed in the form of laws, which
describe the behaviour of systems — natural or synthesized. For
instance, there is the Ohm’s law in electricity, that expresses the
relation between current, voltage and resistance in an electrical
system. According to it, the current is given by the voltage divided
by the resistance.

It is clear from this relation that if we raise the voltage applied to,
say, a water heater, the current flowing through it will increase. If, on
the other hand, we replace its heating element with a different one
having a higher resistance, then the current will decrease. While the
voltage, resistance and current might thus vary, the law itself remains
the same. In other words, it has a constancy or changelessness that
is not possessed by any of those three parameters. We therefore take
the law to represent a facet of scientific ‘reality’.

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1 Here, we distinguish between the mind that divides and subdivides knowledge,
and a consciousness that allows integral awareness beyond the confines of the
analytical mind.
PARALLELISM BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC AND SPIRITUAL REALITY

A great many laws of science are expressed in the form of equations. We may term them as ‘quantitative laws’. Certain other laws are ‘qualitative’, not expressible in equation form. A well-known example is the principle we come across in magnetism that ‘like poles repel and unlike poles attract each other’. All such quantitative and qualitative laws taken together, and the theories that underlie them, make up the essence of what we call the ‘scientific reality’.

Gradation in Reality
Science, as we know, arrives at its laws by firstly obtaining experimental or observed data, and subjecting those data to theoretical and mathematical analysis. There is thus a correspondence between the data we start with, and the law or theory that is derived from them. This leads to interesting consequences as we see from the following.

The motions of the planets of the solar system have long been the subject of study by astronomers of both the east and the west. The vast data so accumulated could easily be explained by a startlingly simple theory, namely, Newton’s universal theory of gravitation, propounded in 1687. However, studies in the early twentieth century revealed certain other astronomical phenomena that could not be accounted for by this theory. To explain them, a vastly different and far more complex theory was found needed, namely, the ‘general theory of relativity’, put forward by Albert Einstein in 1916.

Scientists could now have dispensed with Newton’s theory of gravitation, and embraced Einstein’s theory as the sole reality concerning gravitation. But they do not do that. They instead retain

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2 There are some laws which are semi-quantitative, and are expressed as inequalities, such as the ‘uncertainty principle’ seen later. They too are implied in this grouping.

3 The law states that any two objects in the universe experience a gravitational attraction between them in proportion to their masses, and inversely as the square of the distance between them.

4 Typical instances are the rotation of the axes of the elliptical orbit of the planet Mercury, and the bending of light rays due to gravity. Cf. (Sears and Zemansky’s) University Physics, revised and enlarged by H.D. Young & R.A. Freedman, Ch. 37, Relativity, p.1296, (12/ed., 2008), accessible at http://www.4shared.com/office/cjcvydWS/university_physics_sears__zema.html
both the theories. This is because Newton’s theory is found adequate for several common-place applications such as the motions of planets. In such cases, it is preferred over Einstein’s theory due to its simplicity and the ease of calculations it affords — particularly so, since it can be deduced as a limiting case of Einstein’s theory.\(^5\) The latter theory is pressed into service only when those limiting conditions do not apply. Newton’s theory is therefore taken to belong to a ‘lower’ order of reality and Einstein’s theory the ‘higher’, as regards gravitation. A gradation in reality thus comes to be accepted in science, solely for practical purposes.

**Inconclusiveness of Scientific Reality; the Logic of Induction**

The logic of ‘induction’ may be explained this way: this crow is black, that crow is black, the crow that we saw last week was black, the crow that our friend shot with his camera is black, and so on. So, we conclude that ‘all crows are black’. In other words, we take a number of individual cases, and then generalize the common trait that figures in them all. This way of proceeding from the ‘particular’ to the ‘general’ is called ‘induction’.\(^6\)

Science derives its laws primarily by the method of induction.\(^7\) The method consists in the collection of experimental or observed data on a finite number of systems, analysing the same and arriving at a law that justifies those data to reasonable accuracy. The law is then taken to be generally applicable to all systems that are similarly situated.

We can see at once the limitations of the method of induction. For instance, in the case of the crows’ example, if some day we come across a crow that is white, our generalization that ‘all crows are black’

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\(^5\) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_relativity#Causality_and_prohibition_of_motion_faster_than_light](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_relativity#Causality_and_prohibition_of_motion_faster_than_light) In fact, there is a general principle that any advanced theory must account for any pre-existing, well-established theory as its subset. It is called the ‘correspondence principle’. Cf. University Physics, Ibid.


becomes falsified.

Similarly, the Newton’s law of gravitation, postulated on the basis of extensive planetary data, was falsified when certain new data came to be considered. We now resort to the general theory of relativity as the highest reality concerning gravitation; but there is no surety that this theory will continue to hold for all time, because there is always the possibility that some new data will come up some day and falsify it, necessitating a yet newer theory. The ‘reality’ that science projects, being primarily based on induction, is thus always inherently inconclusive. 8 9

Abstract Nature of Scientific Reality; the Macrocosm:
The concepts of space and time are basic to the way our minds function and follow the phenomena taking place around us. We are conscious that we live in a three-dimensional space. We believe this space to be absolute, that is to say, it is the same to all ‘observers’, irrespective of their relative motions. Similarly, we think there is an absolute time that is the same to all observers. It is on these premises that Newton gave out his laws of mechanics, which shaped our understanding of nature for centuries.

In the year 1905, Einstein came up with his ‘special theory of relativity’. It heralded a revolution in our thinking of space and time. To illustrate, let us say a spaceship is moving away from us in a straight

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8 Philosophy of Science, op. cit., p.12.
9 Mathematics is distinguished from science in that it is solely based on ‘deduction’.

In deductive logic, we pass from the ‘general’ to the ‘particular’, and there is a great certainty about its conclusions as compared to induction (ibid, pp.10-11). Sciences that are more mathematical, especially physics, make greater use of deductive logic, and so develop and become consolidated much faster than others such as the social sciences. Hence when it comes to defining the contours of scientific reality, physics serves us far better than, say, social sciences. Hence our large reliance on it here. Cf. Physics and Philosophy, pp.5-6, by Sir James Jeans (1877-1946), accessible at https://archive.org/details/physicsandphilos031647mbp.

10 By ‘observer’ here, we mean that he belongs to a space in which an object originally placed at rest does not move except by the action of a force. Such a space is said to conform to the ‘law of inertia’.
line at a speed of 0.9 billion kilometres per hour. For a relative idea of this speed, we may note that light travels in vacuum at a speed of roughly 1 billion kmph. Let us say that a metre rod is placed in this spaceship along the direction of its motion. Suppose now we measure the rod’s length from our position on earth using some scientifically valid technique. Normally, we would expect to find it to be 1 metre; but if we actually measure it, we will find it far short — only 43.6 cm!

Next, let us say that we had taken two accurate clocks, and placed one of them in the above spaceship before it left us, and kept the other with ourselves for reference. And suppose that we now observe the clock in the moving spaceship from our position, and measure (by our clock) how much time it takes to move forward by 1 hour. Normally, we expect it to be 1 hour too, but our measurement would actually show it to be much longer — 2 hours and 17 minutes! A person travelling in the vehicle will, however, find nothing unusual with his metre rod or his clock; but will find a metre rod held by us to be precisely that much shorter, and our clock that much slower. These observations have nothing to do with limitations of measurement, but are inherent in the very way our universe is structured. Space and time are thus relative to an observer, and have no absolute basis.

The ‘special theory’ has another interesting consequence. Suppose the spaceship of our above example fires a small space-probe directly in front at a speed of 0.6 billion kmph, as measured from it. Now, let us say we measure the speed of that probe from our position on earth. Common sense tells us that we should find it to be the sum of the two speeds (0.9 and 0.6), i.e., 1.5 billion kmph. But actual measurement would show it to be far less — only 0.974 billion kmph!\(^1\) Einstein’s theory in fact tells us that no matter what we do, we can never make an object move at a speed exceeding 1 billion kmph, which is the speed of light in vacuum. These consequences are again not due to

\(^1\)The calculation of these aberrations in length, time and speed, are quite simple, and are based on the so-called Lorentz transformations. See University Physics, op. cit., Ch. 37, Relativity, pp. 1274-86.
any practical limitations on our part, but only because our universe is structured that way!!

Einstein’s ‘general theory of relativity’ goes a step further to say that space and time are not two separate entities as we normally take them to be, but are components of a four-dimensional matrix, called ‘spacetime’. The theory explains gravitation as due to a ‘curvature’ of this spacetime in the vicinity of objects.\(^\text{12}\) We find the concept of spacetime itself not so easy to conceive; that of a ‘curvature’ in it beats our imagination. Empirical reality of the macrocosm is thus entirely alien to our common sense notions of the world.

**The Microcosm**

We look upon the world basically in terms of the matter contained in it. Matter, as we know, is composed of atoms and molecules, the molecules themselves being chemical combinations of two or more atoms. Elementary science tells us that an atom comprises principally three kinds of particles, viz., protons, neutrons and electrons.

Electrons were thus at first visualized as particles. But in the year 1927, evidence came to light that they sometimes behave as waves. Light was already known to exhibit this kind of dual behaviour – as both particle and wave. Soon, it was recognized that all matter, not merely electrons, exhibits such duality.\(^\text{13}\) Interestingly, where the particle nature of matter shows forth, its wave nature lies dormant,\(^\text{14}\) and where its wave nature shows forth, the particle nature lies dormant. It is as though nature is ‘two-faced’, and is playing pranks with us showing one face at a time!

The mystery of matter does not end there. Any wave is normally understood as an oscillation of something physical in space and time. When we drop a stone in a pond, the waves created in it are due to oscillations of the water ‘particles’.\(^\text{15}\) Similarly, sound waves result


\(^{13}\) The wave nature, however, becomes insignificant with bodies of non-microscopic size.

\(^{14}\) This kind of mutual exclusivity of behaviour is formalised as the ‘complementarity principle’.
from oscillations of ‘pressure’, and light waves from oscillations of electric and magnetic ‘fields’. But, when it comes to matter waves, we find it impossible to say what the oscillating entity is physically. We represent it mathematically by a symbol such as the Greek letter \( \Psi \) (‘psi’), but can assign no physical significance to it! This is because \( \Psi \) is a ‘complex number’, part of which is imaginary. If there is anything physical about it, it is only that the ‘square’ of this \( \Psi \) represents a certain probability. Each particle may therefore at best be visualized as a sort of a ‘probability cloud’ spread over the entire space! It is left to us to ponder if we can treat that as something ‘material’.

It is thus that the scientific reality depicted by both the macrocosm and the microcosm is abstract to the point of being weird from our common sense point of view.

**Uncertainty in Scientific Reality**

We know that the measurement of any physical quantity cannot be exact due to practical limitations of the instruments and techniques used. As technology improves, the limitations are slowly overcome, and the margins of error reduced. This gives us the feeling that, given a continuously changing system, we can determine the state in which it is present at a given moment precisely enough, by making simultaneous measurements of all the quantities required. Unfortunately, such a hope is not borne out by science.

A hypothetical experiment on an electron illustrates the kind of problem we have. Let us say there is an electron in motion, and we want to determine its position and speed at a given instant. In order

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15 The term ‘particle’ has a special meaning in this context. It represents a minute quantity of the liquid, containing over tens of thousands of molecules, all of which have the same overall motion at a given instant.

16 *University Physics*, op. cit., Ch. 39, ‘The Wave Nature of Particles’, p.1362, (‘Caution’). An imaginary number may be visualized as a product of a real number and the square root of minus one.

17 Ibid. The ‘square’ is actually not of \( \Psi \), but of its so-called ‘absolute value’. It is a real number, and is a measure of the probability of finding the particle in a unit of space around a given point.

18 The ‘thought experiment’ given here is a simplified one meant to give a rough idea. For a rigorous presentation, see *University Physics*, op. cit., Ch. 39, p.1357.
to locate (or ‘see’) the electron, we need to interact with it in some way such as by allowing a photon to impinge on it. Since the electron is very small, we have to use a photon with a small enough wavelength. Otherwise, it could be like trying to point Tiruvannamalai in a map of India using a stout bamboo stick. But then, the small wavelength means large energy, and so the impact by photon will alter the original motion of the electron greatly.

So, while we may determine the location of the electron a little closely, we will greatly err in measuring its ‘speed’. If, on the other hand, we choose a large wavelength photon, i.e., one with low energy, we can measure the electron’s ‘speed’ with fair accuracy, but not its position, as stated above. There is no way we can ensure accurate measurements of both position and motion at the same time.

We face the same predicament with the other subatomic particles as well. Particle physics has an interesting law that links the uncertainty in position with the uncertainty in ‘speed’ (see footnote 19). It says that the arithmetic product of the two uncertainties cannot be less than a certain value, which is the same for all particles over the entire universe. This is known as the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. It shows that these uncertainties “are fundamental and intrinsic. They cannot be circumvented even in principle by any experimental technique, no matter how sophisticated.”

The true face of nature thus seems forever veiled from our prying eyes for unfathomable reasons.

Origin and Nature of the Universe

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19 The actual term should be ‘momentum’, and not ‘speed’. Momentum is mass multiplied by velocity. Velocity means speed considered along with the direction of motion.

20 Photon is the name of the particle of light or electro-magnetic radiation.

21 The value is roughly $1/10^{34}$ part of a Joule-second. It is obtained by dividing $h$, the Planck’s constant arising from quantum theory by 2 times $\pi$ (‘pi’), $\pi$ being the ratio of the circumference to diameter of a circle.

22 *University Physics*, op. cit., Ch. 39, p.1357. The consequences of the uncertainty principle are practically negligible with non-microscopic objects.
Science traces the evolution of the universe to about 13.7 billion years into the past. The universe was then supposed to be extremely small, and so it is nominally taken to be the time of its ‘birth’. Since the entire mass and energy of the universe were concentrated in a very small space, the universe was unimaginably dense and hot at the time — so hot that no ordinary matter could have been present in it. For some inexplicable reason, the universe then underwent a catastrophic explosion, called the ‘big bang’, and its matter started flying out at enormous speeds in all directions.

As the universe expanded, its density and temperature progressively decreased. It took about 380,000 years for ordinary matter, as atoms, to evolve in it. Initially the matter was in the form of clouds of gas, which slowly condensed into individual galaxies. A galaxy is a gigantic cluster of stars and their planets, along with any interstellar dust, debris etc. The expansion is expected to go on indefinitely. Viewed from any galaxy, all the other galaxies would be seen receding away from it in all directions at ever-increasing speeds. The farther a galaxy is from us, the faster it moves away from us. Some of the galaxies farthest from us have already exceeded the speed of light. They are said to have crossed the ‘particle horizon’ in that no signal from them can ever reach us, and so we can never know

24 The temperature was then of the order of $10^{32}$ degrees C, at which only some rare kinds of subatomic particles could exist. Cf. University Physics, op. cit., Ch. 44, Particle Physics and Cosmology, p.1540.
25 The manner of evolution of the universe predicted along these lines is called the ‘standard model’. The ferocity of the explosion may be judged from the fact that the universe expanded $10^{50}$ times (1 followed by 50 zeros) in $1/10^{32}$ part of a second after the big bang. Ibid, pp.1534, 1540 & 1541.
26 Ibid, p.1544. The temperature came down to about 3000 degrees C by that time.
28 The universe is found uniform in all directions. This is called the ‘cosmological principle’. Ibid, p.1534.
29 The rule of proportionality between the distance and speed is known as the Hubble’s law. Ibid, p.1533.
30 Einstein’s general theory says that the expansion of the universe is not into new, hitherto unfilled space, but is due to expansion of the space itself. Space is not a material object, as it has no mass. So the limitation as per the special theory that an object cannot travel faster than light does not apply to it. Ibid, pp.1534-5.
anything whatever of their present or future existence.\cite{31} They may be said to belong to a ‘world’ of their own, practically non-existent to us. Logically, it would seem possible that the universe consists of many such disconnected ‘worlds’.

Matter that we normally encounter emits radiation, a small part of which is in the form of visible light. The rest can be detected by instruments. Such matter is called ‘luminous’ matter. This matter by itself is unable to account for the levels of gravitation and certain other effects observed in the universe. Hence another kind of matter is hypothesized to exist to account for these discrepancies. We have no direct knowledge of it, as we do not find any measurable radiation from it.\cite{32} It is therefore called ‘dark matter’.

Gravitational forces exerted by matter, luminous and dark, are normally expected to effect a steady slowing down of the expansion of the universe. But actual observation shows the opposite. It leads us to suspect the presence of some other influence like an ‘anti-gravity’ that more than offsets the effect of gravity. This unseen influence is thought to be a property of space itself, and the energy associated with it is called ‘dark energy’.\cite{33}

Einstein’s theory considers matter as condensed energy.\cite{34} If we take the energy so associated with the entire luminous and dark matter contained in the universe, and add to it the dark energy, we get the total energy present in the universe. Estimates show that of the total energy, luminous matter contributes about 5 percent, dark matter 27 percent and dark energy 68 percent. Thus, of the total energy in the universe, an overwhelming proportion, as much as 95 percent, comes from parts that are out of bounds to our normal experience.

\(^\text{(To be concluded)}\)

\cite{31} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Event_horizon#Particle_horizon_of_the_observable_universe.
\cite{32} Cf. University Physics, Ch. 44, op.cit., p.1537.
\cite{33} Ibid, p.1538.
\cite{34} The energy equivalent of a mass, \(m\) is given by \(m\) multiplied by the square of the speed of light in vacuum. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_matter. See also University Physics, Ibid, p.1538.
Staircase leading to Sri Bhagavan’s Shrine
23rd February 1978

Sadhu Om: There is an old saying, ‘Think, think, until you can think no more’. It does not mean think of worldly things, but only think of the guru, his greatness and his teachings, until the mind can form no more thought.

When we first come to our guru, our love for him is so great that it occupies our whole mind, so we lose all interest in whatever else we previously desired. This is what Bhagavan referred to in verse 318 of Guru Vacaka Kovai when he said ‘the feet of guru-natha, who has taken us as his own by extinguishing the threefold fire [of desire for women, wealth and fame]’. However this peace and freedom from

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.
desires is only temporary, because the guru knows that in order for us to hold this peace permanently we must master it ourself, so after giving us a foretaste of the happiness of desirelessness, he puts us into the battlefield to face all that is within us.

As Bhagavan said in the third chapter of *Maharshi’s Gospel* in reply to a devotee who said that after he left his presence the peace he experienced there continued for a while as an undercurrent, but then faded away: ‘If you strengthen the mind, that peace will continue for all time. Its duration is proportional to the strength of mind acquired by repeated practice [of self-attention], and such a mind is able to hold on to the current [of peace].’

What is important is not our ability to abide as self, but our love to do so. Such love is true *bhakti*, and unless we have it God and guru can do nothing for us. They will not absorb us into self until we wholeheartedly love to subside and be absorbed forever.

It is said that guru is greater than God, because whereas God will fulfill all our desires, guru will not, because his duty is to make us desire only *moksha* (liberation). Once we have been caught in the jaws of the tiger (that is, once the guru ‘has taken us as his own’), he will kindle within us the fire of love for self-abidance. He will make us experience all the outward-going tendencies (*vishaya-vasanas*) that are within us, and will give us the love to overcome them by clinging firmly to self-attention, as he taught us to do in *Nan Yar?*.

Even though *vishaya-vasanas* [inclinations or desires to experience things other than oneself], which come from time immemorial, rise [as thoughts] in countless numbers like ocean-waves, they will all be destroyed when *svarupa-dhyana* [self-attentiveness] increases and increases. Without giving room even to the doubting thought ‘Is it possible to dissolve so many *vasanas* and remain only as self?’ it is necessary to cling tenaciously to self-attentiveness. […]

This battle between our love to be self-attentive and our outward-going tendencies is the combat or warfare of grace that he sang about in verse 74 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*:

Arunachala, show [me] the warfare of grace in the public space devoid of going and coming.
He will not let us hide from this battle, but he is always by our side, and by his grace we will surely win. Nothing is impossible for him, as he assured us in verse 215 of Guru Vacaka Kovai:

There is no undertaking that is not possible by the power of self. What is called the power of self is the power of grace. [...]’.

There are times when he will (for our own benefit) allow our vasanas to get the better of us, and we will then feel abandoned and pray to him, ‘Arunachala, for whose sake did you take me as your own? If you now forsake me, the world will blame you’ (Aksharamanamalai verse 4), and, ‘[…] What wrong has this poor wretch done? What small obstacle now [prevents you killing me outright]? For what do you torture me in this way, keeping me partially alive [suspended between life and death]? […]’ (Patikam verse 3). The verses of Sri Arunachala Stuti Pancakam are not just ordinary prayers or hymns for singing. They describe the actual experiences that every aspirant must go through. The more we progress in our sadhana, the more meaning we will find in them.

People complain that self-enquiry is difficult, but they would say the same about self-surrender or guru-puja (worship of the guru) if they knew the real meaning of these terms. But do we come here for something easy? The efforts people make to achieve worldly aims are nothing in comparison to the efforts that an aspirant must make to experience self-knowledge. As aspirants our whole life is a fight, a Mahabharata war, because we must always be on the alert, vigilantly guarding against the rising of the ego.

However, we need not worry about whether we will overcome our foes (our vishaya-vasanas), because as Krishna replied when Arjuna asked him how he could hope to defeat his own archery gurus, ‘They are already killed by me. Fight your fight, and if you die in the process, what is the loss?’ This is the real spiritual life, fighting to conquer our vishaya-vasanas by vigilantly watching their root, the ego, and thereby preventing it from rising. In comparison to this, posing as a great guru, getting up on platforms, giving beautiful lectures, blessings, vibhuti and so on, is all mere child’s play. We are not expected to serve
Bhagavan outwardly or to propagate his teachings, but only to keep the fire of our own bhakti burning in our heart by constantly trying to attend only to ourself, the first person.

We should not try to discourage others who are intent upon chasing after false gurus. Let them go and find out for themselves. Even if we were to try to discourage them, they would only think that we are prejudiced or fanatical. If they claim that some other guru is another Ramana or as great as him, we should not be perturbed, because that would only show that they have not understood who Ramana actually is – that he is not a separate person but only the sole reality that shines as ‘I am’ within each one of us.

As Sri Krishna said, a wise person should not create confusion in the minds of ignorant people who are attached to karma (Bhagavad Gita 3.26). This is why Bhagavan often seemed to give his approval to practices other than atma-vicara [self-investigation or self-enquiry] and why whenever he was asked about such practices by people who were attached to them, he would always encourage each person to follow whichever practice they had faith in. It is also the reason why I ended the Bhakti chapter [in the second part of The Path of Sri Ramana] saying that until a person is tired of whatever other sadhanas they have been practising and asks of their own accord whether there is any better way, we should not interfere and disturb their faith in such practices but should encourage each of them to pursue their own path.

26th February 1978

Sadhu Om: When we read any teaching of Bhagavan – such as verse 323 of Guru Vacaka Kovai, in which he describes the guru as that which pervades everything, both ‘I’ and this, both inside and outside, both in this world and in the other world – we should reflect on its implications and try to understand what it means. All that is required is a simple change of outlook, and the appropriate manana [reflection on the guru’s teachings] at the appropriate time may be sufficient to trigger that change by turning our attention inwards.
Sadhu Om: Bhagavan has introduced revolutionary meanings for many old and traditional words. For example, he was the first to reveal that ‘grace’ (arul) is nothing but self, and that ‘heart’ (hridayam) also means only self. He has revolutionised literature, philosophy, sadhana, the description of the state of self-knowledge, and so on. That is why we should not give any of his books for review, because very few people, no matter how learned they may be, will be able to appreciate and adequately understand his ideas or the way he uses words. It would be like giving scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita for review. The world is not yet ready to receive his teachings as they are. This is why I say we must simply keep the glow of his teachings burning within ourself. We do not have to propagate them, but we must preserve them as best as we can.

Actions (karmas) are generally classified as those of body, speech and mind, but this is only a superficial classification, because our body and speech and all their activities do not exist independent of our mind. Our mind alone is what functions through our body and speech.

We also talk of triputi, the three factors of objective knowledge, namely the knower, the known and the act of knowing, but if we consider them carefully, we will find that they are all only an expansion of the ego, the one ‘I’ that rises to know anything other than itself. But how to stop the rising of this ‘I’? As Bhagavan explained to us, the only way to stop it rising is to watch it vigilantly.

When our understanding is sharpened by the resulting clarity of self-awareness, we will come to recognise that this ‘watching’ is merely being – that is, it is just being the pure self-awareness that we actually are. Bhagavan’s path is actually just total relaxation – doing nothing but just being as we really are. This is the sum and substance of the entire spiritual science.
antahkaranas (the ‘inner faculties’ or mental components, namely the mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), will (cittam) and ego (ahankaram)), are not actually necessary. When our aim is only to know what we ourself really are, such classifications tend to complicate matters and distract our attention away from what is essential, namely ourself, the first person.

As Bhagavan said in Nan Yar?, enumerating the tattvas [the various ontological principles or fundamental categories of things that are supposed to exist but are other than ourself], which are concealing ourself, is like analysing rubbish instead of throwing it away. All we need to know is what we ourself are, and when we know that, nothing else will remain to be known.

Bhagavan’s philosophy and the ideas he expresses in Ulladu Narpadu are all very simple. The purpose of sravana (hearing, reading or studying his teachings) and manana (reflecting on them) is not to increase our intellectual activity, but only to simplify and clarify our understanding of everything, and thereby to reduce the range of our thinking until we are left with nothing to think about. That is, when he teaches us that everything is just an expansion of our ego (verse 26), and that this ego will disappear if we attend to it (verse 25), there is nothing else that we need think about.

2nd March 1978

Sadhu Om: ‘Do not believe what you do not know’ is one of the fundamental principles of Bhagavan’s teachings. That is, he begins his teachings by asking us not to believe anything that we do not know by our own experience. The most self-evident experience and knowledge that we each have is only ‘I am’, so we should start by investigating what this ‘I’ actually is. As he says in verse 11 of Ulladu Narpadu:

Not knowing oneself, who knows, knowing [instead] other things is [only] ignorance; except [that], can it be knowledge? When one knows oneself [the ego], the basis (adhara) of knowledge and the other [ignorance], knowledge and ignorance will cease.
Here ‘oneself’ (tannai) means the ego, which alone knows other things and which is therefore the sole basis or foundation of both knowledge and ignorance about them. Since this ego does not really exist, ‘knowing oneself’ means experiencing the non-existence of the ego, and when one experiences this, knowledge and ignorance will cease to exist, because their seeming existence is based entirely upon the seeming existence of the ego.

We know that all pleasures and pains are experienced only by ‘I’, the ego, and that they are not experienced in sleep, where this ego – the knower or experiencer – does not exist. However, we know that we exist even in sleep, and that we experience there a happy state, unaffected by any pain or multiplicity. Since we thus know from our own experience that we can exist happily without the ego, the knower of multiplicity, Bhagavan recommends that we should try to attain that egoless state even now.

The ego is now being nourished and sustained only by attending to and experiencing things that seem to be other than itself, because we know that whenever it ceases to attend to any other thing it subsides in sleep. In sleep we know nothing other than ourself, ‘I am’, so what we are attending to in sleep is only ‘I am’. Therefore we know from our daily experience that our ego subsides whenever we attend only to ourself. Hence Bhagavan is simply pointing out to us what we already know from our own experience.

There can be no disappointment in Bhagavan’s path. Other gurus may tell us to come to them to experience the guru’s presence, but Bhagavan says: ‘Do not take this body to be the guru. Do not come here expecting the guru’s presence. Go within. The guru shines within you as ‘I am’, so he is always present in you as your own self’.

If we want to seek or rely upon anything outside ourself, we will certainly be disappointed, because whatever appears outside will sooner or later disappear. Hence Bhagavan advises us to attend only to ‘I am’ – to rely only on ‘I am’. Therefore since ‘I am’ alone is ever present, if we follow his advice, how can we ever be disappointed?

(To be continued)
The Navnath Sampradaya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Part Three

Catherine Weiss Boucher

In Part Two we saw with Sri Nimbargi Maharaj the beginning of the modern historically documented Navnath Sampradaya. He was the first modern guru of whose life and teachings we have reliable evidence. Sri Nimbari Maharaj (ca.1789-1875) entrusted the lineage to Sri Bhuasaheb Maharaj (ca.1843-1914) who upheld and enriched the tradition.

Sri Bhuasaheb Maharaj was born into a deshastha brahmin caste and was named Sri Venkatesh Kanderao Deshpande. Sri Bhuasaheb met Sri Nimbari at the age of 14 and was given mantra initiation by a Sri Sadhubua at the instance of the saint of Nimbari. As Sri Bhuasaheb was from a brahmin caste and Sri Nimbari Maharaj was a Lingayat, Bhuasaheb experienced considerable opposition both from

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.
his family and his community, which in those days exerted a powerful controlling influence upon its members with a real fear of ostracism. That did not deter him from his eagerness to follow and practise under the tutelage of Sri Nimbarigi Maharaj. He was awakened and authorised by Sri Nimbarigi to carry on the lineage. In the introduction of Sri Bhausadeb Maharaj: Life Sketch and Nama-Yoga, we find more evidence of his internal detachment and his attitude that life in the world prepared one for spiritual practice:

“It resembles the Abhyasa-Yoga of the Gita. ‘To denounce and renounce worthless things’ is his vairagya (dispassion). To attain the essential we must eschew the non-essential. Still like Sri Ramadas, the renunciation advocated by Sri Maharaj was internal and not external. Like Sage Vasistha, Sri Maharaj preferred ‘antastyaga’, mental renunciation. He advised his disciples to perform their worldly duties with perfect diligence. But he warned them that they should consider their spiritual discipline to be the be-all-and-end-all of their life and that it should claim their highest loyalty. Hence, while they are engaged in the daily work they should not fail to meditate on the Divine Name.”

Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj in a series of letters wrote to his sons and disciples about different aspects of spiritual life and practice. His letters and teachings have been gathered in a book called Nama-Yoga. As mentioned earlier, the compilers and translators of this book have coined this term Nama-Yoga, however, Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj, himself called it Jnana Marga. Even though Nama Yoga seems to have been a component of instruction coming down from Sri Nimbarigi Maharaj, both Sri Nimbarigi and Sri Bhausaheb evidently intended for it to be a practice of jnana, wisdom, namely an enquiry into truth.

Sri Bhausaheb said: “A seeker should live in this world like a lotus-leaf in the lake, untouched by its mud. He should perform meditation while engaged in his worldly affairs. He should, however be very cautious here and should never fall a prey to the attractions

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of women and gold belonging to others. He should be satisfied with what God has granted him and steadily continue his spiritual Sadhana. Moreover, he should perform his worldly duties, with the utmost care and diligence. He should not shun them through idleness. He should constantly observe and examine his conduct at every step, and should always behave prudently. Imprudence is the source of misery. Still, with all our prudence we must not fail to realise that God’s will alone ultimately prevails. Hence we should be ever ready to abide by His will. When we are overwhelmed with dangers, we should not fail to remember Him and perform our duty.”

Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj puts the emphasis in life on one-pointed meditation on God, but he does not believe that one has to remove oneself from life’s circumstances. Instead one should live life with this meditation as its purpose:

“A person is required to worship God for success in his worldly business as well. That would form his Worldly Religion, useful for his worldly life. But that is not all in all. That alone will not bring about fulfilment in his life. On the other hand, he should adopt the path of Spiritual Religion and try to identify himself with God through proper devotion. He should learn to adapt himself even to (adverse) places and (trying) circumstances in which he would be called upon to live through the will of God and should never give up meditation on the Divine Name on any account.”

Although the moralistic tone of both Sri Nimbargi Maharaj and Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj may be hard to relate to in the twenty-first century, the advice given above provides a useful meditation theme for any modern man or women. Sri Bhausaheb takes us beyond the duality of the spiritual and the worldly. Here he strikes a chord similar to that of his renowned descendent, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj:

“Worldly life and Spiritual life, Duality and Identity, Censure and Praise are pairs of opposites in which, without the help of one, we cannot understand the other. Identity cannot be understood without

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2 Ibid., pp.11-12.
3 Ibid., p.18.
duality; in the absence of censure the value of praise would not be realised. Likewise, without the help of worldly life, spiritual life cannot be properly realised. Worldly life is reprehensible no doubt. But its aid is quite necessary for attaining the commendable spiritual life. We must realise all this properly and through the proper practice of meditation attain the love and bliss of spiritual life.”

One wonders whether Sri Bhusaheb finds worldly life reprehensible because it is so easy to get enmeshed in all manner of attachments and desires or because it takes up so much of one’s time and attention. He does however stress, ‘Its aid is quite necessary for attaining the commendable spiritual life.’ The worldly life does provide financial sustenance and more than that, it provides opportunities for detachment, for compassion and for seeing the Absolute nature of all apparent manifestation. He even shows us that the illusion we get entangled in, is only God’s maya:

“Man desires that the Lord should not throw him — entangle him — in the meshes of Maya. But it is futile to entertain this desire. Even the Lord Himself incarnates in the Maya, carries on displays of His sport [lila] in it. How then can we be freed from Maya? When we are residing in the domain of Maya, we should develop devotion for the Lord, by remaining unaffected by Maya. Maya then could not affect us. We should learn to participate in the sport of the Lord, in the Maya of the Lord, like the Lord Himself. Never should we forget that Maya belongs to the Lord Himself, and then we won’t be troubled by Maya.”

Sri Bhusaheb Maharaj, also known as the saint of Umadi, had disciples who were Lingayat and Muslim as well as from the Brahmin caste. He also had harijan (untouchable) disciples, which was quite unusual for the times. One of the Brahmin disciples, Sri Bagewadi Maharaj, was the spiritual teacher of Sri B.D. Jatti, former Chief Minister of Karnataka, Vice President and Acting President of India. This lineage became quite ecumenical as more disciples came into its fold.

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4 Ibid., p.29.
5 Ibid., p 36.
He established a Math (monastery) in the village of Inchageri, Bijapur district, northern Karnataka. He had several realised disciples. It appears the Navnath Sampradaya then split into two major groups. One was led by those of Sri Amburao Maharaj, who appears to have been a prominent disciple of Bhausaheb. He functioned as a guru to his guru bandhus (guru brothers and sisters), particularly to Professor R.D. Ranade after Bhausaheb left the body. The second branch was led by Sri Siddharameshwar, who was the guru of Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj, Ranjit Maharaj and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj among others.

Prior to writing this chapter, I had no knowledge about Bhausaheb’s other disciples. I had a cursory knowledge about R.D. Ranade, from the books on the poet saints of Maharashtra. I was unaware of Nisargadatta’s ‘guru cousins’, who had also carried on the lineage of Navnath Sampradaya. I realized that this was an opportunity to delve into the branch of the lineage which included Sri Amburao (ca.1857-1933), Sri Sivalingavva (ca.1867-1930), Professor R.D. Ranade (ca.1886-1957) and Sri Girimalleshwar (ca.1873-1934).

All four of these disciples had been householders, and all four had encountered the loss of a spouse, a child or children, or their fortune. Their sadhanas were kindled by these losses, and forged in the fire of their intense meditation, guru bhakti and Nama Yoga practice. The Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Volume One, described the situation of these disciples, whom they regard as pillars of the sampradaya, “Even suffering had its share in intensifying the sadhana. Jealousy, bereavement, and acute illness proved to be blessings in disguise. They all endured them with fortitude and equanimity and did not allow them to disturb their sadhana. They were all embroiled in relatively adverse circumstances, but they could still rise above them with the aid of their Master’s grace. This shows how a strong will and firm faith coupled with profound devotion, could enable an aspirant to overcome mountains of difficulties and attain the cherished ideal.”

Sri Amburao Maharaj, also called Baba by his devotees, was born to a poor but pious family in the town of Jigeewani. Later he was sent to live with an uncle in the town of Nimbargi. His uncle was in fact a disciple of Nimbargi Maharaj; he attended school there and had the darshan of Nimbargi Maharaj at this time. He was orphaned at a young age. Then at twenty he went to live with an older brother and during this period he went to work at a Sankara Math. He later married and had a daughter. His wife and daughter both died and therefore he wished to marry again: “Thus Baba was left alone and his hopes and aspirations of a happy family life toppled down like a house of cards. The untimely death of his life-partner at such a youthful age preyed much upon Baba’s mind. He looked extremely disappointed and dejected.”

He came across Sri Bhausaheb, while working as a kulkarni (accountant). He had hopes of finding a wife and marrying again. He had come to Inchageri for a religious celebration which his sister had encouraged him to attend in order to lift his spirits. There, Sri Bhausaheb recognized Amburao as a suitable disciple and was persistent in his offer of initiation. Sri Amburao, felt ambivalent about this and tried to avoid taking mantra initiation from Bhausaheb. But Bhausaheb was able to convince Sri Amburao that he would take full responsibility for Amburao’s dedication.

“Unable to resist this pressing assurance of Sri Maharaj, Baba finally agreed. Sri Maharaj, then showered his grace on him, initiated him through the medium of his spiritual brother Bhaurao of Savalsang and said: ‘Amburaya, now go on with meditation on this Nama.’”

Amburao then dived into his meditational practice, which brought about a sudden and “...great mental transformation in him. Sri Maharaj’s words ‘Now go on with the meditation on this Name’ were ringing in his ears.”

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8 Ibid., p.3.
9 Ibid., p.4.
10 Ibid., p.6.
11 Ibid., p.6-7.
Amburao, like his fellow disciples, meditated ardently for up to nine hours a day on the Name. He had many intense spiritual experiences and was extremely devoted to his gurudev, Bhausaheb. He initiated many disciples into Nama Yoga and was an inspiration and guru figure to many of Bhausaheb’s disciples; he was a true guru-bhai.

From Ranade’s website we learn, “After Bhausaheb Maharaj died, Amburao Maharaj was the only saviour to all the devotees. He travelled far and wide to spread Bhakti and blessed many sadhakas by initiating them with Nama mantra. Sadguru Shri Gurudev Ranade also followed his footsteps and sought guidance from him whenever needed. Amburao Maharaj and Gurudev Ranade were disciples of Sadguru Shri Bhausaheb Maharaj, and were very close to each other as Guru-bandhu.”

R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage is a description of how Amburao’s life and sadhana were perceived by his fellow guru bhais:

“...His devotion was not so much in the making, it was already an accomplished perfect product which could not have been improved except by making its roots go deeper into the soil of his most fertile faith and love...Baba didn’t make the transition to faith and love. Faith and Love were there from the very beginning of his spiritual career.”

Here are a few of Amburao’s sayings:

“No.4. Undaunted by difficulties and calamities, meditate firmly with courage and love on the Name as instructed by the Guru and you will come to know that you alone are the happiest person in this miserable world.

No.10. Look at the illumined vision of God and meditate silently on His Name even when you are busy in doing other activities.

No.12. To see God everywhere is what is meant by real samadhi.

No.13. To become satisfied by looking at one’s own immaculate form constitutes true religion.

No.28. Any spiritual gain which is not the result of one's own exercise of meditation lasts for a short time. But an experience which is the joint effect of one's own endeavour and of the grace of God lasts forever, and is the progenitor of other spiritual experiences.”

Amburao provided guidance to his many guru brothers and sisters, as an exceptional example of guru devotion and bhakti. He was scrupulously honest and his obvious integrity attracted new devotees to the lineage.

Sivalingavva of Jath, a female disciple, was discovered by Sri Bhausaheb when she was ten years old. She had a renunciative spirit and didn’t want to marry; however, she did so at the suggestion of her guru, Bhausaheb. Her son and her husband both later died. In *R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage*: she is thus described:

“She was so enamoured of the meditative life that she was not prepared to get married. But on the advice of her Guru, she did get married. As nature would have it, a son was born to her who unfortunately died and also her husband died and though she was grieved she could, by the grace of her Guru turn her bereavement into part of her meditative life. She later composed a poem in which she stated that a son had been born to her. Fools might say that it was an illegitimate son born to her, but this is not so. It was the divine immortal child made of light, who she could always see playing with her. It was not given to anyone to have this experience. It was the fruit of a long, long sincere devotion to God.”

Professor Ranade compared Sivalingavva to Muktabai and Mahadevi Akka, other female poets of note. As mentioned above she composed a poem about the birth of her spiritual son, using the son as an allegory for spiritual devotion and realisation. Use of the concept of significant relationships as symbolic of union with the Absolute is common in mystic poetry, ranging from Rumi to Sri Ramana. Here are a couple of verses, which were printed in the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir Volume One*:

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14 Ibid., pp.103-105.
15 Ibid., p.234.
A Spiritual Son is born to me
To him let’s sing a Lullaby!
All the objects of pleasure now,
Have been flung far away.
Swing the Spiritual Cradle soon
And attain the Lord’s benign boon. (6)

My Master has graciously granted
A supremely beautiful baby
Never shall I fail now
To sing him a sweet Lullaby.
You have broken my vicious cycles
Of recurring birth and death.
Ever, hence, shall I worship Thee
Constantly day and night. (8)

In R.D. Ranade and his Spiritual Lineage, Sivalingavva is described thus: “She could meditate at a stretch for six hours, changing her posture after three hours. That she had seen her own face [true identity] and had many photic, phonic and morphic experiences as visions of several bygone saints during her meditation is also a fact. All these were the fruit of her silent meditation on the Name of God.”

While Sivalingavva never took on the role of a guru, she did initiate devotees into the spiritual life. Remarkably, Professor Ranade himself bowed down before her, something he rarely did, in homage to her importance to the lineage and to the depth of her realisation.

She is important in a lineage that is otherwise filled with illustrious men. Later, Jean Dunn would distinguish herself as a disciple of Nisargadatta, and there were other women who had roles in the Siddharameshwar lineage, but Sivalingavva’s importance confirms Bhausaheb’s true sense egalitarianism.

18 Ibid., p.238.
The third disciple of Bhausaheb is Girimalleshwar Maharaj (also known as Girmallapa). He was born and lived in Jamkhandi. He was a celebrated merchant who was wealthy and highly respected. He was also a strong man, who enjoyed sports, as well as being inclined towards spiritual matters. He had a generous disposition and built a temple. He was familiar with many spiritual texts including the Jnaneshwari, Bhagavad Gita, and the Dasbodh. He longed for a Sadguru. The website set up by his ashram states that he:

“...knew that unless with Sadguru’s blessings it is difficult to attain the Truth. At the same time when his heart was yearning for Sadguru, he suffered a great loss in his business and ultimately understood the incompleteness and instability of human life. This incident made him turn towards the path of Self-realization which opened the doors of introspection, which resulted in the purity of mind and detachment. When this state is reached, one is ready to meet the Sadguru. Thus finally, at the appropriate time Shree Girimalleshwar Maharaj met his Sadguru Shree Bhausaheb Maharaj at his own place Jamkhandi... No sooner did he see his Sadguru than he experienced ecstasy and joy reigned in his soul. Consequently, he received a spiritual initiation from Bhausaheb Maharaj. After getting initiation, in no time he started practising... Upon fulfillment of his austerity, he attained the Self. On the instruction of his Sadguru, he started initiating people into spiritual life. There were many enlightened souls who came to his feet just for the sake of his love and God realization.”

The fourth and most well-known disciple on this branch of Bhausaheb’s lineage is Professor R.D. Ranade (also known as Rambhau, Gurudev and Gurudeo by his disciples.) He was born in Jamkhandi, Bijapur and died in Nimbal, near Solapur, Maharashtra. In R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage, there is an account of his being saved from drowning by his friend Kallu Bokhare, who later brought Ranade to be initiated by Sri Bhausaheb. One could say that he was saved from drowning twice by his good friend!

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Ranade had his share of troubles in life, the loss of a child, his wife and his mother. He also struggled with health problems for much of his life. “Though he was fighting his own life-long disease from 1909 till the end of his life in 1957, he cared for and struggled for the highest good of all those who approached him with humility and surrender.”21 And, “He developed great dispassion and renunciation towards the end of his life and used these qualities to deepen his spiritual practice.”22 He had to resign his post at Fergusson College and was without any job for three years but his devotion grew ‘abundantly’. When his mother and his wife both died, he kept on practising and saying to God, “You and I shall now live together.”23

He was a philosopher and scholar of Indian mysticism, writing meticulous books on Indian mystics and their philosophy with informative comparisons to the great mystic traditions. He articulated the teachings of Jnanadev, Nirvrittinath, Eknath and Muktabai, as well as skillfully detailing the teachings of Tukaram. He taught at Willingdon College, Sangli, and later at Allahabad University, and retired as Head of Department of Philosophy and Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University. Despite his life as a busy professor, administrator, philosopher and writer, he maintained a rigorous meditation schedule and placed great emphasis on his experiential meditation on the Name which his guru, had imparted to him. Though an erudite scholar, Ranade was grounded in practical spiritual mysticism. He describes mysticism in his ‘Original Preface’ to his *Mysticism In India – Poet Saints of Maharashtra* thus: “Mysticism denotes that attitude of mind which involves a direct, immediate, first hand intuitive apprehension of God. When Mysticism is understood in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken to signify any occult or mysterious phenomena as is occasionally done. It is an irony of fate that a word which deserves to signify the highest attitude of which man is capable, namely a restful and loving contemplation of God, should be taken to signify things

21 Ibid., p.138.
22 Ibid., p.147.
23 Ibid., p.146.
which are incomparably low in the scale of being. Mysticism implies a silent enjoyment of God. It has often been regarded as ineffable.”

This quote by Ranade is quite interesting to me because while researching this article I came across numerous descriptions of the meditation experiences of Amburao, Sivalingavva, and even Ranade himself, describing photisms, visions of Vaikunta, and stars, after periods of intense meditation. The descriptions seem to indicate the meditators accepted them, not in a symbolic way, or metaphorically but matter of factly. I am perplexed by this and wonder if these were ‘lesser’ experiences, and how they fit in with the advaitic lineage of Nisargadatta Maharaj. Presumably they are normal stations on the Way, because they were not given undue importance by those who experienced them.

Just as many visitors to Nisargadatta’s mezzanine floor seeking advaitic teachings might have struggled with the importance of devotion, Ranade too, struggled with the idea of bhakti and how the devotional could be compatible with non-duality. He was confronted with this unresolved dilemma when he visited a Sankara Math in Varanasi. His intellect again proved to be a powerful instrument for him to solve a great philosophical problem, namely as to how it is possible for the non-dualistic philosophy of Sri Sankaracarya to be compatible with devotion to a isthadevata (personal deity).

During his visit to Banares he happened to hear in the Math of Sankaracarya, the song of devotion, Bhaja Govindam: “Be devoted to the Lord Govinda – a lesson in grammar will not save you when the death is at hand.” This gave him the impetus to make a thorough study of Indian philosophy and mysticism as taught by the saints of India.

Again, in Ranade’s ‘Original Preface’ he states, “It must be remembered that Sankara did not neglect Bhakti but absorbed it into

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his absolutistic scheme. If Sankara’s movement is not mystical in its aim, we do not understand what it is.”

Professor Ranade met Professor Woodhouse and Annie Besant who recognised his high calibre but he declined to join them in the world-wide Theosophical Society movement. The Silver Jubilee Souvenir says, “But there was, on the other side, the hope of realizing God by means of silent meditation on His Name, as instructed by his Guru, Bhausaheb Maharaj of Umadi. With intellect, will and courage he could set aside all the temptations which Theosophy offered him then.”

Instead, he created ‘The Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion’ in Belgaum, Karnataka, South India. Professor Ranade was one of the great lights of India, making the mystic teachings of India available to the world through his profound experience and study of the great works of the poet saints of Maharashtra and Karnataka. In his comparison of Western Philosophy with Eastern Philosophy, and of European mystical traditions (including Greek) with those of India, Ranade was one of the early exponents of the ‘perennial philosophy’. Unfortunately, the scope of this article doesn’t allow a fuller discussion of Ranade’s explorations into philosophy and mysticism.

A living tradition continues in Maharashtra due to the disciples of Bhausaheb, Amburao and R.D. Ranade, with centres and temples which actively function with a rich tradition of guru bhakti, meditation and Nama Yoga. In the next chapter we will look at Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, who refined the practice and created what he called the Bird’s Way, a direct enquiry into the truth.

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27 Ibid., p.134.
The word ‘siddha’ means, complete, perfect, accomplished from the root ‘sidd’ ‘to attain’. There are two uses of this word. One use refers to an accomplished one, a seer, a sage, a perfect being, a jnani, a mukta. The other use refers to a person who possesses one or more miraculous powers (siddhi). Bhagavan Ramana used the word in both of these ways. Further, in this regard he said:

“There are two kinds of siddhis and one kind may well be a stumbling block to Self-Realization. It is said that by mantras, by some drug possessing occult virtues, by severe austerities, or by samadhi of a certain kind, powers can be acquired. But these powers are not a means to Self-knowledge . . . the other kind are manifestations of power and knowledge which are quite natural to a person when the Self is realized. They come of their own accord, they are God given.”

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1 Sastri, Kapali, *Sat-Darshana Bhasya*, p. xxii.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
Sri Ramana sometimes would say that whether a *siddha* possesses *siddhis* or not is due to his destiny. However, whether they come or not, the jnani, the *siddha*, is not disturbed by them. Bhagavan said that the *siddha* who is firmly settled in the Self, in *sahaja samadhi*, knows that such a one is the Self and that is the unshakeable *siddhi*. It has often been noted that Sri Ramana, like Sri Ramakrishna and others before him, had no use for miraculous powers. A true seeker should pursue the Self and not supernatural powers.

“Telepathy or radio enables one to see and hear from afar. They are all the same, hearing and seeing. Whether one hears from near or far does not make any difference in hearing. The fundamental factor is the hearer, the subject. Without the hearer or the seer, there can be no hearing or seeing. The latter are the functions of the mind. The occult powers (*siddhis*) are therefore only in the mind. They are not natural to the Self. That which is not natural, but acquired, cannot be permanent, and is not worth striving for.”

“Occult powers will not bring happiness to anyone, but will make him all the more miserable!

Moreover what are these powers for? The would-be occultist (*siddha*) desires to display the siddhis so that others may appreciate him. He seeks appreciation, and if it is not forthcoming he will not be happy. There must be others to appreciate him. He may even find another possessor of higher powers. That will cause jealousy and breed unhappiness. The higher occultist (*siddha*) may meet a still higher *siddha* and so on until there will come one who will blow up everything in a trice. Such is the highest adept (*siddha*) and He is God or the Self.

Which is the real power? Is it to increase prosperity or bring about peace? That which results in peace is the highest perfection (*siddhi*).”

This is obviously true from one perspective. However, there is another perspective to consider. Bhagavan stated in the *Sri Ramana Gita*, compiled by Ganapati Muni, “The glory of the *siddhas* is beyond...”

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3 Ibid.
imagination. They are equal to Siva. Indeed they are the very forms of Siva. They have the power to grant every prayer.”

When Sri Ramana was asked in a court suit with the Government about the ownership of the hill (Arunachala), Bhagavan replied, “Siva always remains in three forms: (1) as Parabrahman rupa; (2) as Linga rupa; (3) as Siddha rupa.”

In the Sri Arunachala Mahatmya Siva says, “Though in fact fiery, my lack-lustre appearance as a hill on this spot is an act of grace for the maintenance of the world. I also abide here as the Siddha.”

Bhagavan made this clear by stating when a devotee raised a doubt about the difference between a siddha and a jnani. He replied:

“The Gita questions were asked in a certain spirit. The answers were according to it. People look to the body only and they want siddhis also. With Self-Realisation no powers can extend even into it, and how can they extend beyond? People anxious for siddhis are not content with their idea of jnana and so want siddhis associated with it. They are likely to neglect the supreme happiness of jnana and aspire for siddhis. For this they are going through the by-lanes instead of the royal path and so will likely lose their way. In order to guide them aright and keep them on the royal road alone the siddhis are said to accompany jnana. In fact jnana comprises all, and a jnani will not waste even a thought on them. Let the people get jnana and then seek siddhis if they so desire.

I have said: sarira samsrayah siddhayah (the siddhis relate to the body), because their outlook is concerning the body. A jnani and siddha are not different. In varan datum (to bestow boons) the boons include atmalabha (the gain of Self) also. The siddhis are not merely of an inferior order but of the highest order.”

In the Halasya Mahima Siva says, “Though there are eight great siddhis, a bhakta never wastes a thought on them.” Siva then says that he never grants boons. If only the Self is Real, who is there to display

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4 Sri Ramana Gita, Chapter XVIII, verse 26.
5 Talks, Talk§492.
7 Talks, Talk§57.
what to whom? In order to display siddhis there must be others to recognize them. Therefore, siddhis are not worthy of even a thought; only jnana, the Self, is to be sought and gained.

The term siddha also refers to a mukta, a sage, defined by Sri Ramana as one naturally, eternally abiding in sahaja samadhi.

He said, “The body is impermanent (not real). Whether it is at rest or moves about and whether by reason of prarabdha it clings to him or falls off from him, the Self-realized siddha is not aware of it, even as the drunken man blinded by intoxication is unaware whether his cloth is on his body or not.”

There are siddhas and siddhas. Bhagavan many times spoke of the siddhas who dwell, he said, in caves on Arunachala. Some must have been individuals who possessed siddhis and employed them and others may or may not have possessed siddhis. He said, “To this day Siddhas (with supernatural powers) dwell in its caves, whether with physical bodies or not, and some are said to have seen them as lights moving about the hill at night.”

There are a number of incidents where Bhagavan Ramana spoke of siddhas coming to have his darshan in the form of animals. He said about a golden-hued mongoose, “It must be a Siddha Purusha who has come in this form.”

He was asked: “Is it true that Siddha Purushas come in various forms?” Bhagavan replied, “Yes, it is true.” Another devotee asked, “Arunagiri Yogi came in the form of a mongoose. Is it true?” Bhagavan replied, “Yes, it is also true.”

Can a siddha, a jnani, a perfect one perform siddhis? It is obvious that miraculous events do happen around a jnani and on occasions happened around Sri Ramana. The Maharshi said that a jnani has no mind. He does not make choices, does not act. For such a one, who is to do what to whom? Naught really exists but the Self.

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8 Mudaliar, Devaraja, Day by Day with Bhagavan, 2013. p.113. 21-1-46.
11 Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, 1-1-46. Ch. 18, Leopards and Snakes.
Years ago I met a Swami Sundaram who lived right across the tank from the Kapaleswar Temple, Mylapore, He was known all over South India as Guruji and had a small ashram on the outskirts of Chennai. He sweetly said,

“Siddhis are like the money you earn at your chosen profession. You work, you earn, you put the money in the wallet that is kept in your pocket. When you need the money, you take it out and use it. Then you put your wallet back in your pocket. There are people who earn miraculous powers through austerity (tapas); others by practising samyama (the practice of dharana/concentration, dhyana/meditation, and samadhi/absorption in one object); others by consuming certain drugs or herbs; still others receive them as a gift from their guru or from the divine; still others by mantra repetition; others by pranayama or breath control; and some come to possess them spontaneously.

“A guru is like a postbox. People come and deposit letters in the postbox. The swamiji then acts like a postman and delivers the letters to their proper destination. It is the divine that is truly the ultimate dispenser of all miracles, never the messenger.”

All of a jnani’s actions are performed through the power of the Self. Ordinary people observe that a jnani appears to be acting. They cannot imagine how any action, including miraculous actions, can be done without choice, decisions, without a mind.

There were actually quite a few accounts of miraculous happenings during Bhagavan’s lifetime. A significant number of devotees related incidents that happened around him of miraculous nature. He would reply, if at all, by remarking that all such events were not performed by him, that they were involuntary and spontaneous. He never took credit for any of them and revealed no interest in siddhis. He would often remark that they are of no value. Once he said, being told about one such incident, “I suppose that is what Siddhas do.”

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11 Osborne, Arthur, Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge, 2006. p. 110. See also Godman, David, The Power of the Presence, Vol.I, p.17-8. In the chapter on Ranga Rao, Bhagavan said. “Jnanis are of two types – siddhas and suddhas. Siddhas know that they have extraordinary powers. Suddhas also have such powers but they do not even know that they possess them.”
Brahma on the Matrubhuteswara Shrine Vimana
The next verse shows how all the virtues and generally, all that is good, are centred in that one excellence – the giving up of the ego-sense. Bhagavan composed this verse.

Verse 13
The cessation of ‘I am the body’ sense (*dehatmabhava*) is itself charity, austerities, sacrifice, righteousness, yoga, devotion, heaven, wealth, peace, truth, Grace, silence – the true State of emancipation, deathless-death (the loss of ego), right awareness, renunciation, liberation and bliss.

Commentary
The expedients for mind-purification during sadhana are enumerated. The good things desired by all are wealth, heaven, liberation and so on. All these are comprehended in the egoless state and hence one who is in this state has all these qualities.

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.
Charity or Generosity: The giving up of oneself (self-surrender) to the One who was spoken of as the Real Self, the substratum of the world appearance, consists in renouncing the notion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. This means the giving up of the idea ‘I am the body-mind’. Hence egolessness is the real self-surrender. It is obviously the most efficacious of all gifts and its rewards are beyond measure. It makes the sadhaka ready to receive Divine Grace. This is why the spirit of generosity is the ideal for self-sacrifice to occur.

Tapas: ‘Tapas’ is practically an untranslateable word. It is defined as the practice of the restraint of the mind and senses, which develops one-pointedness or meditation. Tapas is considered an effective means to the attainment of any wish. It also purifies the mind. The opposite of tapas is self-indulgence, which fouls the mind with desires and makes it useless for sadhana.

The root of all desires and of all the taints of the mind is the ego-sense. Giving up the ego-sense (the notion ‘I am the body-mind’) is therefore declared to be the real tapas. The same idea is present in verse 30 of Upadesa Undiyar, which Muruganar composed:

“‘The attainment of that wisdom, which is direct knowledge of one’s true nature as the Self, gained on the total extinction of the ego, is the greatest of all tapas,’ so sings, with infinite compassion, Guru Ramana, who shines as the Self Supreme.”

Righteousness: All unrighteousness arises from the ego-sense. By achieving egolessness all unrighteousness is put an end to; hence egolessness is perfect Righteousness or acting in accord with the Dharma. All else, being tainted by the ego, is imperfect and inefficacious.

Yoga: Yoga is ‘union’ or ‘yoking’ with the Absolute; all differences are annihilated then and there. The obstacle that has hindered this union so far is the ego. After the annihilation of the ego, perfect Union with the Absolute is achieved. Hence this is true Yoga.

Devotion: Perfect devotion to the Lord is hindered by one’s attachment to the body and the world. This attachment is rooted in the ego-sense and is put an end to by the cessation of the ego-sense. Hence egolessness is the perfect devotion which, through Divine Grace, leads to the Supreme State.
**Heaven:** Heaven is the world of happiness to which all virtuous people go after death, to experience unceasing pleasure, and is desired by almost all. But the sojourner in heaven can remain there for only a limited period of time, dependent on his or her merits. After that time, he/she has to descend from there to be born once again. So life in heaven is not eternal, nor is it free from shortcomings. The state from which there is no return to this world is the Natural State of the Self which can be attained only by the extinction of the ego. This is the true heaven. That Natural State is the Bliss that is Infinite and Unalloyed.

**Wealth:** Due to the ego-sense one becomes a stranger to one’s own Self and loses access to the Supreme Bliss of the Self. This is true poverty and the cause of discontent and misery. To get rid of this poverty one seeks to amass wealth, but this wealth does not make one happy. One’s real wealth is one’s own Self. To get access to this real wealth one must give up the ‘I am the body-mind’ idea. Thus egolessness is the true wealth.

**Peace:** The ego is the source of all mental unrest and trauma. Real Peace, which is the Bliss of the Self, is won by egolessness.

**Truth:** It is the greatest untruth to regard this vile body as the Self. Since this body is not the Self, to regard it as the Self is ultimate untruthfulness and hence, as long as the ego-sense is not given up, there can be no truth. Hence egolessness is equated with Truth.

**Divine Grace:** The extinction of the ‘I am the body’ idea comes through the practice of sadhana, aided by Divine Grace. The totality of Grace is manifested on the extinction of the ego.

**Silence:** True Silence is firm abidance in egoless Awareness. By Silence one attains the state which cannot be attained through words or speech. The Silence of the mind is egolessness.

**The True or Natural State:** By the extinction of the mind the state of Absolute Rest is won. The ego-sense is the root of the mind, thus the extinction of the mind comes about by annihilating the ego. Hence the ego’s extinction is the same as the True, Natural State of the Self.

**Deathless-death:** When misery becomes unbearable one wishes for death and is even prepared to commit suicide. At other times,
one wants to transcend death and to lead an eternal life. The right way to conquer death is by making the ego die. When the ego-sense dies this wrong identification, of one’s body with the Self, ceases.

**Right Awareness:** The ego-sense is the primary ignorance. Egolessness being the cause of its cessation, thereafter Right Awareness dawns. Hence the two are the same.

**Renunciation:** Renunciation usually means the giving up of one’s family, property, house, etc., and then becoming a recluse, an ascetic or a *sannyasi*. But the notion ‘I am a renunciate’ may remain. This cannot lead to liberation. Bhagavan therefore says that true *sannyasa* is to give up the ego itself, by which the entire phenomenal world is given up. Thus the Absolute is attained, because the sadhaka has made the greatest sacrifice, which is the sacrifice of the ego.

**Liberation:** Our ego constitutes our greatest bondage and is the sole cause of all other worldly bondages. Hence renouncing the ego gives true liberation.

**Bliss:** Bliss or Perfect Happiness is the very nature of the Self. The intervening ego-sense obscures it, hence one is unhappy in the world. When the ego dies, this obscuration is removed and one’s Natural Bliss is regained. Hence egolessness is Bliss.

(To be continued)

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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. 31/03/2015
When I began reading the works of Ramana Bhagavan I ran into certain difficulties. The postulate of the world as unreal, was a serious challenge to my cherished beliefs. In my limited understanding, a spiritual pursuit would ideally involve doing what was right and good which would contribute to improving the world (which was therefore real), and the condition of its inhabitants, including myself hopefully. The self-improvement industry which churns out books, workshops, messiahs and promises a package deal of success in all endeavours leading to personal power and happiness, had me firmly in its grip. Therefore considering the world as unreal was beyond me. Bhagavan has emphasised the absolute necessity of understanding the unreality of the world. The following instructions to Sivaprakasham Pillai are found in the work *Who Am I?*.

Geetha Ravichandran is an ardent devotee of Ramana Bhagavan. She considers herself specially blessed to be guided on the path of Bhagavan by Swami Shantananda Puri, while at the feet of Arunachala. She is an IRS officer, presently posted as Commissioner of Income Tax at Bangalore.
Q. When will the realization of the Self be gained?
A. When the world which is what-is-seen has been removed, there will be realization of the Self which is the seer.
Q. Will there not be realization of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)?
A. There will not be.
Q. Why?
A. The seer and the object seen are like the rope and the snake. Just as the knowledge of the rope which is the substrate will not arise unless the false knowledge of the illusory serpent goes, so the realization of the Self which is the substrate will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real is removed.

Q. When will the world which is the object seen be removed?
A. When the mind, which is the cause of all cognitions and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.  

Although I could not appreciate this, I valiantly plodded on with my reading of the works of Bhagavan. Then I read the story of the two friends with which Bhagavan used to illustrate that joy and grief are mere products of the imagination. Two men from the village went to the city to earn their living. Their families had no news of them. One day a traveller from the village went to the city and met one of them. He asked the traveller to convey to his family members that he was comfortable and prosperous. He also told him to inform the family members of his friend about his sad demise. The traveller returned to the village but mixed up the names and events. Therefore the family members of the man who was alive and well mourned his death and the family of the person who was no more, held a feast to celebrate his success.

This story held a fascination for me. But I wrestled with it mentally. The restrictions of time and space could affect perceptions of reality but surely such situations can be remedied. Also in these days of instant messaging and real time broadcast we are empowered to know

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1 *Who Am I?* §3-7.
facts and are not mislead easily. Paradoxically, the more empowered we believe we have become the more vulnerable we actually are. A modified version of the story of the two friends, one healthy and another diseased, maybe heard of today in a modern high-tech hospital where mixed up medical reports would cause grief or joy and further complications without any actual correlation to facts.

Another argument that the mind comes up with, is that the perceptions of the senses is not unique to any individual but is validated by others. But we attribute authority to others and set great store by the opinion of others without appreciating that a common veil of ignorance shrouds the human situation itself.

The allegory of Plato’s cave which he used to illustrate his theory of forms proves helpful in understanding the nature of the real. (My interpretation is both unauthorized and simplified!) Plato gave the example of people chained in a cave, facing the wall of the cave, unable to turn around and only able to see the wall. There is a fire burning in the cave. As objects are brought up behind the flame, they project a shadow on the wall.

Plato proposed that everything we observe in the real world is like the shadow projected on the wall. Basically, objects exist independent of the projection of that object on the wall. This realm of perfect mathematical forms outside the cave is the realm of real objects which the prisoners are not aware of. They therefore mistake the appearance of imperfect shadows of the perfect forms for reality. They converse about the shadows taking them for actual objects. They acquire concepts through sense perceptions of the physical world and mistakenly presume that the concept in their minds is reality. They are unable to appreciate that the distortions of reality are caused by their own imprecise mental equipment and the flickering fire.

The chains that bind the prisoners in the cave could represent the conditioning which has been inculcated in us from birth by family, by society, by religion so that we end up believing what others want us to believe as true. We therefore validate each other’s experience. We are roped in to be minor players in an on-going drama. To get
off the arc lights even as the show goes on, to understand it is mere shadow play is to recondition ourselves, to be free.

Bhagavan explains the actual nature of Reality thus:

“The pictures move on a screen in a cinema show, but does the screen itself move? No. The presence is the screen: you, I and others are the pictures. The individuals may move but not the Self.”

The consolation in this situation is that everyone is eligible to know reality and experience their true nature. Queen Madalasa a realized soul imparted her wisdom to her new born children. The lullabies she sang as she rocked them in their cradle awakened in them their immortal, eternally free nature.

_Suddhosi Buddhosi Niranjanosi_  
_Samsara Maya Parivarjitosi_  
_Samsara Badhan Tyaja Moha Nidram_  
_Na Janma Mrityu Twahyi Sat Swarupe..._  

One day while at Ramanashramam, I told Swami Shantananda Puri, that only if I had known this story and these songs when my children were born I would have raised liberated souls and not rebellious teens. Is there anything I could do now to remedy this? Swamiji replied with a twinkle in his eye that I should first get a big cradle into which my boys would fit in! But as Swamiji himself states since grace is ever present, there are no lost opportunities.

In the words of Swamiji, “The sole Reality is the infinite inner space of Self awareness. The final and absolute truth is that there is pure awareness alone which is real. Unless this truth is learnt by the individual jiva, there is no way of getting out of this mega delusion”.

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3 “You are eternally pure, true and spotless; you are free from illusion, birth and death and are already awakened.”

4 Shantananda Puri, Swami, *Sadhanas from Guru Vachaka Kovai*.  

April - June
Sleep and Recuperation

M. R. Kodhandram

Sleep is very important for the recovery of the body and mind which get tired due to the activities of the day. The various organs of the body function due to the life energy or prana-shakti flowing through them. This life energy is very subtle unlike the energy coming from the intake of carbohydrates which is the physical energy required for our activities. When we are sick, the life energy is low because all the energy is utilised for fighting the infection. That is why we feel weak and we need to rest. If we are active even during sickness, the life energy will not be sufficient to fight the infection and thus the recovery will be slow. That is why the doctor advises us to take rest during sickness.

A major portion of the life energy (about 75%) is taken up by the body for the purpose of maintaining the metabolic routine like digestion, respiration, transporting nutrients to where they are needed.

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needed, elimination of waste products, cell building and conversion of food into juice, blood, tissues, bone, marrow and vital fluid — in that order. In this manner continuous conversion and manufacture are constantly going on within the body which requires a lot of life energy.

The other portion of the life energy (the balance of 25%) goes for performing the mental functions such as thinking, feeling, analysing, understanding, calculating, emotions, enjoyment etc. If for some reasons, the life energy is not adequate, they may be just enough for the maintenance of the metabolic routine and the result is short supply for the mind. This is what happens at the end of a busy day in office. Your body and mind become tired and you need to rest.

Sleep is a gift of God to make the body and mind rest and regenerate. Only when the mind goes to sleep, the system can work on the body because more life energy will be available for the metabolic functions. So much of repair work is done in the body when we sleep. The dead cells are removed and new cells are produced. There is growth of tissues, bones, digestion, waste product removal etc. going on when we sleep. Without proper sleep, there will not be enough energy for such functions which are very vital for our survival. That is why Nature puts us to sleep so that it can work on the body.

We normally require about 8 hours of daily sleep. Babies may sleep for more than 20 hours a day and teenagers may require about 9 to 10 hours of sleep. It is not good to sleep more than the required time because it will make the mind dull. But if we are sleeping for lesser number of hours daily, due to keeping awake late in the night, it will eventually have a toll on our health. Without enough hours of restorative sleep, you won’t be able to work, learn, create, and communicate at a level close to your true potential.

The best way to figure out if you are meeting your sleep needs is to evaluate how you feel as you go about your day. If you are sleeping enough hours, you will feel energetic and alert all day long, from the moment you wake up until your bedtime. Nowadays, we see many people going to sleep late and getting up late and then rushing to the school or office. In the process, they are unable to do many things in
the morning. If they have early working hours, they will be forced to
sacrifice on their sleep and this will affect their physical and mental
health. If they are students, they will not be able to concentrate on
their studies in the school and may doze off during the lectures in the
class. If they are office goers, they will not be able to perform well in
their work. If we are not sleeping sufficiently in the night, there will
not be sufficient time for the various repair and regeneration activities
required for the body. This will cause toxins to build up in the body
leading to various ailments over a period of time. If sleep is shallow
during the night, the immunity of the body to fight infections will
diminish and will breakdown sooner or later.

If we constantly watch a TV screen or computer screen too long,
our eyes will tire out fast and over a period of time the vision will
begin to reduce requiring spectacles. Many spend late hours before
the TV or computer screen and go to sleep only after one o’clock
which is a very unhealthy practice. Or they may go to parties, clubs
or movies and sleep late which is again unhealthy. If we are sleeping
at irregular times, it will affect the quality of sleep. Some would feel
that they have not had enough sleep even though they would have
slept for 8 to 9 hours.

The quality of your sleep directly affects the quality of your waking
life, including your mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance,
creativity, physical vitality, and even your weight. Just as exercise and
nutritious food are essential for good health and happiness, so is sleep.
No other activity delivers so many benefits with so little effort!

Sleep deprivation has a wide range of negative effects that go way
beyond daytime drowsiness. Lack of sleep affects your judgment,
coordination and reaction times. In fact, sleep deprivation can affect
you just like the use of alcohol. Some people tend to think that they
can make up for lost sleep during the week by sleeping more on the
weekends. This sleeping pattern will not completely make up for the
lack of sleep. Furthermore, sleeping more on the weekends can affect
your sleep-wake cycle so that it is much harder to go to sleep at the
right time on Sunday nights and get up early on Monday mornings.
While the body requires at least eight hours of sleep daily, it also requires it at a particular time when it will enable optimum performance for its maintenance activities. Your sleep should follow the natural rhythm for it to be beneficial. Generally, sleeping between 10 pm and 6 am is good for the body. It is even better if you can sleep earlier, say 9 pm and wake up at 5 am to the call of the birds. You cannot go to sleep at 2 am and wake up at 10 am and think that you are giving the body adequate rest. It is said every hour of sleep before midnight is worth two hours after it.

There is an old saying that early to bed and early to rise makes one healthy, wealthy and wise. If we look at the nature, every creature generally goes to sleep early after sunset and wakes up early in the morning. We too have to emulate them. It is not good to sleep after sunrise as the sun rays are not good for sleeping. Your sleep will be disturbed and you will have more dreams if you sleep after sunrise. At night, your body produces melatonin, a hormone that makes you sleepy. During the day, sunlight triggers the brain to inhibit melatonin production so you feel awake and alert. Therefore, sleeping in the daytime is not a healthy practice.

Thus we must develop healthy sleeping habits early in life so as to lead a happy and healthy life. But to get up early in the morning, we need to go to sleep early so that our body and mind will get sufficient rest. If we get up early in the morning, we will be able to do many things before going to our college or office. We will also be able to go for a refreshing walk in a park or a beach which will give us good health. Going for a walk or a jog in the morning in the open is beneficial not only for the body but also for the mind. The mind when exposed to the nature gets relieved of its stresses and gets strengthened as it watches the trees and birds and the blue sky or the sunrise. Moreover, the air is fresh and unpolluted in the morning and breathing exercises such as pranayama done at this time are very beneficial.

Nowadays, there is the trend to go a gym in the morning or evening where it is air-conditioned. There is no scope for watching the nature or breathing fresh air. It is only a mechanical way of exercising the body
without getting benefit for the mind. When we get up early in the morning, we will also have time for our prayers, puja and meditation and also be able to prepare ourselves for the day ahead in a leisurely manner. Moreover, we will be able to listen to many useful lectures that are telecast in the early morning these days. This will help us to go to office in a positive frame of mind. We will also be able to eat our morning breakfast leisurely. Moreover, students will be able to benefit if they study getting up early in the morning because the mind will be fresh. Thus we can see the advantages of rising early in the morning. If we develop such good habits early in life, we will be able to benefit throughout our life. Once we get used to waking up early, we will be able to sustain it automatically as the system will get tuned to it. There is a biological clock working within us which will wake us up daily at the same time. Thus leading a disciplined life will help us to achieve success in all walks of life.

Let us try to understand the mechanism of sleep. All sleep is not the same. Sleep consists of a series of recurring sleep stages that are very different from one another in terms of what is happening beneath the surface. From deep sleep to dream sleep, all are all vital for the body and mind. Each stage of sleep plays a different part in preparing you for the day ahead. There are two main types of sleep:

1) REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep is the most active part in which you dream. Your eyes actually move back and forth during this stage, which is why it is called Rapid Eye Movement sleep.
2) Non-REM sleep consists of three stages of sleep each deeper than the previous one.

There are four stages in sleep: The first is the non-REM sleep which consists of three stages which occur immediately after you go to sleep:

1) Transition to sleep is the first which lasts for about five minutes in which your eyes move slowly under the eyelids and muscle activity slows down and you can be easily awakened in this state.
2) Light sleep is the next stage in which your eye movement stops, heart rate slows and body temperature decreases. This stage lasts for about 10 to 25 minutes.
3) The next is the deep sleep state which may last for 30 to 40 minutes. In this stage of sleep, your brain waves are extremely slow. The blood flow is directed away from your brain and towards your muscles, restoring physical energy.

4) The final is the REM sleep which occurs 70 to 90 minutes after you go to sleep where dreaming occurs. This may last for 20 to 30 minutes. Here your eyes move rapidly, breathing becomes shallow and heart rate and blood pressure increase. Also during this stage, your arm and leg muscles are paralysed.

Thus each sleep cycle lasts for 90 to 100 minutes and one may have four or five cycles in a night’s sleep. The amount of time one spends in each stage of sleep changes as the night progresses. For example, most deep sleep occurs in the first half of the night. Later in the night, your REM sleep stages become longer, alternating with Stage 2 light sleep. However much one may sleep, the deep sleep will not be for more than two hours in a night. Each stage of sleep in the sleep cycle offers benefits to the sleeper.

However, deep sleep and REM sleep are particularly important. A normal adult spends approximately 50% of total sleep time in Stage 2 light sleep, 20% in REM sleep, and 30% in the remaining stages, including deep sleep. Deep sleep is a time when the body repairs itself and builds up energy for the day ahead. It plays a major role in maintaining your health, stimulating growth and development, repairing muscles and tissues, and boosting your immune system. In order to wake up energized and refreshed, getting quality deep sleep is essential. Just as deep sleep renews the body, REM sleep renews the mind by playing a key role in learning and memory. As we age, we experience changes in our sleeping patterns, but our total sleep needs stay the same.

Having thus understood the importance and mechanism of sleep, we should try to develop healthy sleeping habits so as to enjoy good health and happiness.
Surrender — Conscious Powerlessness
Every day it seems we come across more and more people addicted to various activities or things. It could be that someone wants to control their appearance by weight loss, weight gain or by other cosmetic means. Perhaps because of modern technology the most recent addictions are more openly displayed. It could be someone’s apparent need to always be on the phone, to constantly use a computer or to play computer games, to have more virtual friends or to gamble. Some addictions are so commonplace that they are acceptable to the point that in many cases it is now politically incorrect to even mention them. Modern society has expanded the range of addictions so much that they could include a whole gamut of human behaviour. Let’s alphabetise only the most common ones: anorexia, alcohol, bulimia, body building, cocaine, chocolate, crime, drugs not prescribed but available on the street such as glue, inhalants, solvents and legal highs, exercise, food, fetishes, gambling, heroin, internet, jogging,

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kleptomania, love, marijuana, nicotine, overeating, pornography, prescription drugs, quintessential behaviour (perfectionism), religion, social media, shopping, sex, self-harm, telephones, television, tattooing, underachieving, video games, wealth.

The naked truth behind addiction is dependence on the presumption that happiness comes solely from the exterior material world. Over-emphasis on the external conditions makes it much more difficult for people to access their inner selves. Thinking or rationalism has almost overwhelmed everything so that the inner aspect has been neglected. How has this come about?

Our superficial externalised cultures promote and encourage the acquisition of certain behaviours, experiences and possessions through all kinds of advertisements in the media using powerful role models. Many of these create desires which when fulfilled give the person the illusion of having obtained the accepted symbols of success. Some of these create the craving for more.

Similarly people’s appetite for technological progress in the external world is fuelled by their minds’ desire for external knowledge so that they can control the external world and experience it to their liking and satisfaction. Their simple error is in doing this at the expense of their inner being. The desire of the mind to be dominant in everything overcomes their inner self which is eclipsed and withers. This results in a fatal loss of balance between the mind and the spirit.

The inner ‘spiritual’ world is the glue which when shared holds groups of men and women together and so when it is dissolved people become isolated and unhappy. This is when they let addictions move in... rent free.

Carl Jung was the first modern doctor to realise that medicine, psychology and psychotherapy do not work for people addicted to drugs or alcohol. Recently we have seen that this insight applies to many addictions.

On their last meeting in 1931, after many therapy sessions, Carl Jung informed his patient Rowland Hazzard of his ‘hopelessness’ as far as medical or psychiatric treatment was concerned in treating his addiction. Bluntly Jung wrote him off, making him conscious of his
powerlessness over his addiction. However Jung advised him that there might be hope for him if he became the subject of a religious or spiritual experience and if he placed himself in a religious atmosphere. Jung thus made Hazzard conscious of his powerlessness and of the option to surrender to a higher power.

This was an extraordinarily insightful and ground breaking thing to do. Rowland Hazzard followed Jung’s advice and completely recovered. Using Jung’s advice Hazzard helped Bill Wilson to recover; Wilson in 1935 went on to co-found the first successful self-help group programme for recovering addicts, known today as AA or Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill Wilson said his conversation with Rowland Hazzard, his humility and deep perception played a critical role in the founding of the AA Fellowship.

In 1961, just months before Jung’s death, Wilson wrote to thank Jung for his direct help in curing him of his addiction and his influence in helping to set up the first addiction recovery programme. Jung immediately replied informing him that he had taken a great risk at the time in advising Hazzard that the only hope left for him was to lead a spiritually based life in a community. For a medical doctor and psychiatrist to suggest a spiritual cure for addiction in 1931 was radically new and is probably why Jung did not mention it until after he was told about it by Wilson in 1961.

Most people believe that Jung’s chief legacy was Analytical Psychology, a perspective which he hoped would take people further than religion in understanding themselves and making themselves whole. Many countries have several Jungian groups or Jungian societies. Jungian therapists influence thousands of people and Jung has been an enormously important contributor to modern psychology. However his actual practical influence on humankind has been quite different to what he expected because it has primarily been in the field of addiction.

The Mechanism
Carl Jung in his reply to the 1961 letter from Bill Wilson said, “Alcohol in Latin is ‘Spiritus’, and you use the same word for the
highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: Spiritus contra spiritum.” Jung may have linked the two words together himself or he may have been displaying a condition he wrote about called ‘cryptomnesia;’ in which unknowingly he was quoting the Roman Caesar, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (120-180 AD) who declared, ‘Espiritum vinci espiritus.’ Irrespective of this, both quotes mean the same, which is, spirit destroys spirit.

There are two ways of accessing the spirit; either the illusion of the spirit is invoked by alcohol, drugs, eating, gambling and sex or the authentic spirit is invoked by the collapse of the ego and its surrender to the true self — this is the ‘sense of the sacred.’

The lure of addiction gives people the feeling of satisfaction and wholeness whilst in reality they are isolated and fragmented. They are experiencing not genuine wholeness of spirit but an imitation, a ‘cuckoo’ spirit. The cuckoo is a parasitic bird which in ten seconds can push an egg out of a nest and lay one of its own there to be hatched and nurtured by the host bird. When the cuckoo chick hatches it evicts the other chicks and is usually a giant compared to them causing massive problems to the host mother. In this biological ‘arms race’ the host mother adapts by changing the pattern on her eggs, specifically so that she can recognise them as her own, as opposed to the imitation egg placed there by a cuckoo. Similar to the host mother feeding the cuckoo chick, addicts are aware that they are harming themselves, but are compelled to continue to satisfy their craving. Likewise their families and friends continue to support addicts even though they know that addiction harms them as well.

When people gather together, having decided to fight their addiction, a spirit is formed in the group which is a higher power than any individual can generate on his or her own. Just as the host mother uses nature to create an egg pattern which the cuckoo can’t mimic, the spirit of solidarity formed and experienced in a community can shatter the illusion of satisfaction and wholeness that addictions create.

A supportive community which encourages togetherness, understanding and spiritual meaning can inspire hope and encourage
addicts to want to change their behaviours and belong more to the community. For many this may be the only path available to a sense of authentic wholeness. There is no actual cure, no medicine or therapy but there is hope.

This possibility of hope given to addicts by Jung in the form of spirituality in a group has probably had more influence on the world in the form of addiction groups than all the rest of Jung’s work. It has probably contributed more to the healing of the sick than any form of psychological therapy. His contribution to mankind’s spiritual development has not just been significant, it has been colossal and in a very different way to that which he imagined.

Therapy may be useful after recovery has started but therapy on its own doesn’t produce a meaningful recovery from addictions as Jung and many since him have indicated. The most successful answers are in spiritually centred supportive communities such as Internet/Television/Narcotics/TelephoneAlcoholics/Overeaters-Anonymous for the addict and similar support groups for families and friends.

The Wider External World
The devastation is nowhere more obvious than in most of the native populations of North America and Australia whose spirit is still enshrined in their lands which they can no longer freely access. This is also becoming true in Tibet and in other lands where the natives’ traditional connections with their sense of the spiritual through the earth are severed. Relocation, poverty, poor education, lack of prospects and opportunities could each be named as the culprit behind their addictions but this is not the original and ongoing cause. The true reason is that they have had their spiritual connection with the earth removed and they have had it replaced with a substitution of a false spirit composed of drugs or alcohol usually supplied by the thief who took their original true sense of wholeness and sacred integrity, a cuckoo spirit. The cuckoo spirit also inhabits and deeply affects family members and friends, disguising and taking over their true spirit.

It seems as if addiction has been weaponised to overcome whole nations which once flourished on and were proud of their spiritual life.
For the people in these places the diet of the soul seems temporarily one sided and overpowered by man’s greed to obtain, own and control.

**Families and Friends**

Whatever the origin, addictions are a progressive disease of all the addicts’ relationships. Addictions can’t be controlled or cured, only arrested. Addiction is not just an individual illness because everyone in the family is deeply affected and unhappy. In some areas, whole communities and nations of people are deeply affected by addictions. Every family member leads a powerless life through the illusion that they cannot control the addict but the cuckoo spirit makes them keep on trying to change and control the addict.

In trying to stop the addict’s drug taking/drinking or control their usage and in trying to make up for it, family members change emotionally, becoming disturbed themselves in reacting to the addict. They get stuck in a cycle of trying to have power over something which is unmanageable. They feel that they are being driven crazy.

There are always some similar patterns in all addicts and their families. Because there is no control over drugs, alcohol or other addictions, the addict’s effects on everyone are chaotic and unpredictable with the result that everyone feels powerless. Unlike other diseases addiction is unmanageable and the people around the addict have to be over-vigilant and can’t relax in normal ways and therefore can’t relate in normal ways. They often become obsessional.

Family members and friends become different in the sense that they are not their ‘full selves.’ They remain emotionally confined and limited by the addicted person’s behaviour. As well as fear and shame there is always resentment and anger. Unless family members are helped, this pattern of relating usually continues in their relationships with all others and extends for their whole life. Similarly, drug addiction/alcoholism not only devastates families, but also the next generation of children whose parents are handicapped because they themselves were brought up by an addicted parent.

Addicts may remain addicted as an emotional anaesthetic because they don’t have the tools and the skills that are necessary to deal with
emotions. Often they can’t deal intelligently with their emotions because they weren’t taught how to do so because they were brought up in an environment where a parent or grandparent was a drug taker or an alcoholic who was incompetent with his emotions.

Non-attachment
Addicts and their families and friends cannot be helped unless they themselves feel there is a need and they are ready to be helped. It is only when there is nowhere worse to be that their ‘hopelessness’ is recognised and help is sought by family’s friends and the addicts. The well-meaning efforts of family members can stop addicts from getting the help they so desperately need. It is as if there has to be a ‘gutter moment.’ Likewise there may be a ‘gutter moment’ for family members and friends when they feel they will go crazy unless they leave the relationship or get some help. The naked truth about this time is best seen and understood by a parallel example in nature, as told in the following story.

A young boy found a cocoon and knowing what was inside it he brought it into his house where he waited for it to open up. He waited for hours looking at the cocoon. He eventually fell asleep and woke in the morning to find a hole had appeared in the cocoon. He watched it for a long time and finally in the afternoon a black leg appeared out of a hole struggling to make the hole bigger. There was little progress by the evening and so the boy thought he would help. He went to his Granny’s sewing basket where he found a delicate pair of scissors that she used for crochet work. He went back to the cocoon where the leg was still struggling to open it. He delicately cut a line along the opening and out emerged the creature.

He looked at it for a long time waiting for it to open its wings but it just seemed to wriggle about. Eventually he placed it by the open window where he thought the air would help it. He went off to ask his Granny for her help. She came back with him but the creature was lying on its back with its legs straight in the air as if dead. His Granny said, “When a butterfly is trying to get out of its cocoon, it struggles so hard that its heart beats faster and faster until its blood
pressure gets very high. The very high pressure forces blood into the wings so that they open up, thus breaking open the cocoon. It is the only way a butterfly wings can open.”

The loved ones of drug addicts and alcoholics usually support their illnesses and cover up for all of their mistakes and shortcomings. But this only prolongs and prevents the addict and their family from getting proper help. Family and friends think they can control and cure the addictions but they are unmanageable diseases which can only be arrested.

Referring an addict for medical or psychological help usually wastes time because most doctors, psychiatrists and psychotherapists are not experts in this area. It is recovering addicts or recovering alcoholics themselves who are the experts. The proof is simply that they are ‘clean’ and sober and largely remain ‘clean’ and sober. Any other therapy is usually either a waste of time or will only eventually lead to Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous, so they might as well go straight to Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous to start with.

The drug addict/alcoholic may have some other problems which can be helped by therapy but this can only happen later on. The primary problem must be spelt out and acted on first, otherwise it risks, and may encourage, denial and avoidance and can perpetuate the problem. A person who goes to Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous will learn something that they can learn no other way.

Most drug addicts or alcoholics who stop taking drugs or drink without using the resources offered for support and development by Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous remain as fragmented addicts or sober drunks. Usually their block in going to Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous is obsessional fear simply due to their lack of emotional tools and skills. Ironically Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous is just the place where they will find these emotional tools.

Similarly anyone who has had to suffer and endure living with a drug addict/alcoholic is usually wounded on so many levels of consciousness that there is no point in thinking they can get adequate help from well-meaning doctors, psychologists and psychotherapists. They are best helped by the friends and families of other drug addicts/
alcoholics who have worked through this and who are therefore experts. They offer hope that there is a way out for families and friends to avoid being overwhelmed by a drug addict/alcoholic and their disease.

Families and friends need to understand how to deal with their emotions and their sense of their ‘inner self’. They need to look again with another ‘understanding family’ to try to see the drug addiction/alcoholism with loving non-attachment. They can then reconnect with others, their ‘inner self’ and their sense of the sacred. Their boundaries, attitudes and relationships can then at last begin to improve as they recover.

**Recovery**

Recovery is really based on four principal ideas. The first is that as an addict or a family member you are utterly ‘powerless’ over drugs, alcohol or any other addiction. The second is that because of this the only choice is to turn to something bigger than yourself… your sense of a higher power or the sacred. For some this higher power may be just the power of the group they go to. The third is realising that your thinking, in its attitudes and behaviours has been disturbed by the addiction or the addict and you accept that you want to change your attitudes and behaviour. The fourth is that you can only keep the gift of healing that you have received if you give it away by helping others.

Perhaps the most liberating principle of 12 step programmes for addictions is religious freedom . . . freedom from religion. It can be anything you see it as. This unifying principle has been echoed repeatedly. On the portals of the temple of Delphi were written two things. ‘Everything in moderation and Know the self’. Christ said, “The kingdom of God is within.” Shakespeare said, “This above all—to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not be false to any man.” Vivekananda said, “It is a blessing to be born in to a religion and a tragedy to die in one.” Sri Ramana Maharshi said, “Happiness is your nature. It is not wrong to desire it. What is wrong is seeking it outside when it is inside.”

THE CUCKOO SPIRIT IN SEARCH OF WHOLENESS
Corridor in front of the New Hall
Channels of Grace

A Tribute

Neelam Dewan

Introducing Baba and Amma

I would like to pay tribute to my parents Air Marshall Gian Dev Sharma and Mrs. Kamla Sharma, while at least one of them is alive. Amma passed on in 2012 at the age of 91. In February 2012 we were here at the ashram as usual and by June she was gone. Baba, my father, completed 93 years in September 2014 by His grace, and is still visiting the ashram.

They have been regular visitors to Sri Ramana Ashram since 1950, arriving just a few months after Maharshi left his body. Their introductions to Arunachala are stories in themselves. It was Mr. Bose – ‘Dadu’ – (of Bose Compound opposite the ashram) who made them aware in Bangalore of His Divine Presence. Baba was posted there at

Neelam Dewan is Air Force daughter, Army wife, Navy daughter-in-law and has lived in and seen India thoroughly. At retirement her family settled in Simla where she began mountain trekking. She is perhaps the first Indian woman to cross the Baralacha pass, Jalori pass, Bhaba pass in Himachal Pradesh.
the time. Mr Bose was a dear friend and through him they read a lot of Maharshi Ramana’s teachings and were greatly influenced.

First Amma came, in 1950, soon after Bhagavan had left His body. Mr. Bose told Amma he wanted to visit Tiruvannamalai and Pondicherry and that she could drive him. Amma had just about learnt to drive so she naturally demurred, but he prevailed upon her. They reached at last light, when the road to Tiruvannamalai was barely a track. Ladies were not allowed in the ashram after nightfall, so she spent the night at Bose Compound and came to the ashram the next morning. Some time earlier she had had a dream of a very benign old man which somehow stuck vividly in her mind. Imagine her surprise and awe when she first beheld Maharshi’s picture — she exclaimed to Mr. Bose, “This is the old man I dreamt of!” There and then she realised the meaning of her visit. Years later, while settled in Dehradun, Swami Chidananda of Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, was giving her deeksha (initiation). He asked her if she already had a guru. She replied, “Yes, Maharshi Ramana.” “Oh, that is alright,” he said and proceeded to initiate her.

Amma, from being orphaned in her mid-teens and being a rustic from Himachal Pradesh, persevered to educate herself right upto Indraprastha College, Delhi, and evolved into the Air Marshall’s wife. She did her last trek up to Skandashram at the age of 82. An avid reader, when she was no longer capable of walking to the ashram library across the road, she would yet go by autorickshaw. She never lost her zest for life and had plans to return to the ashram till the very end. When she was lying so ill in the hospital in her last few days, we would sing “Arunachala Shiva,” to her, and she would smile and sway her head and sigh happily “Aaaah!” At that point it was the only thing that brought a smile to her face. She was always buying books and the Ramana cloth bags from the bookshop. So when she passed on and we conducted her last rites on the banks of the Ganges in Rishikesh, our very last act was to put her ashes into her coveted Ramana bag. We zipped the bag and gently nudged it into the flow of holy Ma Ganga. Arunachala, Amma and the Ganga....
In 1949 while Baba was posted in Bangalore, he read and was deeply affected by Paul Brunton’s account of Maharshi Ramana in his *A Search in Secret India*. Baba was able to get in touch with Paul Brunton through his publishers in the U.K. They corresponded and arranged to meet in London on Baba’s forthcoming visit. But, unfortunately, when Baba reached London Paul Brunton was out of town.

However, when Maharshi left his body in April 1950, Brunton wrote to Baba that he would be visiting Bangalore and that they could go to Ramana Ashram together. So Baba drove him down and they stayed in Mr. Bose’s house. Paul Brunton wanted to pay his last respects at Maharshi’s Samadhi and was carrying a flower offering. So the two of them went to see Chinnaswami (Maharshi’s younger brother, Swami Niranjanananda), the ashram manager. Brunton had had a falling-out with the ashram, so Chinnaswami cursorily took the flower offering and said he would do the needful. But Brunton took back the offering and walked away. He privately told Baba that they would return in the dead of night to the Samadhi so that he could personally pay homage to Maharshi — and that is exactly what they did. Unseen by anyone, they returned at midnight to the Samadhi with their flower offering and sat next to the Samadhi, in perfect silence, for a long, long time…

On this first visit Baba also climbed to the peak of Arunachala. At the peak he was not sure of the exact summit spot, and was looking around. He felt a tap on his shoulder and saw a hand pointing to the spot. He turned around to thank the person, but there was no one there…. The last time he climbed to the peak was at the age of 82, and the last pradakshina he did was at 83. He has also flown around the peak while still in service.

**Baba in Service**

In 1947, after independence, the R.I.A.F (Royal Indian Air Force) became the I.A.F (Indian Air Force). Baba had been one of the first Indians to be directly commissioned as an officer and pilot in the R.I.A.F. After independence the I.A.F started the process of acquiring
planes directly from the U.K., so senior I.A.F. pilots used to go there to fly them over. Baba was one of them. In the Second World War Baba had been a dive-bomber in the jungles of Burma. The R.I.A.F. pilots were both British and Indian. They were nicknamed ‘the Brylcream Boys’ because of their glamorous, hard-drinking life style. It is quite incredible that Baba, in their midst, remained a vegetarian, a strict teetotaller and a believer, with his faith intact – despite the fact that their war rations were mainly comprised of tinned meat and units of liquor! His photograph of those days, striding along by his aircraft with his parachute bag on his back, is hanging in the Air Force Museum in Delhi.

Baba must be quite psychic. This emerges particularly from a dramatic incident in his dive-bomber days in Burma. He had been cleared for take-off on a jungle airstrip and was taxiing to do so, when something suddenly told him to veer off the airstrip and into the grassy verge. Sure enough, the next moment a returning aircraft landed directly in his path. If he had not veered off, both pilots would have been instantly killed in the crash.

I remember another incident as a child. Our mother, my sister Rekha and I had planned a trip to Delhi (from Agra) and Baba kept telling us to postpone it, but Amma paid no heed. On reaching Delhi, on the way from the railway station to our house, we had a horrible accident in the thick of the Old Delhi traffic when our vehicle turned turtle. Yet we all survived with just minor injuries.

Another incident I remember him narrating is flying a dead body from Jodhpur. It was the body of a member of the royal Jodhpur family. It was night and terrible weather with thunder, lightning and awful turbulence. Baba was piloting the Dakota plane, so he asked the navigator to go behind to check if the body was secured. But the navigator was so petrified that he barely took two steps out of the cockpit and stuttered that it was OK. Fear and faith do not go together. They landed safely in Agra. I don’t ever remember Baba being frightened or nervous. I asked him how he had felt when he was carrying out his bombing raids during the war. Significantly, he said, “I didn’t feel – it was a job to be done!”
He has had an impeccable reputation. He was nicknamed ‘Panditji’, meaning ‘priest’, not because he was a Brahmin, but because he succeeded in remaining a vegetarian teetotaller in the midst of the hard-drinking, meat-eating ‘Brylcream Boys’. He was a stickler for correctness, sometimes annoyingly so. When he got posted to Udhampur (Jammu and Kashmir) from Srinagar, on promotion, the new staff car came to transport him there; with star-plate, flag and all. Yet we all had to bundle up in our old Vauxhall car and my sister and I were squeezed into a corner at the back, because our oversized spaniel sprawled out, as usual. The empty new staff car followed us all the way, because Baba insisted that this official vehicle ought only to be used by him after he had taken over his new appointment.

Another time an airman was caught redhanded pilfering aviation fuel. Baba as the squadron commander penalized him and struck him off the roster for the courier flights to the UK. But this fellow had contacts and Baba was pressurized to reinstate him. Instead Baba put in his resignation, stating that if they thought he was incapable of commanding his squadron, so be it. Of course his resignation was ignored.

Perhaps his cheekiest flight was when he left a minister behind in Delhi. Baba was due to take off to Leh (Ladakh) before the weather packed up in the mountains. But the minister kept delaying and Baba kept getting calls to wait for him, but ‘Panditji’ being ‘Panditji’, he finally took off — without the minister. Of course he got a ticking off. Incidentally, he was amongst the first to land a plane in Leh, when the airfield was just a dirtstrip. The locals and the Tibetans looked on in awe and prostrated to this ‘bird from the heavens’!

He was in the V.I.P. squadron for a while and flew many dignitaries including our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on a state visit to Afghanistan. In Kabul, while waiting for the official function to start with the arrival of Pandit Nehru, who was the state guest, the king of Afghanistan was happily chatting informally in perfect English with Baba and others. However, as soon as the function started, not a word of English was spoken by the king and the entire meeting was conducted through an interpreter.
Baba rose to the rank of Air Marshall and as the seniormost in the airforce, was nominated to take over as the airforce Chief. The then Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram congratulated Amma and Baba on his forthcoming promotion. But at the last minute, a political twist resulted in the appointment of somebody else. However, Baba and Amma were not fazed at all. Baba has always maintained that whatever happens, happens for the best.

He is a trained mountaineer from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, led by Tenzing Norgay, who climbed Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary. He celebrated his sixty fifth birthday with a trek to Mount Kailash. He trained himself for the Kailash trek by regularly carrying a backpack laden with stones up the bridle path from Dehradun to Mussoorie. For his ninetieth birthday the family wanted landmark celebrations in Delhi, but Baba was not interested at all and just wanted to be at the ashram. When everyone in Delhi kept insisting, he finally said, “O.K. go ahead – but I will be in the ashram!” So, instead, we all happily assembled in the Ashram.

**Spiritual Encounters**

Baba and Amma attracted spiritual encounters with great souls. On a picnic in Rishikesh in the late 1950s we came across a big man in a huge overcoat. He called us over and began chatting with Amma and Baba, and then invited us to cross the Ganges in his boat. He turned out to be Swami Sivananda. He got himself photographed with us and later signed the picture.

While posted in Bangalore in the late 1970s Sathya Sai Baba came to their house for lunch. Amma had a goitre on her neck. Sai Baba looked at it and told her never to put a knife to it, thus settling the question of whether to operate or not. The goitre subsided.

On a posting in Dehradun in the 1960s we were regular visitors to Ma Anandamayi at her ashram. Sometimes Baba would drive her in his car from one ashram to another. Amma was part of Ma Anandmayi’s inner circle in Dehradun. So much so that she once threw a tantrum, when she felt that poorer people were not being given prompt darshan, versus those arriving with large hampers and...
gifts. That night she had the most excruciating headache and the first thing she did the following morning was to go and beg Ma’s forgiveness for walking out in a huff.

**Ramana Ashram and Arunachala**

Amma and Baba used to drive down to Tiruvannamalai all the way from Delhi and Dehradun, where they had their homes, right up until their early 80s. Similarly, they would insist on sitting on the floor in the ashram dining hall also in their 80s, until I convinced them that they were unnecessarily straining themselves. Once, about four years ago, somebody asked Baba, “Sir, when did you last go round the Hill?” Baba replied, “I go everyday! – mentally and spiritually!” They drove to the ashram with no driver, as they both could drive. Rekha’s husband and my husband were both in the army and had many postings in the South, so Amma and Baba would stop with us enroute. But they would cut short their holidays with us, saying they were missing the ashram, and again return to the ashram.

Even though the other holy centres were closer, the draw of Arunachala, Maharshi Ramana’s teachings and the beloved ashram always proved strongest. Baba has been coming to the ashram now for 65 years, since 1950. In the early years he and Amma made a visit almost every year; in later years they came more than once a year.

I asked Baba (in January 2015) what he had felt on his first visit:
Baba: A sense of great bliss.
Neelam: What brought you back again and again?
Baba: Maharshi’s Presence is very much here.
Neelam: Considering you had all those other holy places nearer you, why did you keep coming all the way back to Ramana Ashram?
Baba: It is a great blessing to be here. There is always a feeling of coming home, surrounded by love, kindness and helpfulness down to the smallest thing. And, in the old days, to interact with very good old devotees.

One such devotee who is still around is Dorab Framji whose company he enjoys very much whenever he comes to the ashram. Baba was also very fond of Mr Kothari, who used to visit him regularly...
in his room. Baba has always attributed everything to the Lord, and until today he keeps repeating, “It is all His grace!” In August 2014 when he was at the ashram, he kept repeating, “It is His Grace (Unki kripa hai) that brings and keeps me here! …That I am still walking about and sufficiently independent!”

Then aged 93, he would walk to the dining hall for his meals and to the Samadhi Hall for the evening parayana and aarti. For the three of us (Amma, Baba and myself) our days at the ashram were pure perfection and complete harmony. We would sheepishly admit to each other, “There is no one and nothing that we miss!” This was our home, and our time away from it was simply marking time until we could return.

I bow my head in eternal gratitude to our parents who inculcated the Divine in us. They enabled us to meet spiritual luminaries like Swami Sivananda (whose picture is in the ashram dining hall), Swami Chidananda his successor, whose room in Dehradun was filled with pictures of Bhagavan and Arunachala, Ma Ananda Mayi (also pictured in the ashram dining hall), the Dalai Lama, Satya Sai Baba, Mother Teresa, and many other spiritually evolved beings who frequented our home, including Miss Merston from Ramanashram and an American devotee called Freddy, in saffron robes, also from Ramanashram.

They finally anchored us, till the fourth generation, at Blessed Arunachala. Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.
The past is past
Now, be here

John Grimes

There is no jnani, only jnana. There is only the Self, the Heart, The One pristine Self. Be still. Find out who you are.
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

Shortly after having moved back to Chennai, I paid a visit to Professor R. Balasubramanian, one of my Vedanta professors at the University of Madras. He said, “I can’t seem to find someone to write a volume on Sri Ramana Maharshi, for a series I am the General Editor of, The Builders of Indian Philosophy Series. Would you like to do it? I would like the finished manuscript in nine months time.”

I immediately said yes. Not only was I thinking about the love and respect I have for Sri Ramana and his teachings but, I felt something special would happen in the writing. To be presented with the opportunity to plunge deeply into Sri Ramana’s teachings was too good to pass up.

All the books in this Series have a philosophical format. The first chapter is a short history of the philosopher’s life. The second chapter is
an overview of what will follow. Then come chapters on epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, spiritual practices, jivanmukti, and an evaluation *vis-à-vis* the philosopher being covered.

What an incredible time I had writing the book. From Sri Ramana's perspective there is no teacher, no taught; no birth, no death; no enlightened individual, no unenlightened individual, no path to enlightenment; there is no knower, no known, and no means of knowledge. Obviously Sri Ramana was not a philosopher in the traditional sense of the word.

As Sri Ramana said, “I was indeed fortunate that I never took to philosophy. Had I taken to it, I would probably be nowhere, but my inherent tendencies led me directly to enquire, ‘Who am I? How fortunate!’” What is astonishing is Sri Ramana’s teachings emerged spontaneously as the fruit of his Great Awakening and only subsequently, almost by accident, did he learn of the ancient Upanishadic and philosophical teachings. Even more astounding is that his words are almost, word for word, identical with those found in the Scriptures.

Every time I had a question in my mind as how to approach or deal with relating Sri Ramana to Advaita philosophy, I would drive to the ashram and, sit in Sri Ramana’s shrine or on the slopes of Arunachala, and contemplate. I was given nine months with which to complete the book and thus I was extremely focused during that time.

In the beginning I had the thought that Sri Ramana had called me to write the book. After it was completed, I understood that Sri Ramana did not need another book written about him and that it was really Arunachala that was calling for me, not my book.

Since 1973, my sister, Farion, had made numerous trips to Sathya Sai Baba. She would fly into Bangalore, taxi to Puttaparthi and/or Whitefield and then fly out of Bangalore back to California. This visit she asked me if I would take her to Tiruvannamalai.

After spending a few days in Puttaparthi, my sister and I drove together to Chennai. Along the drive we had a rather deep discussion about the nature of Reality and whether Advaita presented an accurate description of It. There are most definitely any number of
philosophical theories. All are true and all are false. There are those who say, ‘take the one that most appeals to you’.

Theories are but ways of putting words together. Theories are neither right nor wrong. They are attempts to explain the inexplicable. The theory does not matter half so much as the way it is being tested, put into practice. Sincerity, earnestness, and full concentration are what counts, not the theory itself.

After a few days in Chennai, we drove to Tiruvannamalai. For the first two hours of the drive, our intense discussions continued. Back and forth our presuppositions flew, often wrestling like two mad monsters!

At once moment, about five or so kilometers from Arunachala, we simultaneously looked up and, there it was, Arunachala, looming auspiciously through the front windshield, towering right in front of us. It was my sister’s first darshan of Arunachala. I had previously seen it on numerous occasions, seen it exclusively as a mountain.

We both went dead silent. The silence hung thick in the air for a few minutes. Then, I said to my sister, “Do you feel that?” She replied, “Yes.” I asked, “What does it feel like to you?” She said, “There is a force field all around me. The silence is overpowering.” I said, “I feel something like liquid plastic permeating the air and there is energy pulsing through it. It is like liquid, tangible Consciousness.” I really cannot come up with a physical example that accurately depicts this force field.

We drove to the Sri Ramana ashram. The force field was still palpably felt. It was so strong and so tangible that it was easily felt wherever we went. It was as though we had entered into the aura of Arunachala and the experience continued. The incredible thunderous silence continued.

We went into Sri Ramana’s shrine and it was there. It was there in the mother’s temple. It was there in the accommodation office. Then we walked up to the caves where Sri Ramana had spent twenty-three years. We entered the Virupaksha Cave and it was there. We entered Skandashrama and it was there. The force field and silence ever present, a physical Presence.
Interestingly, while in Skandashrama, my sister remarked that the energy in the cave began vibrating in a horizontal manner. In the cave I remarked that the energy seemed to start vibrating in a vertical manner. In Virupaksa cave, our experiences reversed with my sister feeling the energy vibrating vertically, with blue light, and myself horizontally. Except in these two instances, the force field vibrated in all directions, simultaneously.

We remained in this force field for two days. As we drove away from Arunachala and back to Chennai, the force field gradually dissipated.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana sang a song about Arunachala in his *Eight Stanzas to Sri Arunachala*, verse one:

Look, oh, great wonder! There it stands as if insentient. Mysterious is the way it works, beyond all human understanding. From my unthinking childhood the immensity of Arunachala had shone in my awareness, but even when I learned from someone that it was only Tiruvannamalai, I did not realize its meaning. When it stilled my mind and drew me to itself, and I came near, I saw that it was the Immovable, stillness absolute.

For some thirty-five years I had been visiting Tiruvannamalai solely for Sri Ramana and Sri Ramanasramam. I came to sit in Sri Ramana’s shrine and to absorb Sri Ramana’s teachings. I paid little attention to the hill. It is true that I had performed many a pradakshina around Arunachala. However, I did this, mainly because Sri Ramana highly recommended people to do it.

By luring me, again and again, as I worked on the Sri Ramana book, and by the good fortune of having a sister whose presence was required, I eventually had Arunachala’s *darshan*. As Sri Ramana sang,

The mountain is mysterious and mysterious in the way it works. It is not just an insentient pile of earth and rocks. It is Lord Shiva, the One Self, standing there in all its glory for those who are given eyes to see.

At times seekers ask the question: ‘How does the Sage give instruction? Is it from the state of ignorance?’ If this were so, the mind
would not have been dissolved, the threefold differentiation of the knower, knowledge, and the known could not have been merged. So what would the Sage be able to give you? Where could he lead you? But there is a stage where this question does not arise. Is it the body that is the obstacle to Supreme Knowledge? Is there even a question of whether the body exists or not? At a certain level this question is simply not there. On the plane where this question arises, one is not in the state of pure Being, and one thinks this question can be raised and also replied to. But the answer lies where there is no such thing as questioning and answering, where there are no ‘others’, no divisions — only the Self, Sri Ramana, Arunachala.

Rounding

Upahar

Blessed this night wind on the heart’s old pathway; invisible love, closer than all memory, flowing within.
Who will speak now,
or who put on the burning robe of silence?
All is already given.

Slow moon of long-forgotten prayer ascending;
our timeless faith, imponderable gift, singing all alive.
Who could possess this endless moment,
or wear this crown of joy?
The vast wings spread.

Blessed this ancient world at the edge of dawning;
ocean of stars, above Your lovely head, dissolving within.
Who will seek shelter now,
or long for the bright completion?
Our refuge is infinite.
Selections from Satsangs with Sri Babuji

Editor’s Introductory Note

Sri Sarath Babuji (1954-2010) was a precociously-gifted South Indian saint who was mystically connected to Sai Baba of Shirdi and inspired in his sadhana by the example of Sri Bhagavan’s life and attainment. Known affectionately as “Guruji”, he attained realisation (saksatkar) at the age of 20 in the presence of the peerless avadhut and ajagarabhave, Poondi Swami of Kalasapakkam (d.1979). Thereafter he lived a life of faultless devotion to his great Sadguru, Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918). Sri Babuji’s path can be seen as the nirguna bhakti of Medieval Sants like Nanak and Kabir, and of more contemporary saints like Sri Ananada Mayi Ma and his own Sadguru, Sai Baba. It is distinguished from classical (saguna) bhakti by the equal emphasis it places on the formless aspect of the Beloved in all modes of devotion and theological expression.

As in Sufism, Medieval Nathism and the Sant tradition culminating in Kabir, nirguna bhakti is an interior path of the heart that transcends historical distinctions of religion and outward forms of sectarian worship to focus on devotion to the Beloved One dwelling formlessly
within. The longing to cultivate an intimate, loving relationship with the Beloved as the object of fulfilment results in a deepening devotional intimacy and experiential knowledge of the Beloved’s formless nature where salvation resides. This process is catalyzed by the loving grace and glance of the Sadguru, whose presence functions as the Beloved mystically manifest in embodiment.

On the path of nirguna bhakti the highest attainment is advaitabhava, the experience of absolute Oneness. This is an ineffably blissful state in which the adept experiences the Beloved’s divine nature permeating all things, even as Lord Krishna declared in the Gita, that he is sarvabhutasayasthitah, ‘residing in the hearts of all creatures’ (Gita 10.20) – a verse Sai Baba quoted from his own experience. Thus, when Guruji speaks of longing for Baba, the longing he refers to is not only for the historical Sai Baba and his miraculous manifest lila, but, even more, for the experience of Baba’s formless nature as absolute love in its dynamic, boundless dimension, where his eternal lila of dispensing grace and blessings continues uninterrupted by his earthly passing.

This is how Baba can declare that his tomb will speak – his formless nature as saccidananda is undying and available even now, every moment, if we want and long for it enough. This is the longing that leads to the sense of belonging, that Guruji speaks of, that eventually frees us from separative, egoic existence by experiencing our identity with the Beloved’s formless nature. The transformation of our self-experience from separation to union is realized through the alchemizing grace of the Sadguru’s love. It may be added that this is the same longing that took Sri Bhagavan to Arunachala in search of the Father and inspired his love poems for the sacred mountain, alluded to by Guruji. In them, not only is Arunachala’s geographical presence hymned, but also its formless nature as a reservoir of divine grace (arul) and redemptive love (anbu) that responds actively to devotees’ prayers and longing.

The selections below are taken from satsangs given privately in English to small groups of devotees in India from 1993 to 2010. They were recorded as Sri Babuji spoke, then transcribed and edited. Since
Guruji had no systematized set of teachings as such and replied only to individual questions, the extracts given here have been collated from various satsangs around the theme of devotional longing, a topic which recurred time and again. For more information on Sri Babuji’s life and teachings please visit the websites given in the source note below.


— Ram Brown Crowell, editor, Rose Petals

Longing with a Sense of Belonging

DEVOTEE: Guruji, can prayer be used as an expression of our longing?
GURUJI: The experience of longing is prayer. Prayer doesn’t mean only a formal expression in words. If you are hungry, that is a prayer for food. If you are thirsty, your very experience of thirst is a prayer for water: you’re praying. Your love, your longing for Baba, is itself a prayer. That longing should be there, as a perpetual, constant prayer. What is that longing? Deep down, it is the sense or the feeling of belonging – I belong to Baba, Baba belongs to me – and experiencing that sense of belonging. Because you are not yet able to experience it fully and concretely, in order to bring it into your tangible experience, there is longing. And as long as you have that keen experience of longing, that is prayer, that is meditation, that is the spiritual quest, that is sadhana. Do you follow what I’m saying?
DEVOTEE: So once you have that longing and realize you belong to him, then that brings fulfilment – is that what you’re saying?
GURUJI: The experience that Baba belongs to me, and that I belong to Baba.
DEVOTEE: Does everybody have that longing to some degree?
GURUJI: Yes, everybody has that longing. And that longing relates to belonging. That is, to ‘be longing’ is also ‘belonging,’ isn’t it? Having that longing is belonging. Because you all feel that you belong to me, you long for satsang, don’t you? [Guruji laughs]
DEVOTEES: Yes, Guruji!! [Laughter]
GURUJI: What is important is the experience of remembering that sense of belonging-ness: I belong to Baba and Baba belongs to me. That’s enough. As long as you remember this, that is real smarana, real remembrance.
DEVOTEE: Is belonging always unconditional?
GURUJI: Whether it is conditional or unconditional, as long as you remember, it is enough. And I don’t understand what you mean by ‘unconditional’.
DEVOTEE: What I meant to say was that most of the time when I have a desire and I ask Baba, if he gives, I feel that sense of belonging for only a moment, for a brief time.
GURUJI: If you have that sense of belonging-ness, even if he doesn’t give, the experience won’t go. For instance, you have a child. You very much expect her to pass in first class, but if she doesn’t, do you stop loving her? Why do you still love the child? Because she belongs to you! In the same way, whether Baba fulfils your desire or not, once you have that experience of belonging-ness, everything is done. The whole work – everything – is done. You need not explore anything, you need not learn anything more. That is enough. What we are all trying to achieve here is only this: to realize our sense of belonging-ness.

Even in the case of Bhagavan, if you read his biography, his whole quest actually started with that sense of belonging-ness, his quest for identity. Ramana wrote in the note he left for his family upon leaving home, “I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to his demand, started from here ... ”. His quest was for his Father. He felt, “I belong to Him,” so he ran to Arunachala. Just read what he wrote in this perspective and you will see what I am telling you now. It sounds so simple, but it is not so simple. It is that sense of belonging: “I belong
to Arunachala, He is my Father, I belong to Him.” At that young age he didn’t know who or what it was; he thought it was Arunachala. So he came here and saw the mountain. At one level he got contentment, but it was not only that, something else was there. Then he started experiencing that, “He is the Father, I am the son, He is the Father, I am the son” – that identity – answering the question of identity. He expressed this question in his own way: “Who am I?” Or, in another sense, we can ask, “Who enquires?”

DEVOTEE: You mean enquire, “Who is my Father?”

GURUJI: No, I mean the enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ It is a question of one’s own identity. People experience their identity in different ways. Some may experience it as, “I am atman, I am Brahman, I am Ishwara.” Others may experience it as Ramana Maharshi experienced it. What was his identity? The son of Arunachala.

Like that, you can experience, “I am the son of Sai Baba. I belong to him, he belongs to me.” Because he belongs to you, you want to possess him, you want to experience him and all your expressions become expressions of your so-called ‘possessiveness’. It may sound negative, but it is not. You want to possess him – his love, his nature, his bliss.

Again, in another sense, if we quote Ramana, he said it in a different way: “When that identity came to me, I was possessed.” He used the Sanskrit word avesham [pervasion, suffusion, possession], as if some spirit had possessed him, not negatively, but in a very beautiful way. He was possessed by a greater identity. And that ‘possession’ by a greater sense of identity transforms us, because the crux of all our thoughts, all our emotions, rests on our identity, this ‘I-ness’. Once our identity starts changing and transforming, then all the other things in our life and all our experiences based on our identity, also start transforming. That is the mula, the root. What is the root? Identity. That is why Bhagavan said, “Know who you are. Find out, ‘who am I?’ First know your own identity.” Don’t try to identify yourself, but to know your identity – there is a difference. Unless we lose our present identity we won’t find out our real identity, whatever it is. Bhagavan didn’t say what it is; his experience was one answer, his own. Some other
people’s experiences may be different, but it is enough if we know our real identity.

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DEVOTEE: Do love and longing transcend ego?
GURUJI: Yes, love always transcends ego.
DEVOTEE: When there is longing it presupposes a duality, of lover and Beloved, doesn’t it?
GURUJI: Longing is what gives the pull to go beyond duality. Take two persons, a man and woman, who love each other. They each want to possess the other. Actually, duality is present: he is here, she is there, and there is longing between them. But once they are together, when their union takes place, then it becomes, “I am you and you are me, we are not two, we’re united, together.” At that moment, there is no he or she – it is something else.
DEVOTEE: Can there still be longing in that state?
GURUJI: There is fulfilment. At that moment, fulfilment. But after fulfilment, again longing can come, because the experience of fulfilment is transitory so long as it is the product of longing based on duality. Without duality, there won’t be the longing to overcome it. So longing helps us to transcend duality, or, as Ramana said, “to use a thorn to remove another thorn.” Bhagavan’s longing was to see and experience Arunachala which brought him the fulfilment of being united with it. That is why, in the last stanza of Arunachala Ashtakam, Bhagavan said there are not two.¹ His longing culminated in non-duality.

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DEVOTEE: Could you say then, in a more general way, that everyone’s search for fulfilment is a search for identity?
GURUJI: Yes, for everyone it is the same. But many people are not aware of it in that way. Their problems are maybe more mundane,

¹ Eight Verses to Sri Arunachala, v.8: “... when the soul finds the way back to its source, it will sink and be merged in Thee, Oh Arunachala, Thou ocean of bliss!” (Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, ed. Arthur Osborne, 6e rev., 1996, p.109).
so this question of identity won’t arise for them. Or, the question of identity may arise in a different way. For instance, they have a desire and they want to get it fulfilled, so they ask Baba. Why should Baba have to fulfil it? So, they want to create a relationship, an identity that “I am his devotee, we have a karmic relationship, I have rinanubandha with Baba.” It’s like asking, “Who am I?” with the answer, “I belong to him!” So the sense of belonging creates a relationship which gives them the means to fulfil their desires. Even here, what they are trying for is a sense of belonging-ness, which again is a quest for identity on a different level, in a different way, with a different scope and intensity. Here also it is the same: we read Baba’s life, we do Baba’s nama repeating “Sai Baba, Sai Baba” – what is all this? Creating the certainty of belonging to him, that identity! “Baba, I say your name so many times, we are familiar with each other. I am intimate with you, I belong to you, so please take care of me and fulfil my desires.” The result is the sense of belonging, so here also it is a question of identity.

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GURUJI: Only he who comes down to where we are, and frees us here is a real Sadguru.

DEVOTEE: But why should he come down and help us, doesn’t he need some incentive?

GURUJI: If he is a Sadguru, the incentive is not your qualifications, your sadhana, or your greatness. There is only rinanubandha, indebtedness, which binds a guru to you, nothing else. When Baba said it is indebtedness, the debt is on his side, not on our side. We have paid something to him and he has to repay it to us. He said, “If you give me one rupee, I will give you ten.” He pays the debt back with interest! So be happy at the receiving end and enjoy it!

The literal translation of the word ‘rinanu’ is not exactly ‘debt’. There is more of an emotional tone to it, so I translate it as indebtedness, or connectedness or a sense of belonging. He feels that we belong to him, just as we feel Baba belongs to us. He feels, “Yes, they belong to me, they are my people, my children.”

DEVOTEE: So he has a responsibility for us?
GURUJI: Yes, he has that responsibility. And his responsibility is shown in his responsiveness, how he responds to your wishes and prayers. To be able to respond, is being ‘response-able’ (responsible), isn’t it? [Guruji laughs]

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DEVOTEE: Guruji, if we sincerely pray to Baba, is that what puts us in the magnetic field of the Sadguru? The longing and praying?

GURUJI: Yes. But that longing is so abstract. The words are good and they sound beautiful to say, and in poetry it is even better, but in reality, they are so abstract they are not palpable enough. We have to express our longing, so we do things like translating Baba’s Charitra or having satsang, or drawing a picture of Baba – all these things are expressions of that longing. But we should take care that it really expresses our longing – simply drawing a picture or making a translation is of no use. We should always check whether it’s really expressing our emotion and longing.

DEVOTEE: Is it by questioning ourselves that we get clearer about how to express our longing, and that increases our happiness?

GURUJI: Yes. The happiness and longing increase, and as the longing increases, you become closer to Him. The more you long, the more the ‘length’ between you and Him decreases [Guruji laughs], that’s the beauty of it. The longing is not becoming ‘longer’ because, as it brings you closer, the sense of separation is less.

DEVOTEE: But the longing is both sweet and painful, isn’t it?

GURUJI: Yes, both sides are there. It can be painful because of the separation that we feel, but longing also implies an underlying emotion of belonging. As long as that is there, the longing is also thrilling and beautiful. It is wonderful to long with a sense of belonging!

Tulasidas spent his days in God-remembrance and singing the exploits of Lord Hari. His fame illumined the four corners of the country. Akbar, the emperor of Delhi, having heard of Tulasidas’ greatness came to Varanasi to meet him. He approached the saint with reverence and conveyed his greetings. He stayed in the city for some days attending the satsangs of Tulasidas.

One day, a young noble brahmin in the city was overtaken by the lord of death suddenly. How true it is that once the prarabdha karma of a person, the debt to be discharged in the current life, is exhausted, then life deserts the body at once! The grief stricken young wife could not bear the loss. She cried in agony, “O God! Why have You forsaken me and wrought this cruel fate on me at this young age? How can I live without my husband? To live as a widow in this world is very unfortunate. The scriptures declare that for a woman, serving her husband is the highest dharma, he is the highest God for her. Now whom will I revere and serve? What kind of God are You to take delights in the sorrow of mortals? Don’t You pity my condition which is like that of a helpless bird that has lost its wings?”
“For Your world-play, You have created male and female species on the stage, infused in them a mutual attraction for the purpose of procreation which will keep Your sport going. Drawn to each other physically and emotionally, they behave like puppets without their own volition. Having created in them a fondness for each other’s company, does it behove You to mercilessly snatch away one of them and drown the survivor in an ocean of anguish? What do You gain out of such a sport? Don’t You know that pangs of separation torture a person to such an extent that the person goes out of his or her mind or spends days listlessly like a corpse? Within that play, You have made woman subordinate to man’s authority and control. While this is the plight of a woman in the scheme of Your play, how can she survive bereft of a life-companion’s support?”

“In spite of being the Lord of all the three periods of time – past, present and future – didn’t You roam in the forest overwhelmed by sorrow when Sita was abducted by Ravana? Then, what would be the magnitude of my sorrow, a helpless woman, on losing my husband at such a young age? Imagine the depths of darkness of my torment at this irreparable loss, while Sita, the almighty Goddess bemoaned her separation and burnt in the fire of agony like wax melting in heat, to such an extent as to resort to take her own life! When helpless mortals suffer such agony, can You really rejoice in that? Or is such suffering the result of our evil doing in the past that we have to bear with it? But then, how can such misery be inflicted on hapless jivas without Your knowledge as they are brought into existence by You! Or are You anything other than the all-perfect, all-powerful Omniscient that such things can escape Your notice!”

“How can I live without my heartthrob? Is it not better to die than to be stranded alone? Can a truly chaste woman endure a lonely and solitary life without her husband even for a moment? My youth will surely invite persecution! When even a bird falls down dead on losing its mate, how long can I retain my life, swallowed by the misery of parting? It will be most appropriate for me to jump into the river when my husband’s body is immersed. To remain alive will be sheer madness. For a faithful woman, ending her life along with the
deceased husband will open the gates to higher realms. However long this body is preserved, it has to reach the city of death one day. This choice of joining my husband in his voyage to the world of manes will bestow on me immortality.” Her mind made up thus, the young widow walked resolutely towards Ganga behind the pall-bearers.

On the way, she saw Tulasidas’ ashram crowded with people and the emperor’s retinue. She entered the gates boldly to have the saint’s darshan. At that time, Tulasidas, surrounded by devotees was talking to the emperor in a spontaneous and rapturous flow about the glories of God, with waves of joy sweeping over him. In that ecstatic state, when the young widow saluted him, unaware of her misfortune, he showered his abundant blessings on her, “O noble mother, may you live long with your husband and be blessed with auspicious children and eight-fold wealth!”

She was nonplussed to hear this at first! Then she answered with an amused look, “O Swami, you are uttering strange words! It is hardly a few hours since my husband’s body turned cold, the merciless hand of death having snatched away his life. I have lost all auspiciousness. His lifeless body is being carried to the river Ganga for immersion. I am accompanying the party of mourners with the intention of jumping into the river and accompany my husband to the other world. On the way, I saw people gathered here. I entered the precincts to prostrate to you and have your blessings before the plunge. Now, you have conferred on me a blessing that has astounded everyone here.”

“It is better to give up this life instead of suffering torments in the world or losing my honour. Even if I beget children as you have blessed, how wretched it will be to live with other men and cause children to be born? Will it earn me the blessed auspiciousness? Such a life will take me to purgatory at the end. Of what avail are Your Holiness’ blessings for a widow like me? However, it is said that the blessings of saints never go in vain. While so, how can the words of Your Holiness, who enabled the entire city of Varanasi to revel in the magnificent darshan of the Lord in broad daylight, be falsified?”

“O Swami, if your blessings are true, then come with me and bestow new life on my dead husband! If I am to be fortunate to enjoy
auspicious children and eight-fold wealth, bestow your divine grace on his body and revive him.”

Everyone’s attention was riveted on the widow and the saint. Her remonstrations set a new train of thought in the mind of the emperor who was watching the scene with interest, “Aha.. ! A wonderful opportunity has presented itself to know personally the greatness of this saint. Is it possible to revive a dead man even for a saint of high order? Will his greatness match his fame that has spread everywhere? Is the magnitude of his power really great? Is it really true what people talk about him or is it merely an exaggerated adulation? All will be known shortly!”

All awaited and watched eagerly Tulasidas’ face. He was shocked to hear the young widow’s reply. He said, “O mother, I am equally mystified as to how these words of blessing have emanated from me. God’s will be done! You be on your way and join the mourners.”

He sank in deep thought, “Is it humanly possible to impart new life to a dead body? Even if possible, is such a thing approved by sages and scriptures? Great saints also cannot achieve this feat! How can ordinary mortals reverse the course of destiny? How did these words of blessing spring out of my mouth?” Extremely embarrassed with the situation, ashamed to face the emperor and the people, he kept praising the Lord silently with his head bent.

The Lord, Rescuer of His beloved devotees, assuming the guise of Tulasidas went near the bier and spoke to the corpse in the presence of mourners, “O dead brahmin! O self-forgetful brahmin! Please get up and walk behind me to legitimize the blessings I conferred on your wife.”

Instantly, the brahmin rose from the bier with new life-force. Those who were in the funeral procession, dazed at the sight, asked the brahmin, “You were dead for sure! But, then how did you get up as if waking up from slumber?” They undid the ropes which had bound his body and released him.

The joyous brahmin leaping out of the bier fell at the feet of Tulasidas and exclaimed, “O Swami, for my sake you left the ashram and came here! I am blessed by your divine sight!”
As he followed Tulasidas, he was met at the entrance by his wife who was proceeding in the direction of the river. She was taken aback to see him alive, walking behind another Tulasidas. She exclaimed, “Just now, I left the saint sitting in the pavilion. How could he have revived my dead husband and accompanied him here? Is this a hallucination?”

She walked back with them and was befuddled to see another Tulasidas conversing with Akbar. Concluding that Tulasidas was the almighty Lord himself, she burst into adoration.

The Lord resuming His divine form addressed the emperor, “O king! Is your doubt about Tulasidas’ greatness set to rest? I am seated on the tongue of Tulasidas. Whatever he utters are verily My own words. True to My blessings uttered through his form, this dead brahmin has been revived. Ram Nam is eternal and words of Tulasidas are nothing but the truth.” The Lord then vanished and the celestials rained flowers and divine trumpets sounded proclaiming the glory of the saint.

The emperor was distressed over his small-mindedness and misgivings about Tulasidas’ greatness and bent his head in shame. He was dumbfounded at the series of events — the appearance of Tulasidas’ double, restoration of the dead brahmin to life and the grateful adoration of the young wife.

He resolved, “I am going to spend the rest of my life in the service of this great being. If the priests and followers of my religion utter even a single word against this saint, I will subject them to death penalty immediately. They are all like feeble glow worms before the radiant sun of Tulasidas.”

With great devotion and humility, the emperor made obeisance to Tulasidas and said, “O exalted being! Is it possible to measure your greatness? O blessed one! O humble one revered by all! You soared to the heights of eminence from the depths of notoriety, just as a tame cat is suddenly roused to the ferocity of a tiger! Your power has ascended to the level of raising the dead! My life will be lived in vain without the fellowship of a mahatma like you. My soul needs the nourishment of your noble company. You must accompany me to Delhi, which you must look upon as your own home.”
The emperor was so inspired by the holiness of Tulasidas that he plunged whole-heartedly into the restoration of Hindu temples and became a loving patron of the religion. Giving over one hundred million gold coins to the king of Varanasi, Akbar told the king to restore all the temples and holy places which had been plundered and vandalized and perform good deeds like construction of tanks, shelter for pilgrims etc. With his heart overflowing with devotion and good will, Akbar seated Tulasidas with all honours on a caparisoned elephant and returned to the capital city of Delhi along with the saint. He continued with the noble acts of promoting the welfare of sadhus and spent his days in the company of the saint and repetition of Ram-mantra.

Tulasidas was swept by a flood of gratitude and joy, dwelling on the miraculous events and how the Lord had rushed to his rescue to validate his words! He poured his heart out expatiating on the glories of the Lord, “O Protector of sadhus! Saviour of the celestials! Lord of creation, sustenance and dissolution! O Lord of lords! You are the Pure Existence without adjuncts, beyond the reach of gross, subtle and causal instruments! You remain the unattached Witness of all the three sheaths and shine forth as the Pure Awareness in the lotus of the heart of all!”

“O Vasudeva! By a mere side-glance at us, please shield us from likes and dislikes, bitter and sweet facets of life and the cycle of birth and death; and bestow on us unbroken bliss and immortality! You, the Lord of the universe, have conferred on me the immortal nectar of direct experience of the ever blissful, ever rising, equanimous, eternal, absolute, transcendental Peace and Bliss. You are the intimate Beloved of those who always contemplate on Your lotus feet! You bring forth sweet blessings and joy to them who please You by one-pointedly fixing their mind on You, the most auspicious goal of life! Yet, by Your motiveless compassion, You have redeemed me, though unworthy, from the impending doom, brought me out of the dark tunnel of ignorance, disentangled me from the maze of sense-pleasures and uplifted me. Keep me as your bond-slave for ever. Praise be to the all-merciful Lord!”
[The attainment of *jnana*] will be like the rising of the sun; like the overwhelming desire of the lover for his beloved; like a ship sighting shore after surviving the perils of the ocean; it will be like being freed from prison or being cured of an incurable disease; it will be like witnessing a miracle. (85)

The sun is here referred to as *arunan*, from Sanskrit *aruna* meaning reddish-brown, tawny, red, ruddy, (the colour of the morning opposed to the darkness of night). It is therefore a word well suited to symbolise the coming of the dawn of realisation, before which the darkness of *anava malam*, the ego and the false world of duality which is founded upon it, fades and ceases to be. The all-consuming bliss of the Self is

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: [http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666](http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666).
then compared to the desire of the lover for the beloved, which grows ever greater, eclipsing any other thoughts and desires.

As the body, senses, mental faculties, the three *gunas* (principles of nature), and the ten vital airs fall away one after the other, [mature disciples will attain] the liberation which lies beyond nada, the highest of the *tattvas*; then the personal self, which stands in the middle ground [between the world and the Self], will be eradicated, and they will enter the ocean of supreme bliss. Finally, becoming free of all divisions, how will they not be amazed, knowing now that which they have never known? (86)

In this verse the thirty-six *tattvas* are referred to once more, with the addition of the three universal principles – *raj as*, *tamas* and *sattva*, and *the ten vital airs* – *vayu*, the principal one of which is *prana*. The thirty-six *tattvas* are a subset of a total of ninety-six, which include, in addition to the thirty-six which are the main focus of Siddhanta, *the gunas, the vitals airs, the bodily sheaths, the nerves*, and so on. Four stages, leading to the disciple’s realisation of his unity with the Self, are described. First he grasps the nature of the world around him, (described in Siddhanta terms as consisting of the thirty-six *tattvas*), and, realising that it is none other than the Self, becomes free of it, resulting in *veedu* – *liberation* [from the *tattvas*]; next the ‘I’ which stands between the Self and the world of the *tattvas*, subsides, a process here described as *tan ozhivu* – *the loss of oneself*, the duality which it had previously mediated having now ceased; at that point the disciple is enveloped in the ocean of supreme bliss. Finally even this state is transcended and the disciples attain the state of oneness with the Self, becoming *canthu azhivar* – those who are free of all divisions. See also v. 41 which expresses the same fourfold progression.

What obstacle remains for those who have realised the nature of knowledge, the knower, and ignorance? Will they be parted
[from the Self]? It is impossible, just as it would be impossible for the heavens, fearing they might be robbed, to go and hide in the kitchen. (87)

Chidambara swamigal equates these three entities, knowledge, the knower and ignorance with the Siddhanta triad, pati, pacu and pacam – the Lord, the soul and (worldly) bondage. In terms of Advaita Vedanta we could call them the Self, the ego and the world, or maya.

Since the disciple has become one with Sivam, the Self, it is impossible for him even to entertain the idea that he might become separated from it, and to take measures to prevent that happening. In the same way it is impossible for the heavens, since they provide the space in which all things subsist, to be robbed of anything, or even to entertain that fear, since all things, wherever they are, are always contained within it.

For those experiencing blissful union [with the Self], having come to know the true reality as surely as they had once known the false, there is no longer any connection with anything whatsoever. What a wonder is the destruction of oneself, like the spreading rays of the sun, rising in the vision of a clear-sighted eye [and blotting it out completely]. (88)

Before he sets out on his spiritual quest, the disciple identifies himself with the body, senses etc., but it is not a conscious identification. Rather is it an underlying assumption regarding his being in the world, one that most people instinctively make, and which is never called into question. Even such a great jnani as Sri Ramana Maharshi, ripe for liberation though he was, had never questioned his bodily identity until he underwent a death-like experience at the age of sixteen. Later on the disciple is told that he is not the body and begins to investigate his true nature. Finally, usually after many struggles, he realises his true nature and becomes established in the Self. The point being made here is that the enlightened jnani will not, cannot, question
his identity as the Self. It is as natural to him as identification with the body is to those in the unenlightened state.

The rise of the Self eradicates all distinctions, such as the triad of knower, knowledge and the thing known, just as the triad of seer, sight and the thing seen is obliterated in a vision overpowered by the brilliance of the sun.

For those whose personal consciousness has been annihilated, what association with anything whatsoever remains? For them, the whole universe has been destroyed. Where might they go and hide? Like the tale of the man who once went in search of a tiger, [was mauled by it and devoured], the Self will hold them in its unblinking gaze, and bring them to complete stillness. (89)

Since the \textit{jnani} is one with the non-dual Self, the reality beyond being and non-being which transcends all limitation, nothing ‘other’ exists with which he might have some form of relationship, connection or attachment. Upon the loss of the ego, the personal self, the universe is seen by the \textit{jnani} to be unreal in itself, existing only as an appearance within the Self. Thus it is effectively destroyed. Moreover, since he is no longer part of that illusion, and dwells beyond time and space, being and non-being, as the Self, there will be no personal self to fear that it too will be annihilated, and to attempt to preserve itself by seeking a hiding place. Hence it is said \textit{enge olittu irukkalaam?} – \textit{where might he go and hide?}

Sadhu Om, in his commentary on Sri Ramana Maharshi’s \textit{Ulladu Narpadu}, v. 19, records that Bhagavan was known to tell the story of the man who set out to look for a tiger, to illustrate the point that, for the seeker to realise the Self, the seeker that initiated the search must himself be annihilated, offered up as a prey to the Self. The story is as follows: A man who has never seen a tiger becomes obsessed with the idea of seeing one. Wandering in the forest he hears that there is a tiger in a cave at the foot of a mountain and goes there. The cave is dark and he is not able to see the tiger, so he crawls inside, whereupon
the tiger takes him in its jaws, kills and eats him. (Paraphrased from Shri Ramanopadeca Nunmalai, 1987 edition, p. 156). The fact that the story is alluded to only briefly here suggests that even at the time of Kannudaiya Vallalar the illustration was already widely known.

Having realised the Self, they abide as That; for them, having perceived the nature of ignorance, there is neither knowing nor absence of knowledge. If one were to attempt to describe the bliss which flourishes in the pure emptiness of the Self, where they live without living, it would be like trying to calculate the volume of the heavens with a pint pot. (90)

The Tamil words translated as pure emptiness are verum pazh, which mean an empty void, but this should not be taken literally. The words refer to the nature of the Self, as transcending both being and non-being, and possessing an infinite potential for creation and manifestation. Envisaged from the point of view of objectifying consciousness, it appears as a void. The verse as a whole is reminiscent of v.12 of Ulladu Narpadu, each standing as kind of commentary to, or gloss on, the other:

That in which knowledge and ignorance do not exist is [true] knowledge. That which knows [the world] is not true knowledge. Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or makes known, the Self is [true] knowledge. It is not a void.

The words pint pot at the end of the verse translated the Tamil word padi, which is a small measure of volume for liquid or grain. The translation uses the words pint pot as a rough equivalent. The mind and all the other faculties, which exist only in the bliss of the Self, could no more measure it than the pot could measure the space within which it exists, and with which it is always filled.

The Agamas speak of Sivam as ‘the consciousness of consciousness’, whilst Vedanta speaks of ‘pure consciousness.’ Both statements are appropriate when referring to the state in
which there is no separation [from Sivam or Brahman]. Those who claim ‘You are That’ or ‘I am Brahman’ will try the patience even of Hari and Brahma. (91)

Once the personal consciousness is lost, the paths of Vedanta and Siddhanta, which appear opposed and contradictory to those of lesser attainment, will be seen to be equally valid means of achieving the same goal. TCS glosses: the declarations made by those Vedas and Agamas will apply equally to the state of union with Sivam upon the loss of the ego consciousness, and the state of union with Brahman upon the loss of the personal self.

The two best known of the mahavakyas – great sayings of the Upanishads are referred to here, tat tvam asi – You are That, and aham Brahmasmi – I am Brahman. According to Chidambara swamigal the first is associated with the Agamas and the latter, with Vedanta. The sentiment expressed here is similar to that of v. 32 of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Ulladu Narpadu:

The Vedas may proclaim in thunderous tones, ‘You are That’, but to think ‘I am That. I am not this’, — instead of knowing oneself through enquiry and remaining in that state,— is due to lack of strength of mind, since That ever abides as oneself.

Bhagavan himself was always eager to point out that all disagreements as the ultimate nature of reality are based on the ego-mind only, and cease when it ceases. This verse is one of the few that Bhagavan actually referred to directly to in his conversations. See Day by Day with Bhagavan, 27-3-46 Afternoon, in which he paraphrases the verse, which is then read out before the assembled group.

In the next chapter Kannudaiya Vallalar devotes an entire separate chapter to each of the subsidiary spiritual paths, cariyai, kiriyai and yogam, explaining how in the final analysis they are unsuitable for the gaining of true realisation, nanam. The paths are dealt with in reverse order, beginning with the highest of the three, yogam.
The present work serves as an introduction to scholarship on the ancient Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra, a brief scripture recited each day at Zen, Chan and Son temples and centres around the world. Kazuaki Tanahashi, best known for his work on Dogen (the great 13th Century Japanese Zen Master), sets himself the task of discovering the origins and meaning of this opaque piece of sacred Buddhist literature. Unique to Mahayana schools, the sutra has always been assumed to have derived from the Sanskrit Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra. But here the author highlights the work of scholars such as Jan Nattier, who argue that the text is of Chinese origin, having been ‘back-translated’ into Sanskrit in the 5th century.

The Heart Sutra is the testimony of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Quan Yin in China; Kannon in Japan) and has at its centre the signature theme of Zen non-duality: “Form is emptiness and emptiness is form” (rupameva sunyata sunyataiva rupam). In other words, all phenomena are in and of themselves without abiding substance, and yet, out of the void, the world appears. But what is emptiness and what is form, the sutra seems to beckon.

Emptiness is a byword in the Zen tradition and expresses itself in the minimalism typical of Zen art. However, in a genuine effort to counter common misunderstandings regarding Buddhist Emptiness, the author decided to render the sutra’s shunyata as ‘boundlessness’, a choice that may meet with opposition in Zen circles. As a calligrapher,
the author will have likely performed the single brushstroke that comprises the Japanese *enso*, the renowned Zen ‘zero’. But in its geometry, can the enso be said to depict boundlessness? Or, for that matter, that which is bound? Zen, ever keen to steer clear of the twin snares of duality and monism, rigorously avoids any sort of reduction; and so, whether bound or unbound, spatial metaphors may not help in clarifying Emptiness.

But this small translation detail should not detract from appreciating the merits of this delightful little volume. Tanahashi’s prose is smooth and engaging, adroitly threading scholarly insights in and through a story of discovery. The book’s content is erudite while all the while accessible to the uninitiated. Sections analyzing scripts and semantics in the relevant lexicons of various Asian languages (Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, Mongolian, etc.) are absorbing and reveal the scope of the author’s linguistic training. Tracing the trajectory of modern scholarship and offering a brief history of Mahayana scriptures and of the migration of Mahayana thought (i.e. from India to China and Japan, and finally, to the West) makes for good reading. The inclusion of photo facsimiles of Heart Sutra scrolls from diverse regions of Asia — even if depicting languages unfamiliar to most of us — adds an aesthetic dimension that stimulates our appreciation for the sutra’s universal, timeless legacy. This small volume will serve as a resource for any personal library, especially of those drawn to Buddhist and other Asian traditions.
South India. An admirer and biographer of U.G. Krishnamurthi, the author wields a sharp pen and a critical eye, and his iconoclastic wit finds ready targets in the misalignments characteristic of many contemporary spiritual centres.

In the style of a travelogue, Between the Serpent and the Rope alternates between good old-fashioned story-telling and philosophical rumination with a sprinkling of cultural observation and investigation into the role of religion in modern life. The story begins in Kaladi with the life and work of Adi Sankara, and wends its way to the shrines and Ashrams of everyone from Akka Mahadevi and Sri Aurobindo to Satya Sai Baba and Kalki Bhagavan. The author gives us an unadorned picture of the present and the background of many of the places or people he visits in a pleasant and observant manner. In particular, the contentious cult of Kalki Bhagavan is painted impartially and we the readers are left freely to form our own conclusions.

The chapter on Sri Ramana is upbeat and the author seems to have been favourably impressed with his visits to Sri Ramanasramam. However, while his understanding of Bhagavan’s teaching is sound enough, he doesn’t seem to have fully grasped the spirit of Bhagavan’s ‘Who am I?’, evidently unaware of vichara’s centuries-long history in various parts of Asia. Of course Sri Ramana as a boy was not familiar with Who Am I?’s great influence in Chan Buddhism and Zen in China, Korea and Japan but independently discovered the ancient practice in a most natural way during his death experience in the summer of 1896.

The author’s discussion of the irrelevance of vichara once surrender is in place is in keeping with Sri Bhagavan’s own statements on the subject: Vichara is an expedient means and once the mind is turned back to the first I-thought, becomes quiescent and surrendered, then vichara is no longer needed, says Bhagavan.

Mukunda Rao’s narrative goes on to glimpse the lives and legacies of other South Indian spiritual celebrities, concluding with a lengthy and insightful reflection on J. Krishnamurthi and UG in a section aptly titled, The Pathless Path. — Michael Highburger


There are some books which deserve to be better known and the two under review belong to this category. Sister Gargi (1912-2004) was an American disciple of Swami Ashokananda (1893-1969), a monk and direct disciple of the great Swami Brahmananda of the Ramakrishna Order, who, with limited resources but unlimited faith and energy, developed the Vedanta movement in northern California.

Though many have trod the path Sister Gargi walked, it is rare that we find the combination of a sincere, intelligent seeker with the gift of writing. Her ability to convey through her biography of Swami Ashokananda and her diary of her own inner spiritual journey guided and assisted by her Swami is captivating. Her vibrant account brings alive the relationship of this remarkable, fiery Bengali teacher with his students, to whom he lovingly and relentlessly clarifies the Vedantic wisdom with straight talk and imparts in their day-to-day spiritual training a love of truth and a profound sense of a higher purpose in life. In 1983, in recognition of her work as a researcher and a writer, particularly her monumental work on the life of Swami Vivekananda in America, she received the prestigious Vivekananda Award from the Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata.

_A Heart Poured Out_ is his biography, which is an inspiration and a joy to read. Yogesh Chandra Datta was born in 1893 near Habiganj in Sylhet district of Assam, now a part of Bangladesh. During his student days he met the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi and in the aftermath of that experience he said, “You can no longer believe that the world of our present experience is real...the way we see it is only a figment of our present state.” After many twists and turns while at the University of Calcutta, he met Swami Brahmananda at the Belur
Math with whom he formed a close bond and eventually he joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1921. He spent time at the Madras Math before he was ordained into sannyasa in 1923 by Swami Shivananda, the second President of the Order. He served as a dynamic editor of the Prabuddha Bharata (1926-1930), and in addition translated into English the second part of M’s Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. He met and moved with many of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Dr S. Radhakrishnan at that time described him as one of perhaps three original thinkers in India. The story of his early life and spiritual quest was quite remarkable and inspiring to read. It is said he received direct guidance from the great Vivekananda.

His mission in life began after he was sent to California in 1931 where his sharp intellect coupled with unflagging energy as leader of the Vedanta Society of northern California, he built three temples in San Francisco, Berkeley and Sacramento and created the largest Vedanta Retreat in America at Olema. How he did it while creating a core group of loyal, dedicated disciples has to be read by all who wish to be inspired that yes, traditional Vedanta can take root in an alien soil and thrive.

The second book, A Disciple’s Journal, covers the twenty years of the author’s close relationship with Swami Ashokananda between 1950 and 1969. It gives a marvellous glimpse into the day-to-day training of a highly articulate person who, one imagines, the Swami enjoyed teaching because of her quick intellect, acute observation and dedication. Her shared insights are just as much about the Swami’s behaviour and attitudes as his wonderful, pungent gems of wisdom. Fearless like Vivekananda, the swami spoke the truth wherever he saw it. One gains from this journal an idea of this extraordinary spiritual teacher who selflessly poured his heart and mind out in complete service to his master, Sri Ramakrishna. Reading both this journal and the biography one cannot help but be inspired with longing to further one’s own practice. For Swami Ashokananda’s words originate from his own direct perception of the higher realms of Vedanta. How fortunate Sister Gargi was and how fortunate are we to read of this wonderful teacher by an exceptional writer.

— Christopher Quilkey
Sri Bhagavan’s 135th Jayanti Celebrations
Bhagavan was born 135 years ago at Tiruchuli in the month of Margazhi, the holiest month of the year for Tamils. He was born around 1am as the Arudra darshan was underway in the nearby Bhuminatha Temple. On January 6th, 2015, the Samadhi Hall was packed with devotees. Nadaswaram music heralded the beginning of the celebrations in the elaborately decorated Shrine. The Mahanyasa puja was concluded 10.30am when the final arati uplifted the devotees with its sacred flame.

135th Jayanti Retreat at Tampa, Florida
On 2nd to 4th January, 2015, over fifty devotees from Canada, England, and the U.S. came together for Bhagavan’s 135th Jayanti Retreat at the Franciscan Center in Tampa, Florida. With its simple, quiet beauty and peace-soaked air, the facility reminded one of Sri Ramanasramam. Each day the programme started at 6am with Vedaparayana and ended at 9pm with Aksharamanamalai, Ramana Satguru, Upadesa Saram and Arunachala Pancharatnam parayana and meditation. Mr. Louis Buss from the U.K. and Dr. Shanta Ramachandran gave talks. Mr. Buss talked about his research into how Major Chadwick came to Bhagavan. Shantamma reminisced about Bhagavan’s stillness, his dispassion and natural calmness when the dressing over his tumour was changed, and about his divinity in human form. On the evening of the second day, all sat on the banks of the Hillsborough River and chanted bhajans under the silvery light of a nearly full moon.

More than a commemorative event, this retreat was a joyous occasion to celebrate Bhagavan’s living, guiding Presence, which was tangibly felt by all. This wonderful experience, where one was able to rejoice in the glory of the Master and celebrate the practice of his universal teaching would not have been possible without the untiring efforts of Mr. Rohit Vaidya and his fellow devotees from Tampa and Fort Lauderdale, and the support of Arunachala Ashrama, New York.
Mahasivaratri
Mahasivaratri celebrations began on Monday morning the 16th February with *Maha Rudram* chanting in the New Library Auditorium followed by *homa* on the morning of the 17th. The First *Kala Puja* for the ‘Night of Siva’ began at 6pm followed by *pujas* every four hours throughout the night and interspersed with *Rudram* chanting and *kirtan*.

Obituaries

**Pachaiappan** quietly passed away in his room in Kurangu Thottam on December 23rd 2014. He came to Bhagavan in 1941 at the age of 16. His father, Krishna Konar, served for years at Skandasramam and was one of the pallbearers for Bhagavan’s mother in May, 1922. In 1947 while working in the Mother’s Shrine, Pachaiappan had a bad fall and suffered permanent hearing loss. But such catastrophes never dulled his joyful spirit. When the temple construction was completed in 1949, he returned to his native village and was married in 1951. Later, he returned to serve permanently in the Ashram, first at the President’s compound, then at Morvi Guest House and finally in Kurangu Thottam. Former Ashram President, T.N. Venkataraman, and his wife Nagu were fond of pointing out Pachaiappan’s sincerity.

**Murugayya Pankajakshi Ammal**, daughter of C. Somasundaram Pillai, was born in Cuddalore in 1922. She merged at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan on 26th December 2014 in Ramana Nagar. Her grand-uncle presented her with a photo of Sri Bhagavan and a copy of the *Collected Works* graciously touched by Bhagavan. She immediately became a devotee and first sat in Bhagavan’s presence in 1939. She settled with her husband and children in 1945 near the Ashram. She wrote numerous songs in praise of Bhagavan, many of which
are still sung today. Her *Sendhil Sannidhi Murai* was published in Tamil as were her recordings of the stories told about devotees by Kunjuswami later published as *Enadhu Ninaivugal* (*Living with the Master)*.

**Patrick Roberts** was an ardent disciple of his beloved guru Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He came to Arunachala in the early 1970s and stayed for some years near the ashram, notably Palakothu. He moved to Glastonbury in 1986 and usually came every year for a month to the ashram. He learnt computer programming and worked for twenty years as a programmer/analyst largely on a self-employed, contract basis. He loved Chalice Well Garden in Glastonbury where he was a volunteer. He approached his death philosophically and merged in great peace with Arunachala at noon time on 22nd January 2015. His single-minded devotion and faith in Bhagavan was an example for all who knew him as his death approached.

**Rolf Skarnitzl** was born in 1925 and did his formal training in pharmacology. He was drawn early to the spiritual life and subsequently came to Bhagavan who became the all encompassing love of his life. He started a small Ramana satsang group in his native Prague. On his first visit to the Ashram, he met Annamalai Swami who became a guiding influence for him. He later translated some of Bhagavan’s works into Czech. They can be read on his website www.rudolfskarnitzl.cz. In recent years he introduced a formal university course about Sri Ramana’s teachings in Prague. He constantly helped, encouraged and inspired the *sadhana* of his many pupils and fellow devotees with his profound knowledge of the teachings, which he imparted with clarity, feeling and humour. He merged peacefully on 11th February, 2015 at the age of 89.

We regret the passing of **Rhoda Tata** (nee Shrof) on 11th February. She was with Bhagavan as a child. We hope to publish a tribute to her in the next issue.