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Ramana Ashtottaram

101. ओ दण्डपण्येय नमः

om daṇḍapāṇaye namaḥ
Prostration to the Wielder of the Staff of Wisdom.
As a renunciate Lord Subrahmanya is called Dandapani, the one who holds the strong, unadorned staff that repels the demon of ignorance. Normally, He holds the Vel (spear) which indicates one-pointed concentration and is an emblem of supreme Power. The name of Dandapani represents His nirguna (formless) aspect which is devoid of Maya. He is free of desire and action while firmly rooted in the power of jnana (knowledge).
Bhagavan Ramana has no individual desire nor does he act as a wilful, separate jiva. He is Dandapani who is free of all desires and fears.

102. ओ कृपापूर्णय नमः

om kṛpāpūrṇāya namaḥ
Prostration to the One who is full of Grace.
If there is one quality which describes Bhagavan’s spontaneous activity in the world, it is the ocean of compassion that spontaneously springs up to alleviate the devotee’s ignorance and suffering. For those sincere in heart there is no obstacle Bhagavan’s Grace cannot illuminate and transcend.
The most wonderful consequence that comes from being aware of Bhagavan’s presence is the realisation that he is accessible everywhere. As we go through life like trapeze artists at the whim of fate it is reassuring to know that the safety net is always there to catch us if we fall. How else can one explain the unmistakable experience of Bhagavan’s Grace regardless of wherever we may be in the world? Such incidents are so common, be it in the waking state or the dream world, that it no longer surprises us but confirms his omnipresence. The implication is that there are no barriers in time and space to what we call the presence of Bhagavan. That presence is ever available like the very air we breathe.

There is an interesting discussion about Bhagavan’s pervasiveness which gives us some idea of how we may boost the frequency of these surprising epiphanies:

“Siva Mohan Lal asked Bhagavan, ‘When I concentrate here in Bhagavan’s presence, I am able to fix my thoughts on the Self easily. But in my home it takes a long time and much trouble to do so. Now why should it be so, especially as I feel convinced that Bhagavan is everywhere and is my antaryami? [Indweller; inner guide].’ He
continued, ‘It must of course be so. Though we are told that God is everywhere, are we not also told that he is more manifest in some objects or places than in others, e.g., in temples, and images or avatars?

“Bhagavan said, ‘Ask Muruganar, who is here. He has sung a song where he says Ramanasramam is not simply here for him, but everywhere.’ Thereupon Muruganar read out the following stanza from *Ramana Devamalai* [which translated means]:

“Because (by His grace) the mind has attained quiescence and remains calm everywhere as it used to remain at Ramanasramam, wherever I may go in this world it is to me Ramanasramam, to which even devas go with keen desire.’

“In other words, Ramanasramam is *chid akasa* which is everywhere and to which we gain access by killing the mind.

“Bhagavan added, ‘Time and place really do not exist. Even in the radio we have a hint of this truth. We have Hyderabad here. What is sung there, we hear here at the same time as it is sung there. Where is time and place?’”

We tend to assume that Bhagavan has some type of form that can be defined by size and density, even though we have been told again and again that Bhagavan was not to be confused with the physical body we called Ramana Maharshi. He never was and is still not that body which expired some sixty five years ago!

Though we pay lip-service to the fact that Bhagavan is no longer present in a physical body we still associate him with a form we can relate to. We look at Bhagavan’s photo and this brings us a measure of calm and reassurance. We stand before his samadhi and it fills us with peace and well-being. Is this all there is or have we yet to understand something fundamentally deeper which the normal mind cannot comprehend?

There is nothing wrong with our approach because it is much easier to personalise our relationship with Bhagavan rather than consider the *nirguna* or formless aspect of his presence. Bhagavan is available in

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whatever aspect can bridge the gap of ignorance we believe separates us. He can be a father, a confidante, a friend, an older brother, a forbidding authority. It all depends on our attitude, which with time and maturity changes and becomes more refined.

What is clear from the above anecdote is that within the space of Ramanasramam there is a chid akasa (space of awareness) which draws us inward. It is an unforgettable experience. Like a seed once planted it will grow according to how much it is nurtured by our sadhana. One day, through the Grace of Bhagavan, it will swallow us till we know no difference between our inner and outer dimensions, nor will we discover any external difference between the tranquil space at Arunachala and the turbulence of New York city.

Whether we are fully aware of it or not, the inner compulsion of our heart is to reside in that spaceless and timeless awareness. Once tasted it is never forgotten. It overrides all other impulses. It is an almighty impersonal wave that we ignore at our peril and yearn to experience and make our own.

If we keep our minds fixed in one-pointed awareness using the remembrance of Bhagavan, activities will still go on and their ultimate outcome will not affect us. It is important to remember that we are not the doer, things happen. That power, by whatever name we call it, which created this world and brought us into existence will see that our destiny is fulfilled.²

We may pretend we are masters of our destiny but there is a higher and unseen force which knows and does otherwise. We may as well try and stop the wind for all our vain attempts to control the unstoppable.

Again, what we can do is fix our minds and hearts on Bhagavan in whatever shape or form or bhava (attitude) suits us best. With

² “Two birds, companions [who are] always united, cling to the self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the fruit and the other looks on [as a witness] without eating. On the self-same tree, a person immersed [in the sorrow of the world] is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the other, the Lord who is worshipped and his greatness, he becomes freed from sorrow.” Mundaka Upanisad, 3.1.1-2. The Principal Upanisads, S. Radhakrishnan, Harper Collins, Delhi, 1994. p.686.
practice we can overcome the pramada (wilful forgetfulness) that makes us think we are separate. Our devotion is answered though not necessarily in the form or result we imagined. That our sorrow is lessened and our doubts and confusion cleared to the point where they seem quite irrelevant in the face of an overwhelming sense of peace, is evident to all who enter the ambit of Arunachala Ramana.

On a purely physical level we know that the speed of light is some 186,000 miles per second. We also know that the speed of thought is faster than light. What if there is something which is faster than thought? How to think it, or imagine it? We cannot because our mind is an instrument of thought. But what if there is ‘something’ which transcends all sense of difference?

Bhagavan said repeatedly that he and the Self are one and the same and our mistake is to identify him with a body and mind. Let us accept for a moment that what he says is true and not just nod our heads blindly and pay lip service to this insight. If Bhagavan is not the body or the mind then who is ‘he’? And if we are to believe him, that he and we are one and the same, who then are we?

Consider. We cannot know it with our physical bodies, that is, wherever we travel we will not find it. We cannot know it with our minds because whatever we conceive with thought is partial and transitory. Thought, to extend a physical analogy, is not fast enough to catch it. Then how can we ‘catch’ it? It is not a thought. And this is the clue: ‘we’ cannot catch it. It catches us.

We think we can do it and that is our delusion.

What we can do is develop one-pointed attention for ‘it’ to find and catch us. By this practice we learn that the one absolute essential of sadhana is to be still (summa iru).

That is as far as we can go with our minds. It is here that surrender or the practice of self-enquiry keeps us quiet. Their purpose is to purify our minds. We are creating the conditions for Grace.

Someone asked Bhagavan to bless them upon their departure knowing that possibly they might never get the chance to be at Ramanasramam again:
“M.: You do not go anywhere away from the Presence as you imagine. The Presence is everywhere. The body moves from place to place; yet it does not leave the one Presence. So no one can be out of sight of the Supreme Presence. Since you identify one body with Bhagavan and another body with yourself, you find two separate entities and speak of going away from here. Wherever you may be, you cannot leave ME.

“To illustrate it: The pictures move on the 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.”

So when we say Bhagavan is everywhere what do we really mean? Bhagavan is telling us that our goal is here and now but we keep identifying with the pictures and not the screen on which it happens. Bhagavan does nothing. How can he when he is not identified with or controlled by a body? This may sound strange because the power of Grace which we ascribe to ‘him’ works wonders but it is true.

It is ‘automatic divine action’ which happens because we are receptive. For a moment we are in tune with this stillness and are not identified with any thought or feeling. There is no sense of opposition or separateness. There is no desire, no fear. This simple step is the beginning.

We slowly come to understand that Bhagavan is not bound by time or space nor our concepts as to who ‘he’ is. Once that indelible revelation is given to us through an unmistakable encounter at the Samadhi, or a dream, or an instant of recognition when we see his photograph or a sentence in his teachings, we are joined to his Name. We begin to realise that Bhagavan is everywhere and wherever any of us gather in his Name he is there; wherever any one of us prays to him, he is there; wherever any one contemplates him, he is there. For each one of us, we only need to remember him any time and in any place, he is always there.

We may not always be aware of Bhagavan but Bhagavan is certainly aware of us.

3 Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Talk§470.
Shadow and Substance

I.S. Madugula

Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.
Macbeth, V.v.24-27.

Shadow is the opposite of substance. The longest life is yet insubstantial. It is but a hallucination. It’s just as Shakespeare says.

All the world’s a stage
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts.¹

¹ As You Like It, II. vii.

Indusekhara Sastri Madugula, who formerly taught English at various universities and colleges, is a frequent writer for the Mountain Path and lives in Austin, Texas. He has written a book on AdiSankara and is convinced that all life is a self-evident affirmation of advaita.
But where there is shadow, there’s got to be substance in some way, shape, or form — or even in a totally formless manner.

The Shadow
A definition of shadow is “something insubstantial or fleeting.” Insubstantial means that it lacks substance, reality, though it looks real in some ways. Shadow also refers to something that attaches itself to something real. No matter how you look at it, shadow is unreal, with no existence of its own. Thus it is not worth paying attention to because, if you do, then you are losing track of the substance and wasting your time on a useless pursuit.

Examples in life are aplenty. Just about every activity we engage in seems futile in an ultimate sense, though there might appear to be an immediate justification. Not only that, some activities could be disastrous even in the short run. As humans, we tend to follow a routine from the time we are born. Education, marriage, children, job, retirement—then the end. Things are never uniformly nice. There is failure, disease, desperation. Even when all goes well, what do we have to show for our lives? Have we found the “meaning of life,” whatever it means?

True, some people achieve greatness. There are great scholars, musicians, scientists, physicians, and so forth who help their fellow humans in many ways and thus make their lives meaningful. But have they attained their goals or, more significantly, do they know what their goals are? If they are content to do just what they are doing, fine, but then they are missing out on the very purpose of life that they seek. They are elated and depressed alternately. Feel calm one minute only to get agitated the next minute because something has gone wrong.

Life is never a bed a roses for anyone. It has its thorns, too. Patanjali says, *duhkham eva sarvam vivekinah*, all is misery to the person of discernment person because of perpetual change and anxiety. At the end of the day, life, as the bard said, is sound and fury signifying

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2 *Yogasutra*, II, 15.
nothing. This is so because we focus entirely on the shadows that go by the name of life or that we take to be life. Sankara’s Bhajagovindam confirms that the world is gripped by misery because life as we live it is totally tainted by ego and is subject to disease and destruction.3

Horace Walpole, the 18th Century English writer, claimed that “this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel,” because feelings involve deep thinking and understanding something that you can superficially laugh off.

Then what happens? It “is heard no more.” The greatest works of life bite the dust.

How do we get out of this untenable situation even as we live our daily lives? How can we be happy and contented doing what we do under these unfair conditions?

Only through an understanding of what is a shadow and what is the substance whose shadow it is. Actually, these are the same thing: if we know the substance, then we know that everything else is its shadow.

The Substance
It is our very nature to live constantly on two levels, a ground floor life, as it were, and an upper floor, exalted life. Both levels of existence are equally instinctive to us. The aim of life is eventually to transcend the lower instinct and learn to dwell in the higher realms of enlightenment. This has a number of advantages. First and foremost, we already are capable of doing so, i.e. the higher instincts are capable of taking control of our lives, despite the folk wisdom that we are slaves to our basic instincts.

The Single Entity Theory
There’s got to be a source for all that exists. There’s got to be a power to run the show. It is plain common sense. Why? Because nothing emanates from nothing: ex nihilo nihil fit. They call it the law of conservation of mass and energy. I suppose they mean something

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3 Bhajagovindam, 4. ...jivitamatisaya capalam/ viddhi vyadhyabhimana grastam/ lokam sokabatam ca samastam.
like our Single Entity by Energy with a capital E. This Entity – this source is unitary, and the unitary source is present in everything that has ever existed and will ever exist.

There is nothing revolutionary in this approach. It was declared millennia ago: *ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti*. There is just this One Thing, whatever it is. Everyone – the self-styled rationalist, the combative evolutionist, the atheist, and everyone in between – just has to agree that there is something that is responsible for the cosmic show – whether that One is gravity, electricity, consciousness, the primordial protein, the God Particle. This is true even if the show is self-perpetuating. That there is *nothing* is a logical absurdity and an insult to our intelligence. Understood along these lines, there is no mystery at all.

I guess I am just sharing my thoughts on the subject with you, how I try to understand it, and how it all makes sense to me, at this stage of my life. It is a sort of culmination of my personal journey.

This ‘theory’ is backed by millennia of thinking and experimentation. If T.S. Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock can sing a ‘love song’ on an evening stretched like a patient etherized on the table while growing old with the bottoms of his trousers rolled, I can make up an esoteric theorem while being fully in possession of my faculties. Besides, literary critics probably have missed the point that Prufrock’s problem is not just isolation and not being wanted by the person he wants. He really doesn’t know what his problem is, and he doesn’t dare ask:

Or, do not ask, “what is it?”

He has already asked the formidable question, “Do I dare disturb the universe?” Experience has taught him, after “measuring out my life with coffee spoons,” and having known “the evenings, mornings, and afternoons,” to let things be. If there is an echo here of Sankara’s *dina yaminyau sayam pratah/sisira vasantau punarayatah*, the relentless passage of time, then it should follow that Prufrock and we are wasting our time in meaningless pursuits, instead of using it to decipher the meaning of

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4 *Rgveda*, 1.164.146
life. The simple answer to this age-old question is: the meaning of life consists in discovering the meaning of life beyond the shadow cast by superficial existence. The purpose of life is to find out the purpose of life. Eliot, who was enormously influenced by Eastern thought, might be laughing at his Prufrock who, well past his prime, is moping around feeling dejected, instead of making something out of his life.

It makes enormous sense to reduce everything seen, unseen, and yet-to-be-seen in all its unimaginable and indescribable glory to a single entity posited as the source of it all.

This process of regression is facilitated through surrender. Surrender is a simple and elegant notion. What can be simpler than giving up everything — everything, that is, including the good and the bad, the pairs of opposites, and the single greatest trouble-maker in life, the ego. If nothing belongs to you, why hang on to ego? Granted, it is the last thing to quit on its own, you can easily get rid of it with simple determination and logical thinking. What does the ego do for you, an intelligent person?

Surrender thus really means expulsion of the ego from your system. What you are surrendering is your ego, thus disburdening yourself of an enormous amount of baggage. Baggage that pulls you down. Then what remains is you, the uncluttered you, the simple you, the real you, the tvam of tat tvam asi.

The philosophical term vastu refers to the Ultimate Reality, the Self. This is the word also used in ordinary language to denote an object or substance — an implied acknowledgment that the real substance in all existence is the Self, not the shadows thereof that comprise the phenomenal world.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi explains this with his characteristic directness:

People would not understand the simple and bare truth—the truth of their everyday, ever-present and eternal experience. That Truth

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is that of the Self. Is there anyone not aware of the Self? They would not even like to hear it (the Self), whereas they are eager to know what lies beyond—heaven, hell, reincarnation. Because they love mystery and not the bare truth, religions pamper them—only to bring them round to the Self. Wandering hither and thither you must return to the Self only. Then why not abide the in the Self even here and now?  

Bottom line? Empty your mind of all clutter. Kick out your ego, which is a shadow, anyway, of the Inner Being. Stick to the substance, the Reality, the Single Entity behind everything seen, unseen, and yet to be seen. Sankara warns those of us who are wasting our time in silly and childish pursuits to wise up and live in that one Reality from the time we wake up until we go to bed, because death is never far away.

What happens when only the substance is present and the shadow vanishes? You won’t waste valuable time on shadowy pursuits. You are free to focus your attention inward, because the shadow of the world is gone. There is nothing to see. Put another way, there is just you seeing yourself everywhere. When that happens, you have arrived. The shadow may return, but you are not fooled by it any more. You see yourself, yourself alone, your Self.

How would life then be? Imagine. Just imagine for a minute a life full of unalloyed bliss, of splendid isolation, which you will not trade for anything in the world, literally, because you have transcended the world and all its allure. In fact, the world holds no allure at all for you. You have simplified life in the best sense of the term. A life in which Eliot’s Prufrock can learn a thing or two and transform the wasteland of his heart into the fertile ground of his soul with which he now communes directly.

Familiar things appear new as they take on new meanings. Near and dear ones become nearer and dearer as they now form part of

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7 Vedantadindima, 79. *Supteruththaya suptyantam brhmaikam praviciytatam/natidure nrnam mrtyu riti vedantadindimah*. 

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your own Self. Strangers become near and dear for the same reason. You now begin to understand what Yajnavalkya told his wife Maitreyi:

You have been truly dear to me (even before), now you have increased your dearness...Not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear but for the sake of the Self is the husband dear. Verily, not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear but for the sake of the Self is the wife dear...when, verily the Self is seen, heard, reflected and known, then all this is known...these gods, these Vedas, all these beings, this all are the Self...This Self, verily, is imperishable and of indestructible nature...where there is duality as it were, there one sees the other, one smells the other...one knows the other. But where everything has become just one's own self, by what and whom should one smell...taste...speak...touch, by what and whom should one know? The self is (to be described as) not this, not this...O Maitreyi. Such, verily, is life eternal.8

Now we are talking substance—as opposed to shadow. This is what we call the Single Entity Theory, the One Source of it all. Sankara sums this up nicely:

The wise should always think with great care of the invisible, the visible and everything else, as his own Self which is consciousness itself.

Having reduced the visible to the invisible, the wise should think of the universe as one with Brahman. Thus alone will he abide in eternal felicity with the mind full of consciousness and bliss.9

Once you are face-to-face with this Single Entity, you are a changed person. You are free from all criteria of bondage and liberation. This is elaborated toward the end of Vivekacudamani:

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9 Aparokshanubhuti, 141-142.
He who knows the Atman is free from every kind of bondage. He is full of glory. He is the greatest of the great. The things perceived by the senses cause him neither grief nor pleasure. He is not attached to them. Neither does he shun them. Constantly delighting in the Atman he is always at play within himself. He tastes the sweet, unending bliss of the Atman and is satisfied…

The man of contemplation walks alone. He lives desireless amidst the objects of desire. The Atman is his eternal satisfaction. He sees the Atman present in all things…

He acts, yet is not bound by his actions. He reaps the fruit of past actions, yet is unaffected by them…

He dwells in the body, but he regards it as a thing apart from himself — like the cast-off skin of a snake…

The illumined soul lives eternally conscious of his oneness with Brahman. He tastes continually the joy of the Atman, the one without a second…

There is neither birth nor death, neither bound nor aspiring soul, neither liberated soul nor seeker after liberation— this is the ultimate and absolute truth.10

Thus what remains at the end is the substance, devoid of all shadows. This substance does not cast any shadow. The Single Entity is the logical substratum of everyone and everything. That’s the sheer beauty of it. The more we experience that Unity, that simplicity, the greater our bliss. Wouldn’t it be great to experience that Entity just once in our lifetime? At the end, individual consciousness merges in Universal Consciousness from whence it arose, which is the Single Source of everything. Sankara explains:

No division in Consciousness is admissible at any time as it is always one and the same. Even the individuality of the Jiva must be known as false, like the delusion of a snake in a rope.11

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10 Prabhavananda and Isherwood, *Vivekacudamani*, p.121 ff, verse 535 ff.
11 *Aparoksanubhuti*, 43. Tr. Swami Vimuktananda.
The beauty of the Single Entity Theory lies in the fact that everything is reduced to its simple primordial form, taking all needless complexity out of life. It’s a practical postulation that transcends all doxies and philosophies and religions; it is irrefutable, no matter how it might be formulated in a particular environment. At the very least, it lets you live a hassle-free life on a daily basis.

Now, if it were that simple, how come everybody doesn’t get it automatically? That’s where the philosopher’s nescience comes in. The reason is Maya which is itself, interestingly, sourced in the Single Entity. It is the shadow of the substantive Entity with no independent existence. It, too, has to dissolve in the Entity when the phenomenal world ends. If we view life as emanating from the Single Entity and disappearing into it again, the mystery of death will be solved. That is, since consciousness is neither born nor does it die, what “dies” is the body, which is just as well. Who wants to drag it around forever, even if we can afford the doctor’s bills?

One caveat, however, is that the Self is not really a substance with specific characters that can be described and catalogued. Only in contrast to the shadow do we refer to the Self as being substantial, something to be striven for, not that it can be known in any sense of the term. It just has to be realized in one’s own heart, hridayakuhara madhye.

A good first step to reaching there is by consciously dissipating the shadows. Which shouldn’t be too hard, because they are nonexistent in the first place. You surrender. You receive Grace. You have found your Self, which underlies both the shadow and the substance.
Bhagavan with Yogi Ramiah
Writing about the old days has jogged my memory tree and a lot of old pictures have come tumbling out.

Although there are endless stretches of running wild and free around the hill and over the fields, actually our year was punctuated by dire days in school in Kodaikanal…days which do not bring back such vibrant, happy memories. But luckily term had to end.

As soon as we arrived home from school we would rush over to say hello to Bhagavan. We never spoke about school here and never spoke about home when we were there…just as well really as we went to a Catholic convent where our home life would definitely not have been appreciated. In school we had catechism class presided over by a nun. First we got a little lecture about the poor heathens who worshipped idols and how lucky we were to worship Jesus, and then from the catechism question one…Where is God? Answer by a lot of little girls as we had been taught…God is everywhere. Kitty Osborne
who is curious and likes a logical explanation asks, “Is God really everywhere?” Nun with benign expression, “Yes dear, God is really everywhere.” “Is God in the walls?” Nun with slightly less benign expression, “Yes dear, he is in the walls.” Kitty, persistent, “Is he in my pencil?” Nun impatiently, “Yes dear he is.” Kitty, trying to visualise all this “Is he in my desk?” Nun definitely running out of patience “Yes he is.” Kitty, “Is he in the idols that the poor heathens worship?” I wasn’t being cute, I actually had no idea what a poor heathen was anyway… I truly wanted to know. Anyway, after quite a long pause I was sent out of the class for being cheeky and possibly gained the distinction of being the only six year old to be so honoured.

I told my father about it when we came home and when he laughed I knew it was alright. Of course we were delighted to be home and free again. There were no railings around the couch in those days so we could go right up to Bhagavan and talk to him or show him our toys and discuss with him our latest news. The first time the railings were put up and my brother Adam came in and saw them, he looked unbelieving and then walked round and up to Bhagavan to tell him whatever it was he had come to say. Bhagavan laughed and commented to authority in general, “You see what use your railings are.”

Apart from those I mentioned before, the stalwarts sitting in the hall included Major Chadwick with his broad cloth band to keep his knees up as he hadn’t been trained from childhood to sit cross-legged; my parents were nearly always there and Mrs. Talyerkhan in her white saris and white hair and white skin was there regularly until she quarrelled with everyone and wouldn’t honour the ashram with her presence any more. Mr. Bose, an industrialist from Bangalore was often there. We three children stopped him one day and I asked if he would help me with my matchbox label collection. He agreed and he also agreed to help my sister Frania with her stamp collection. Adam hadn’t said anything so Mr. Bose asked him what he was collecting. Adam replied very earnestly “Money.” Mr. Bose thought this such a brilliant reply that he gave Adam Rs.5. Can you imagine how much that was in the days of 16 annas to the rupee and ¼ of an anna was a
three thumbadis and had purchasing power. We thought Car Street in town was called that because the only car our town owned was parked there; instead of it being named for the temple chariot. The stalls in front of the ashram were makeshift as the word ‘supermarket’ hadn’t been invented yet and neither had internet, or internet café. The single provision shop our town owned was on the main road opposite the temple and when they got anything we thought we needed like shampoo or corn flakes the word went round like wildfire and in no time they were cleaned out. Rs. 5 would have bought out the entire stock of the vadai stand across the road from the ashram gates and there would have been change. We would happily have bought Bhagavan a gift of vadas or murukus but he would never accept anything unless there was enough for everyone. Ladies who brought him a jar of their particular pickles or anything made specially found that out. “Is there enough for everyone?” He would ask and if not he wouldn’t take it.

Bhagavan was a good cook himself and enjoyed it I think. He used to go and help in the kitchen until he told the cooks to save some ends of vegetable or fruit for use later. They threw them out and Bhagavan never went back. How extraordinary that people could be near Bhagavan and treat his words as of no consequence. He was the embodiment of power and his every utterance was significant.

His brother, Chinnaswami whom we knew as the Sarvadhikari was so aware of this and in awe of Bhagavan that he rarely got up the courage to speak to him personally. He would send someone else in with the message. We all knew about this little quirk of his but no one actually mentioned it that I heard of. Sarvadhikari had a quick temper with a low flash point, but he loved children and was always very kind to us. We ran free all over the ashram and I only now appreciate how tolerant of us they all were. Bhagavan still kept an eye on the kitchen however. When my mother wanted the recipe for idly batter a cook wrote it out and showed it to Bhagavan to check … naturally, as I said before, everyone showed him everything. He read through it carefully and said “You have forgotten the salt.” I still like
that idly batter when they make it. Another time when a roof was being stripped before being re-covered in grass, a workman found a metal object in the old thatch and...you’ve guessed it...he showed it to Bhagavan and asked what it was. Bhagavan examined it thoroughly and told them it was something people used to help get their shoes on...a shoehorn and it should be given to Osborne who would have use for it. What a shoehorn was doing in old roofing thatch is anyone’s guess, but I inherited that shoehorn from my father and it is one of my most treasured possessions.

Some of the things we learned as children were only to use the right hand for giving or receiving anything or for eating; and never to point the soles of our feet at anyone as that was very bad manners. Bhagavan himself sanctioned that practice on one well documented occasion; but I feel he knew that the lady in question, who was a foreigner and didn’t know Indian customs, meant no disrespect and would have been mortified to know she had been discourteous and she probably couldn’t sit cross-legged anyway. This was before the days of widespread yoga practice and way before the days of universal appreciation of Indian sages. The thin but steady trickle of foreigners tended to be sincere and reverent. Still it bothers me when I see Indians doing this as I assume they know local customs. Or perhaps not. We were also taught not to eat or drink in front of our elders or those to whom we should show respect unless it was at mealtimes so I have to get used to seeing people with their water bottles sipping away wherever they are. Times do indeed change and I am sure one should learn to change with them but it certainly isn’t easy!

Another thing Bhagavan didn’t encourage was exotic behaviour. If anyone wanted to sit or pray in a strange posture or doing contortions he ignored them. Of course a person doing something odd that they couldn’t help was another matter; but Bhagavan definitely had no time for anyone indulging in weird conduct, nor did he condone self-aggrandising madness. They too did not get sympathy. I am pretty sure he did not approve of gimmickry, either physical or spiritual.

Sitting in the dining hall with Bhagavan and seeing him eat was an education. He sat against the kitchen wall where we could all see him
on both sides of the partition. That was because there were a number of old Brahmin ladies who had spent their entire lives not being allowed to eat in front of strangers and it was too much of a wrench for them to change their ways so late in life, so they were allowed to do things in a way that made them feel comfortable. Bhagavan never wasted even a grain of rice; his leaf was always absolutely clean when he was finished.

We children loved to eat in the ashram...much more fun than sitting on chairs at a table and anyway our mother’s cooking was a bit chancy. Much better on the floor with a leaf in the ashram. Even then, although he seemed to be concerned with nothing but his own meal, Bhagavan would notice if someone was given something they just couldn’t eat, either it was too spicy or something else and he would direct a server to give the person something more suitable. I think we all took Bhagavan’s excellent memory and his attention to detail for granted. In fact I now realise that we took altogether too much for granted...it never occurred to us children that Bhagavan wouldn’t always be sitting there on the couch wearing the body we knew and able and willing to answer our questions and share in our world. We spent time playing on the hill and racing around the countryside when we could actually have spent more time with him. I don’t think children are terribly good at thinking ahead.

The afternoons when most people were resting was when the still air rang to the music of the stone masons chip, chip, chipping at the enormous stones that were to become the Mother’s temple. The front of the ashram which is now a sort of motorcycle park was, at that time full of all the huge stones. All day the work went on but it was in the quiet of the afternoons that one could really hear it the most and at that time the sound carried far in the hot silence. We three children offered to help with the effort, but for some reason the maestris (masons) were not keen, in fact they took to hiding their tools to discourage us from our helpful hammering efforts. They attacked a pillar with blunt nosed chisels with increasingly smaller heads, and the stones became smoother and smoother. Actually the four black pillars at the corners of Bhagavan’s Samadhi were done the same way...
until they were smooth as silk, and then they were oiled and made to look like marble. But the stones for the temple were worked to a less fine finish. Their chipping was a lovely soporific sound but didn’t have quite that effect on three lively children who could escape parental watchfulness for a while. We climbed up the scaffolding over the Mother’s temple and in under the coconut matting protection where the artists were doing the plastering, and when they weren’t actually working we helped to build the dome. We ‘improved’ a number of statues, as I remember. Yes, our fingerprints are definitely there for all time!

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Recondite _Guhyaa_,
lissom enigma in
the still of the pulse;
you are the ruffles of truth,
the raging whispers of light.

Your body the truth,
_Satyanandasvarupini_,
your touch paradise;
take us in your ocean arms,
Mother, drown us in your peace.

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.
The Death Experience of Bhagavan

Hindu Mythological Perspectives

Sri Ramana Gita contains the quintessential question posed by Deivarata to Bhagavan on the paramount duty of human beings caught up in the cycle of births and deaths:

Kim kartavyam manushyasya pradhaanamiha samsrutau
Ekam nirdhaarya Bhagavan tanme vyaakyhaatumarhati

To which Bhagavan replies:

Swasya Swaroopam vigneyam pradhaanam mahadichchataa
Pratishthaa yatra sarveshaam phalaanaamuta karmaNaam

“For those desiring the highest, discovering one’s Self is most important since it is the basis of all actions and fruits.”

The above is echoed in the four well known Mahavakyas from the four Vedas extolling Brahman (which is no different from Self) thus:

Savithri Krishnan is a devotee of Bhagavan from Bangalore.
Prajnaanam Brahma (Consciousness is Brahman). This Mahavakya appearing in the Aitareya-Upanishad of the Rigveda dwells on the nature of Brahman or the Self.

Aham Brahma Asmi (I Am Brahman.) Contained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajurveda, this Mahavakya expounds Brahman to be the object on which the sadhak contemplates.

Tat Tvam Asi (Thou Art That) The Guru instructs that he (the disciple) is the Supreme consciousness through this Mahavakya contained in the Chhandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda.

Ayam Atma Brahma (This Self is Brahman.) This Mahavakya from the Mandukya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda declares one’s Self to be verily the Brahman.

As for the method of attaining Self-realisation, Bhagavan has time and again unequivocally asserted that there are only two paths. They are: (i) Self-enquiry; (ii) Complete, unconditional Surrender to the Almighty. Bhagavan himself realised the Self through the first path as he has, in the later years narrated to the devotees his legendary Death Experience as a youth of seventeen at Madurai.

The Hindu scriptures are replete with mythological characters who encountered Yama, the Lord of Death. It’s interesting to muse over some of these characters in the light of Bhagavan’s own Death Experience. The three foremost inspiring mythological characters that come to one’s mind are Nachiketa, Savitri and Markandeya. While Nachiketa and Savitri directly encountered Yama and had a dialogue with him, Markandeya took to the second path of absolute surrender to Lord Siva on encountering Yama.

What follows is a brief account of each of these.

Bhagavan’s Death Experience
A sudden fear of death overtook Bhagavan when he was all alone at the first floor of his uncle’s house at Madurai. He was only seventeen years old, and there was nothing wrong with his health. It did not occur to him to consult a doctor or his elders. He just felt that he was going to die, and resolved to take it heads on and to solve the problem himself then and there. The event that followed is best expressed in his own words.
“The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: ‘Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.’ And I at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though rigor mortis had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word ‘I’ or any other word could be uttered, ‘Well then,’ I said to myself, ‘this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body ‘I’? It is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the ‘I’ within me, apart from it. So I am the Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. This means I am the deathless Spirit.’ All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. ‘I’ was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that ‘I’. From that moment onwards the ‘I’ or Self focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on...”

Bhagavan stresses on the eternity of the Self notwithstanding burning to ashes of the body in which it temporarily resides. The indestructibility of the Atman (Self) is explained in the Bhagavad Gita by Lord Krishna thus:

*Nainam chhindanti shastraaNi nainam dahati paavakah*  
Na cha enam kledayantyaapo na shoshayati maarutaha  
“The soul can never be cut into pieces by any weapon, nor can he be burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind”.

*Na jaayate mriyate vaa kadaachinnaayam bhootvaa bhavitaa vaa na bhooyaha*  
Ajo nityaha shaashvatoym puraaNam na hanyate hanyamaane shareere
“It is not born, nor does it die. After having been, it does not cease to be; unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient. It is not killed when the body is destroyed”.

In fact, this verse was included in Sri Gita Sara, a selection of 42 verses from the Bhagavad Gita by Bhagavan.

**Nachiketa’s Encounter with Yama**
The story of Nachiketa appears in the Katha Upanishad. His father Vajashravas desiring prosperity conducted a yagna to please the deities. As was customary, at the end of the yagna, he donated cows to the Brahmins. However being a miser, he donated only old, lame, blind, barren cows that didn't yield milk. This disturbed Nachiketa and wishing the best for his father asked him to whom would he (Nachiketa) be offered? Though angered at his question, Vajashravas chose to keep quiet. On being repeatedly pestered, he lost his temper and yelled, “I give you to Death, Yama.” Taking this as his father’s command, he proceeds to Yamaloka. On realising his mistake, Vajashravas tries to stop Nachiketa but to no avail.

On reaching Yama’s kingdom, he is told by his guards that Yama is away for three days. Nachiketa decides to wait at the doorstep until Yama's return, and sits there without food or water for three full days. Yama returns on the fourth day and feels guilty for having offended a Brahmin guest by making him wait for so long without offering any hospitality. Since it was a sin to not welcome an atithi (guest), he wanted to make up for it by offering three boons.

Nachiketa sought peace with his father as the first boon. He wanted his father to welcome him lovingly when he returned home. As a second boon, he wished to learn the sacred fire sacrifice which leads one to the heaven. Yama not only instructed the method but also named the sacred fire after Nachiketa. As a third boon, he wanted to know the state of the soul on death. Yama was reluctant to impart this knowledge and evaded him by saying that this has been a mystery even to the gods, and tried to coax him into asking a different boon. He instead offers many material gifts such as gems, silver, gold, horses, elephants, a regal life not only to him but for several of his progeny,
and even the happiness of heaven etc. Nachiketa stood firm with his resolve to pursue the path of realising Brahman (the great mystery) and rejected out right all the material gifts realizing their ephemeral nature that they would last only till the morrow. Yama was pleased with Nachiketa’s perseverance and had to finally yield, by imparting the highest truth of atma jnana to this young deserving disciple.

Savitri’s rendezvous with Yama
As per the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata, Asvapati the king of Madra and his queen Malavi being childless wish for a son for their lineage to continue. They undertake an ascetic life and offer oblations to Sun God Savitr. Pleased with their devotion, God Savitr appears before them and grants a boon that they will have a daughter. They are overjoyed at the prospect of having a child, and name the daughter Savitri in honour of the god. Needless to say, she imbibes the traits of asceticism and devotion as she was born out of them. When she reaches the age of marriage, her father is worried as none come forward to seek her hand realising their inability to match her purity and beauty. Hence her father tells her to find a husband on her own. She travels across and beyond her kingdom for this purpose and finally chooses Satyavan, the son of a blind king named Dyumatsena, who after losing everything including his kingdom and eyesight lives in exile as a forest-dweller.

When Savitri discloses her decision, Sage Narada warns Asvapati about her bad choice. He reveals that though Satyavan is peerless and perfect in every way, he is destined to die in a year. Asvapati’s repeated pleas to Savitri to reconsider her decision fall on deaf ears as she is adamant on her choice. He finally acquiesces and conducts the marriage of Savitri and Satyavan with great pomp. Soon after her marriage, she too takes to the ascetic way of life, dons the attire befitting a hermit's wife, and lives in perfect obedience and respect to elders. As the destined day of Satyavan’s death approaches, Savitri takes a three-day vow of fasting and vigil. Though her father-in-law advises her against such harsh austerities, she convinces him and seeks his permission to accompany her husband to the forest on the
third day. Dyumatsena accedes to her request as she hadn’t asked for anything during the entire year’s stay at the hermitage.

On the day of Satyavan’s predicted death, he suddenly becomes weak while cutting wood and places his head on Savitri’s lap. Yama himself comes to claim the soul of Satyavan. She follows him as he carries Satyavan’s soul away. His effort to convince her to return goes in vain. With her wit and wisdom, she wins over Yama. She first speaks about Dharma, then the benefits of having acquaintance with the wise and the disciplined, and praises Yama for his just rule and hails him as Dharmaraja. Impressed, he offers to grant her two boons except the life of Satyavan. She first asks for the restoration of both kingdom and eyesight for her father-in-law. She then asks a hundred sons for her father. Having granted the boons, Yama proceeds to his kingdom but is surprised to find Savitri still trailing him. Taking pity on her, he offers to grant her a third boon. But this time he forgets to add the clause, “except Satyavan’s life”. Savitri wisely asks for a hundred sons for herself and Satyavan. Yama is in a dilemma as this would indirectly mean restoring Satyavan’s life. However, pleased with Savitri’s purity, perseverance and wisdom, he revives Satyavan and blesses her with eternal happiness.

Markandeya’s Unconditional Surrender to Lord Siva on Encountering Yama
This story is narrated in the Skanda Purana. Being issueless for a long time, Rishi Mrikandu and his wife Marudmati intensely worship Siva and seek the boon of progeny. Pleased with their devotion, Lord Siva appears before them and offers two choices; a dim-witted son who would live a hundred years or an exceptional son with a short life span of only sixteen years. The couple chose the later. As expected, Markandeya (literally son of Mrikandu) grows up to be a handsome and an exemplary child quickly mastering all the Vedas and Sastras. He soon becomes an accomplished sage and is extremely devoted to Lord Siva. As he was nearing sixteen, his parents grew nervous. Observing this, Markandeya sought to know the reason and learnt about his
impending death. He consoles them assuring that Lord Siva would surely come to his succour. Since then, he intensely offers worship to the Siva Lingam, and on the destined day, Yama himself approaches Markandeya, as his minions were unable to take away his life owing to his extreme devotion towards Siva.

On seeing Yama, out of fright, Markandeya hugs the Siva Linga tight with undivided devotion and surrenders completely. When Yama throws his noose around the young sage, it encircles the Siva Lingam too. Enraged at Yama’s audacity to throw the noose over Siva Lingam, Lord Siva emerges out from the Linga in his fiery form and strikes at Kaala (Yama is also known as Kaala or time, since time brings an end to all things) with his trident. He then revives Yama under the condition that the devout youth would be a *chiranjeevi* (one who lives forever). Markandeya is thus bestowed with immortality much to the delight of his parents. Siva thenceforth was known as Kaalaantaka (ender of Kaala). He is also Mrtyunjaya (conqueror of death) and Mahaakaaleshwar (ruler of time who is beyond time and death).

Here ends the narration as found in the scriptures. The text that follows is an attempt, from a layman’s standpoint, to interpret the events given their puzzling nature.

Ever since I first came across the stories of Nachiketa and Savitri in the Sanskrit classes during my high school days, I have wondered at the possibility of travelling to *Yama Loka*. Is it a concrete place on Earth such as India or the United States? Is it possible to visit the place at all as one would travel from say Bangalore to Tiruvannamalai? As, when Bhagavan first came to know that Arunachala is in fact a place on Earth from his uncle, he looked up an atlas to figure out the route to reach Tiruvannamalai. So when Nachiketa’s father says that he is offering him unto the God of Death, how does Nachiketa actually embark? It is said that he waited at Yama’s door for three days without food and water. One would obviously end up surmising that this only figuratively depicts the rigorous fast and penance that Nachiketa undertook for three days in the quest of Death. Likewise, Savitri too undertakes fast and severe austerities for three days prior
to the destined day of death of Satyavan, and she also travels with Yama for miles together up to the doorstep of Yamaloka. All these obviously can’t be at a physical realm but can only be mental.

As Bhagavan says, he mentally enacted Death by imitating a corpse and posed to himself a series of questions to get to the source of the ego. Moreover, the Scriptures point out that none can go to heaven or even to the nether world in flesh and blood, but only the soul (barring a few exceptions such as Sundarar, Jnaneshwar). Perhaps Nachiketa and the others too had a physical death, with only the soul traversing to the Yamaloka, and later coming back alive, somewhat akin to Bhagavan’s second death experience (though he did not travel to any other world) at the Tortoise Rock on Arunachala where he says that his physical faculties like the heart-beat, circulation of blood and respiration had completely stopped for about fifteen minutes with the body even turning livid blue, but with his usual current of awareness continuing to remain in that state as well. Thereafter, apparently a shock passed suddenly through his body reviving respiration and circulation with enormous force bringing back the colour of life on the skin.

Another striking point with Nachiketa’s and Savitri’s episodes is the period of penance for ‘three days’. Perhaps it has some spiritual significance as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa too experienced nirvikalpa samadhi in a matter of only three days leaving his Advaitin initiator Totapuri stunned as he himself had attained the state only after years of practice. Sri Ramakrishna’s utter disregard for food and water, and one pointed concentration on the objective instructed by the Guru and the subsequent attainment of the goal in a mere three days was hailed as absolutely phenomenal by his own instructor.

With respect to the boons, one may wonder that if they encountered Death only at the mental realm by keen enquiry, how was it possible to obtain them from Yama. This perhaps may be interpreted in the light of questions posed by Ganapati Muni in Ramana Gita on worldly desires. Jnaanaayaiva samaadhih kim kaamaayaapyyuta kalpate and Kaamena yogamabhyasya sthitaprajno ...saaphalyam adhigachchati va na va. He asks Bhagavan whether the spiritual practice would confer
only jnana on the sadhak or would it also fulfill his worldly desires. He further asks that if a sadhak starts his practice with the objective of getting his worldly desires fulfilled and eventually attains Self Knowledge, what would be the fate of those desires.

Bhagavan says, *Kaamaarabdhassamaadhistu kaamam phalati nischitam* – Such worldly desires with which the sadhak sets out before attaining jnana would certainly be fulfilled. Perhaps Nachiketa strongly wanted to appease his father after having an altercation over his donating senile cows to the Brahmins. And so on attaining jnana, this desire of his was fulfilled, along with his other desire to know the secret fire sacrifice that takes one to heaven. Likewise, Savitri too would have wanted her father’s lineage to continue, and during her year’s stay at the hermitage, she would have strongly desired for the restoration of Dyumatsena’s kingdom and eyesight, as also the longevity of Satyavan. So when she won over Yama (attained Self-knowledge), these desires were naturally fulfilled.

Sri Aurobindo in his masterpiece, the epic poem, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, beautifully correlates each of the characters in the story to different qualities and asserts that each of the characters in the story are not mere personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces, that have taken human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

He proclaims that Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance. Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save. Asvapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes. Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory.

With reference to the story of Markandeya, his faith in Lord Siva is so firm that he convinces his parents not to worry. Knowing
beforehand his foreseen death, he intensely contemplates on the Lord and with undivided devotion hugs the Siva Linga taking refuge in Him completely. When Yama throws the noose around Markandeya’s neck, his ego was no longer present having completely merged in the Self (Siva), the noose consequently landing on the neck of Siva. Since the Self is immortal, the noose has no effect on it. Siva thus bestows the boon of ‘Immortality’ on Markandeya. The implication of which is Markandeya attains enlightenment. He was no longer bound by time (kaala) or death having gained oneness with Lord Mrityunjaya and conquered death itself.

This reminds one of the second dhyana sloka of Bhagavan’s Ulladu Narpadu as stated in Sat Darsanam the meaning of which runs thus: “The ‘I’ thought is the first to die for those who have taken refuge, out of fear of death, at the feet of the conqueror of death. Thereafter they are naturally ‘immortal’. Can they ever again be assailed by the fear of death?” This perfectly relates to Markandeya with a possible minor alteration that it was with ‘total surrender’ that he took refuge at the feet of the conqueror of death, more than ‘out of fear of death’ (though the story says that fear gripped him on seeing Yama, and so he tightly hugged the Siva Linga), which ultimately led him to ‘immortality’!

Time or Kaala, as represented by Yama brings an end to all things, but Siva brings death to time itself as he is eternal and is beyond time and death. Hence he is hailed as Mahaakaala and Mrtyunjaya. The take away from the episode is that one should contemplate on Mrtyunjaya Siva like young Markandeya to attain jnana for it was Siva’s grace that saved Markandeya.

The stories of these mythological characters, together with Bhagavan’s death experience inspire the earnest sadhaks to realise the Self, with the ever flowing grace of Sad guru Ramana.

1 MaraNabhayamikkuluvan makkaLaranaaha MaraNabhavamilla Mahesan SaraNama vraarvataan sarvRoDutaan saavutraar saaveNNam saarvvaro saavadavaru/ Mrtyunjayam mrtvubhiyasritaanam ahams matir mrtvupaiti poorvam atab swabhaavaat armteshu teshu katham punar mrtvudbiyovakaashaaha.
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Fifteen

Sadhu Om

as recorded by Michael James

23rd March 1978

Sadhu Om: There was once a guru who had many disciples, most of whom were grihasthas (householders). When they came to him and asked him how to see God, he replied that what they were already doing was the right thing, and that to have a wife and children and to lead a good life was the best way. Among his younger disciples were three brothers, the eldest of whom once asked him, ‘You tell all your older devotees that the grihastha way of life is the best, so should I also get married?’ ‘Yes, certainly, that is the best thing you can do’, replied the guru. A year or two later the second brother asked him, ‘You advised my elder brother to get married, but I want you to tell me the truth: is it actually good to be married or not? Please give me the correct answer, and do not afterwards advise others to the

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.
contrary’. ‘Certainly, marriage is the best thing. I would not advise anyone differently’, the guru replied.

After a few years the two elder brothers asked him, ‘You advised us both to get married, so why is it that you have not yet given the same advice to our younger brother?’, to which he replied, ‘Because he has never asked me. You asked me and so I gave the appropriate answer for you, but he has never had any such doubt, so he seems to be fit to remain a brahmachari (celibate). He is contented just to be, so he has no inclination to get caught in the maya of family life’.

Such is the nature of a true guru. He never tells anyone to do anything unless he is asked, but nor does he ever discourage anyone from doing what they wish. That is why Bhagavan was never worried if people misunderstood or misinterpreted his teachings. He never corrected them unless they said that they did not understand. To him all this talk of ignorance and of not knowing self was like a game played by children. He could see clearly that all are only self, and that all therefore know self.

We can jokingly say that he was being hard-hearted, but it was actually his supreme grace. The greatest grace he can bestow on us is to see us as none other than himself, and his silence is the most powerful weapon he uses to remove the false ignorance of his devotees. Such blessing by mouna diksha (silence) is far more effective than blessing by sankalpa diksha (thought). In his view sastras (sacred texts) were just a game for children, because he knew that what is real can never be expressed in words, and that even his own Ulladu Narpadu could not express it adequately. This is why he often said that his real teaching is only silence.

If we can understand this, we can understand why he answered certain questions in the way he did. For example, as Swami Natananandar recorded in Sri Ramana Darsanam, a young boy once told Bhagavan that his father had asked him to repeat a certain ‘sakti panchakshari’ mantra, and asked him whether he could attain liberation thereby, as his father had told him. Bhagavan replied, ‘Yes’, so the boy then asked him whether he was also repeating the same mantra, to which Bhagavan also replied, ‘Yes’.
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

We should not worry ourselves about those devotees who were with Bhagavan for many years and yet failed to understand his teachings, nor about those who seem to have stagnated. If anyone is now stagnant, they were never really flowing. Everyone who comes to Bhagavan will typically say, ‘I have come only for moksha [liberation]’, but how many actually want to lose their individuality? In the spiritual battlefield, even if a thousand soldiers fall around us, we should not concern ourself, but should rise up and go forwards. Such courage and faith are necessary. If we sincerely follow the path taught by Bhagavan, we will never be abandoned.

No one need tell us when we should give up sravana and manana. When we are able to abide permanently as self, then we will not even think of reading or reflecting, but as long as we feel unable to remain constantly as self, we must continue to do sravana and manana. If we give up atma-vicara [self-investigation], our mind will turn to loka-vicara [investigating the world], and thus we will bind ourselves still further.

Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this with a story about three thieves in a forest, called Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Tamas wanted to kill the lost wayfarer whom they had robbed, but Rajas persuaded him that they should just tie him securely and leave him there. However Sattva returned later to untie him, and took him to the edge of the forest [maya] near his village [liberation]. There the wayfarer thanked him profusely and invited him to come to his house and be his guest, but Sattva declined saying, “I am a thief, so I cannot leave the safety of this forest.”

Bhagavan’s teachings are like Sattva. They lead us safely to the edge of the forest, but there we must leave them. In the end, we must leave even our dearest friend behind, and must return home alone [stripped of all adjuncts and gunas].

For an extremely mature aspirant, written or spoken words are unnecessary, because they can receive Bhagavan’s upadesa in silence. Many subtle truths can be learnt only in silence.

25th March 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan begins the second verse of Ekatma Panchakam with the words, ‘Even though one always exists as self’, so what he
MOUNTAIN PATH

says in that verse is intended primarily for those who are content with their natural awareness of their own existence, ‘I am’. If we are perfectly happy with the simple knowledge ‘I am’ and therefore desire nothing else, we will not attend to anything other than ‘I am’, so what need would there be then for us to enquire ‘who am I?’ or ‘whence am I?’? However, so long as we feel ‘I am a body’, ‘I am a doer’, ‘I have desires’ and so on, we will not be content with simply being aware that ‘I am’, so in such a condition it is necessary for us to enquire ‘who is this I?’ or ‘from where does this I arise?’

The self-shining existence, ‘I am’, which is known by one and all, is the ultimate truth, so it is all that we need ever know. No sadhana is needed to know it anew. Therefore Bhagavan repeatedly said, ‘You know that you exist, and that is all you need know’, because he wanted us to be content with this knowledge. There is nothing we need do, so it was only to those who asked ‘What can I do?’ that he suggested, ‘Find out who this ‘I’ is or from where it arises’.

Our outward behaviour and more importantly the behaviour of our mind can indicate how much strength we have to attend to self. If we are much concerned about what others think or say about us, we will not be able to free ourself from the tyranny of thoughts even when we try to attend to ourself. Courage is needed. If we are able to believe firmly, ‘Other people are only my own mental projections, so what does it matter what they seem to think or say about me?’, then we will have the faith and strength to abide as self, and hence we will be indifferent to praise and blame. Until then we must persevere in trying to attend to ourself, because our concern for the world will thereby fade away naturally. Such indifference is called *udasina*.

We are never actually the doer, because all actions are done only by God. Therefore there is no need for us to give up the sense of doership. All we need do is avoid assuming any doership. This is the path of surrender, and so it is an attitude that accepts the existence of God and the world. However, if we sincerely try to follow this path, then from our own experience we will gain a type of knowledge and conviction that God is doing everything, and thus our thoughts and attachments will slowly drop off. Therefore even in this path of *bhakti*
marga (devotion), it is only knowledge that gives our mind peace and quiet. In verse two of *Atma Bodha* it is said that without knowledge one cannot gain peace, which is the state of liberation.

The one essential qualification is not the ability to subside and keep quiet, but only sincere love to do so. Such love is real bhakti, and bhakti is the mother of jnana. For guru it is not a problem to give us *mukti* (liberation), just as the ocean loses nothing when one bubble is burst.

31st March 1978

**Sadhu Om:** Shortly before he left his body, seeing that everyone was weeping Bhagavan remarked, ‘It is said that the sole purpose of all that is taught in scriptures is removal of *duhkha nivritti* (misery) and attainment of *sukha prapti* (happiness), but how to remove misery, which never exists, or to attain happiness, which alone ever exists?’ That is how much weight he gave to all our misery and our sadhanas to overcome it.

In the ‘Guru’s Grace’ chapter of *Maharshi Vaymozhi* [the Tamil version of *Maharshi’s Gospel*] it is recorded that someone asked Bhagavan whether he knew anything about a group of invisible rishis who are looking after the affairs of the world, to which he replied, ‘If invisible, how to see them?’, but the questioner answered, ‘In *jnana-dristi*’, so Bhagavan explained to him that in *jnana-dristi* (the view of self-knowledge) there are no others to see. If he had been asked how he was able to enlighten others through his silence, he would have answered in a similar way: ‘In silence there are no others to be enlightened’.

Even in *Vivekacudamani* the guru’s final instruction to the disciple is to go and teach what he had been taught to other ripe souls, so we are very fortunate to be born in Bhagavan’s time and to learn from him that there are no others for us to teach. For a jnani, standing on a platform delivering a lecture is as meaningless as locking oneself in a room and repeating to oneself all that one has learnt. Even for an aspirant, it should seem absurd to want to inform anything to others.

*(To be continued)*
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.

1 The Navnath Sampradaya began to be called Nimbargi Sampradaya since the advent of Nimbargi Maharaj (1789-1885) who came from Inchegiri.
Over the years, I have seen photographs of Nisargadatta Maharaj, celebrating holy occasions (saptahs) with other disciples, and honouring their guru, Siddharameshwar. I recognized some, and now can recognize more when I look at those photos. I noticed a certain quality about these disciples that marked them out as different. Some appeared radiating an awareness, awakened perhaps, or at the least, were in a state of unshakable peace or bliss. Who were these disciples?

K.B. “Some of the prominent disciples of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj are: Ranchod Maharaj, Karwar; Gurupadeshwar Maharaj, Basavan Bhagacadi; Sadananda Maharaj, Goregaon, Bombay; Dhondopant Maharaj, Solapur; Nisargdutt Maharaj, Bombay; Nirbhadananda Maharaj, Bombay; Sadguru Kadasiddheswar Maharaj, Siddhagirimuth near Kolhapur; Sadguru Datt Maharaj, Agra; Balakrishna Maharaj Dingar, Ali Nasik; Taisaheb Maharaj, Amadosi; Ranjit Maharaj, Bombay and Ganapatrao Maharaj, Kannur.”

While I have searched books and the internet for mention of many of these accomplished disciples, I have found information about just a few: Dhondopant Maharaj of Solapur, Sadguru Kadasiddheswar Maharaj of Siddhagirimuth, Ganapatrao Maharaj of Kannur, and Ranjit Maharaj of Mumbai.

In this Part V, I shall include Bhaññath Maharaj of Mumbai, as he was always described as Nisargadatta’s gurubhai (I can only assume that he too was a disciple of Siddharameshwar, even though I do not see him in the list above). I have not focused on Nisargadatta himself, as I will write more about him in Part VI.

I have had the blessed good fortune to meet three of them: Nisargadatta Maharaj, Bhaññath Maharaj and Ranjit Maharaj.

When I visited Nisargadatta Maharaj in 1978, I noticed there was someone who came to his satsang and was given special deference.

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3 There is a Marathi website, which I was able translate a little online into English, and could discern that he indeed was a member of the Sampradaya, as there were many references to the lineage and the word Hinchgiri. The website is: http://dhondopantmaharaj.org/
Later I found out that this gentleman was also a sage, called Bhainath Maharaj, whose family name was K.A. Sabnis. He was referred to as Nisargadatta’s *gurubhai* (guru brother). Whenever Bhainath showed up at Nisargadatta’s mezzanine satsang room, or elsewhere, Nisargadatta made sure that he was comfortably seated and showed proper respect. As an example, during a speech to be given at a spiritual centre, Nisargadatta waited until Bhainath was seated before he would speak to the assembled people. Nothing seemed to start without Bhainath being shown this deference, so I began to wonder who he was.

One evening during my Mumbai visit, I was invited to dinner at Nisargadatta’s son-in-law, Mr. Hate’s home, and Bhainath’s nephew was also there at dinner. He informed me that Bhainath would be willing to meet with me in person. There was also mention that Bhainath spoke fluent English (something Nisargadatta did not). The nephew agreed to set up an appointment for noon the next day to meet and speak with Bhainath. Later that night, I had second thoughts about doing this, because shortly after meeting with Nisargadatta Maharaj, he had asked me, “Are you going to roam about?” I had been contemplating a visit to Tiruvannamalai, but wasn’t sure if I wanted to leave his side, when Nisargadatta said this to me; I took this not as a question but as a command. I didn’t want to go anywhere due to the injunction that I believed Nisargadatta had given me. So the next morning I raced over to the house where Bhainath lived and tried to cancel my appointment with him. Bhainath invited me in and said to me in English, “The truth is very simple: You are not the body and the ego is unreal.” After this, I went to the morning satsang with Nisargadatta, where I recounted the incident and he laughed after hearing about my dilemma and visit with Bhainath, and said that I was free to see anyone.

I always wondered about the relationship that Bhainath and Nisargadatta had. There was such extraordinary care, deep love and respect from Nisargadatta towards Bhainath. In researching this article I found some wonderful writing about the time Nisargadatta and Bhainath spent together in the years shortly after the *mahasamadhi*
of Siddharameshwar Maharaj. This appeared in a piece called *Meet the Sage*, which was excerpted online:

“From 1941 onwards he came in a close contact with his brother disciple, Sri Bhainath Maharaj. Everyday they usually used to go to Girgaum Chaupati [beach in Bombay] for a walk after the shop hours. They were engrossed for hours together in their discussion, the subject matter of which was nothing else but spiritualism. In those days of the Second World War, there used to be a blackout every night. Sometimes even curfew hours were on, due to communal riots and house-fires. Close by, country bombs used to explode on the open streets. Braving such tense atmosphere and unmindful of the rain or the cold winds, these two Guru bandhus were engrossed for hours together in spiritual discussions on the Chaupati sands or the Chaupati bandstand or sitting on the footsteps of a closed shop or standing at the corner of N. Powell. It was not uncommon that when they reached home it was two or three hours past midnight. Their daily routine mundane duties, however, did not suffer on that account...Sri Maharaj was much spirited and clear-cut in his talks. Sri Bhainath Maharaj had, therefore, usually to play the role of a listener. Commenting on his calm habits Sri Maharaj once said to him, ‘You are indeed very cool like Lord Vishnu. Look at me! I am like the fiery Lord Rudra...These long and subtle talks on spiritual matters helped both. This nightly spiritual fire was continuously on for 25 years.’

During my visit to meet Nisargadatta, the fact that Nisargadatta functioned as guru and Bhainath did not, intrigued me, given that Bhainath spoke fluent English and Nisargadatta did not. Why, if he spoke fluent English did he not transmit the truth? I learned later that not all of Siddharameshwar’s awakened disciples functioned as gurus, and some came to that function later in life. Some had been given the authority to initiate others via mantra initiation, through direct injunction or mystical vision.

Nisargadatta Maharaj answered a question in Chapter 83 in *I Am That*, which pertains to this subject:

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“Q. Does every knower of the Self become a Guru, or can one be a knower of Reality without being able to take others to it?

“A. If you know what you teach, you can teach what you know. Here seership and teachership are one. But the Absolute Reality is beyond both. The self-styled Gurus talk of ripeness and effort, of merits and achievements, of destiny and grace, all these are mere mental formulations, projections of an addicted mind instead of helping, they obstruct.”

Perhaps my concern about why some gurubhais were functioning as a guru and some were not is overlooking the obvious, which Nisargadatta pointed out so eloquently, of seership and teachership being one.

Ranjit Maharaj (1913–2000) also spoke about the guru in his talks recorded in the volume Illusion vs. Reality.

“MAHARAJ: When Siddharmeshwar Maharaj was there, there were no cassettes. Master must be a complete Master. He gave everything and that was his greatness. Many teachers don’t give the final understanding. One has to go beyond knowledge, where the knowledge becomes ignorance. That stage he explained to us and made us understand.”

In finding these teachings from two of Siddharmeshwar’s disciples so consistent in their pointing beyond any duality, I could feel the flow of wisdom in the lineage. This is a truly powerful transmission which has been and is available to those who are open to it. At the time I did not know much about Ranjit. I met him once years later in the 1990s when his disciples brought him to California. He spoke fluent English, and was clear and straightforward. He transmitted the Absolute beyond any duality. However, he had not always functioned as a guru, although he had been awakened for many years. He did not want to become a guru since he felt that having disciples would be a bondage. He was also shy and had great respect for his senior gurubhais. However, in 1983, at the age of 70, when faced with

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a request from Yeshwant Rao Maharaj, a son of Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, to give mantra diksha to his daughter-in-law, he could not with all due respect say no. And after that precedence, he could not refuse requests and ultimately he agreed to actively carry on the spiritual lineage. The number of his disciples then multiplied in Maharashtra and then abroad.⁷

Ranjit recounted, “I started to teach in 1983 because my Master’s granddaughter-in-law wanted me to give her a mantra. She said to me, ‘I want a mantra from you.’ If I didn’t give her a mantra, then I’d be faithless to Siddharameshwar Maharaj. So by my Master’s order and grace I started to teach, and at this moment I teach you.” [laughs]⁸

After Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj left in his body in 1981 there was still an influx of disciples who visited Nisargadatta’s Adhyatma Kendra at 10th Ketwadi Lane and some of them then made their way to Ranjit Maharaj’s apartment. In the 1990’s Ranjit started giving satsang abroad. Because of his fluency in English he was able to directly transmit the truth to them. Ranjit also translated into English lectures by Siddharameshwar based on Dasbodh which is called Amrutlaya. Keeping with the teachings of his guru, Siddharameshwar, his emphasis was i) understanding through dialogues ii) mantra initiation and iii) worship.⁹

But let’s go back to the beginning, Ranjit Maharaj was born on 4th January 1913 into an affluent Gujarati family. His father’s name was Chunnilal and his mother’s name was Vidya Gauri. When he was twelve he met Siddharameshwar. He had been very devoted to worshipping Krishna but gave it up after this encounter. He became devoted to Siddharameshwar and spent some time as a sannyasin at the request of his guru.¹⁰

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⁸ http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm
⁹ In the Preface of Illusion vs. Reality, Vol.I., Robert Wolff writes, “Worship of the Master is the pinnacle of Maharaj’s teaching and a common theme that is found throughout his dialogues.” p.1.
“In 1934, at the age of 21, Shri Ranjit Maharaj and his co-disciple Shri Devidas Maharaj took initiation to monkhood. As per his Master’s words ‘Live with the conviction that the whole world is my family,’ Shri Ranjit Maharaj and few other co-disciples who had taken monkhood had travelled to places like Patan, Viramgaum, Khandwa, Delhi and Haridwar. He had many experiences in his monkhood and followed his Master’s teachings to the core, ‘Without devotion knowledge is lame; without knowledge mere dispassion is blind – therefore there should be oneness across devotion, knowledge and dispassion.’

“Later Siddharameshwar Maharaj instructed them to be dispassionate about dispassion and renounce dispassion too. He then made them renounce the ochre cloth of a sannyasin and told them to live a normal life by surrendering all that they have or experience at the holy feet of Sadguru and to be a trustee of all that they had surrendered.”

In another interview, Ranjit further discusses this issue of renunciation: “Many people dressed up as saints and went out, for four months, six months, eight months – as they liked. After some time Siddharameshwar told them, ‘Now take off those saffron clothes and be a simple man as you were before.’ Nobody will say all these things. Many Masters are there, but they never say, ‘Take off those saffron clothes.’ He said, ‘Be a simple person. Understanding has come to you, right over you now. Why should this show be there?’ So if you understand that way, then you can easily throw off the clothes also. People want saffron clothes so then they can say, ‘Oh, they bow down at my feet at once!’ Ego remains always in the mind. So, he said, ‘Renounce the renunciation now...’”

After meeting his guru, Ranjit Maharaj continued living a normal life. Completing his schooling, he tried his hand at various jobs, including that of a bar manager, before becoming an accountant. He lived in the same small one-room apartment for over 58 years.

Another disciple, Ganapatrao Maharaj (c.1909-2004) was initiated at the age of thirteen by Siddharameshwar, lived as a brahmachari and then chose the renunciate path. While he practised meditation and devotional songs, he at the same time studied for a B.Sc degree from Fergusson College, Pune. He practised diligently during this time, having completely renounced worldly pleasures and distractions. Siddharameshwar is reported to have said to Ganapatrao’s spiritual sister, Rukminibai, “He is my true heir and successor to spread Knowledge!”

Ganpatrao, like Ranjit, spoke about Siddharameshwar asking his disciples to become sannyasins for a year.

“During a Saptah in Inchgeri in 1933 A.D. Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj said to his disciples “I am ordering you to take Sanyasa for one year. Who is ready to take it up?” Immediately upon hearing this, Shri Maharaj stood up and said he will do it. After this 7-8 other disciples also came forth. The Sanyasi disciples were instructed to follow the following rules: 1. Wear ochre robes; 2. Meditate all the time; 3. Not touch money; 4. Not ask for anything from anyone and if necessary, beg for food from others, and that too only once a day, in the afternoon; 5. Carry only articles that are absolutely essential, these could include a few spiritual texts. It was a test by fire for the disciples. The disciples chose the bank of river Krishna and carried out tapas (penance) for a year, strictly as instructed. When Ganapati came to Bijapur after completing the tapas wearing ochre robes and considerably thin, his parents were pained to see him so frail, but Shri S. S. Siddharameshwar Maharaj was immensely pleased seeing the aura around the young Ganapati.”

One of the issues I had wrestled with, when I first explored the Navnath Sampradaya, was the desire to prove that it was primarily a householder path. In observing the awakened disciples of Siddharameshwar, I found that we cannot define it as such because this transmission transcends such dualities. Just as we are pushed to go

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beyond the duality of knowledge and ignorance, we are pushed beyond the dualities of renunciation and householder life. Siddharameshwar encouraged some of his disciples to take up a renunciate life; some were encouraged to remain as renunciates, like Ganapatrao Maharaj; some actually came to him as renunciates, as in the case of the 26th Kadasiddha Muppin Muni; still others practised for a while and then were told to transcend physical renunciation like Ranjit Maharaj. Whatever the external stance, all were encouraged to transcend duality and be internally renounced, and just as importantly, renounce the concept of renunciation.

It also became evident that there is a tradition in the Navnath Sampradaya to create centres that offer the local communities temples and commemorative samadhis for the sampradaya gurus to function. These centres are located largely in Maharashtra and Karnataka: Kannur, Nimbargi, Inchegiri and Siddhigiri. Ganapatrao Maharaj (1909-2004) has been involved in uplifting whole communities, providing a straightforward transmission and at the same time providing for the basic needs of the people. It is advaitic involved engagement from the perspective of self-knowledge. He says in his *Easy Steps to Realisation*, in the section titled ‘Karma Yoga and Sanyasa Complement Each Other’:

“The Upanishadic sages and the Acharyas like Adi Shankara give importance to sanyasa, while the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga-vasishtha* give primacy to Karma-yoga. Those who uphold the supremacy of Karma-yoga do not reject sanyasa and resting exclusively in jnana state leading to moksha. According to Lokamanaya Tilak, after obtaining jnana, one can renounce worldly activities and stay in the bliss of Brahman or even better, continue the worldly life after obtaining jnana. While upholding sanyasa after jnana, Adi Shankara does not mind if the Jnani chooses to carry out karmas for the sake of uplifting the common man. However, he must take care that the karma he is engaged in does not affect his jnana.”15

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Ganapatrao was reported to have awakened by age of twenty-three and in later years, other disciples came to him for spiritual guidance. He translated the Marathi *Dasbodh* of Swami Samarth Ramdas into Kannada. He wrote *Sulabh Atmajnana*, which became a classic and was translated into Marathi, Hindi and English in which it is titled *Easy Steps to Self-Realisation*.

To give you a sense of the directness and simplicity of Ganapatrao’s teaching, here are his Ten Commandments for Spiritual Progress:

**The Dasha Sutra**

**Ten Commandments for Spiritual Progress**

1. Blessed is he whose sadhana is/ Centered on that which excludes ‘I’.
2. Why do you roam about with a lost look/While you are the Brahman!
3. Listen, child, this is the secret:/ You yourself are the Brahman/ Do not entertain any doubt in this regard.
4. Be aware of what is ‘I’ and ‘mine.’/With this awareness give up both and/ Experience Brahman!
5. One must be aware one is Brahman and/Merge oneself in the bliss.
6. By thinking of which memory fades away,/Yielding the ground to Awareness/Only those who has [sic] experienced It will know this;/ To others this is an empty delusion.
7. First one must realize Brahman/Then one must remain as Brahman.
8. In this hide-and-seek game of Brahma-vidya/One must remain as he is without becoming anything.
9. When I’m here, Ram is not to be found!/Now Ram is very much here, I’m seen nowhere!
10. Without bringing any images in-between/Instantly take off to what you are!\(^{16}\)

These ten pointers given by Ganapatrao Maharaj are direct and unambiguous. They are a straightforward affirmation of the active intent of Advaita. At once deep and profound, the truth expounded by Ganapatrao is approachable, accessible and sensible. I am struck by verse two which asks, “Why do you roam about with a lost look

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while you are the *Brahman*!” and wonder if this was a statement made by Siddharameshwar to his disciples. What I took to be Nisargadatta’s injunction for me to not roam about (I thought about looking for other spiritual experiences), is part of something larger, altogether. Ganapatrao exhorts us not to roam about in ignorance when we are already That! This explanation illuminates that moment for me, and ties me into an enquiry, springing from the ongoing tradition of the Nimbargi/Inchegiri Sampradaya.

So, some disciples renounced and then renounced the renunciation, others stayed as renunciates and some came as renunciates, which leads us to Kadasiddha Maharaj, 26th Muppin Muni. He was anointed as the 26th Mathadheepati of the (Siddhagiri) Kaneri Math, Kolhapur, Lingayat Parampara, in 1922 at the age of seventeen. The Muppin Muni has a long history, and a close connection to the Navnath / Nimbargi Sampradaya because Nimbargi Maharaj was the 22nd Muppin Muni, and then Bhausaheb Maharaj, the 23rd. I do not quite understand the flow from there as Kaadasiddheshwar (also known as Kadasiddha) received in 1935 the full transmission at the feet of Siddharameshwar Maharaj, after which he returned to the Math and resumed his responsibilities including renovation of the Kaneri Math and renaming it the Siddhagiri Math.

“He was a master in yoga and mastered all the difficult asanas, such as the Kumbhak, which he could maintain for nine minutes. He would meditate for over ten hours a day, and from 1922 to 1935 he mastered all aspects of the Hindu spiritual tradition and philosophy. He met his philosophical and spiritual guru, Siddharameshwar, in 1935. He was given a new outlook on the deep philosophical concepts and attained self-realization, or *Gyan Drishti*. He taught that concepts of sects and religions are an illusion and that everything is unified. To realize this unity is the simplest form of *Vidnyani Avastha*."

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20 The Muppin Muni Math was established in the 7th Century by Revan Nath who was the eighth of the original nine saints (Navnath). Due to his compassion and powers people called him Kada Siddha, *kaadh* meaning jungle.

K.B. Dabade, in 1998, explains further:

“Sri Sadguru Samrtha Sri Muppin Kadeshwar Guru Sri Virupaksha Kadeshwar Swami is the present head and considered to be 26th pontiff of Kaneri Muth, Siddhagiri. According to one version the 22nd or 23rd Pontiff is said to have initiated the saint of Nimargi... The birth place of the 26th pontiff is Lingsur, Gadinglaj taluk of Kolhapur District. He had education up to the 4th standard. Marathi is his mother-tongue and he also knows Kannada. He is said to have initiated more than one lakh aspirants.”

There is also account of the devotional practice carried out there, “Daily four times Pooja is performed. To the left of the main shrine there is a big hall where the photos of some saints of Nimargi Sampradaya are placed including those of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj and the saint of Umadi.”

I noticed in collecting information about the disciples that there was similarity in the form devotion to the guru was expressed. It brought me back to the devotional practices of pujas and bhajans that I observed while sitting in Nisargadatta’s mezzanine. In looking through the photos of devotional activities and accounts, pilgrimages and festivals connected with the teachers of the sampradaya one can see a common thread of devotion and strong social interaction.

Ranjit Maharaj for example, insisted on participating in the four saptahs (gatherings) each year connected with the sampradaya: Guru Purnima and Sadguru Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj’s Punyatithi at Bagewadi; Rathsaptamisaptah at Pathri; and Diwali Saptah at Mumbai. Disciples were expected to sing all four prescribed bhajans every day as they contained the essential teachings and reinforced their individual practice.

Ranjit Maharaj said,

“In our lineage, there have always been bhajans, and Siddharameshwar was also singing bhajans. He sang them up to his last”

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moment, you follow. Then, what happens? Nothing remains for you. So, you no longer want anything from him. He never wanted anything from his Master, but still why did he worship him? To honour him! To do service in honour of his Master, in honour of Reality. Only a brave man can do service. He wanted nothing. He taught us the Truth and we accepted what he taught because it is absolutely true. So the only thing that one can do after understanding is to honour Him. What else is worthwhile? Tell me! You are He. Now, what to do?"  

A disciple reported, “In spite of its very strong Advaita nature, bhakti, devotion towards one’s guru, is an important part of the teachings handed down from Bhausaheb. Both Ranjit Maharaj as well as Nisargadatta Maharaj showed exemplary devotion to their master. Despite preaching non-duality even between master and disciple, Ranjit Maharaj never failed in the performance of the daily puja and four bhajans as taught by Siddharameshwar. According to Kishor Chopda, this extreme bhakti was not a path to attain realisation, but in fact arose from there.”

For Ranjit Maharaj as for other accomplished gurus of the tradition, bhajans were prayers requesting guidance and blessings but a celebration.

“After liberation, one naturally worships his Master. Once you have understood, what is left for you to do? There is nothing to do except pray to the one who has shown you Reality. You feel so thankful, knowing that the Master is in your Heart. You and he are one.”

Ganapatrao too, speaks about honouring the gurus through awakening in a chapter called ‘The greatest service to the Sadguru’:

“The greatest service by which one can serve the Sadguru is to put into practice what he has taught. With full faith in him one must follow his instructions in letter and spirit. What is dear to the guru is atma-bodha or knowledge of Self-realisation. The guru naturally gets attracted strongly to a disciple who is constantly aware of his teachings.

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25 http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm
26 http://lifepositive.com/ranjit-maharaj-the-stateless-state
27 http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm
and tries to follow them. The disciple gives up his ego completely and experiences the supreme state of bliss of Self-realisation. Such a disciple is very close to the Sadguru.”

There are wonderful teachings from the disciples of Siddharameshwar and of course, many sincere seekers are familiar with Nisargadatta’s works, starting with *I Am That* and the many transcriptions of his talks. Ranjit Maharaj also has had some of his talks recorded and there is a two volume book called *Illusion v/s Reality: Dialogues with Shri Ranjit Maharaj On Stateless State*.

As I bring this portion to a close, I feel a great welling up of gratitude that I have been directed to explore and experience the teachings of the *gurubandhus* (guru disciples) of Nisargadatta. Had I not been requested to take up this joyous task of writing about the Navnath Sampradaya’s link to the Nimbargi/Inchegiri Sampradaya and the wealth of spiritual teachings about the Absolute, I might not have read the words of Ganapatrao and Ranjit Maharaj. Their firm conviction in the non-existence of the ego, and their continued exhortation to venerate the Master makes a powerful and unmistakable impression.

Part VI will focus on Nisargadatta and how he lived, practised and functioned as a master of the Navnath Sampradaya, even though he and the other masters of his lineage remind us there is no one there to do so. To quote Ranjit about this:

“The Master takes you to that place where there is no one to understand anything. There is no knowledge nor ignorance and so understanding has no meaning. Let everything appear within That, but say that it is not true. There is no need to change anything because it doesn’t exist. When you forget the sense of the world, which is nonsense, then you will know the real sense and Reality opens up to you.

“The Master is the greatest illusion because all that he says with full heart and frankness is false. But the false words that the Master tells you can make you reach Reality. Speaker and listener are both false. If one reaches Reality, then they become realised.”

And Ganapatrao Maharaj echoes this sentiment:

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29 [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Meeting.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Meeting.htm)
“Jnana: After all the explanation, the guru asks the disciple, ‘After giving up the body, mind, ego and others in this manner does anything remain?’ ‘Nothing remains, Sir,’ the disciple answers.

“The guru has another question, ‘You who knows that nothing remains, have remained, isn’t it?’

“The disciple answers, ‘Yes, sir. I remain as jnana. Henceforth, I will always remain aware that the awareness is me.’” 30

In the next section titled ‘Be as you always are’,

“The guru concludes with the observation, ‘You say, “I am awareness” in response to my question. In your natural state you have no reason to assert that you are awareness. So give up this need for stating your own existence and simply be as you always are. This state I the Real you this is the real state of every Jiva. It is Para-Brahma, the bedrock of everything.’” 31


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**Discontent**

D. Samarender Reddy

Not a pebble on the sea-swept shore
Is out of place;
Not a star in the deep blue yonder
Is out of place;
But we are not content.
Perhaps our discontent, too,
Is not out of place.
Bhagavan Krishna said, “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Just as the dweller in this body passes through childhood, youth, and old age, so at death he merely passes into another kind of body.”\textsuperscript{1} Bodies pass through stages but the question is, “Are you the body?” In addition, there is no restrictive rule that one must pass through all the stages of life performing the duties incumbent on them or renounce all duties in order to know who they really are.

Strange is it not that upon birth virtually every human being accepts as true, as valid, the data that their sense organs and mind perceive. Even when informed that the sense organs are extremely limited in their abilities, there are very few who enquire into this situation. Humans have coloured rods and cones in their eyes. Thus the world full of colour appears. Ears hear within a limited range,

\textsuperscript{1} Bhagavad-gita, Ch. 2., vv. 12-13.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
etc. Who stops to wonder what is really ‘out there?’ What would the data appear as, if humans had infra-red or ultra-violet rods and cones instead of their limited frequency range? Why do so few enquire into the seer? Who am I really?

The term ‘ashrama’ (from the root ‘sram’ meaning ‘weariness’, ‘toil’, ‘labour’ + ‘a’ meaning ‘not’, ‘absence’) in mainstream Brahmanic thought refers to four distinct vertical social positions within which a person pursues cultural and religious goals. As well, Ashrama is a term given to mean, ‘a place to rest from one’s toils or exertions’. Thus, we have Ramana ashrama. Intriguingly, there is a saying, “The ashrama is the guru’s body.” This provides us with an opportunity to enquire who Ramana is and what is the nature of an ashrama?

According to Hindu dharma an ideal human society is fundamentally hierarchical. Traditionally, every individual, whether disciple or Guru, will fit into one of four categories. In the empirical world, there is place for everyone. People differ from one another and these differences are both distinctive and crucial. People have different aptitudes, predilections, and abilities. In regards to social position, there are designated stages of life (ashramadharma) that emphasise the individual aspect of one’s personal development vis à vis one’s vertical ascent towards liberation from the wheel of birth and death: (brahmacarya – chaste student wherein the childhood role is played out; grihastha – married householder wherein the role of a family person is played out; vanaprastha – withdrawing forest-dweller, a serious spiritual practitioner; and sannyasin – homeless wandering renunciate ascetic). What is much less known is that the scriptures also speak of an ashrama that is beyond the four commonly known ones, i.e., atyashrama (beyond all ashramas). It is here where one may find rest, i.e., in a person who belongs to the atyashrama and/or their ashram.

In the 1930s a devotee called Perumal Swami, who had managed Sri Ramanasramam prior to 1922, instigated a court case against Ramana Maharshi and his brother Chinnaswami. The latter had taken over the management of the ashram around 1928. Perumal Swami claimed in his submission to the court that he was still the legitimate
manager of Sri Ramanasramam and attempted to support his case with some rather convoluted logic. Firstly, he declared that since Bhagavan was a *sannyasin*, he could not legally own land or property. This being so, Perumal Swami argued, Bhagavan had no rights over the property known as Sri Ramanasramam. Perumal Swami then went on to argue that since Bhagavan could not own any of the ashram’s property, he had no authority to appoint his brother to manage it. He then advanced his own case by saying that since he had been the undisputed manager at Skandasramam, where Bhagavan had lived from 1916-22, he must still be the ashram manager because neither Ramana Maharshi nor anyone else was legally competent to remove or replace him.

In court, Sri Ramana was asked:

“Question: To which *ashrama* does Bhagavan belong?
Bhagavan: *Atyashrama*.
Q: What is it?
B: It is beyond the four commonly known *ashramas*.
Q: Is it *shastraic*?
B: Yes, it is mentioned in the shastras.”

Perumal Swami’s complaint to the court conveniently ignored two important points: First, Bhagavan never claimed that he was a *sannyasin*. Since he had never been formally initiated into any order of *sannyasins*, he was still entitled to own and dispose of property. Second, Perumal Swami had voluntarily relinquished the job of ashram manager in 1922. Since that date he had neither lived in the ashram nor taken any part in its management.

Under Indian law, with the formal adoption of *sannyasa*, the *sannyasin* is legally regarded as being dead. He loses all rights to his property, which is taken over by his appointed heirs, and, if he belongs to some of the traditional orders of *sannyasa*, he has no rights to own or acquire property again. In order to refute Perumal Swami’s case, Bhagavan had to demonstrate that he belonged to an *ashrama* that permits its members to own property. In *sannyasa*, owning property

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is prohibited. A member of the other three ashramas face no such restriction. However, instead of declaring himself to be either in the householder or hermit ashrama, he declared that he was beyond all ashramas.

Though a brahmin by birth who had his upanayana, or brahmin thread ceremony, before he came to Tiruvannamalai at the age of seventeen, he threw away his sacred thread and had his head shaved within an hour of his arrival. He then threw away the three rupees on his person.

In throwing away his thread he renounced his caste and in shaving his head he indicated that he had embarked on a life of physical renunciation without taking the formal step of adopting sannyasa. He thence remained in this state of atyashrama as he was not attached to anything, neither wealth or status or approval for his anomalous condition. In the early years of his stay on Arunachala one person wanted him initiated into a sannyasin lineage but even then he declined.

A few weeks after the first cross-examination, Perumal Swami’s lawyer continued.

Q: You spoke of atyasrama (beyond the asramas — beyond the orders of life) the other day. Is there any authority for it? Is it mentioned anywhere?

Maharshi: Yes — in the Upanishads, the Suta Samhita (Skanda Purana), Bhagavata, Bharata ³ and other works.

Q: Are there any restrictions or disciplines for that state?
B: There are characteristics of it mentioned.
Q: There are Gurus for each ashrama. Is there a Guru for atyashrama?
B: Yes.
Q: But you do not admit a Guru.
B: There is a Guru for everyone. I admit a Guru for me also.

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³ For atyasrama, refer to Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, v. 1-15; Svetasvatara Up. VI. 21; Tejobindu Up. I. 47-48; Suta Samhita-Mukti Khanda Ch. V. v. 9, 14-43; Sivamahatmya Khanda Ch. V. 32,37,55.
Q: Who is your Guru?
B: The Self.
Q: For whom?
B: For myself. The Guru may be internal or external. He may reveal himself internally or externally.
Q: Can the atyashrami own property?
B: There is no restriction for them. They may do what they please. Their conduct is not regulated according to rules or codes.4

For the people who belong to castes, elaborate *ashrama dharmas* or codes of behaviour for each of the stages of life have been laid down by eminent persons well versed in the sastras. These rules are always compulsory for those people who have a caste and an ashrama. However, the caste and *ashrama dharmas* do not bind those, either male or female, who have attained clear knowledge of Brahman.

“One of his songs hails Sri Bhagavan as ‘Ramana Sad-Guru’. Once when it was being sung Sri Bhagavan himself joined in. The devotee who was singing it laughed and said, ‘This is the first time I have heard anyone singing his own praise.’

“Sri Bhagavan replied, ‘Why limit Ramana to these six feet? Ramana is universal.’”5

The literal translation of an *atyashramin* is, “one who is beyond the *ashramas.*” Alternately, it can mean, “one who is in the highest possible *ashrama.*” Thus, *atyashrama* means, “the ultimate where that ‘one’ rests, who has nothing to rest from (or who has no toil or labour to do).” Thus the term *atyashramin* refers to a *jnani* and a *jnani* alone.

Caste and stages of life are imaginary things imposed on the body through delusion. They have nothing to do with the Self, the Absolute, and one who knows this is called an *atyashramin*. He or she sees no differentiation. Devotees exist due to differentiation and live in the world of multiplicity. They identify with their physical body. Out of compassion the Self assumes a form and appears as a body to bestow grace upon them.

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Ashram Kitchen view from the Gosala lane
Introduction
The condition for the successful pursuit of the enquiry is the giving up of all the ambitions and the means for this is the giving up of the ego. While this is the true path, there are those, who wish to feed the ego, such as craving for supernatural powers. This desire would subvert all spiritual progress. This idea is presented in the next verse, which deals with the irrational desire for attainment of supernatural powers (siddhis) as mentioned by Bhagavan in Ulladu Narpadu verse 35.

Verse 15

Those deluded men, without realising that they themselves are activated by the Divine power, strive to achieve supernatural powers. They are like the cripple who declared, “If only someone could hold me up for battle, what are these foes to me!”

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine Ramanodhayam, dedicated to Bhagavan.
The individual soul or *jiva* is not real but only a phantom entity. It is not self-acting but acts according to the predetermined path, which in turn is subject to the cosmic power or *maya* of the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is identical or the same as the real Self. Due to their ignorance of this truth, people think that they can accomplish their ambition solely by their own effort by careful planning.

The primary ignorance is that there is in existence no individual self but only a phantom created by nescience. Hence no independent power actually resides in him. The power by which mind and body, the very life itself function resides in God alone. To that power, all the creatures belong.

This being so, it is vain to think of achieving supernatural powers, neither for enjoying superior pleasures of for effecting great improvements in the world-process, with an intention of uplifting the human race. The analogy given here illustrating the absurdity of this desire or ambition is the story of the cripple, who boasted that he by himself would slaughter an entire enemy of invaders, if only someone would hold him aloft in the erect posture. All these desires for abnormal powers only tend to strengthen the ego and thus, postpone liberation.

In order to impress on the aspirant that all the *siddhis* fall within the ambit of *maya* and hence are false, and that it is foolish to develop desires for them, Bhagavan says that even the common life of men and other creatures can be termed as a result of *siddhis* and these have not made life a happy one. The so-called *jiva* (limited self) who has no reality of its own, being merely a mental conception, somehow gets hold of a body and through it, live in the world. This itself is a miracle, which, being a common occurrence, does not cause wonder. Are these *siddhis* craved by many deluded yogis, more wonderful than these? As the worldly life does not seem to be happy, so it seems life with the aid of *siddhis* will prove to be happy. Any material achievement does not bring joy and contentment in the real sense. The nature of the mind is to never be content with what it has achieved; it ever craves for something new. Wisdom consists in learning this truth and
taking care not to allow the mind to cherish desires for something other than itself.

The next verse shows that for those who go after siddhis, it is difficult to reach the stage of mukti.

Verse 16

Since it has been declared that total peace of mind is itself liberation, how can those, whose minds are tied to attaining siddhis or supernatural powers — the attainment of which is impossible without active effort of the mind — ever reach the state of mukti?

Commentary

In this verse Bhagavan points out that the individual who is hankering after siddhis, has to go by a path diametrically opposite to the one that leads to mukti. Here, the truth is laid bare: that mukti is that perfect peace which consists in one residing in one’s own true self, which transcends the mind where these desires take root and grow.

Bhagavan eloquently asks here, “Since absolute peace of mind alone is mukti, or liberation from the knots of delusion, tell me, how can those whose minds are tethered to the desire for achieving super-natural powers, which cannot be attained without the activity of the mind, achieve mukti which is the state of total non-movement of the mind?”

The very first words of this verse, Chittanonttin santi which means peace of mind, indicate the state in which we abide in total dissolution and absolute peace, the state of true Being, which is bereft of any mental movement or activity. Only in that state of total peace can we experience true self knowledge. The state of true knowledge can free us from the bondage of limited existence as a jiva. This limited existence is caused by our ignorance that we are other than the infinite Cosmic Consciousness. Bhagavan Ramana describes this state of mukti as Siddhi, which means ‘that which is attained’, because it is the eternally attained state of true Being.
The rhetorical question expressed by Bhagavan in this verse is the core idea of attaining eternal happiness. Since we can experience eternal absolute joy only in the perfectly peaceful state of liberation, where true self-knowledge has dawned, the state in which all mental movements have ceased, it is apparent that such experience of total joy cannot be experienced if the mind is tossed around by desires for the sake of any form of siddhi.

So long as our mind is active, it is not possible to know our true self, because the true self is synonymous with total peace. Mental activity arises when we imagine ourselves to be a limited form in a corporeal body. All the incessant activity ceases only when our mind dissolves in deep sleep. As soon as the mind again rises either in waking state or dream, again we imagine ourself to be body-mind complex and engage in dualistic activities. The rising of the mind obscures the true self of perfect peace and bliss. This has been clearly explained by Bhagavan in the third section of Nan Yaar.

Saint Manickavachakar also expresses the same idea in the Siva Puranam:

*Mattram manam kazhiya nindra maraiyon* meaning, “When the activities of the mind ceases, the Lord comes and establishes himself there.” Also in Devikalottaram, Bhagavan states that samsara is a state where the chittam (mind) engages in activity.

*(To be continued)*

**The Sea**

Patrick Roberts

The lunatic sea is ever bound to beat  
Some deep homeless rhythm,  
Pounding, liquid pounding,  
Sounding out the earth’s solidity -  
As permanent as sand,  
As substantial as an echo.
The search and discovery of a guru who is competent to guide a spiritual seeker is of vital importance in Hinduism. Without the guiding wisdom and compassion of the guru the seeker is often lost. The Hindu scriptures have identified the relationship between a guru and a sishya with several categories according to the individual temperament of the seeker. The principal attitudes are: i) *shanta*, the peaceful love for God; ii) *dasya*, the attitude of a servant; the example of this approach is Palaniswami’s devotion towards Bhagavan at Gurumurthum; iii) *sakhyā*, the attitude of a friend such as the attitude of Ranga towards Bhagavan; iv) *vatsalya*, the attitude of a mother towards her child such as Mudaliar Patti towards Bhagavan; v) *madhura*, the attitude of a woman towards her lover; the attitude of Mirabai towards Giridhar (Lord Krishna) exemplifies this path.

Louis Buss is a British author. He studied politics at Durham University and until recently, worked as a teacher. His first novel, *The Luxury of Exile*, won a Betty Trask Award in 1996. He is the son of the late Robin Buss, film critic and translator of French classics.
Among the devotees of Bhagavan there were many different ways of approach to their master. Some regarded him as a friend such as Devaraja Mudaliar who happily talked to Bhagavan about all his family news and troubles. Ramaswami Pillai considered himself a servant of Bhagavan and did all he could to make Bhagavan’s life comfortable. There were others who were in such awe of Bhagavan that they did not dare speak to him at all. Muruganar, said to be among the deepest of devotees, sang innumerable verses in praise, for the more he realised Bhagavan’s greatness, the more he was inspired. For many devotees the dominant attitude was one of shanta, peace.

Among the Westerners who came to Bhagavan the example of Alan Chadwick stands out for its longevity and for his close proximity to the master. He was fortunate enough at last to find a guru in the 1930s whom he could revere as well as call a friend. The names alone tell you what an unusual friendship it was for those times.

In the India of 1935, there were not many men with a name like Alan Chadwick who could genuinely say they were intimately connected with someone called Sri Ramana, or as Bhagavan was commonly called in those days, the Maharshi. Britain was still more or less in command and ruled India for another twelve years or so before Independence came in 1947. Due to the cultural, social and political divides between them, an Englishman and an Indian would have had normally the briefest of acquaintanceship. For British rule being what it was, the most likely relationship for an Englishman and an Indian would have precluded close friendship. There would have been official government activity, business links, and social relations in the higher social circles but for the most part each side kept to its own. By and large the most fraternising was between the Indian royalty and the British upper classes. In general both the Indian and English sides understood the minute differentiations of social class and abided mostly by them with exceptions proving the rule. Alan Chadwick was an exception. Though a sterling example of an upper middle class Englishman born to rule, he broke through all the social and religious barriers.
An early photograph of Bhagavan with Chadwick and devotees
Whatever else Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Major Alan Wentworth Chadwick may have been, they were friends, and their friendship stood British India on its head. Far from taking a superior position, Alan obeyed Bhagavan’s every command without an instant’s hesitation. Indeed, the Englishman’s servitude was so complete that he would suffer a toothache rather than visit the dentist without explicit permission from his Indian master. While other Englishmen were busy arresting political agitators seeking political freedom and locking them in prison, our Alan, confined himself for years in a small cottage with basic amenities far from what they would have called civilisation.\(^1\) Though he did have a servant, he was dependent, like most people at that time, on buckets of water brought to his room, hurricane lamps at night and appalling heat during the summer that his English body was not prepared for. And all this for the sake of his guru and friend, Sri Ramana. At the ashram he broke all the accepted British rules of behaviour and bowed down at Bhagavan’s feet, deliberately and formally stretching himself, all 6’4” of him, out on the floor whenever he came into the hallowed presence of the master.

This unusual couple first met on 1st November, 1935. Coming from a devout Christian background, Chadwick cannot have been unaware of the symbolism when he fixed the date of his arrival in Tiruvannamalai: for he travelled towards the Ashram on the night of Halloween (‘Holy evening’), and it was on the morning of All Saints’ Day that he first beheld Bhagavan. In the liturgical calendar Chadwick knew so well, many of the famous saints have a special day reserved for their worship. But on 1st November we remember all those saints who do not have a particular day of their own, thus ensuring that all the saints are duly honoured. It could therefore be described as the day when we celebrate the saints in general, or the notion of sainthood as an ideal. And it was in the hope of joining this great communion that Chadwick travelled to Tiruvannamalai in 1935.

\(^1\) His cottage consisted of a large main room with a verandah, bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen plus a room for his servant at the back. It was surrounded by a flower garden and was the nicest private accommodation in the ashram.
Several months had by then passed since he’d read Paul Brunton’s *A Search in Secret India*, whose descriptions of Bhagavan and his life were illustrated by a couple of photographs. So, although mere words and pictures could never prepare you for the impact of seeing the Maharshi in the flesh, Chadwick did arrive that first morning with some idea of what to expect. On his side, Bhagavan would have known that an Englishman was due to appear that day, eager to make spiritual progress under his guidance; for Chadwick had written ahead in advance to make the arrangements, and his letters may even have revealed some details of his religious background and development. If so, they would have made fascinating reading.

Chadwick had become spiritually inclined at the age of 16, whilst attending St Edward’s, a highly religious public school in Oxford. By the time he moved down the road to The Queen’s College at the age of nineteen, he had made up his mind to become a priest. In this he would be following not only in the footsteps of his father, but of both grandfathers as well. If he’d been born in their era, the devout young man would surely have gone ahead and been ordained, but by the time Chadwick started university in 1909, the intellectual and spiritual landscape had changed beyond all recognition. As science raced into the future, so the figure of Jesus Christ receded into history. The more we learnt, the less omniscient and godly Our Lord appeared.

Meanwhile, the Bible itself, which for Chadwick’s priestly forebears would have been completely sacrosanct, was being subjected to modern methods of textual and historical criticism. As they searched for the historical Jesus, theologians in dog-collars were questioning the truth of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection itself. The evidence suggests that Chadwick came into direct contact with these radical new ideas at university, and that they had a devastating effect. All we can say for certain is that he dropped out after two years without finishing his degree. Instead of becoming a priest, he disappeared to Canada, where he took a job as a surveyor. From then on, he was never part of English society again.

Only during the First World War did Chadwick briefly fit back in. The moment war was declared, the drop-out hurried home from
Canada to enlist, and for the next four years he behaved exactly as an Englishman of his class was expected to behave. But once he'd been discharged from the army, Chadwick vanished abroad again. After that, he frittered his life away as a sort of gentleman tramp, wandering from country to country and from one menial job to the next. There were sporadic bouts of meditation, but there were also love affairs, along with much drinking. All in all, it would be difficult to invent a more perfect modern type of the prodigal son. Having been born into a rich Christian inheritance, Chadwick now disappeared to distant lands, where he recklessly squandered it all. Yet the roots of this profligacy were to be found not in the prodigal’s character, but in his times. As he was to prove once he’d surrendered himself to Ramana Maharshi, this Chadwick was as unswervingly loyal and utterly devout as any of his priestly ancestors. He’d just had the misfortune to be born in an era when the old spiritual certainties were crumbling on all sides. The Victorian solutions of his father and grandfathers didn’t work anymore. For them, the Anglican priesthood had been the most obvious and logical doorway to salvation. But when Chadwick’s turn came, the door had been slammed in his face.

So that first meeting in 1935 was momentous and climactic in every sense. From Chadwick’s personal point of view, it marked the end of his long exile in the spiritual wilderness. All those years of wandering and futility came to an end the moment he finally set eyes on Sri Ramana Maharshi. Yet the scene has a wider resonance, too. For Chadwick is a question-mark in human form, a perfect symbol of the spiritual problems that beset the West in the scientific age. The young priest who loses his faith and then drinks his way aimlessly from land to land somehow stands for us all. For twenty-five years, Chadwick had roamed the world in search of an answer. On All Saints’ Day 1935, he finally found it.

From the outside, it looked like a first encounter. After all, one of the parties had spent his entire adult life in Arunachala, whilst the other had never till now set foot on Indian soil. How could they have met before? Yet here is how Chadwick recounts the momentous occasion in his *A Sadhu’s Reminiscences*:
“To try and describe my reactions when I first came into the presence of Bhagavan is difficult. I felt the tremendous peace of his presence, his graciousness. It was not as though I were meeting him for the first time. It seemed that I had always known him. It was not even like the renewal of an old acquaintanceship. It had always been there though I had not been conscious of it at the time. Now I knew.”

So, despite all outward appearances, this was not the start of a new friendship, or even the renewal of an old one. The Good Shepherd never for a moment abandons his sheep, though he may conceal himself from time to time, disappearing behind a tree or the brow of a hill. That morning in 1935 marked the glorious moment when he came into view once more, and Chadwick immediately understood that he’d been there all along. Through all those years — from the Christian devotion of his youth, through the crisis of the lost vocation and the long period of aimless wandering that had followed — Sri Ramana Maharshi had been silently guiding him back home.

“Chadwick was with us before,” Bhagavan was to say, “he was one of us. He had some desire to be born in the West, and that he has now fulfilled.”

When the prodigal son finally wends his way back to his father’s feet, he is greeted with a great feast and treated as the guest of honour. A special chair was duly laid on for Chadwick. The other devotees in the Hall that morning were of course sitting cross-legged on the floor in a position almost impossible for anyone to assume who is not initiated into it from childhood, and for weeks to come the Englishman remained blissfully unaware that they all considered it offensive to occupy a chair in the presence of the Guru. The feast itself consisted of the spiritual food for which Chadwick had been hungering for so many years. If Chadwick was a question-mark in human form, then now he was finally to be satisfied with all the answers he so desperately wanted.

Yet if he also symbolised the entire West with all its modern dilemmas and doubts, then it is interesting to note that this first

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3 Ibid., p.12.
conversation was all about Christianity. In subsequent discussions, Chadwick would ask about meditation and the nature of cosmic consciousness, but his most urgent need was to solve the burning riddle of the Gospels which had perplexed him since his youth. From the jotted sketch in *Talks*, it appears that he and Bhagavan discussed the symbolism of the Crucifixion, Christ’s cry of despair from the cross, the conversion of St Paul and the mystery of the Trinity. All in all, Chadwick’s questions were very much those one might expect from a priest who’d lost his vocation. And Bhagavan pronounced on these Christian mysteries with a supreme authority that left no room for further doubt.

He talked to Chadwick all morning, right the way through till lunch. As a newcomer to the ashram, Chadwick had no idea how highly favoured he was. He didn’t yet realise that Bhagavan would generally sit in silence for hours or even days on end, and that when he did answer a question, it was usually with a pithy statement of a few short words. Given the symbolic resonance of Chadwick’s life, it is impossible not to feel that this unusually long first conversation also has a wider significance. This was Bhagavan’s message to the West. The Gospels are the great question with which all spiritual Westerners find themselves confronted. Sri Ramana Maharshi is the answer, the modern solution to the ancient riddle. Now, in a series of revelatory statements he announced himself.

All new friendships start with an exchange of information. We naturally want to know what the other person believes and what they have gone through in life. Chadwick explained it all in the ordinary way, allowing the information to come out in the course of conversation. But Bhagavan was a great spiritual teacher, a famous man about whom books had been written. Rather than explaining his life and ideas, he could simply direct his new friend to the literature.

The first thing he asked Chadwick to read was *Who Am I?*, the little pamphlet that contained the essence of his philosophy. The second was *Self-Realisation*, which told the extraordinary story of his life to date. Much of this reading would have been done in the large
Alan Chadwick on the verandah of his house
room, now long since demolished, which Chadwick shared with Annamalai Swami for his first three months in the Ashram. Here Bhagavan himself would sometimes stop by on his morning walk to chat with the new arrival. Chadwick may well have been engrossed in *Self-Realisation* at the very moment when Ramana Maharshi appeared at the doorway. How extraordinary it would have been to look up from some enchanting story of Gurumurtham or Virupaksha Cave and find that the hero of those old fairy tales had materialised in the room before you.

Yet the familiar ease Chadwick had felt from the start was such that he didn’t even stand up when the Maharshi appeared there, leaning on his stick whilst a respectful attendant followed with his water-pot. Chadwick’s failure to rise, like his continued use of that chair in the Old Hall, gave unconscious offence to the Indian devotees. But his friend Sri Ramana knew his heart and understood his feelings. Bhagavan was a man with no ego so he never cared if people treated him like a god or if, when he sat in the Old Hall, they sang the praises of Arunachala Siva, burnt incense and waved lights in the daily pujas of formalised worship. He was like some absolute monarch who was embroiled in the elaborate formalities of the court. But in Chadwick’s room he put all that ceremony behind him for a while. Here he was Sri Ramana, stopping by like an ordinary person for a chat with his English friend Alan. “He might pick up my pocket-book and take everything out of it, a photograph, a membership card and any odds and ends it might contain, remark on each thing and ask some question about it. It might have been embarrassing but luckily there was nothing questionable in the wallet. Not that Bhagavan would have minded, for there could be nothing questionable or otherwise for him.”

Chadwick knew how to fire a gun, drive a car and ride a horse. He knew how to hail a cab, how to check into a hotel and tip a bellboy, and even how to lay a railway. There was no end to the trivial things that Chadwick knew, yet he also understood that Bhagavan, who

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4 Formal pujas only began after the consecration of the Mother’s temple. Pujas were never done in the Old Hall where Bhagavan sat and they were never done to him directly.
lived an apparently circumscribed life, knew something far greater than all the knowledge and experience Chadwick had gained from his endless peregrinations.

During the weeks after Chadwick’s arrival, their remarkable friendship blossomed. As a pioneer during the war, Chadwick had been responsible for digging and construction. Now he got into the habit of joining Bhagavan and Annamalai Swami on their daily tours of the Ashram building works, and no doubt he was able to offer a few words of expert advice. Of course, it was also another excuse to spend more time with Sri Ramana. While the Indians had their siesta, Alan would slip into the Old Hall and offer to relieve Sri Ramana’s attendant of his duties. The offer was usually accepted, and so Chadwick would find himself all alone in the little room with the spiritual colossus of the century. Alas, Chadwick was a very modest and rather secretive person, and we will never know what passed between him and Bhagavan at those private audiences. But it seems safe to assume that Chadwick revealed everything about his past, which was perhaps why Bhagavan started humorously referring to him as ‘Father Chadwick’.

There can be few more pleasant experiences in life than making a new friend, getting to know one of those people with whom we feel immediately in tune. When the new friend is Sri Ramana Maharshi himself, the experience must be utterly intoxicating. Yet, no matter how magical it may all have been, Chadwick was not here just to make friends. He had come to solve once and for all the spiritual questions that had always troubled him, to realise in himself the great truth he had been seeking since his youth. Given his highly religious background and the years he’d already spent meditating, he might naturally have expected to make rapid progress with a teacher of Bhagavan’s stature to guide him. But, as so often happens in spiritual life, things were not as simple as they initially appeared.

On 5th February 1936, Chadwick frankly expressed his mounting disappointment and frustration:

“It is said that one look of a Mahatma is enough; that idols, pilgrimages, etc. are not so effective. I have been here for three
months, but I do not know how I have been benefited by the look of Maharshi.”

Bhagavan gave a well-known reply: if the Mahatma was a spark, then the different categories of men coming into contact with him were like gunpowder, charcoal and coal. Chadwick might have arrived here hoping that, like gunpowder, he would instantly ignite, but it hadn’t happened. So now he would simply have to accept that he was in one of the other categories and that the fire would take longer to kindle than he’d originally hoped.

So it was that, within a few weeks of this conversation, Chadwick settled in the Ashram on a more permanent basis. In February 1936, he moved into the little cottage which he was to occupy, with only one interruption, until his death in 1962. It was a very small dwelling for such a large man to inhabit, and a very modest one for a relatively wealthy Englishman of independent means. Indeed, by any worldly standards Chadwick’s new home was not large, but in spiritual terms Chadwick’s cottage was the Taj Mahal. To live at the feet of Arunachala was already a rare blessing, but to have your own personal dwelling within the confines of Ramanasramam itself was beyond all good fortune. This extraordinary privilege has only ever been extended to two or three others, and Chadwick will always remain the only Westerner to have enjoyed it. From now on, Alan and Sri Ramana were almost next-door neighbours, separated from each other only by the short walk along the edge of the Pali Thirtham tank. Having personally supervised the construction of Chadwick’s cottage, the Maharshi further blessed his arrival by attending the consecration ceremony in person. Shortly afterwards, when Alan was temporarily away from the Ashram, Sri Ramana gave further evidence of his solicitude by noticing a leak in the guttering, and instructing Annamalai Swami on how to repair it.

Like everything else in this remarkable story, Chadwick’s cottage is a symbol that works on a number of levels. By moving into this little cottage, Chadwick proved his determination to become enlightened

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at all costs, his willingness to make sacrifices and turn his back on the world in pursuit of his spiritual goals. Its location within a stone’s throw of the Old Hall also symbolised his unique position at the heart of the Ashram. From now on, he would always be part of Bhagavan’s innermost circle, a small group which was otherwise almost exclusively Indian. The cottage therefore also symbolises that the West has a central part to play in the Ashram. Chadwick’s humble dwelling is, so to speak, its embassy in Arunachala. In welcoming Chadwick so warmly and supervising the construction of his new home, Bhagavan was welcoming us all. Now we too will always have our place a stone’s throw from the Old Hall. So the cottage is also a symbol of Bhagavan’s global significance, and thus of his own greatness and universality. As Chadwick himself was at pains to point out, Bhagavan came for the whole world, and he had a special message for the West. Of course, Sri Ramana was a Hindu, just as Jesus was a Jew. But the Maharshi, like the Christ, came for all souls. And there could be no better symbol of this than the dwelling he constructed at the centre of his Ashram for the most Christian of his devotees. After losing his priestly vocation, the young Englishman had wandered the world like a lost sheep in search of his shepherd. Now Father Chadwick had finally come home.

On a more personal and intimate level, that little cottage simply symbolises the friendship between Alan and Sri Ramana. Its construction cemented their new relationship. Alan had moved in. From now on until the end of Sri Ramana’s life, they would be ever the best of friends.

Yet this most loyal of Englishmen had only been living in his new home for three years when his friendship was put to its severest test.
Elephant steps, Ashram
Letting Go

Mandodari’s Quest for Sita

Neera Kashyap

In Valmiki’s Ramayana, Ravana’s wife Mandodari surfaces with a single soliloquy only when her husband has been slain by Rama – his body clothed in yellow garments and dazzling bracelets like a dark-hued cloud once riven by lightning – now riven by so many arrows that she cannot embrace it. Her address to her dead husband is a rich mixture of grief, attachment, horror, regret, awareness and acceptance. It also echoes the recognition of a woman – a chief queen – who felt she was invincible through the protection of her father – the King of the danavas, her consort – the Lord of the Titans, and her son – the conqueror of Indra, but in the end must stand alone, stripped of all protection barring the strength of her awareness as witness to the implacable turn of Destiny.

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In her soliloquy, Mandodari swings between grief and pride, disbelief and objectivity, nostalgia and awareness – an acute awareness of the salient causes that led to a tragedy so colossal that it wiped out an entire race. She takes pride in the boons that her husband won through hard penance from Brahma, the Creator himself. But she also displays pride in her husband’s excesses, protected as he was from the power of these boons: to instill terror in the great sages and illustrious *gandharvas*, to use magic in battle, to utter insolent threats in the presence of the enemy, to rob the Gods, *asuras* and men of their daughters, to plunge the widows of foes into mourning. All this she tolerates because she believes in Ravana’s unlimited valour and strength – as unsurpassed conqueror, as support of family and attendants, as guide of the people, as saviour of the Titan race.

When Brahma grants boons to Ravana as reward for his great penance in subduing the senses, Ravana seeks immunity from *devas*, *danavas* and *rakshasas*, not bothering to include the meek human race. Mandodari echoes the same dismissal. She cannot believe that her husband could have been defeated by ‘a mere mortal, a mere man, a wanderer in the forest.’ But she is no fool. She has heard of the feats of this ‘wanderer’ in Janasthana – shades of things to come. Rama first kills mountainous demon Viradha who dares hold his wife Sita in his lap, then Ravana’s brother Khara along with his commanders Dushana and Trishira and 14,000 Titans. Then on his way to the kingdom of the monkey kings in search of Sita, Rama kills the demon Kabandha, then the mighty monkey king Bali himself, re-instating Bali’s unlawfully exiled brother Sugriva to the throne of Kishkinda. And Sugriva’s army chieftain Hanuman audaciously enters Lanka, inaccessible to the Gods themselves.

She counsels her husband. There is only the briefest of references to Mandodari counseling Ravana not to foster enmity with Rama. But the suggestion is that she counsels him consistently and unrelentingly: “How often did I address you, saying, ‘Have we nothing to fear from Raghava?’ but you did not heed me. These are the consequences,” she says.
That her husband who attained inconceivable powers by subduing his senses should be conquered by his senses, in turn, is obvious to her in her address. There is a foreshadowing of this in the laments of the women who gather to mourn the death of their menfolk after Mandodari’s invincible son Indrajit is killed and Ravana’s army routed.

The women refer to Ravana’s arrogance on account of the boons he received, his not heeding the wise counsel of his brothers Vibhishina and Kumbhakarna to return Sita whom he forcibly abducted, and his unawareness of the omens that presaged complete destruction by a force called Rama. Mandodari gets a clear glimpse of this force. First she considers her husband’s death by Rama, a human being, as destiny and then dismisses this. Next, she considers him being killed by Indra, the Lord of the gods, but dismisses this again – her husband being more powerful than the celestials. Then with riveting awareness, she pronounces, ‘Assuredly it was that great Yogi, the Supreme Soul, the Eternal Spirit who was your slayer. He has no beginning, middle or end, the most High, greater than Mahat (cosmic intellect), the Support of Nature…’ She finally sees in Rama this force manifested, the force of the everlasting Vishnu who carries the conch, the discus and the mace and to whom prosperity belongs.

This awareness comes early in her address. Yet the heart of her soliloquy reveals a woman who is attached to her husband physically, emotionally and through the fatalism of fortune. She refers to his charming eyebrows, brilliant complexion and arched nose; to his beauty, splendour and radiance which rivalled the moon, the lotus and the sun. She speaks of how they sported together on famous mounts and woods and the gardens of the gods in a chariot of incomparable magnificence, beholding innumerable countries ‘whilst now I am deprived of all pleasures and enjoyments by your death, O Hero!’ She feels transformed as if into another, condemned by the fluctuations of kings to widowhood as the final period of her life. Her grief is rendered through images of comparison: ‘Having rested on sumptuous couches, O King of the Titans, how is it that you are now sleeping on the earth, the dust your coverlet?’
Even through her attachment, desire and grief, Mandodari does not lose her objectivity. She sees that even while possessing valour, Ravana misused his power to assume any form at will by using disguise as deception. She wonders with horror how he could have been so base as to carry away a woman by luring her husband Rama away with the help of an illusory deer. She sees that despite his famed valour, he had been so intoxicated by his own powers that he had separated Sita from Laxmana's protection to forcibly carry her away. She nearly utters a curse: ‘Since all the Gods with Agni at their head feared you, you were not instantly destroyed when you did lay brutal hands on that slender-waisted lady.’ But her curse is present in her knowledge that the women widowed through this war, firm in their duty, devoted to their husbands, submissive to their Gurus had cursed him in their grief, and so brought about his retribution.

There is no indication that Mandodari meets Sita while she is held prisoner in Lanka – neither in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, nor in twelfth century poet Kamban's Tamil *Ramayana*. Yet, it is by confronting the reality of Sita that Mandodari reaches her finest moment. She is fully aware that the key to her husband’s lust, anger and ultimate destruction lay in his infatuation with Sita. For a moment, she sees it in physical terms: that he had possessed other women who were far more beautiful than Sita, but in his infatuation with Sita had not realised this. She raises the bar. She sees Sita as nobler than Arundhati who in Puranic literature is the wife of Sage Vasishtha, an epitome of chastity, wifely devotion and conjugal bliss. Then flow her famous words, ‘Not by birth, nor in beauty, nor in qualities is Sita better than me – not even my equal. Only, you did not know.’ Then she realises what it is that had obsessed her husband: ‘O My Lord, the asceticism of that lady faithful to her husband, has consumed you!’

There are innumerable re-tellings of the *Ramayana*. The written versions were often changed by professional reciters to suit contemporary aspirations and thinking. Sometimes, the story reflected significant variations that changed the very concept of the character and the meaning of the event associated with her/him. In the book, *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology* edited by Malashri Lal and
Namita Gokhale (Penguin India and Yatra books, 2009), there is an essay by Smita Tewari Jassal in which she describes a moving encounter between Mandodari and Sita as depicted in Bhojpuri women’s songs.

In essence, the songs sing of Mandodari paying Sita a visit in grand finery. This dazzle turns as cool as a moonbeam in Sita’s luminous presence as if the sun itself was struck speechless with awe and wonder. Mandodari asks, ‘If you were indeed so chaste and pure, Sita, how come you went off with the husband of another?’ Sita replies, ‘Chaste and pure I ever was – merely came to see this kingdom of yours.’ At these words, tears roll down Mandodari’s eyes.

Writes Jassal, “The song notes the transformation in Mandodari’s consciousness when confronted with Sita’s divinity and awe-inspiring presence. When Mandodari sets out to confront Sita, it is once again Sita’s fire of chastity that first ‘melts’ down her pride, then evokes reverence and humility. Hence, instead of the challenging mood of rivalry suggested at the beginning of the encounter, what we witness is a shedding of layers of artifice in a final expression of feminine solidarity and understanding.”

In fact, in the deep and subtle interpretation of the Adhyatma Ramayana, it is said that Ravana was totally convinced of the power of Rama as a manifestation of Vishnu and had decided that the surest way to attain abidance in the Self/Vishnu was by being killed by Rama. So in kidnapping Sita, his sole aim was that Rama should come to rescue her, wage a war with him, and kill him. In the same way, perhaps Mandodari did not really mourn Ravana but mourned her own pride, her own material desires and misfortunes which she could only resolve by confronting them, bearing witness to them, and letting them go – as in the Bhojpuri women’s songs – in her realisation of the pure divine Spirit of Sita.
Door leading to Bhagavan’s Maha Nirvana room
The requirement imposed on anyone who wants to practise psychoanalysis as a profession of being first ‘psychoanalyzed’ himself…so from what source did the first psychoanalyst obtain the ‘powers’ that they communicate to their disciples, and by whom were they themselves ‘psychoanalyzed’ in the first place? ¹

The above quotation by René Guénon (1886-1951), a pre-eminent exponent of the ‘Tradionalist’ or ‘Perennialist’ school of thought, has framed the most decisive question regarding the entire theme of psychology in relation to the perennial philosophy:

from what source did modern psychology first originate? This question touches upon the very kernel of the issue raised in the title of this piece. The traditional or perennial method draws upon the universal principles underlying all modes of knowledge, from sensible perception of the contingent to the direct or non-dual perception of the Absolute via intellectual intuition (*noesis*). These metaphysical principles, being eternal and immutable, provide the criteria for the discernment between “sacred science” and “profane science”—yet because they are for the most part absent from modern psychology, it is left in a precarious situation. “[W]e have no clear exposition of guiding principles,” says Carl Jung. This then leads us to the following dilemma: “What we call consciousness without an object, oneness, doesn’t exist for modern psychology.”

**No Psychology or Science of the Soul without Metaphysics**

If it is the sacred or spiritual domain that, according to the perennial philosophy, not only situates the psycho-physical domain but balances and heals it, then an authentic and integral psychology needs a priori to be rooted in and intrinsically connected to a spiritual tradition in order to be effective. This is what allows for the *metanoia* or integral transformation known as *cura animarum*, or “cure of souls”, the goal of what has been termed the “science of the soul” in the ancient sense. While we acknowledge that each orthodox spiritual tradition contains a corresponding integral psychology, we are not suggesting that spirituality is psychology as such, for Spirit simultaneously supersedes the psyche and includes it. The reverse is not true for psychology, however, as the psyche is always subordinate to what is higher than it, namely the Spirit. We recall an illuminating point that speaks to the unanimity of all integral psychologies that correspond to their traditional spiritualities before the rupture of the modern world: “There is no science of the soul [psyche] without a metaphysical basis to it and without spiritual remedies at its disposal.”

Modern psychology for the most part has not only radically abandoned but negated its metaphysical origin. It now seeks to cure the mind or cognition taken in isolation, rather than recognizing the separation of the soul from the spiritual domain as the root of the
problem. “The word ‘mental’ is often used to indicate the domain which has been explored by Western psychologists and which is often expressed by the word ‘psyche,’ so as to avoid metaphysical and religious inferences suggested by the word ‘soul’.” By distorting the original meaning of the term psyche or ‘soul’, modern psychology has disabled itself and has only recently begun to realize this. In fact the entirety of modern psychology’s enterprise could be astutely summarized in a few brief words underscored by one of its well-known proponents: “Psychology is the Science of Mental Life, both its phenomena and of their conditions.” The official beginnings of modern psychology—as an autonomous field of science separate from philosophy and physiology—is thought to have commenced in 1879 with Wundt’s establishment of the first experimental psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany. Some have suggested that modern psychology’s inception began with John Locke, one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment to whom was attributed, among other things, the formulation of the doctrine of empiricism.

The complete disconnection of modern psychology and modern science from integral metaphysics, which has always brought order to the psycho-physical domain, has had catastrophic effects upon the world we live in; very few would argue against this. The origins of the perennial philosophy, quite to the contrary, are inseparably connected to the sapiential revelations. As René Guénon remarks:

[\textit{W}]hat is the origin of these traditional metaphysical doctrines from which we have borrowed all our fundamental ideas? The answer is very simple, although it risks raising objections from those who would prefer to consider everything from an historical point of view, and the answer is that there is no origin—by which we mean no human origin—that can be determined in time. In other words, the origin of tradition, if indeed the word ‘origin’ has any place at all in such a case, is as ‘non-human’ [supra-human or supra-individual] as is metaphysics itself. Metaphysical truth is eternal.\footnote{Guénon René, ‘Eastern Metaphysics’, in \textit{Studies in Hinduism}, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 100.}
Since modern psychology can trace neither its origins nor the continuity of its transmission to what is sacred and transcendent—“[Modern] psychology, and indeed modern science itself, are historical products”—it is undeniably at a profound impasse which it cannot go beyond by its own efforts. In fact, the father of American psychology reached the following conclusion regarding the limitations of modern psychology: “[Psychology] a nasty little subject—all one cares to know lies outside.” The integral psychology of the perennial philosophy differs fundamentally from this perspective since it recognizes the sacred as infused into all domains of reality. This is underscored in the following passage from Whitall Perry (1920-2005), which speaks to what is designated by the term ‘Tradition’ in this perspective:

Tradition is the continuity of Revelation: an uninterrupted transmission, through innumerable generations, of the spiritual and cosmological principles, sciences, and laws resulting from a revealed religion: nothing is neglected, from the establishment of social orders and codes of conduct to the canons regulating the arts and architecture, ornamentation and dress; it includes the mathematical, physical, medical, and psychological sciences, encompassing moreover those deriving from celestial movements. What contrasts it totally with our modern learning, which is a closed system materially, is its reference of all things back to superior planes of being, and eventually to ultimate Principles; considerations entirely unknown to modern man.3

The Margins of the Human Psyche

The perennial philosophy insists that “the higher cannot emanate [proceed] from the lower,” which is to say that the human psyche or the empirical ego cannot transcend itself—“the psychic cannot be treated by the psychic” — without the agency and benediction of what is higher than itself. It is apropos of this that Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) described the empirical ego as “the true seat of anxiety,” unconsciously highlighting its epistemological and ontological limitations—for only

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what is integrally spiritual can act as the true antidote for the modern and postmodern malaise, marked as it is by unequivocal relativism, the notion that any opinion is as good as another. It will thus be no surprise to find the following example of the relativism within which modern psychology is imprisoned: “The only reality I can possibly know is the world as I perceive and experience it at this moment…. And the only certainty is that those perceived realities are different. There are as many ‘real worlds’ as there are people!”

No matter what theory or methodology the modern psychologist or therapist employs, although it might appear at first glance to be genuinely insightful or helpful, it is still bound to what is axiomatically relative and subjective because it is limited to the domain of individual interpretation, which consequently has nothing to do with intellectual intuition or the spiritual domain. Thus it can be affirmed that “We are in many ways the prisoners of a psychology based on Cartesian principles.”

**Traditional Cosmological Perspectives on Health and Well-Being**

Numerous individuals within varied disciplines have pointed out that the primordial norms of the past have cascaded into unprecedented disorder, establishing abnormality as a new norm. As Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) has affirmed: “Humanity today is in a state of serious collective and individual crisis…. We could say that ‘normal’ people now live ‘outside themselves’ from a psychological or spiritual point of view — this expression, once used to refer to people who were mentally ill, is now quite an apt description of modern [and postmodern] humankind!” Carl Jung (1875-1961) concurs when he says that “… our age is afflicted with a blindness that has no parallel.”

What is altogether missing from the modern diagnosis and treatment of mental illness is the understanding of time and the human psyche in light of traditional cosmology. The unfolding of time, contrary to contemporary schemas of ‘evolution’ and ‘progress’, was unanimously perceived in pre-modern times to be cyclical. Time begins with human individuals living in proximity to the sacred, but by its passing individuals become farther and farther removed from it; the psychological implication of this is that the human psyche,
disconnected from Spirit, becomes farther and farther removed from its source in divinis. It is this distance from the spiritual domain that causes the human psyche to become deregulated, fragmented, and imbalanced. The present-day disequilibrium is firmly and unavoidably contextualized within what the Hindu tradition has termed the Kali-Yuga (“Dark Age”), or what in the Buddhist tradition is known as mappo (“the decadent age of the Dharma”).

It is interesting to note that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, better known as the DSM (soon to be in its fifth edition), attempts to diagnose the very illness that it itself is a byproduct of—the materialistic science of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which gave birth to modern psychology. From this perspective the DSM could arguably be characterized as describing the many psychological disorders and pathologies that are part and parcel of the Kali-Yuga. If the spiritual domain is the only antidote for a human existence devoid of the sacred, then any true and authentic psychology requires that we recognize it and conform to it.

Man can be truly human only when he is mindful of his theomorphic nature. When he ignores the divine in himself and in other existences he becomes sub-human. And when this happens not merely in the case of a single individual but in the case of society as a whole, then that society disintegrates through the sheer rootlessness of its own structure or through the proliferation of psychic maladies which it is powerless to heal because it has deprived itself of the one medicine capable of healing them.4

We cannot easily brush aside the fact that the Kali-Yuga has played a central role in diminishing the rightful place of religion or spirituality in today’s secular milieu, which is marked by systematic dehumanization and chaos in all spheres of the human condition. In fact even the spiritual traditions themselves are not safe from the onslaught of these decadent times: “The Kali Yuga is not only the time when there is no longer anything but problems without solutions, nor

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the time when the sacred ceases to exist. It is the time when everything that fundamentally opposes the spiritual passes itself off as spiritual.” That psychology or therapy has blurred or even usurped the role of traditional spirituality—“it has been said that if science is the new religion, then psychotherapy is its place of worship” —is a sure sign of the Kali-Yuga. “[P]sychoanalysis is one of those mass movements which are both a cause and consequence of spiritual decay.” The therapeutic age of today that endorses the empirical ego or self above all else has forgotten the crucial directive of one of its most celebrated figures, who unintentionally affirms tradition and thus the perennial philosophy: “Everything new must have its roots in what was before.” And the following statement is equally significant: “the history of psychology is the history of forgetting.” What has been forgotten is that the human psyche has at all times and places been situated within the spiritual domain:

The image of man presented to us by modern psychology is not only fragmentary, it is pitiable. In reality, man is as if suspended between animality and divinity; now modern thought—be it philosophical or scientific—admits only animality, practically speaking. We wish, on the contrary, to correct and perfect the image of man by insisting on his divinity; not that we wish to make a god of him, quod absit; we intend simply to take account of his true nature, which transcends the earthly, and lacking which he would have no reason for being. It is this that we believe we can call—in a symbolist language—the “transfiguration of man.”

**The Critique of Modern Psychology**
Though modern psychology is far from being homogeneous and most psychologists or therapists identify themselves as “eclectic” in their orientation, it can be divided into four general phases that are often described as ‘forces’—behaviourism, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology, including

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their various schools. These ‘four forces’ in modern psychology encompass a broad spectrum of approaches; most psychologists or therapists do not exclusively identify themselves with one of them, often availing themselves of more than one school within the “forces” themselves.

The overarching traditionalist or perennialist critique of modern psychology has been termed psychologism by its exponents; however we would suggest that this critique also might include scientism, evolutionism, syncretism, and New Age thought. It is important to point out that all of these various ideologies of modernism, which extend into postmodernism, are not separate from one another; they often intersect and complement one another, while all of them share the error of reductionism or relativism which is inseparable from the loss of the sense of the sacred in the contemporary world:

Relativism sets out to reduce every element of absoluteness to a relativity, while making a quite illogical exception in favour of this reduction itself. In effect, relativism consists in declaring it to be true that there is no such thing as truth, or in declaring it to be absolutely true that nothing but the relatively true exists…. In short, every idea is reduced to a relativity of some sort, whether psychological, historical, or social; but the assertion nullifies itself by the fact that it too presents itself as a psychological, historical, or social relativity… [I]ts initial absurdity lies in the implicit claim to be unique in escaping, as if by enchantment, from a relativity that is declared alone to be possible.6

This analysis encompasses a host of other reductions that have occurred and continue to perpetuate themselves in the modern and postmodern mindset, including the reduction of integral psychology to psychologism: “[P]sychologism attempts to explain the greater in terms of the lesser and excludes all that goes beyond its own limits.” These can be summarized as follows: the confusion of the Absolute with the relative, the Spirit with the psyche, the Intellect or Intellectus with reason or ratio, the Self with ego, and the Personality with

individuality. Modern psychology and the subject of the human psyche are by definition circumscribed by the relative or horizontal domain: “Psychological realities represent relative truth.” We might even say that in the contemporary era spiritual realization has been reduced to the attempt to attain mental health and well-being as “the practice of psychoanalysis … has come to replace religion in the lives of many people.” Of course we are not suggesting that there is something problematic in seeking psychological health and well-being, so long as it is not mistaken for spiritual realization; they are situated on two different levels. The higher spiritual includes the lower psycho-physical. Nonetheless, seeking happiness for happiness’s sake, devoid of any deeper significance, is essentially pathological: “The soul, like every other domain of reality, can only be truly known by what transcends it.”

Psychologism: Hostage to the Empirical Ego
Psychologism is defined as the reduction of the spiritual to the psychological—the objective to the subjective—which is to say the psychologization of the spiritual domain. Within modern psychology itself psychologism has been defined as “An approach that reduces transcendental or spiritual events and experiences to the level of purely psychological explanation.” Without the inclusion of the spiritual domain the human individual must be defined or understood by the most superficial and whimsical criteria: “by their own theories of human nature psychologists have the power of elevating or degrading this same nature. Debasing assumptions debase human beings; generous assumptions exalt them.” This underscores the implicit and operative unbridled subjectivity upon which modern psychology—whether behaviouristic, psychoanalytical, humanistic, or transpersonal—is circumscribed. “Psychologism can be described as the assumption that man’s nature and behaviour are to be explained by psychological mechanisms which can be laid bare by a scientific and empirical psychology.” This reductionism cannot avoid confusing the spiritual with the psychic, denying what is higher than itself, and replacing it with the psychological. It must not be forgotten that Carl
Gustav Jung, Freud’s foremost disciple, considered to be seminal in the development of transpersonal psychology, unequivocally articulates the fundamentals of his own psychologism: “One cannot grasp anything metaphysically, but it can be done psychologically. Therefore I strip things of their metaphysical wrapping in order to make them objects of psychology.” The process of psychologizing can be so subtle that it sometimes occurs without the psychologist or therapist even being aware of it—“the real danger is that of mixing them [the spiritual domain and the psychological] without realizing it.” We need to emphasize, however, that there are also those within various schools of modern psychology who have challenged the phenomena of psychologism and what has been astutely identified as the “confusion of levels” — the confusion of the psychic with the spiritual domain, the relative with the Absolute. “What I am protesting,” says Rollo May, “is the confusion of religion and psychology which I believe does not do service to either.” We might add the often quoted passage: “Psychosynthesis [transpersonal psychology] does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical nor a theological explanation of the great Mystery – it leads to the door, but stops there.” A similar statement on ‘the decisive boundary’ is mentioned by Viktor Frankl: “Logotherapy does not cross the boundary between psychotherapy and religion. But it leaves the door to religion open and it leaves it to the patient whether or not to pass the door.” With these cautions in place we still need to be mindful of the real boundaries that do indeed exist between the psychic and spiritual domains.

Its error consists in reducing the spiritual to the psychological and in believing there is nothing beyond the realm of psychology—in other words, that this very limited science can attain to all inner realities, which is absurd. This view would imply that psychology, or even psychoanalysis, could comprehend Satori or Nirvana. Modern science, like modern civilization as a whole, is thoroughly profane, having lost all sense of the sacred, reducing everything to merely individual and trivial dimensions.  

Akbar became quite displeased with his courtiers on whose account the city, citizens and himself came to grief. He chastised them, “O ministers! Your stupidity and impudence, besides causing a great deal of trouble to the citizens, also brought on me humiliation and ridicule in the public eye. You have injured the gentle heart of the saint with your inhuman treatment. If you, the evil doers are allowed stay in the city, surely you will bring ruin. You indulged in unpardonable acts. You were ignorant of the greatness of Tulasidas. You are not fit to live in the city anymore. Leave the place at once.” He banished those sycophants from the city. However, the emperor remained inconsolable for a long while.

He felt ashamed of his role in the whole episode. Joining both palms together above his head in a gesture of supplication, he walked
to the Ashram. Overcome by mortification, he stood in a corner. Embarrassed to come to the presence of Tulasidas, from afar he sang the praises of the saint in a low voice.

Tulasidas was aware that the noble emperor was not responsible for whatever had happened. He called him near and spoke loving words to him, “You are not to be blamed for the past incident, O king! However, sadhus should not be subjected to any harassment; for, it will surely rebound on the culprits. Sadhus, by their very nature, are unaffected by honour or dishonour. The fire of suffering does not burn them, but recoils manifold on the miscreants. Nevertheless, a ruler should not be careless. May you attain all auspiciousness, O benevolent king!

“I intend to set out on a pilgrimage to establish myself perfectly in sahaja samadhi, so that I abide firmly in the bliss of the Brahman inwardly while carrying on outer activities unattached. The people of this city are divided on religion, which has naturally caused conflict, friction and jealousy. One faction or the other will always try to gain your influence to create friction between us or engage in fruitless debate with me or wantonly create some trouble. Such things have taken place throughout history. No government is free from such intrigues and machinations.

“Once, an innocent saint of your faith was persecuted by the high priests and religious bigots. In spite of strong public support, influential people in the higher echelons consumed by jealousy branded him as a heretic, as he always inhered in the superconscious state of perfect union and identity with the Truth. The fakir was subjected to painful lashes, excruciating torture and then impaled on a spear. His state was so exalted that the drops of blood which had splattered on the ground from his body started uttering the mahavakya, ‘An-al-haq’ i.e. ‘Verily, I am the Truth’. This incensed the enemies to such an extent that they cremated his body so that no trace of him would be left for his affirmation to emanate. However, when the ashes were collected in a pot, to the amazement of all, the mahavakya resounded from the pot! When the king’s daughter peeped into the pot, the mahavakya entered her womb and was born as a
TULASIDAS BESTOWS HIS GRACE ON THE EMPEROR

perfected being uttering ‘An-al-haq’. Later, when an untimely death took place in the royal household, this great being revived the child by uttering the sacred avowal. Alas! the fanatics became angry with him for uttering a vakya from an inimical faith. They tried to punish him with whiplashes. The saint became so furious at their intolerant behaviour that the heat of his fury started to burn the city like the sun which made the detractors tremble in fear. After condemning the religious faction and affirming the universal Truth of Unity of all, he left the city for ever in utter disgust.

Tulāsīdās continued, “A similar parochial tendency has taken deep root amongst your courtiers which caused the painful episode. This trend of persecuting sadhus will continue in the future also. It will bring a stain on your noble and unbiased rulership. Give me leave to proceed on my yatra. May the Lord bless you with all well-being!”

The emperor was grief stricken to hear this and placing his head on Tulāsīdās’ feet and caressing them with his eyes, he implored in a choked voice, “O Swami, I will be lost without you to guide me on the right path. I am in such a predicament that I am fixed neither in Islam nor in Hinduism. I am assailed by doubts. Will you abandon me in this helpless condition? If you, a kind and compassionate being, forsake me, who will come to my rescue?”

Embracing the emperor, Tulāsīdās said, “O great king, you are of sattvic nature, established in peace and harmony! That which is glorified in Quran is the same Truth which is expounded in the Vedas. The conflict arises because Hindus worship the forms along with the formless, whereas Muslims abhor idol-worship. Both religions point to the same Ideal. The form is like the salt and formless is like the sea water. Out of ignorance, people do not comprehend the whole truth. If one makes deep enquiry, one will realise that all religions utter the same truth. Therefore, realise the Brahman, the formless Absolute, which you have been cherishing, within your heart and immerse yourself in bliss.”

Tulāsīdās, placing his hands on the head of the emperor, blessed him and initiated him into the mahāvākyā. He enlightened him about how jīvas mistake the body-mind complex for one’s real Self.
and wallow in darkness. He explained about the gross, subtle and causal bodies and the individual sense or egoism which binds the jiva (individual soul) to the material world and enmeshes it in attachment and ignorance. He elucidated on the mysterious nature of jagrat, swapna and sushupti i.e. waking, dreaming and deep sleep states; and also on the unfathomable and inexpressible transcendental state of the Absolute and of the signs of great bliss when one dives deep within. Thus he dilated upon the esoteric truths of monism. Then he asked the emperor whether he had any doubts.

Since the precepts he had heard from Muslim fakirs and the path set out by the saint were more or less the same, the emperor gained a clear understanding; so he kept quiet. After a while, he asked, “O revered Swami! Whatever you said agrees with what our priests tell us about the formless aspect of Godhead and of the direct experience of the Self. However, I wonder how this phenomenal world came into existence and how it will come to an end.”

The saint spoke with much love to the worthy disciple, “O king, listen! Even the sleep state which everyone experiences daily is beyond one’s comprehension. While so, how can one explain or understand the origin and end of the world? Whatever I have learnt from wise persons and scriptures, I will relate to you now. Listen attentively to the aspects of the intricate science of cosmology.

“The undivided Essence, Perfection, Truth-existence-bliss, eternal, blemishless, self-effulgent, incomparable God-head is beyond names and forms and sense perception, though available to one’s direct experience. The Trinity alone can give expression to the Inexpressible. If anyone starts to describe the state, he becomes dazed or gets immediately absorbed in the motionless state of Brahman. As such It came to be referred by various names for different reasons. The causeless Para-Brahman is like the lustre of the moon, a waveless ocean, or a magnet fixed in its centre; as such, It remains without movement or action, though it is the Cause, inspiring motion and action by Its very presence.

“An illusory power, Maya emanated from this static Brahman. This power is also labeled, inter alia, as primordial Nature, Avyaktam, or
Moola Prakriti, the very nature of which is dynamic. In the awesome presence of the Brahman, Moola Prakriti is like the iron filings drawn to the magnet, heat emanating from the fire, water in the mirage caused by sun, shadow play of the lamp or the snake in the rope. It is ever active and its form is Nescience or primordial ignorance. O king! Do you see clearly the polarity or the difference between Brahman and Its power?

“The Brahman is the undifferentiated Effulgence and Its form is Light; and the shadow of this Light is Maya. Before the creation of sun and moon, there was nothing but a thick mass of darkness, the Maya.

“O king! When an infinitesimal speck of this darkness i.e. the shadow or Maya arose from the vast infinite Light, the One became two and then many. In other words, when the One or Self-obliviousness became conscious of Itself, splitting Itself into two – consciousness and Itself –, duality or multiplicity became a natural corollary. Do you see the marvellous beginning of movement and creation!

“The reflection of Brahman in the Maya is called by the generic term Easwara, who in turn gives rise to multitudes of kaleidoscopic names and forms.

“Now we will see the sequential stages in the creation of cosmos. The reflection of Brahman in the pure Tanmatras – the basic subtle essence of creation in the ever-dynamic Maya – brought forth the five primordial elements. Thus, out of the (five) Tanmatras, evolved forth the five elements viz. space, air, fire, water and earth.

“In the ever-active Maya appeared the pure formless space or akasa Tanmatra (attribute is sound); the reflection of Brahman in the akasa Tanmatra is Sadasiva, the ruling deity of space.

“In the formless akasa Tanmatra appeared the air or sparsha Tanmatra (two attributes of sound and touch); the reflection of Brahman in the sparsha Tanmatra is Maheswara, the ruling deity of air.

“In the sparsha Tanmatra appeared the fire or roopa Tanmatra (three attributes of sound, touch and form); the reflection of Brahman in the roopa Tanmatra is Rudra, the ruling deity of fire.
“In the roopa Tanmatra appeared the water or rasa Tanmatra (four attributes of sound, touch, form and taste); the reflection of Brahman in the rasa Tanmatra is Vishnu, the ruling deity of water.

“In the rasa Tanmatra appeared the earth or gandha Tanmatra (five attributes of sound, touch, form, taste and smell); the reflection of Brahman in the gandha Tanmatra is Brahma, the ruling deity of earth.

“The five elements, the rulers of five elements and the Maya which brought forth the cosmic egg are but a minuscule part of Brahman.

“The process is reversed at the time of dissolution – earth is subsumed in the water; water is subsumed in the fire; fire is subsumed in the air; air is subsumed in the space; and space is subsumed in the shadow of Maya.

“The Maya manifesting itself like a whirlwind from the static Brahman – which can be likened to motionless space – combined the five elements or Pancha Bhutas in diverse combination and permutation through the agency of ruling deities and created the countless universes with its multiform colours and dazzling facets. Just as the reflection of a muticoloured object in a pure crystal makes it appear colourful, the reflection of pure Brahman in the space appears as Sadasiva, in the air as Maheswara, in the fire as Rudra, in the water as Vishnu and in the earth as Brahma respectively.

“Brahma engages in manifold creation with the five attributes of earth element. Vishnu sustains the creation with the four attributes of water element. Rudra destroys the creation with the three attributes of fire element. Maheswara deludes the jivas and veils the Reality with the two attributes of air element. Sadasiva bestows grace, imparts clear vision to the jivas and reveals the Reality with the single attribute of space element.

“Maya causes the knot of ego or false sense of ‘I’ to arise in the body-mind-senses complex, which are made of these five elements.”

“Brahman remains within as a pure Witness of the reflected consciousness or the individual self bound by the body-mind-senses.”

“The Atma dwells within as the silent Witness observing the activities of the embodied soul. By Its very august presence, activities take place in the microcosm, as in the case of macrocosm. Through the agency of Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra – the jiva or individual
sense is born (creation), which experiences the sweet-bitter aspects of mundane existence in waking and dream states and void in deep sleep (sustenance) and on the death of the body, jiva the individual sense leaves the body, but sheathed in mind (dissolution).

“Maheswara (veiling and projection) causes self-delusion in the jiva akin to the self-oblivion of the superconscious state. Sadasiva (revealment or grace) bestows the final Beatitude, the all-transcending state, the bliss of Self-knowledge on the jiva.

“The jiva, unaware of the everlasting bliss within, due to the deluding power of Maya, is deceived into mistaking the sorrow for happiness – sorrow is the reverse side of happiness – and is enmeshed in a long chain of desires. He takes countless births for the gratification of endless desires. Unable to find the shore of the vast ocean of samsara, he remains drowned in grief.

“When the embodied soul investigates into the mystery of life at the level of macrocosm, it will realise that the Tanmatras, five elements and the consequent world creation are nothing but the playful activities of Maya, the illusory power of Brahman. The entire panorama is illusory in nature i.e. transient undergoing constant changes like appearance, mutation, disappearance, reappearance etc.!

“Similarly, in the microcosm, the body-mind-senses are constituted by the five elements and the ‘I’ has nothing to do with them. When the jiva enquires into the true nature of ‘I’ with a keen perception, he will understand that his mistaken identification with the body – mind complex arises from a phantom-like ‘I’ – Brahman reflecting in the mind (which itself is a part of Maya) causing the contracted ‘I’ limiting itself to the body-mind. Thereupon, the pseudo self vanishes and the silent Witness i.e. the real Self or Atma, emerging from the depths of consciousness shines forth.

“This mysterious Witness is the self-revealing Brahman that informs the kaleidoscopic whirl of world-play and sensory inputs in the waking and dream states and the void in the deep sleep. This also awakens the deluded jiva to the prospect of a higher existence. While the embodied jiva is entangled in the multiplicity, otherness, transience and nescience, the detached Observer remains as One
without a second, imperishable, eternal and self-illumined Knowledge. While the jiva is entrapped in sorrow and struck down by grief, the unattached Spectator remains bliss-permeated, ever-free, blemishless, immutable, formless, undivided Light and transcendent Unitiveness.

“Those who seek the favours of the Maya may master the siddhis and secure occult powers, but fall inevitably in the dragnet of pride and egoism and get stuck in the realm of nescience for ages. Their arrogance begets them nothing but despair and sorrow. They deprive themselves of the exalted state by short-sightedness and lure of power.”

“However, those who yearn and toil for attaining the Brahman become blessed with unceasing bliss and ultimate Illumination, besides being favoured with siddhis which court their company on their own accord.

“Worship of one of the five Rulers or Deities earnestly is tantamount to worshipping the Brahman itself, as all the deities are derived from Brahman alone. One who is devoted to an Ishta or a favourite Deity with steadfastness until the end of one’s life, attains the ultimate liberation through the grace of that Ishta. It is well nigh impossible to reach the formless Absolute directly, rejecting the Deity with form. A mind which cannot fix its attention unwaveringly even on a form, can never conceive of a formless state! Hence the ancient sages aver that emancipation is more easily attained through the agency of a Deity with form.

“There may be a rare few who have realised the Formless directly. For a common man, to imitate these rare examples and thereby ignore Deity worship will result in futility. No danger or downfall will confront those who contemplate on a Deity with firm resolve and steadfastness.

“There may be some perverse arguments, ‘Manifestation emanates from the unmanifest Brahman. So, it will not be right to say that all motion is beyond the Motionless. Further, if movements take place merely by the Will (which implies thinking and also its opposite, forgetfulness), then the Absolute is not a static principle.’

“For quelling such doubts, the world-play is carried out through the agency of five gods. He is a supreme devotee who worships or reveres either these Deities or the Brahman with purity of mind, speech and body.
Both will bear the same fruit and open the gateway to enlightenment. One who has earnestness coupled with devotion, self-restraint, yogic practices and care-free attitude arising out of absolute surrender is a siddha and he lives long like a python depending solely upon what Providence brings him. Devotion coupled with steadfast yogic practices will ultimately liberate the soul from the bondage of jivahood. He who has brought the body-mind complex under control, realises his true divine nature and is immersed in the torrents of bliss and peace. He is established in the self-oblivious state, united with Brahman, and is liberated for ever from riding on the giant wheel of birth and death!

“An idol worshipper is better than the ignorant who lives like cattle; better than him is he who realises the formless Absolute within; better than him is he who becomes That; better than him is he who remains in undivided bliss of direct Self-experience or non dual union without the sense of otherness; better than him is the supreme soul, dwelling in a lofty realm, beyond the Turiya (the fourth state), who wanders like a madman or behaves like a guileless child. However, O emperor! in my view, he who recognises such sublime beings in spite of their strange appearance and behaviour and dedicates himself unstintingly to their service is worthy of our utmost reverence!

“O King! How foolish are people who turn their back on such a great treasure and embrace miseries voluntarily thus laying waste this rare human birth, and adding to the load of karma! Having lived their lives like beasts, what will they do at that critical hour when the lord of death casts his noose around their necks? Whom will they blame for their fate? However long one lives, this body is going to perish sooner or later! Then, shouldn’t man be sensible enough to be unattached to the unreal bodily existence and pursue the right means to grasp the Reality?

“Just as a pot made of clay is only earth whether it is in the form of a pot or broken pieces; so is a deluded man, who has secured neither devotion nor liberation, verily a corpse whether he is alive or dead! A blind man stares blankly like an idiot at the bright sun; similarly, futile is the talk of wisdom to a man steeped in worldliness! The former’s world is filled with darkness of sight and the latter’s with darkness of ignorance!
Theologians of different religions and sects, goaded by their scholarship, indulge in vain debates for supremacy of one’s religion, unaware of the bliss hidden within. They do not lead a life compatible with the spiritual truths propounded in their faiths. How tragic is it that ignorant people slander saints and sages and commit more sins, reaping the bitter harvest at the time of death and thereafter. Pointless disputes, contempt for the enlightened, indifference to devotion and agnosticism lead a person nowhere except to the endless cycle of transmigration. Beware! Vainglory can never rid one of egoism or attachment, it only exhibits ignorance! It is ridiculous to cherish the body, which is no more than a clay-pot, as something precious!

O mighty monarch! Skeptics and detractors view even the Vedas irreverently, whereas faithful ones become awakened and enlightened even with a single sacred word. At the time of dissolution, even the manifold universes subside into the earth; earth into the water, water into the fire, fire into the air and air into the space, space into the darkness of Maya; and Maya loses its dazzling spell, turns into a void and is subsumed in Brahman like the dew disappearing before the sun or like camphor in the fire. While so, why does man arrogate any significance at all to the material body which is but a feeble shadow of Brahman?

Brahman is beyond beginning, middle and end; beyond names and forms. It is transcendental bliss, eternal, self-illumined, ever-free, blemishless, undifferentiated, unfragmented, static and inactive. By the grace of the Sadguru, one realizes the Brahman as infinite, whole, truth and knowledge. He recognises It as the primordial Cause, adored by the gods, the Supreme, Absolute, self-luminous, pure Consciousness and auspicious Awareness. When one attains to this superlative state, he is redeemed from all sins, relieved of the terror of hell, liberated from the misery of transmigration and becomes the repository of eternal bliss. Don’t cast doubts on my words, O king! doubting mind is at the root of all misfortunes.

To attain this rare exalted state, one must secure the grace of Sadguru and Ishta. O noble emperor, henceforth, may you be blessed with service to Sadguru and sadhus and devotion to the Lord! May you attain the supreme Goal!”
Taking leave of the emperor, saint Tulasidas proceeded on a pilgrimage to Mathura and Brindavan where he remained inebriated with divine joy. Attaining the ultimate state, he shone forth as the crest jewel among sadhus. The emperor devoted his days to adoration of the Lord and was blessed with the knowledge of the Self.

“O siddhas!” concluded NabhaJI, “many a miracle took place in the life of this venerable saint, which are narrated in Bhakta Vijayam. You may read them and rejoice in the glory of the great being, which will fetch you all felicity and joy! Those who recite or listen to this narration on the life of Tulasidas with love and devotion will be surely blessed with devotion, dispassion, Self-knowledge, eternal peace, eight-fold wealth, long life and good health.”

Prostrations at the holy feet of saint Tulasidas!

(Concluded)

A Sonnet for Muruganar

Upahar

One day He shone upon you from within,
bypassed the spacetime of mere understanding,
conferring on you in a simple glance
the pilgrimage of endless inner worlds.
Your heritage of high most noble speech
flowered anew in unimagined radiance;
the sweet, grave, ancient syllables of praise
pouring like jewels before His boundless throne.

Heart, enter now these open gates of worship;
who would stand dumb and thoughtful at this threshold?
Through every voice, out of the shining silence,
one Poem speaks itself as who we are.
Knowing is always loving, loving knowing.
One Being sings itself as what we are.
The mind is like a caged monkey or the grotesque dance of a shadow puppet. Who could hope to subdue it, grasping it and bringing it under control? Even if one remains still, free of any objective perception, it will keep moving by itself, like a whirling rocket that moves under its own impulsion, the balls in a game of *ammanai*, or a spinning top.

(105)

The nature of the monkey is extremely active and restless. How much more so when it is restrained in a cage from which it wants to escape? The image of a monkey kept in a cage is therefore a fitting image for the attempt to control the mind by restraining it with bodily means, such as breath control, and so on, whose principal effect is to spur the mind into ever greater activity. The movements of the mind are next compared to images in a puppet show consisting solely of shadows cast against a screen, which can be observed, but

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cannot be held or restrained in any way. A whirling rocket, [the balls in a game of] ammanai, and a [spinning] top are all given as things which, having been set in motion, continue with a momentum of their own. In contrast to the monkey and the shadow puppet, which represent the gross, outer activity of the mind, these three items represent the mind in its subtle aspect, acting without any outside stimulus, as when it is not consciously directed outwards, yet still continues to generate its own inner activity. TCS glosses, like a rocket that whirls round on its own, without anyone holding it and causing it to move. The game of ammanai is a girls’ game, described in Tam. Lex. as follows, ‘Girls’ game of keeping a number of balls in the air, some rising while others are falling.’

It is the habitual nature of the mind to be active even when it is not directed towards any object. If you try to understand this nature, how will you not be confused? At the slightest contact with it, there will be birth and death for you, but if it dies, you will become Sivam.

The nature of the mind is activity, and it will do anything to prolong and preserve its own existence. The moment it begins to subside, and we begin to get a sense of the peace which this might bring, it springs back into existence, generating numerous thoughts about how, using this very mind, we might determine the nature of this peace, make it our permanent state, and so on. Therefore the wise course is to ignore the mind and put one’s attention wholly on the Self, Sivam, by dwelling on the ‘I’ sense.

Abide simply as pure consciousness. Then delusion will not arise. If there is the slightest movement in consciousness, will not the world of diversity shoot forth like a sky rocket? This state of samadhi can be compared to the perfect alignment of the pointers on a pair of scales. If that state arises, you will be a king of jnana. Who will be your equal?
OZHIVIL ODUKKAM

TCS explains the image as follows: our consciousness is like a pair of scales with stones in one pan and gold in the other; the stones are the state of *kevalam* – unconsciousness and the gold is *cakalam* – the waking state. The scale has two pointers: the lower pointer is the *anma* – *jiva* or soul, which moves as the arm of the scales moves, and the upper pointer is *arul* – grace which does not move. When the two pans are in perfect balance, and the two pointers are therefore perfectly aligned, this denotes the state of *samadhi*, when the consciousness is perfectly aligned with grace, and in which therefore the delusion of the world and its modifications does not appear. The word *arul* is simply another way of referring to the Self, especially when thought of in its dynamic aspect, as conferring or facilitating realisation. The term *cakalam* denotes the state in which the *jiva* is active, under the influence of the *tattvas*, and *kevalam*, the state of unconsciousness, as in deep sleep. The state which is being described here is a state of vigilant awareness, in which awareness is neither wandering lost amidst sense objects under the influence of the mind and senses, nor is it sunk in the blankness of the unconscious state.

“That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat sushupti*...Go to the root of thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is, with perfect awareness.”

Who taught water to be cool, fire to burn and the air to stir and be agitated? Whoever you are, the mind and the other faculties will not simply go away. To attempt to remove them is like trying to bury a shadow. You should see as the heavens see. Only then will they be eliminated.

If one heaps earth upon a shadow, the shadow will of course not be buried but will reappear on top of the pile. In a similar way, if we try to use the mind to eliminate the mind, that mental process will continue to propagate itself *ad infinitum*. The heavens, as pure space,

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1 Venkataramiah, M., (compl), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §609.
When you think of it, is it feasible to measure and know the extent of the earth and the heavens, the weight of the mountains and the volume of the surging ocean? Similarly, when you say that you are the Real, these are only words, [since it cannot be measured or known] without encompassing the destruction of your own ego-self. If you try to know it [otherwise], it will remain quite alien from you. (109)

There are a number of ways of interpreting the latter part of this verse, but the overall sense is as follows: the discriminating consciousness can affirm, ‘I am the Real’, but it cannot know that reality objectively, since the Real is only revealed upon the destruction of the discriminating consciousness that is attempting to know it. Should one make that attempt, the Real will seem alien and unobtainable.

The world of maya, arising and subsiding by turns, is unreal like the clouds in the sky. If we do not realise this, and attempt to suppress the world that rises up using the mind that rises with it, will this not be like a ball, bouncing back again each time we hit it to the ground? Therefore observe it as the witness only. It will be like a tree dug up by the root, yielding neither flowers nor fruits. (110)

The literal meaning in the second sentence here is, ‘if [one] suppresses that which rises up (uthippu) with that which rises up (uthippu). uthippu is a noun from the verb uti, which means to spring up, arise, come into existence. Since the world and the mind arise together in consciousness, the word is suited to conveying both meanings. The
repetition of the word prefigures the idea of bouncing back and forth, as of the ball in the metaphor which follows, and also lends weight to the idea being presented here that the world and the mind are not in essence different, that they are the two sides of the same coin, as it were. Thus any attempt on the part of the mind to suppress the world will cause the world ‘to bounce back’ as it were, prompting further mental activity in never-ending vicious circle. The alternative to engaging in the fruitless activity described in the first part of the verse is simply to remain as the witness. If the mind, the discriminating consciousness, is eliminated, there will be no world of the mind and senses, just as, if the root of a tree is ripped out, it will produce neither flowers nor fruits.

Should you succeed even for a split second in reaching the state of absorption in the Self (nishta), which, as the pure state (cuttam) in which the discriminating consciousness has fallen away, is free of all limitation, ah! I am at a loss to describe it! Is the bliss that rises up then a thing of little account? It would be as if one accessed the [vast] ocean of milk through the tiny hole in a teat!

\textit{cuttam} is the pure state is the state of \textit{jagrat-sushupti} – waking sleep, a state which is neither sleep nor waking but one of total freedom which transcends both of these states. See the notes to v. 106.

The bliss of the Self is compared to the ocean of milk, churned by the gods and \textit{asuras} to obtain divine ambrosia; the experience of the infinite bliss of the Self whilst still in the body upon the loss of the discriminating consciousness is compared to gaining access to the Puranic ocean of milk through the tiny hole of a teat.

Being totally identified with the body, you torment yourself saying, ‘When will the time come that this body is no more, and divine grace will be mine?’ What is the use of this? Do not the myriad phenomena that appear in the ether eventually subside again? Similarly, in the absolute fullness of Reality, which is beyond duality, there is nothing other than yourself.  

\textit{(112)}
puranam – the absolute fullness of Reality is said here to be ethir arra, which means literally without that which is opposite to, in front of, over against [it]. In other words, in that puranam there exists no ‘other’ which it could take as its object. ethir arra has therefore been translated as beyond duality.

Know that habit is pernicious. A fowl will scratch even at a bare rock, and dig around even in a heap of paddy. The blind man who recovers his sight will feel threatened by the light, recoil from it and refuse to give up his walking stick. Similarly the jiva will persist in perceiving distinctions in the grace of the Self [even after realising its non-dual nature]. (113)

Verses 113-116 demonstrate how, due to ingrained habit, the discriminating ego-consciousness will have the tendency to reassert itself at the first opportunity until it is finally eradicated.

The phrase anma arulai pakukkum means literally the jiva will divide grace. The verb paku in its transitive form means to divide, distribute, apportion, allot. The jiva will not be able to hold onto the Self if it attempts to divide it, i.e. analyse it with the discriminating mind. The expression pakuttarivu is commonly used in the sense of discriminating knowledge, rationality. In this verse arul – grace is equated with the Self or Sivam. As mentioned previously, in Siddhanta arul is nothing other than the shakti of Sivam itself, in its active role of removing the three malams and conferring enlightenment.

Unless you slap it and drive it outside, a young calf will not leave its tethering post, even if you untie the rope. Likewise, even if you tell the jiva to abide as Sivam, so that it remains free of attachment like Sivam itself, thus removing its separate identity and bringing it to a state of oneness, it will revert to its dualistic mode of thought.

A young calf may be so used to being tied up that it does not know what to do when its tether is removed. The farmer has to slap it to drive it outside, where it will find its mother and be able to enjoy her milk. Similarly the unripe disciple, having been guided toward the state of the Self by the guru, will, out of
sheer habit, return to his habitual dualistic state of mind, trying to analyse the state he is in, and will therefore be unable to enjoy the bliss of the Self. TCS glosses: ‘Although it has been made one with Sivam, the jiva, which became one with it through the cessation of the [ego-]consciousness, will become two [again] through the movement of that [ego-] consciousness.’ (114)

If someone tells you to abide as Sivam, you torment yourself thinking, ‘I am that Sivam,’ thus falling from that very state. This is like the story of the man who, on being told not to think of a monkey, was unable to stop thinking about it. Is this not the work of the ego, anava malam? (115)

Sri Ramana Maharshi also alludes to the story of the man who is told not to think of a monkey, supposedly saying that it is mentioned by Tayumanavar.

“D: When we attempt to cease from activity the very attempt is action. So activity seems to be inevitable.

“M: True. Thayumanavar has also alluded to it. A doctor advises a patient to take the prescribed medicine with only one condition. That condition is not to think of a monkey when he takes the medicine. Can the patient ever take the medicine? Will he not think of the monkey whenever he tries not to do so? So also, when people try to give up thoughts their object is frustrated by their very attempt.”

Translator’s note: The attribution by Sri Ramana of this anecdote to Tayumanavar is probably due to an error on the part of the recorder, as no such anecdote appears in the known works of Tayumanavar, and Ramana himself is not likely to have made such a misattribution.

Although the nature of the ego-consciousness has been pointed out to them, they still seek Sivam, just as the serpent with a jewel on its head continues to seek out darkness, even when it is already enveloped by it. Such behaviour is akin to someone digging a well in a lake to find water, or fighting with his own

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2 See Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk §601.
shadow to be free of it. Who are they that have the power to remove this ego-consciousness and abide as Sivam? (116)

In this comparison it is assumed that the jewel on the head of the serpent emits its own light. Therefore however deep it burrows, the darkness in which it would otherwise be enveloped (the undifferentiated Self) will always be dissipated by the light of that jewel (the discriminating consciousness). Similarly, Sivam will always evade those who seek it using their own ego-consciousness. If the serpent swallows the jewel, the natural darkness will reassert itself, and there will be no need to seek it, just as, when the ego-consciousness is turned inward and subsides, there is no need to seek Sivam.

Abandoning formal worship, both inner and outer, yogic samadhis and those sleep-like states, in which the kriya yogis mimic the true jnanis who are free of the discriminating consciousness, the true jnanis abide in the Self, so that worldly bondage disappears, like the flame of a lighted lamp in daylight or the rays from a crystal at midday. Who can compare to them? (117)

The verse begins with another reference to meditation on the six energy centres of the body, each with its resident deity, the aaru aathaaram. The yogi becomes identified with each of these in turn, using intensive concentration and visualisation techniques. See also v. 94 and notes.

The aim of such practices is to raise up the energies of the gross and subtle bodies along the spinal column, and to concentrate them in the brahmarandhra centre, located in the brain, at which point the mind becomes totally dormant as in deep sleep. This state is condemned by the jnani as worse than useless because the mind and mental faculties resume their former activities once it is ended, but and because the individual, in such a state, is deprived of any further opportunity to seek the true goal of merging definitively with the Self or Sivam. He may give up that search, mistakenly regarding this state as the ultimate goal.

In the state of realisation the individual ego, which was so prominent in its former state of ignorance, is subsumed in the Self,
losing its individual identity. Similarly the flame of a lighted lamp, although shining brightly in the darkness of night, becomes invisible during the day, being entirely subsumed in the bright light of the sun. Also, in the state of realisation, all the mental faculties (here referred to as *pacam* – *the worldly bond*) subside into the Self and become inactive. In a similar way, a crystal or prism will emit coloured rays in all directions when the light strikes it at various angles during the morning and evening, but will remain clear when the rays of the sun fall from directly overhead at midday.

The Self now awakens the *jiva* from the darkness of absolute nescience, [unites it with the mind and senses], and [finally] abolishes the objective delusion of waking and sleep, gradually consuming the ego-consciousness as the flame consumes the wick of a lamp. Therefore the only recourse is to give oneself up as a prey to the Self], the one who devours one’s [ego] consciousness. The very act of thinking about it will drive it away from you. (118)

In Saiva Siddhanta the soul is pictured as being initially sunk in a state of total nescience. It is only Sivam that, by bringing it into contact with the thirty-six *tattvas*, causing it to experience the three *malams*, and finally eradicating those defilements through the power of its grace, can lead it to the state of oneness with itself. Once it becomes united with the *tattvas*, the *jiva* alternates between *cakalam* (waking and dreaming, in which a manifold objective world appears, in gross and subtle form respectively), and *kevalam* (deep sleep), which, although a state of non-differentiation in which no world appears, is not the state of absolute nescience referred to previously.

Since it is impossible for the mind to seek the Self, it can only present itself in a condition of submission, where it can easily be subsumed in the Self. It therefore must offer itself up as prey, as it were, to be devoured by the Self.

Even the Advaitins, who assert that all that they know objectively is false, cannot escape being trapped in an empty
void. Like them you will be destined to repeated births and deaths. However, having experienced the loss of your ego-consciousness, and the bliss that arises thereafter, if you transcend even these, birth and death will end for you. (119)

The danger, even for the Advaitin, is that, having realised the essential emptiness of all phenomena, if he does not then eradicate the consciousness that formerly perceived the world and now perceives an empty void, he will remain trapped in that empty void, unable to grasp the dynamic reality of the non-dual Self. Bhagavan said:

“In all books on Vedanta you will find this question of a void or of nothing being left, raised by the disciple and answered by the Guru. It is the mind that sees objects and has experiences and that finds a void when it ceases to see and experience, but that is not ‘you’. You are the constant illumination that lights up both the experiences and the void. It is like a theatre light that enables you to see the theatre, the actors and the play while the play is going on but also remains alight and enables you to say that there is no play when it is all finished.”

The falling away of the individual consciousness is succeeded by one of deep bliss. However, since there is still some trace of a consciousness experiencing these states, they too cannot be the final state, and they too are transcended in the final state of union with the Self.

Sivam is the fullness of perfection which abides as the consciousness of consciousness itself; as that which is entirely without divisions. For those who presume to create and destroy Sivam in their minds, meditating on it sporadically, and in such a way that it is limited by their own imperfection, how can birth be avoided? (120)

The text says arivukku arivu, literally the consciousness of consciousness itself. This is the pure consciousness, pure being, that remains as the sustaining core of the relative or discriminating consciousness, cuttariyu in Tamil.

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Having gained some intuitive sense of the greater reality that is the background to their existence, people will try to grasp that intuitive knowledge mentally; having failed in one approach, they will abandon it and adopt other strategies, also based on the mind. And so they will carry on, creating and destroying their false conception of Sivam. The latter part of the verses describes the manner in which the creation and destruction of Sivam takes place. It is done in a manner which does no justice at all to its all-embracing, absolute nature, and Sivam is thus limited, restricted (or rather appears to be so), by the very attempt to think about it. However elevated the concept, the mind is unable to maintain it without straying and forgetting what it was thinking about previously. Thus it is done maravaiyumay – with forgetfulness, punctuated by periods of forgetfulness, here translated as sporadically.

Even as I revelled ceaselessly in the alternating states of remembering (waking and dream) and forgetting (deep sleep), the mind’s delusion, the appearance of a world of diversity and the consequent desire and aversion, Jnanasambandhar transformed me through his gaze and through his touch into his own likeness, as the sun dispels the darkness, and the philosopher’s stone transforms base metal into gold. (121)

Forgetting and remembering are glossed by TCS as equivalent to kevalam – deep sleep and cakalam – waking and dream. In the states of relative consciousness, marappum ninaippum – forgetting (deep sleep), and remembering (waking), the jiva suffers from mayakku – delusion as to its true nature, and becomes identified with the body. From this identification arises vikarpu, vikaarpam – the world of diversity, which in turn engenders attachment in the form of veruppu and viruppu – aversion and desire, which are the source of the deeds whose fruits give rise to the cycle of births.

Saivite initiation, diksha, is performed by the threefold agency of sight, touch and thought. TCS points out that the latter is to be understood as included here, as the first two could not take place without the third.

(To be continued)

This book is a comprehensive analysis of the Mandukya Upanisad and Gaudapada’s Mandukya Karika. The author begins by observing that, though everyone in the world seeks happiness, few are the individuals who know what true happiness is, where it lies, and how to experience it. To be thorough one should look at one’s entire life experience through the three states of consciousness: the waking, dream, and deep-sleep states and their corresponding objective ‘universes’. This is the main teaching of the Mandukya Upanisad and its elucidation of the Om.

The book contains a vast wealth of information. Appendix One contains a word for word translation and commentary on the Mandukya Upanisad complete with devanagari, transliteration, and English translation. Appendix Two analyses ‘other states of consciousness’ including lucid dreaming besides the well-known three. Appendix Four examines the concept of ‘chidabhasa’; appendix Five the concept of ‘manonasā’; appendix Six examines an apparent contradiction on the similarity between the waking and dream state. There is an exhaustive glossary of Sanskrit terms. There is an unbelievably thorough annotated bibliography regarding works on the Mandukya Upanisad and Gaudapada’s Karika.

Unlike other works on the Mandukya, the author presents the material topically. Chapters include: What the Mandukya is about; The world appearance; Causality; Creation; Nature of Reality; Self Knowledge; Practical Aspects; and Conclusion. Whether it is analyzing the Omkara, the waking, dream, deep sleep, and Turiya (the Fourth) states, Ajati-vada (nothing has ever been born), or Asparsa-
yoga (the yoga of non-touch), the author provides extremely insightful comments. The author draws on traditional and original analogies, and where appropriate, commentaries by Adi Sankara, Anandagiri, and a host of contemporary gurus and scholars.

The author, has written this work with an objective to render this important, though relatively unknown text to the public at large, in a simple, clear, coherent and consistent way. Every page contains the ‘voice of the author’ and that is one of its delights, especially for the non-academic reader. As well, the author always includes the textual references to whatever topic he is addressing. This makes it convenient for anyone who would like to delve deeper into the topic at hand to go straight to the text.

Because the author has consulted and studied virtually everything written on the Mandukya, he can stand ‘on their shoulders’ surveying the entire landscape, thus enabling him to extract the best from all the previous interpretations. For those who have an authentic aspiration to know what Advaita means and follow its implications, this is a wonderful place to begin. Gaudapada’s thunderous “nothing has ever been born, nothing will ever die, nothing has really happened at all,” is rendered logically, coherently and intelligibly herein. Buy it. It is worth much more than the price of admission. Herein lies the Truth of Advaita presented in logical, simple language supported by Scripture and Experience.

— John Grimes


This book is a collection of 108 discourses of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati (1871-1953), both in Hindi and English translation. True to the duties of the Sankaracaryas, Swamiji, who became the Sankaracharya of Jyotirmath, a seat that had been vacant for 165 years, travelled
around India expounding the teachings (*dharma*) of Hinduism. These discourses cover a myriad of subjects ranging from the following: the nature of the Divine, the nature and effects of one’s actions (*karma*), the value of human life, sin, *satsang, sadhana, siddhis*, the senses, the mind, suffering, the guru, the stages of life and the classes of individuals, happiness, enlightenment, meditation, possessions, obstacles on the spiritual path, *maya, dharma*, and so on. His talks explore the meaning and purpose of human life in a way that renders deep and difficult religious topics easily and clearly. These talks are elucidating reading for anyone seriously interested in Indian Philosophy, Hinduism, and spiritual practices.

Swamiji left home at the tender age of nine to roam the Himalayan hills where he eventually found his guru, Shri 108 Shri Dandi Swamiji Krishanand Sarasvati of Uttarkashi. Then in 1904, at the age of thirty-three, his guru initiated him as a sannyasin. Among Swamiji’s many disciples are the famous Swami Karpati, Swami Swaroopanand, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. For fifty years Swamiji lived mainly in caves in the mountains and jungles of North India until his guru told him, “You have stayed a long time in the jungles and mountains. Now stay near the towns so that some of the people can benefit.” That is how it came to pass that humanity was able to benefit from Swamiji’s wisdom. That is how he became well known for his spiritual radiance and wisdom. After becoming the Sankaracharya of Jyotirmath, Swamiji set up an ashram in Varanasi. This ashram became the official seat of the Sankaracharya of the Jyotirmath in 1941. It was from here that Swamiji organized the restoration of the peeth of Jyotirmath.

These talks were originally published in Swamiji’s ashram newsletter as *Shri Shankaracharya Upadesha* in Hindi. This Indian edition of the discourses has been made available through the efforts of Indica Books with the help of Alvaro Enterria, editor. Over the years Indica Books has rendered a wonderful service in publishing books of real substance and this stands as another example.

— John Grimes

Ganapatrao Maharaj (1909-2004) the author of this deceptively simple book of advice is an acknowledged master in the Nath Sampradaya of Maharashtra and Karnataka. The contents were originally talks given between 1975 & 1985 and were transcribed and published under the title Sulabha Atma Jnana. It is now available in a proficient and down-to-earth English shorn of all the usual verbiage of spiritual books based on public talks. Far from it: Maharaj means business. There is an urgency in his yearning to transmit the truth and he is not one to waste his time with rhetorical flourishes nor allow foolish and blind beliefs to pass unnoticed. “How invaluable is this human body! You can acquire jnana by using every moment you have. But you think about money instead, and throw away precious moments available to you! This Kamadhenu or the wish-fulfilling cow [of time], has come to your house; don’t push it away like a fool saying, ‘Who will take the trouble of feeding it?’ Use the invaluable moments in paramartha (absolute truth) which gives you real benefit.”

The premise of the book is that the truth is uncomplicated. In the hands of a master such as Maharaj we are given a practical step by step overview. “The essential requirements for jnana are: one must have viveka or discrimination; vairagya or detachment; the six-fold qualities such as shama or tranquillity of mind and dama or self-control. Above all, one must have an intense desire to know oneself. All these pertain to the inner nature. If you have these qualities, that is enough; it does not matter how they have been acquired.”

It is no wonder that Maharaj by the end of his earthly days was surrounded by a large following who hung on every pearl that passed his lips. A great, compassionate, wise and generous soul, he touched the lives of many and transformed them into seekers. Read aright this book will do the same. — Christopher Quilkey
Maha Puja
Maha Puja is one of the four important days in the ashram calendar. It is in honour of The Mother whose Matrubhuteswar temple is fundamentally important for the welfare of the ashram and the propagation of the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. The temple and the rituals performed generate the necessary sattvic sakti for the ashram to function properly. The festivities in honour of The Mother commenced on the evening of the 8th June with a performance by Ramananjali in the Library Auditorium in this, their 505th performance. The songs were by Bhagavan, Muruganar, Ganapati Muni, Sivaprakasham Pillai and others. The main day celebrations started in the early morning hours of the 10th June to the sounds of Mahanyasa japa with flower decorating in the Mother’s Shrine and New Hall. The abhishekam began around 9am and was followed by arati and songs from Susilamma and other women devotees. On the evenings of 9th and 10th in Bhagavan’s Shrine, newly released videos depicting the sites important in Bhagavan’s life with accompanying music were shown to a large gathering of devotees.

Veda Patasala
Sri Ramanasramam joins company with Sringeri, Kanchipuram, Tirupati, Rajahmundry and Mysore as one of only a handful of Vedic Pariksha centres in South India. Some sixty students from all over South India came to undergo three days of examinations (9th to 11th June) in Krishna Yajur Veda, Rig Veda and Sama Veda. Mulam, Kramam, Samhita, Padam in Krishna Yajur Veda; Purvabham and Uttarabham in Sama Veda; and Padam and Kramam in Rig Veda were among the examinations given.

The Rishis of ancient times sought ways to ensure preservation of the purity and sanctity of the sastra and thus devised various pathas or modes of recitation to guarantee accurate transmission down through the generations. Pariksha is yet another measure to ensure that the various pathas are transmitted faithfully.
In all, nearly sixty certificates were awarded at Sri Ramanasramam in this first *pariksha* attended by Vedic scholars. For next year’s *pariksha* it is hoped to include *Atharvana Veda* and *Shukla Yajur Veda* as well as *Krishna Yajur Veda Jata Patha* (‘mesh recitation’) and *Ghana Patha* (‘dense recitation’).

**Advent**

The 1st September is a special day in the ashram calendar. It is on this day in 1896 that Bhagavan arrived at Arunachala. Ramana devotees from the Madurai Mandhiram make the pilgrimage each year in a group to celebrate Bhagavan’s arrival at Arunachala. There was a special *parayana* by this group at the Ashram. In the Arunachaleswara Temple, a special *abhishekam* was performed for the Arunachaleswara linga by the Ashram. It is a time of great joy in the Ashram in which a large group of devotees from Palani later joined.

**Ulladu Narpadu: Anubandham Talks**

Nochur Sri Venkataraman’s seven days of discourses (in Tamil) in the Library Auditorium began on Sunday morning the 12th July and were devoted to Bhagavan’s *Ulladu Narpadu: Anubandham*. *Ulladu Narpadu* was completed last year and this year’s series was devoted to the first six verses of the Supplement. All discourses are available...
for free download in video format from Ramanasramam’s Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SriRamanaDevotee>.

A third set of seven discourses in a series on Aksharamanamalai (in English) by Nochur is tentatively scheduled to begin the day after Jayanti which this year falls on the 27th December.

**Obituary**

Balu Mama came to the Ashram in the early 1970s when he was working as a cook at a hotel in Vellore. Former Ashram Cashier Ganapati Raman was employed nearby in a bank in Vellore and on one of his many regular trips to Tiruvannamalai, he brought Balu Mama with him. At the time there was need of cooks in the Ashram kitchen. Balu joined and served in the Ashram for the next forty years. Viswanatha Swami often spoke with great affection about Balu, pointing out how he “loved to serve the devotees”. And he always served with a smile which endeared him to devotees and made them feel welcome in the Dining Hall. Nothing was too much trouble when he served in the kitchen. On Tuesday 16th June, Balu Mama returned from Pondicherry hospital and merged peacefully at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan at 8pm the 17th June. He is survived by his wife, one son and two daughters.

**Youtube**

Sri Ramanasramam has its own youtube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including recent discourses for free download. Please visit the channel at: https://www.youtube.com/user/SriRamanaDevotee