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# Ramana Ashtottaram

103. ॐ भवरोगभिषग्वराय नमः

om bhavarogabhiṣagvarāya namaḥ

Prostration to the best of Physicians who destroys the ego, the root cause of all disease and discomfort.

The disease of mistaking this phenomenal existence as real is cured radically by destroying the ego through administering the master medicine, *atma-vichara*. Bhagavan Ramana manifests Vaidyanathan, Lord Siva, the master Physician, who cures our sorrows and releases us from the wheel of *samsara*.

104. ॐ स्कन्दाय नमः

om skandāya namaḥ

Prostration to Skanda as the earthly manifestation of Siva.

The *sphurana*, the vibration, of 'I-I' in the heart, is Skanda. He is a manifestation of *Isvara* who is accessible and active on this earth. Skanda is a ray of the transcendent and unapproachable Sun, who is Siva.

## Fool's Gold

**Fool's gold:** any yellow metal, esp. pyrite or chalcopyrite; fig. something deceptively attractive, profitable, etc., in appearance.  
— Oxford Dictionary definition.

Suddenly, out of a daydream we may see a possibility that seems too good to be true. Usually it is. We must learn not to be taken in by glitter and we must recognise the true glow of gold. Even though superficially glitter sparkles and casts a deceptive lure, it actually has nothing to offer. Some people sadly seek the glamour of superficiality without recognising what it is they are seeking. In fact, it is fool's gold. We are so lucky to be in touch with Bhagavan Ramana who embodies the depth and worth of true light.

Our foolishness lies in the false logic that we can get something for nothing. It is not like that at all. Bhagavan said that we are neck deep in Grace and it all depends on the size of our vessel. If we bring a pot to him, we cannot receive more than that. If we bring a cauldron we accept the appropriate amount. In other words, we get what we put into it with interest! Bhagavan is no miser or fussy accountant; he is beneficent beyond our wildest dreams. The problem is we cling to our petty dreams and ambitions as if these pretty pebbles are all we have or want. The question is how to let go of our small mindedness?

Deep down in our hearts we know that it is only by our own instruments of body, heart, mind and labour that we can obtain real gold. We know nothing is free in this world and we learn from bitter experience that anyone who tells you otherwise is deluded.

Bhagavan was asked by Swami Yogananda:

“How is the spiritual uplift of the people to be effected? What are the instructions to be given them?”

M.: They differ according to the temperaments of the individuals and according to the spiritual ripeness of their minds. There cannot be any instruction en masse.

D.: Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realisation of God?

M.: Suffering is the way for Realisation of God.

D.: Should He not ordain differently?

M.: *It is the way.*”<sup>1</sup>

This is not a sweet panacea that Bhagavan counsels. Every winter in recent years at Tiruvannamalai, we see the example of new temples springing up to cater for those who are willing to give a coin as they stand before a shrine in the hope of being heard. Witness a plethora of would-be gurus who hawk their credentials, knowing that there is a steady influx of visitors who come, attracted by the fame of Arunachala and Bhagavan. Casting their nets to earn a name, power and a fortune they present an attractive face and possibly a sincere, though inept, wish to help others. The subtle allure of wanting to be worshipped is as powerful as the allure of gold. It is fool’s gold in another form.

Bhagavan did not deliberately take upon himself to help others for he saw no one as separate from himself. It was his very presence that spontaneously healed and enlightened. Automatically the pervasive sense of light around him made everything translucent. He had no calculated desire to shine but like the sun it was his nature to do so. It was seen by those with the discrimination to recognise truth as opposed to fantasy. Aside from mature souls, children saw it best of all.

It is a question of sincerity: we get what we deserve. No more, no less as the law of karma is exact. Yet before we throw up our arms in misery we should recollect that *Isvara* grants us that *prarabdha karma*

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<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M.,(compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2006. §107. Italics mine.

which is necessary for our spiritual development. Always there is light if we but open our minds and hearts.<sup>2</sup>

Some people are lucky in that they instinctively recognise the true from the false and they walk the path led on by the shining light at the end. Others may have to endure cruel disillusionment before they are confident they are on the right path. We come to realise that Bhagavan is right: the pain and suffering are a necessary part of the process of attaining one's goal. We are given all that is necessary to fulfil our lives. We would do well to remember in the midst of our despair those who reached the other side and looked back, and saw that their suffering was as nothing compared to the blessings. They lament nothing for they saw it all was necessary.

We recognise the difference in worth between someone who has been through the fire of personal tragedy and the unreliable person occupied with irrelevancies. The person who realises that everything contributes to our growth has no regrets and accepts even the disasters and crushing disappointments as a blessing. Once we comprehend that suffering has a meaning, we have taken the first significant step towards liberation.

On the path, we are confronted with stark choices at various important junctions in our lives, which we know will have dramatic and lasting consequences. These flashpoints are the fires that can burn away the illusions we hold. Who we become depends on our commitment to the truth (*satyam*) and acceptance of the cost.

Sometimes we work in the dark and can never quite anticipate the consequences. There is a grey area of uncertainty as we weigh the pros and cons. What is the criterion that gives us the necessary perspective as to what the right decision is? And if we do make the 'wrong' choice then how do we rectify the situation when our illusions collapse? Our aching desire to find someone to guide us can cause us to gloss over and excuse the faults in the one at whose feet we have cast ourselves; and once we have committed ourselves it is even harder to admit that we have made a mistake.

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<sup>2</sup> *Upadesa Saram* v.1. "Action yields fruit according to the ordinance of God. Action being inert, can it be God?"

The outstanding illustration of the spiritual dilemma for us devotees is the crisis which faced the young Venkataraman in Madurai after the enlightenment that catapulted him beyond the fear of death and into the realm of immortality. All sense of doership evaporated and he remained effortlessly quiet and still in the depths of this new profound state of permanent illumination. When confronted by his brother on his seeming laziness, “Venkataraman recognised the validity of the remark and, with that ruthless acceptance of truth (or justice, which is applied truth) that characterised him, he rose to his feet to leave the house there and then and go forth, renouncing everything. This decision took him to Tiruvannamalai and the holy hill, Arunachala.”<sup>3</sup>

We should be careful not to assume that we too are like Ramana Maharshi and can leave all normal security behind at a stroke as if we are *mumukshus* (ripe souls burning for liberation). It either happens or it doesn't and no direct appeal to Bhagavan for permission can force it to happen. More often than not, it is an incremental change that occurs until one day it becomes obvious what the next step is.

It is the clear experience of many devotees that Bhagavan will not interfere. His blessings are there in abundance but each of us has our own individual *prarabdha* (fate). We are all unique and we each have our own *vasanas* (tendencies) to overcome and transform. We cannot abnegate responsibility.

The major moments of truth that decisively alter our lives come in different guises but the primary argument is this: will my decision help or hinder my journey towards what I know in my heart of hearts is the truth? Will my response free me or will it bind? Am I blinded by the glamour of an enticement? Am I fooling myself by timidly accepting something for the sake of peace or perhaps, am I violently reacting because all that I laboriously believed in and built up, is now found to be unsatisfactory and I cannot accept the truth?

There is no end to the variety of challenges, and unless we exercise discrimination, confusion in the form of physical and mental pain will arise until we wake up. We may find ourselves in a whirlpool of

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<sup>3</sup> Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, 2012. p.19.

conflicting emotions and thoughts because we have been fooled by the glamour of a promise, the deceit of a false impression or, more likely, the gullibility of wishing it were true because it is so appealing. We must listen to that still, small voice in us that some may call conscience; others may call it our sense of integrity. If it is damaged we know we are on the wrong path.

Like the magician's trick, the glitter of fool's gold often distracts one from seeing the truth. Although it does not sparkle with the depth of true light it distracts one from seeing the value of what is really there. We ask how then can we not be deceived by fool's gold? We wish to be happy so how can we avoid all the pain and suffering that seems to be our *prarabdha*? Like the thirsty person lost in a desert we succumb to the mirage of water shimmering on the horizon. We think that this time it will be water because we *want* it to be true.

We have five so-called bodies or *kosas*: the physical (*annamaya*), vital (*pranamaya*), mental (*manomaya*), consciousness (*vijnanamaya*) and bliss (*anandamaya*) that require cultivation, but for the purposes of this editorial we can say there are three 'bodies' we need to feed and maintain: the stomach, the mind and the heart. If we give all three the right food, that is, *sattvic* food, we could say that half the battle is won. Whatever we focus our minds, hearts and stomachs on will give us instant feedback. We all know that if we eat greasy, rancid food our stomachs will immediately tell us we made a mistake. Similarly we should be more perceptive when tempted by fast food that offers instant satisfaction. It may give pleasure but the nutritional value is minimal. So too, with the thoughts and emotions that flicker through our consciousness. It is important to keep clean because we inevitably suffer, if not now then later, from negative thoughts or emotions. Depression is a result of wrong thinking.

It is one of the certainties of this world that what we do to others is done to us. What we eat, we become; what we think, we become; what we feel, we become. We do have choice and with this freedom, if we exercise discrimination and dispassion, the way will become clear, for no one in their right mind wishes themselves harm. ▲



Arunachala view from Panchamukham

# Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

A Detailed Commentary by  
Muhavai Kanna Muruganar

SADHU NATANANANDAN

*Sri Ramanasramam has published in early 2015 a translation by 'KAYS' into English of Muruganar's 1952 published Tamil commentary on Arunachala Aksharamanamalai. A second translation by Robert Butler is now available for devotees. The following is Sri Natanananda's Introduction from the second translation. Sri Natanananda was responsible for compiling Vichara Sangraham (Self-Enquiry) and Upadesa Manjari (Spiritual Instruction).*

*Homage to the supreme Self, Sadguru Sri Ramana*

**I**t is said that, to reveal the meaning of the *Tiruvacakam*, the noble Sri Manikkavacagar simply pointed to the divine Hall [of Chidambaram], before himself merging as one with it and disappearing.<sup>1</sup> This is something that should give us much food for thought. If one were to have asked Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who gave us

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<sup>1</sup> According to his biography Manikkavacagar, when asked the meaning of the *Tiruvacakam*, simply pointed at the Golden Hall of Chidambaram, his body vanishing and dissolving into light as he did so. See *Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam*, *Man sumanta patalam*, v. 3105, and *Tiruvatavur Atikal Puranam*, vv. 535-538.

in grace *Aksharamanamalai*, what its meaning was, there is no doubt that he too would have remained silent, pointing to Arunachala, and revealing that its meaning was Arunachala itself.

When we consider the story of Bhagavan Sri Ramana's life, it is seen to be a tale of divine grace, in which 'the flashing forth of Arunachala' (*Arunachala sphurana*) appeared in him as his very nature 'from the innocence of youth,' entirely swallowed up his body, possessions, his very soul and caused him to exist as one with its very own Self.

That there was in him at first some trace of dualistic awareness is demonstrated in his words, 'I have left in search of my Father according to his command.'<sup>2</sup> However, as soon as he laid eyes on Arunachala, he attained the transcendental state in which he remained as the Self alone, as exemplified in the words, 'When I sought in my mind who the seer was, I perceived Him standing there with no trace of the seer,'<sup>3</sup> and remained absorbed for a long period of time in his natural state, *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*, as the very form of Arunachala (unalloyed, pure being), 'which allows nothing to manifest, other than its own nature as the Self.'<sup>4</sup>

Later, he gained the realisation that, although grace and the world are not different, the Self manifests in two different ways, and thus was able to attain the state of *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*, the experience of consciousness free of divisions, in which, even on the worldly level, he still perceived everything, without distortion, through the eye of grace. It was at this juncture that this first work appeared, as the expression of that experience.

Already his awareness, his energy, his mind, his voice, everything had been swallowed up by Arunachala on his arrival there, even as 'the day consumes that darkness of night,' and the name 'Arunachala, Arunachala!' flashed forth from Arunachala's gracious presence which shines as pure being. What meaning then could there be to those

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<sup>2</sup>The words in quotes are taken from the note that Bhagavan left behind when he left his home in Madurai to go to Arunachala.

<sup>3</sup>*Arunacala Astakam*, v. 2, l. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Tayumanavar, hymn 14, *Akara puvanam – Citampara rakacijam*, v. 22, l.1.

‘flashings forth,’ other than that Arunachala itself, the fullness of the Real?

Further, the qualities displayed in the strength of Bhagavan’s austerities, his attainment of the Supreme, are evidenced in such utterances as, ‘Entering my home, you dragged me from it and made me dwell as a prisoner in the cave of your Heart’; ‘Removing my dark delusion, you held me in thrall to your Reality with the magic collyrium of your grace’; ‘Enchanting me as if with magic powder, you revealed your Siva consciousness, plucking away my *jiva* consciousness’; ‘Grasping me as the ghost (*Brahman*) which does not let go of me, so that my ghost nature (the ego) left me, you made of me a ghostly one’; ‘What austerities have I performed, that you should take me as the target of your grace?’.

If we examine such utterances carefully, we can see that his experience was not that of many of the other great sages. According to the expression, ‘If one worships Lord Siva, practising austerities over many eons of time, right understanding may dawn to some degree,’ such sages exerted themselves over long periods of time to gain spiritual maturity through the acquisition of grace gained only with great difficulty. Then, through their own efforts, coupled with the sadguru’s glance of grace, they understood the inner meaning of the *mahavakya* teachings, ‘Brahman am I,’ ‘He am I,’ and ‘Siva am I.’

Finally having performed arduous austerities on paths such as ‘the way of the ant,’ ‘the way of the bird,’ and ‘the way of the monkey,’ [all of which require some form of effort on the part of the *sadhaka*],<sup>5</sup> they attained the state of union which is the meaning of the word ‘art’ [in the *mahavakya* ‘Thou art That’].

Whilst this was so in their case, in the case of Sri Ramana, however, it can be said with certainty that even in his dreams he never thought

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<sup>5</sup> *pipilika marga* – the way of the ant signifies the slow progression of the *sadhaka* through the various stages on the spiritual path; *vihanga marga* – the way of the bird signifies the direct path in which the *sadhaka* proceeds immediately to the practice of *jnana yoga* and *markata nyaya* – the way of the monkey signifies the path of devotion and faith in which the *sadhaka* clings tightly to the Lord in the face of all hardships, as a baby monkey clings to its mother as she swings from tree to tree.

about, desired or strived to attain anything, be it true knowledge, the attainment of liberation, teachings, or the grace of a guru, and that, rather than saying 'he became' Arunachala, it is more appropriate to say, 'he was transformed' into Arunachala. Moreover, when he exclaims in tones of praise and wonder, 'Say to me, "Without knowing the truth of *Thou art That* thus much did you attain. This state that you have attained is the final truth,"' it becomes clear that he is addressing Sri Arunachala, in the second person, as the one who granted him in grace the direct experience of *Brahman* that arose in him suddenly 'in the way of the cat' [which holds its kitten firmly by the neck].<sup>6</sup>

Having had this new, unexpected and wondrous experience of coming to dwell simply as 'That', in which he was thus swallowed up by the vast effulgence of grace, he at that time took up the enquiry, 'Who am I', desiring to refine his understanding of, and become firmly established in, his nature and form, and it was this same enquiry that in later times he taught as *Atma vichara* to the followers who paid homage to him.

Thus the subject of this work is Arunachala, the unmoving reality whose nature is being-consciousness-bliss. It is the space of consciousness (*chidambaram*) which transcends word and thought. Who are those who are capable of perceiving the essence of that nature which is known only through divine silence (*mauna*)! The firm conclusion established by the experience of the great sages is, '[Who can speak of its greatness and to whom?] When That [Reality] comes about, they will be only That. That alone can speak [of its greatness].'<sup>7</sup> Therefore it is a certain fact that only those who possess the fitness for dwelling in that immovable state are the fit ones to communicate that state.

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<sup>6</sup> In Bhagavan's case there was no need for him to seek the Lord by any of the previously mentioned means. It was Arunachala who took hold of him and did not let go, as a cat grasps her kitten by the loose skin at the neck. This is called *marjala nyaya* – *the way of the cat*.

<sup>7</sup> Tayumanavar, Hymn 14, *Akara puwanam – Citampara rakaciyam*, v. 22, l.4..

That great soul, Sri Muruganar, is one who, through the grace of his guru, is possessed of a great strength and ability to take on and complete tasks that are extremely difficult to accomplish. Worshipping the feet of his guru through that grace itself, and relying upon the power of that grace, he has embarked upon the great, rare and good endeavour of discerning the recondite meaning of this work of grace, *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*. That one such as he has achieved a truly miraculous success in his endeavour, is not to be wondered at. No other excellence need be desired of this work, other than that it was composed by Muruganar with the grace of Sri Ramana as his eyes.

However there is one further point worth mentioning. This commentary was composed at a time when Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the author of the source text, still inhabited his radiant, divine bodily form. Being in Bhagavan's divine presence, Muruganar was able to compose it having clearly ascertained the author's intended meaning for every single word of the text, so that there was not the slightest discrepancy between the text and its commentary.

As with the commentaries on the *Prasthanatrayam* and many other commentaries on works imbued with grace, doubts assail the minds of those who study them in a number of places regarding the congruence of meaning between the text and the commentary. However this commentary possesses the unique excellence in which the possibility has been entirely eradicated that it might appear to anyone, ever, that there was a lack of congruence between itself and the text.

Until today, this work, *Sri Aksharamanamalai*, has been considered an ordinary example of the genre of hymns of praise, worshipping Sri Arunachaleswarar in its own distinct fashion as the form of the Supreme, and, as such, has been used for regular recitation (*parayana*). But now, due to the brilliance of the learned Sri Muruganar's commentary, it shines out as a distinguished, authoritative treatise, and has endeared him to the hearts of all devotees. It is no exaggeration to say that this Commentary has made of him one who is rich in grace, who dwells with Sri Ramana, his guru and god. It is certain that this commentary will be greeted with great delight by the wise and learned.





# A Teaching of Mother Sri Sarada Devi

## If You Want Peace of Mind do Not Find Fault with Others

RAMEN MITRA

A few days before she went into Mahasamadhi Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, uttered a few words to a devotee. This was her last advice to all her devotees and to the world.

“I tell you one thing – if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own.”<sup>1</sup>

Every human being tends to suffer from ‘egoism’ and forgets his or her own real ‘self’. This egoism arises from attachment to the gross body. This attachment and love for gross body leads to many evils,

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<sup>1</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi - The Mother of All*, compiled by Swami Raghaveshananda, Vivekananda Ashram (a branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math), Ulsoor, Bangalore. p.23, No. 90. ‘Mother’s Compassion.’

Ramen Mitra is a devotee of the Holy Trio of Sri Ramakrishna Math as well as of Bhagavan. He and his wife have initiations (*mantra diksha*) from Swami Gahanananda Maharaj, immediate past President of the Sri Ramakrishna Math. He is a 75 year old chartered accountant who, after retirement in 2002, settled in Pondicherry.

which ultimately ruins the peace and happiness of a human being. *Sokas* 62 and 63 of the chapter on 'Sankhyayoga' of *Sri Bhagavad Gita* have spelt out the consequences of such ill-effects of egoism.

Egolessness or humility was inherent in Sri Ma's character. This must not be confused with formal politeness or courtesy. True humility is based on spiritual perception. The Holy Mother said that in the fullness of spiritual realisation a person finds that the God who resides in his heart resides in the hearts of all – the oppressed, the persecuted, the lonely and the untouchables or harijans. This realisation makes one truly humble.

Sri Ma's last advice is not bound by time and space. It is ever existent. Although her few words appear to be unassuming, they have given us a message, the faithful application of which in personal, social, national and international life can save the world from the tension of fear and insecurity and bring abiding peace. As such it is important for every person to try to understand the real, inherent meaning of the message as deeply and comprehensively as possible. As one tries to meditate deeper on the significance of Sri Ma's simple message, one is surprised with the discovery that herein lies a compact scheme for the regeneration of mankind, in which peace and joy in life will be by-products. The aforesaid last message of Sri Sarada Devi is nothing but the true inner meaning of Vedanta.

On an earlier occasion the Holy Mother remarked that the mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure or impure.

She asked, "Can you injure anybody by enumerating his faults? You only injure yourself. I cannot see anybody's shortcomings."<sup>2</sup>

She could not see anybody's shortcomings. If a person was inconsiderate in some way towards her she would see it without any sense of offence. To her forgiveness was a great religious austerity. There was no virtue higher than forgiveness.

There are many instances of instructions given by Sri Sarada Devi, that are seemingly simple but have deep spiritual meaning. Once a devotee came to Sri Ma for her guidance on meditation and spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Nikhilananda, Swami, *Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. p.241.

*sadhana* (practice). All day the devotee was with Mother and to her dismay she observed that Sri Ma was all the time busy with household jobs. So, at the time of parting in the evening the devotee told Sri Ma that she had come to her for guidance on *sadhana* and had observed that Mother had been occupied with household jobs. Mother replied that this was *sadhana* and added that whatever be our daily routine we must do it with proper concentration, diligence and with love for such work. Even a petty job done with proper care is *sadhana*. Mother said that while being engaged in such work one must not stop from doing *japa* (uttering *mantras*) mentally. Mother gave a high place to *japa* and meditation in the practice of daily devotions. *Japa* purifies the mind, creates inner calmness and leads to meditation. Mother suggested that by such practice we can avoid being engaged in conflict with others and in trifling matters as our mind would remain focused elsewhere.

The Mother forbade everyone, especially women, to remain idle even for a moment. By being continuously engaged in work the equanimity of the mind is preserved and the bondage of *karma* is removed by *sattvic* action, i.e. the accumulated power of good *karmas* or actions checks the influences of bad *karmas*.

Sri Ma once advised a young Brahmacharin that an unpleasant truth, though true, must not be uttered, for that grows into a habit which is a deterrent to one's spiritual practice. One's sensitivity is lost if one has no control over one's speech. According to her one must practise silence not only in one's daily action and speech but also in one's mind.

Holy Mother was gentleness itself and asked devotees not to hurt others even by harsh words. Her message was that one must not speak unpleasant truths unnecessarily. By indulging in rude words one's nature becomes rude and one loses control over one's words.

Sri Ma always advised that work is essential. It is through work alone that one may break the bondage of Karma, and only then is the person free from desires. One must not be without work even for a single moment.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Devotees used to come to Mother regularly with their problems, difficulties, worries and sorrows. She accepted the reality of suffering and said that creation contains both misery and happiness. She asked if anyone could appreciate happiness if misery did not exist. She queried how it was possible to be happy always. No one can suffer all the time either. Every action brings its own result and one gets one's opportunities accordingly. However spiritual a person may be, we must pay the tax to the last penny for the use of our body. Difficulties always come but they do not last forever. We can observe that they eventually pass away, much like water under a bridge.

Mother emphasised the transitory nature of the human body to which we are attached.

“Today's human body will not last tomorrow. Even the shortest span of life is beset with pain and misery. He who is able to renounce all for God's sake is a living god.”<sup>3</sup>

She laid stress on discrimination. She said that whenever the mind goes after anything other than God, it must be considered as transient and ultimately useless behaviour, and advised devotees to surrender their minds at the sacred feet of the Lord. She suggested that devotees must be like a person who, while fishing, became so absorbed in the act, that he did not hear the din and bustle of a marriage procession passing by.

The Holy Mother did not care much for book learning if it did not lead to faith in God and love for Him. She questioned the growth of faith by the mere study of books. In her opinion too much reading creates confusion. This was the view of Sri Ramakrishna also. Mother did not argue or reason, though she stressed the value of discrimination between the real and unreal, between God and the world. Whatever she taught came from the heart and her inner experience. Her simple words often revealed her deep intuition, refinement and inborn culture, though she had no academic education whatever.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation by the author from an article in the Bengali book *Satarupe Sarada*, edited and compiled by Swami Lokeswarananda and published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.

On *moksha* (liberation) Sri Ma said that everyone should desire God with desirelessness. It should be spontaneous. Desire is the obstacle to liberation. She told a devotee that meditation and prayer contain elements of ego. The ubiquitous ego is present even in the practice of spiritual austerities. When an aspirant has passed through the entire gamut of austerities, he realises that God is still far way. Thereafter he surrenders totally to the supreme Divine, seeking His mercy. Genuine self-surrender is not possible without self-effort. Only self-effort helps us to understand that God cannot be realised without total surrender. The Divine reveals Himself to a man according to His convenience and not when a devotee decides that he wants it.

Devi Sarasvati is considered the personification of knowledge, arts, sciences, crafts and skill. Knowledge is the antithesis of the darkness of ignorance. The name 'Sarada' also means Sarasvati (the goddess of learning). "Referring to her (Sri Sarada Devi) he (Sri Ramakrishna) said to a devotee (Golap Ma), 'She is Sarasvati. She has assumed a human body to impart wisdom to men, but she has hidden her celestial beauty lest people by looking at her should befoul their minds with sinful thoughts.'"<sup>4</sup>

The glorious idea of Indian womanhood blazed forth in the hallowed life of the Holy Mother. Those who are eager to realise this ideal for the best interest of mankind will find in her life a splendid example of perfection that may elevate women to their appropriate position in society, namely through spotless purity, humanity, selfless affection, service, forbearance and compassion. Above all, one-pointed devotion to God was the fountainhead of all of a woman's virtues.

Swami Vivekananda prophesied that the glorious era of advancement of human civilization has been heralded by the advent of the Holy Mother. People about to be lost in the wilderness of religious ideas are surely going to find their way out. After a depressing phase of decadence they will step forward on the correct path, manifesting a little more of the Divine within them. ▲

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<sup>4</sup> Nikhilananda, Swami, Op.cit., Chapter 7, 'Spiritual Practice', p. 85.



Kaz Tanahashi's Boundless (by permission)

# Everyday is a Good Day

## Zen on Human Suffering

FR. AMA SAMY

Case: Unmon giving instruction said, “I don’t ask you about before the fifteenth day; bring me a phrase about *after* the fifteenth day.”<sup>1</sup> Unmon himself answered in the monks’ stead, “Every day is a good day.” — *Hekiganroku*, case 6

Master Unmon Bun'en belongs to the late 9th and the first half of the 10th century. He came to awakening under Master Bokushu (Muchou), who was a disciple of Obaku (Huang-po). Bokushu was a severe master and sent Unmon to Master Seppo Gigen, where Unmon matured and deepened his awakening. Unmon became one of the great masters of Ch'an, known for his eloquence

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<sup>1</sup> In Zen, the full moon, which always occurs on the '15th day', is a symbol for the enlightened mind.

Fr. Ama Samy is founder and abbot of Bodhizendo, the Zen meditation centre in Perumalmalai, Kodaikanal District. This article is adapted from his latest book, *Zen: Soundless Sound of One Hand*.

and depth. He established his own lineage, which later merged with that of the Rinzai school.

Unmon's era in China was a troubled one, with revolts, revolutions and persecutions. Unmon challenged his students to go to the core of life's problem. For him, it is not that one has a problem, but that *oneself* is the problem.

The kernel of *Hekiganroku* case 6 is Unmon's phrase, 'Every day is a good day'. Good refers to the transcendent dimension, the realm of Emptiness that is mystery, mystery that is graciousness. But we have to face the night of horrors, the night of hell and nihilism, before we are able to enter *the mystery that is graciousness*.

In his book *Night*, the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel narrates an incident in the concentration camp when three persons were hanged for minor offences, among them an innocent young boy:

The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive.... For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony before our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. His tongue was red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard [a]...man asking: "Where is God now?" And I heard a voice within me answer him: "Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows..."<sup>2</sup>

In the harrowing narrative of *Night*, everything is inverted, every value destroyed. "Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends, everyone lives and dies for himself alone," a Jewish functionary of the Nazis tells Wiesel. Wiesel comments, "I wanted to show the end, the finality of the event. Everything came to an end — man, history, literature, religion and God. There was nothing left. And yet we begin again with night."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wiesel, Elie. Rodway, S.(transl.). *Night*. New York, NY. Hill and Wang. 1986. pp.61-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.105.

Tell me, was it a good day for the boy? Or for Wiesel? Or for you today in the midst of the tragedies and horrors of the world? Wiesel says, “Yet we begin again with night.” Who is there to begin again? The boy is no more.

Humans long for justice, above all for the victim. But rarely in the world is justice achieved, particularly when the victim has been destroyed and erased from the earth. What justice can there be for them?

For the Stoics, the enlightened person is one who realizes his or her identity with the whole of the cosmos. In this identification he or she finds self-sufficiency and acceptance of what cannot be changed. The world as the Self will go on irrespective of one’s individual fate and death. What is to happen, will happen: this is stoic wisdom. One has to accept all the evils and tragedies of life, all the tortures and horrors, in serene acceptance without any hope for freedom beyond the state of things as they are.

Such stoic detachment is also very much Buddhist. Zen is also often interpreted as advocating such detachment. The Zen monk Yamamoto Ryokan, on hearing of an earthquake which killed thousands, said:

When you suffer a calamity—then be it so; now is the time of calamity.

When you die—then be it so; now is the time to die.

Thus you save yourself from calamity and death.

But is not such stoic detachment deficient in human compassion? Does it not idolize autonomy at the expense of love and relationship? Is it not attached to an illusory independence from life’s circumstances? In contrast to this desiccated approach, feel the pathos of the 18th-century Haiku poet Issa when his one-year old daughter dies:

This world of dew is a world of dew, And yet, and yet....

The line highlights the subtle point of contact between Emptiness — the dew — and the fleeting world of human affection. On the one hand, life is a dream, a world of dew, and when the dream is seen through, the tangible pain of life in a world of attachment is

reduced. On the other hand, even the enlightened ones still move in the human realm. So when the enlightened say, *Every day is a good day*, where does suffering fit in? Has it vanished altogether?

*Good* here may mean what Aristotle called *eudaimonia*, flourishing of one's life and wholeness even in the midst of suffering and loss.

It means above all awakening to Emptiness, to the mystery that is graciousness. This is liberation, coming home to the Unborn and Deathless. Awakening is awakening to Emptiness as the Self, as your very Self. In this dimension the world is your Self and you embrace all the world. The sufferings and joys, births and deaths, are all embraced in your Self.

You may remember Thich Nhat Hanh's poem 'Call Me by My True Names' where the poet is not only the frog but also the snake which eats the frog, not only the butterfly but also the bird which eats the butterfly, not only the starving child in Uganda but also the arms merchant who sells arms to the murderers of the children, and not only the girl who was raped and dies but also the heartless sea pirate. The poem ends with the following lines:

Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and my laughs at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.<sup>4</sup>

Awakening is not only the realisation of Emptiness as the Self; it is the realization that you are present to all the world and all beings; you are not an isolated and independent being. You are responsible to all beings. Your heart is the heart of compassion, open to all the world. Otherwise there can be no real answer for evil in the world. Still, in the actual, phenomenal dimension of the self, one is mortal, fragile, heir to suffering, sorrow, destruction and loss. You move on both levels, in the eternal and deathless sphere as well as in the earthly and mortal sphere. Dwelling in the sphere of Emptiness that is mystery, you come to affirm your phenomenal nature. You realise your Self

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<sup>4</sup> Nhat Hanh, Thich. (2005). *Being Peace*. Berkeley, CA. Parallax Press.

in the earthly dimension in a great Yes. It is not stoic resignation but life-affirmation, a *Gelassensein*; it is the coming home of self in love and peace, a peace that is not apart from the tears and sorrows of the world. It is knowing that it is good that you are, for *every day is a good day* in life as well as in death. If you have been preparing yourself during the course of your life, then in the midst of suffering and pain, you can say, “Thy will be done.”

On the subject of suffering, one author writes:

It’s in the midst of difficulty [that people] begin to feel a call. [...]They don’t say, “Well, I’m feeling a lot of pain over the loss of my child, so I should try to balance my hedonic account by going to a lot of parties and whooping it up.” The right response to this sort of pain is not pleasure. It’s holiness. I don’t even mean that in a purely religious sense. It means seeing life as a moral drama, placing the hard experiences in a moral context and trying to redeem something bad by turning it into something sacred.<sup>5</sup>

Of course when one is in good health, has friends and the family is living in prosperity and well-being, when the country is at peace and its inhabitants thrive in freedom, then questions of the meaning of life and questions about the afterlife recede to the background. Nevertheless even in peaceful times, one has to face death and finitude and the thousand ills of our nature and society.

The Biblical Job, when faced with questions of cosmic justice and fate, got no answer except to bow down in silence before the terrible mystery of the universe and the inscrutable God.

When Jesus was asked why a man was born blind, whether it was due to his karma or his parents’ sin, Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (*John* Ch. 9).

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<sup>5</sup> Brooks, David. (17.04.2014). ‘What Suffering Does’. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/08/opinion/brooks-what-suffering-does>>.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

In the final analysis, there are no human means by which to account for evil in the world. We can only stand facing the abyss of a mystery. Finally let me end with some words from Etty Hillesum who died with her whole family in the camp at Auschwitz:

I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps and yet I find life beautiful and meaningful, from minute to minute. It sounds paradoxical but by excluding death from our life we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it. For I know now that life and death make a meaningful whole. I cannot find the right words for this radiant feeling which encompasses but is untouched by all the suffering and all the violence. And if God does not help me to go on, then I shall have to help God. [...] How good and beautiful it is to live in your world, O God, despite everything we human beings do to one another. Sometimes when I stand in a corner of the camp, my feet planted on Your earth, my eyes raised toward Your heaven, tears of deep gratitude run down my face. There are many miracles in this life.<sup>6</sup> ▲

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<sup>6</sup> Hillesum, Etty. Pomerans, Arno (transl.). (1983). *An Interrupted Life — The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. New York, NY. Pantheon Books.

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Sukharadhyaa*, no  
ritual or sacrifice  
your worship requires;  
just the murmur of your name,  
quiet midnight surrender.

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 Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Sixteen

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

5th April 1978

Sadhu Om: Why should we try to classify every action as either *prarabdha* or *agamyā*?<sup>1</sup> We cannot know which action is which, so we will surely go wrong. If we like to do something that we believe to be good, such as coming to live in Tiruvannamalai, we should try to do it, and should not worry ourselves thinking that it may not be in our *prarabdha*. We can do whatever we consider appropriate – the main thing is just not to allow anything to agitate our minds.

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<sup>1</sup> *Prarabdha karma* is that which works itself out in this life while *agamyā karma* are the results of acts performed in this life which will mature in a future birth.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

Once Niranjanananda Swami was facing a critical problem, so he asked Bhagavan what he should do, to which Bhagavan replied, “Do whatever you think is best, only remember that your principal duty (*dharma*) is to keep your mind at peace. Whatever you may decide or whatever may happen, don’t let it disturb your mind.” Whatever may happen, we should regard it as being for what is ultimately best.

We should maintain *pravilapa dristi*, which means considering everything to be ourself, because it is all an expansion of our ego, like everything that we see in a dream. Whatever we experience is according to the divine plan, the sole aim of which is that we *should awaken* from this dream as soon as possible.

22nd April 1978

Sadhu Om: There is in us a power of knowing or attention, which is called *cit-sakti* and which is actually nothing other than *cit* [pure consciousness] itself, whose real nature is to be aware of itself alone. When this power is directed towards other things, we call it ‘mind’, whose function is to think, but when it is directed towards ourself, it remains as our real self, whose nature is just being. Therefore *nistha* [dwelling] on any second or third person is thinking, whereas thinking of ourself is *nistha* [being or abiding as we really are].

12th May 1978

Sadhu Om: I was once trying to puzzle out why every creature, whether human or non-human, makes the same mistake of identifying a body as ‘I’. In all of them we see the same defects, such as desire, greed, lust and anger, and all of these are rooted in this one mistaken notion, ‘I am this body’. Then I understood that if there were many creatures there would be many mistakes, but there is only one. Because I take my body to be ‘I’, I see this ‘I am the body’ identification in every creature I project. Because I have a desire for something, I see the same desire in others. It is just like in a dream, where we see our own desires and fears in all the dream-creatures. The defects we see in others are only our own defects. If we wish to remove the ‘I am the

body' idea in other creatures, we only have to remove it in ourself. Then we will see that no one has this mistaken notion.

Reflecting in this way, I remembered Bhagavan once saying (with reference to a certain devotee who had asked another devotee to seek Bhagavan's approval for the construction of a certain building in the ashram, saying that everyone wants it), "Who says that everyone wants it? It is only he who wants it."

When Bhagavan said that we should not carry on reading innumerable books, he was referring to those books that analyse and discuss the non-self. So long as we do not have sufficient *vairagya* (desirelessness) to attend constantly to ourself, we must continue to read books that encourage *vairagya*. For encouraging *vairagya*, which entails giving up attention to second and third persons, Bhagavan's own works are quite sufficient. Even just one of his works, such as *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), is sufficient. *Vairagya* is the only thing that is lacking, and when it becomes established in our heart all problems will be solved.

16th May 1978

Sadhu Om [parting advice to some new visitors]: Think carefully over the fact that self-knowledge is the basis of all other knowledge, and that therefore what is most necessary is to gain correct knowledge of what you yourself are. The more you reflect along these lines, the more you will love to know yourself. If you cultivate such love, you will certainly also attain self-knowledge. Love and knowledge are inseparable. In fact, they are one and the same thing.

22nd May 1978

Sadhu Om: Some people complain of a heated brain, emotional outbursts or such like as a result of practising *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry]. This shows that they are not practising it properly. If we practise self-attention correctly, we will find it to be a great relief and relaxation from our normal mental activities.

However, so long as our *vasanas* [outward-going propensities] are strong, our minds will be frequently drawn outwards, so our repeated

## MOUNTAIN PATH

efforts to be introverted will create some friction and tension. This is why continuous *nididhyasana* [practice of self-attention] is not recommended, and why we are advised instead to intermittently rest for a while and do some *sravana* [reading] or *manana* [reflection]. Our *vasanas* are strong only because of our strong attachment to this life, but while doing *sravana* and *manana* we are constantly reminding ourselves of the worthlessness of this ego-life, which helps to weaken our *vasanas*, thereby making the practice of self-attention increasingly easy and habitual. This is why alternating *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are recommended.

In his answer to question two of chapter two of *Upadesa Manjari* Bhagavan said that practising this path of *vicara* is possible only for *pakvis* [those who is spiritually ripe or mature], and that others should practise *sadhanas* that are suited to their own particular state of mind. In this context we should take *pakvi* to mean anyone who wants to give up their ego or separate individuality. The *sadhanas* that he says others should practise are not means to attain *manonasa* [annihilation of the mind or ego] but only to attain other aims, such as *citta-suddhi* [purification of mind], divine visions, heavenly experiences, worldly enjoyments or whatever else they may desire. *Atma-vicara* is only for those who want to close the chapter, being tired of repeatedly projecting pictures of ego, world and God. If one is not attracted to *atma-vicara*, one obviously does not want to close the chapter, so one should follow whichever other path appeals to one. In *Sadhanai Saram* I make it clear that *atma-vicara* is only for those who wish to lose their egos, and that only such people should read it.

26th May 1978

Sadhu Om: A quiet mind is not our aim. Our aim is to gain correct knowledge of 'I'. The mind is quiet in sleep, under general anaesthesia and in all other forms of *manolaya* [temporary subsidence of mind], but it again jumps into activity. Only by self-knowledge is it destroyed entirely. Therefore let us ignore the mind, not concerning ourselves with whether it is quiet or active, and instead direct all our attention only towards knowing 'I'. If we do that, the mind will eventually

merge within ourself forever, so there will then be no scope for it to be either quiet or active.

To learn the secret of the three states, which comprise the whole of our present life, we must learn to abide in a state between waking and sleep. The only practical way to achieve this is to attend exclusively to 'I'.

[In reply to someone who asked, "Should we try to attend to ourself while eating, talking, walking and so on?"] I cannot advise you to do so, because as I have learnt from discussing this with my friends, most aspirants generally do not like to do so. If you like, you can certainly try, because where there is a will, there is a way, but I suggest that you should try this practice at least when you are not engaged in other activities.

Begin by mentally saying 'I', and then try to cling to the self-awareness evoked by this word. You may be able to cling to it for only a few seconds at a time, but even that is beneficial. When you notice that your attention has become extroverted, you should try again, and should continue trying repeatedly until you find your interest in doing so is slackening, and then you should take a rest for a while.

The important thing is to begin trying, even if only for a few minutes a day. The efficacy of trying at least a little but persistently can be illustrated by the story of the camel and the tent. In Arabia a man was sleeping in his tent, and his camel was sleeping outside, but it was very cold. At first the camel put its nose in the tent, and the man allowed it, thinking 'Yes, poor creature, it is cold outside'. Then slowly the camel pushed its whole head inside, and still the man allowed it. Gradually it edged more of its body inside, until eventually it occupied the whole tent and the man found himself lying outside. Likewise, if we attempt to be self-attentive for at least a few moments here and there during each day, that will gradually push out our interest in everything else and thereby lead us eventually to our goal.

The important thing is to have a liking to practise self-attention. By *sat-sanga*, which means reading, discussing, reflecting on and practising Bhagavan's teachings and constantly remembering that

self-knowledge is the only worthy aim in life, we gain more and more liking for it. This liking will lead us to our goal.

[In reply to someone who asked, ‘So does that mean that we must develop will-power?’] Call it will-power, love, *bhakti* or whatever: it is there one hundred per cent in all creatures, so it need not be developed. Even an ant has will-power for achieving whatever it wants. What we must do is not develop our will-power but direct it in the proper direction, namely to experience what we ourselves actually are. We now want so many other things, but what we must learn to want is only to know who this ‘I’ is.

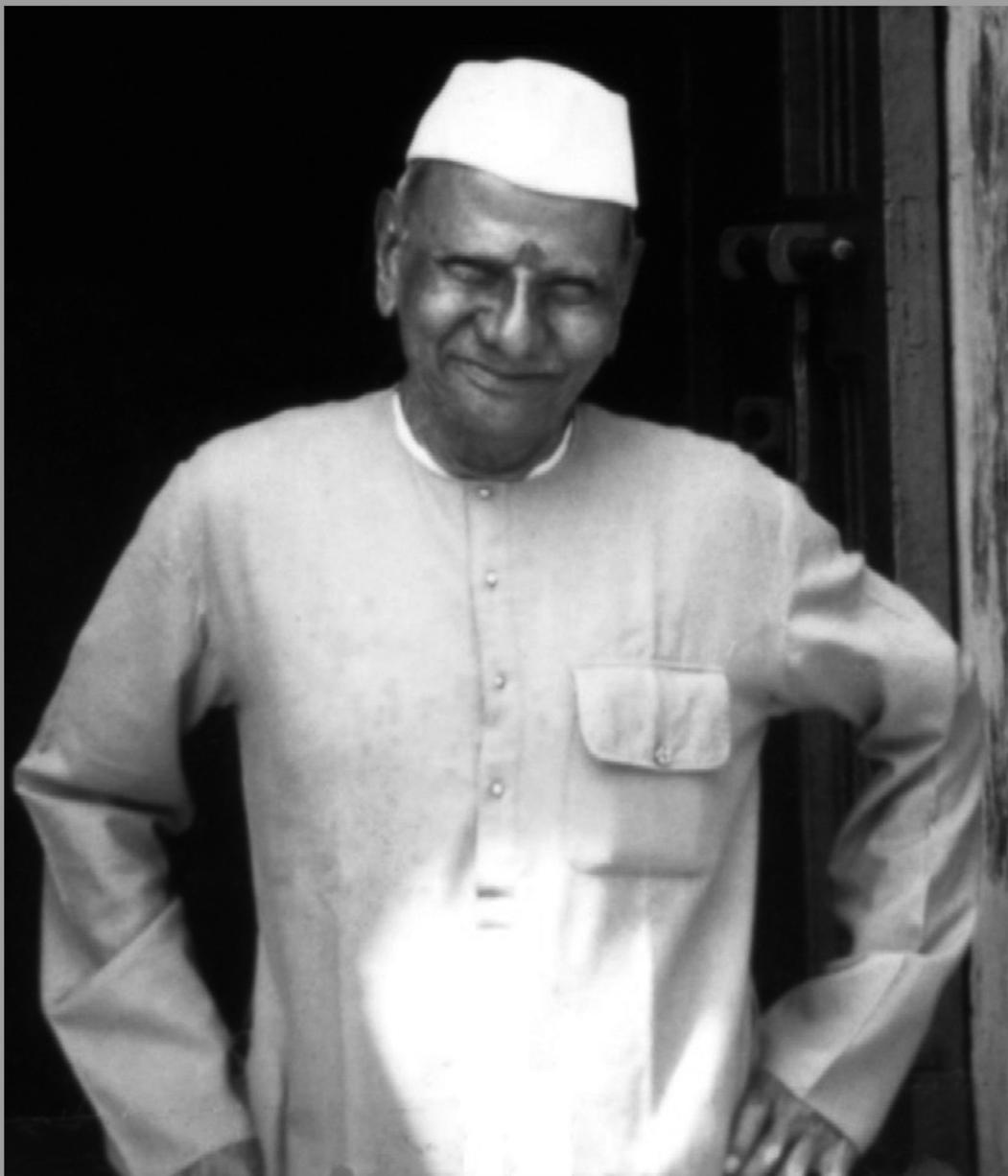
The problem is that although we all say we want to know ourselves, as soon as we begin attending to ourselves some other attraction pops up in our mind and our attention becomes extroverted. We must therefore learn to like self-attention more than we like anything else. Bhagavan once said, “Everyone who comes here says that they want *moksa* (liberation) and *moksa* alone, and that they have no other desires in this world or the next, yet if I were to show them a minute sample of *moksa*, all the crows would fly away and I would be left sitting here alone.”

No one need fear the death of the body. After all, we all know from experience that we can leave this body and take another one, as we do every day in dream. Indeed we are great *siddhas*, because in dreams we take so many different bodies, since the mind can function only when it experiences itself as a body. Many ordinary people are ready to give up their bodies for the sake of their family, country or language, because we all tend to identify ourselves with something more than whatever body we now experience as ourselves. Real death is the death of our ego, but intense fear of such death only comes to mature souls, as happened in the case of Bhagavan. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# ASHRAM CALENDAR 2016

Pongal	Friday	15th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Saturday	23rd January
Sundaram Iyer Day	Saturday	27th February
Maha Sivaratri	Monday	7th March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	18th March
Telugu New Year Day	Friday	8th April
Tamil New Year Day	Thursday	14th April
Sri Rama Navami	Friday	15th April
Sri Bhagavan's 66th Aradhana	Wednesday	4th May
Maha Puja	Monday	30th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Friday	17th June
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Tuesday	19th July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Thursday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Saturday	1st October
Saraswati Puja	Monday	10th October
Vijayadasami	Tuesday	11th October
Deepavali	Saturday	29th October
Karthigai Festival Commences	Saturday	3rd December
Karthigai Deepam	Monday	12th December
Sri Bhagavan's 137th Jayanti	Thursday	12th January 2017



Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj at the doorway of his house at Ketwadi, Mumbai

# The Navnath Sampradaya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Six

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

When I started to write this history of the Navnath-Nimbargi Sampradaya, there were two ideas in mind. One, to show how many of the gurus were able to apparently live as householders, and yet become fully awakened; and two, I also wanted to explore how a completely non-dual path that transcended the relationship of God and devotee or guru and disciple, could also be devotional. As a westerner, I had been oblivious to this and didn't understand how nama yoga (the initiation by bestowing a mantra) could possibly be used in the context of jnana yoga or that devotion to the guru could be considered identical to devotion to Consciousness. During this journey, which started in 2002 and was returned to (by grace of the Absolute, I believe) in 2014, I was pointed to a transcendence of these

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.

concepts and dualisms: householder-renunciate, bhakta-jnani, even knowledge-ignorance. This is because from the point of the Absolute there are no such dualisms which apply and certainly not to this amazing lineage of awakened masters of the Navnath Sampradaya.

This chapter is the return for me, to the apex teacher, Sri Nisargadatta. He is the inspiration for my meandering from Sri Dattatreya and the mists of antiquity to the present time, via a lineage which kept refining the transmission from guru to disciple, becoming more direct and expedient. For those who are seeking the truth from this lineage, Nisargadatta says in a talk transcribed in *Beyond Freedom: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*:

“You should have an intense desire to seek the Truth. Only then will the results be quick. The outcome of japa will be according to the strength of your conviction and the extent of your faith. My Guru did a lot of penance and long spiritual practice before he got this knowledge. But without my having to do any penance or spiritual practice, he bestowed this knowledge upon me. I am not dependent upon this world or this universe; this world and this universe depend upon Me. How do you recognize me? What identity do you allot to me and how do you judge me? With what identity do you judge yourselves? You entertain the idea that you are going to have different births. I don't believe in any such stories. I know 'I' never was. That 'I Amness' was never there for me. I am the unborn state.”<sup>1</sup>

This abidance as the unborn has a beginning story, which Nisargadatta did not want to tell especially as he knew it was illusory but his 'history' has been gathered by various individuals, including members of his immediate family.

Sri Nisargadatta was born on Hanuman's birthday, in March 1897; he was given the name, Maruti, in honour of Hanuman. His father worked as a servant and then later bought some land and became a small-time farmer. After Maruti's father died in 1915, Maruti followed his oldest brother to Bombay. In 1924 he married

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<sup>1</sup> Maharaj, N. (2009). *Beyond Freedom: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta* (First ed.) (M. Jory, Ed.). Mumbai: Yogi Impressions. p.26.

Sumatibai and with her became the parents of three daughters and a son. He started out as a clerk in an office but that did not suit him temperamentally and he soon took to petty trading. He opened a *bidi* shop (shop for hand-rolled coarse cigarettes) and began selling them. He became prosperous.<sup>2</sup> He had a friend named Yashwantrao Bagkar, an intelligent seeker of truth. They would have discussions and one day his friend brought him to meet his Sadguru, Sri Siddharameshwar.

Although Maruti was moved by Sri Siddharameshwar, he felt the teaching was beyond him.<sup>3</sup> Maruti was given a mantra initiation, which is totally in keeping with the Navnath tradition, and instructions on how to meditate. His intense practice really started to develop between 1933 and 1936.<sup>4</sup> Sri Siddharameshwar died in 1936 and evoked in Maruti a strong feeling of renunciation which he then acted upon.

He abandoned his family and bidi businesses and set off for the Himalayas.<sup>5</sup> Srikant Gogte and P.T. Phadol, in the introduction of *I Am That* say of this, “On his way to the Himalayas, where he was planning to spend the rest of his life, he met a brother-disciple, who convinced him about the shortcomings of a totally unworldly life and the greater spiritual fruitfulness of dispassion in action.”<sup>6</sup> When he returned he found that out of six shops only one remained, but that was enough for the sustenance of his family, Maruti became Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, devoting all his free time to meditation on his guru’s instruction. He actually explained how the name came to him in *Consciousness and the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, edited by Jean Dunn:

“Q. How did Maharaj get the name Nisargadatta?”

“M. At one time I was composing poems. Poems used to flow out of me and, in this flow, I just added Nisargadatta. I was revelling in

<sup>2</sup> Maharaj, N. (1973). *I Am That : Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (2nd ed.) (M. Frydman, Trans.). Bombay: Chetana. Part I, p.xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.xxvii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.xxviii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.xxviii.

composing poems until my Guru cautioned me, ‘You are enjoying composing these poems too much; give them up!’

“What was he driving at? His objective was for me to merge in the Absolute state instead of revelling in my beingness.

“This was the way I realized knowledge, not through mental manipulation. My Guru said, ‘This is so’, and for me, it was finished!”<sup>7</sup>

In the book *Nothing is Everything: The Quintessential Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, which was compiled and translated by Mohan Gaitonde, Nisargadatta speaks with a visitor regarding having faith in the Sadguru, and how he realised the truth:

“Visitor. How did you realize yourself?

“Maharaj. I had full faith in my Guru. I abided in his words. Rest of the happening was spontaneous.

“V. Can we know your Guru’s words?

“M. ‘You are all that exists. Presently, you are the consciousness. God, Ishwara etc. are the names of what you are.’ These words were enough to change me completely.”<sup>8</sup>

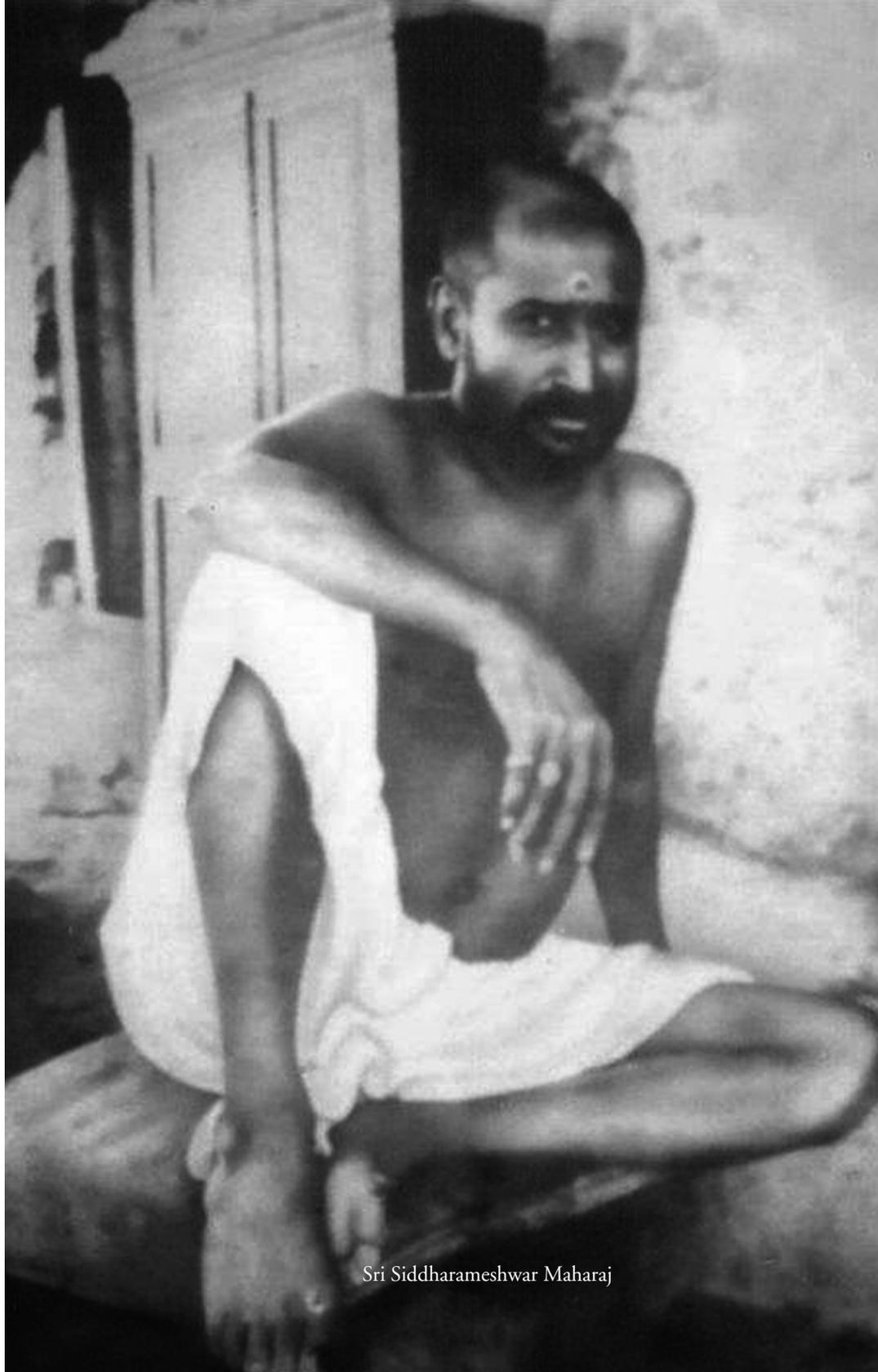
So, after a relatively short time he awoke to the truth. People would line up at the shop to ask spiritual questions and later, when his son took over the business, he began to hold regular satsang (association with the truth).

The transformation begun with Sri Siddharameshwar, of taking a more relative, moralistic path of meditation and then making it more direct and piercing transmission, was finished by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj himself. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s transmission became a beacon of non-dual liberation the world over and in the few years after *I Am That* was published, westerners were attracted to his apartment on Ketwadi Lane. Although there were many cerebral and erudite western people who came to see him seeking clarification, he was always the simple but cuttingly direct, illuminated sage.

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<sup>7</sup> Maharaj, N. (1994). *Consciousness and the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (First ed.) (J. Dunn, Ed.). Durham, NC: The Acorn Press. p.7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Maharaj, N. (2014). *Nothing Is Everything: The Quintessential Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*. (First ed.) (M. Gaitonde, Trans.). Mumbai: Zen Publications. p.41.



Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Up until I had met Sri Nisargadatta, my concept of a Self-realised sage was that of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who was it seemed completely removed from worldly life. Meeting Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj on a noisy street in Bombay shattered most of my concepts about what a realised sage was like or how my life could be utilised to become enlightened. I was wholly made welcome and invited to ask questions and discourse with him. I noticed early on that I was not the only woman present. Both Indian women and western women alike were more than welcome to sit at His feet. There were some very sharp ladies there and I believe that this is also in keeping with the Navnath tradition of inclusiveness.

Sri Nisargadatta reached out with great compassion to the many confused travellers who arrived at his door. He showed great patience and restraint in his dealings with them, or should I say, us. He would explain what the world was like for him, or more precisely that there was no one to experience a non-existent world. He freely gave of his freedom: an example of this is given in *I Am That*, Chapter 38:

“Question: Give us at least some insight into the content of your mind while you live your daily life. To eat, to drink, to talk, to sleep — how does it feel at your end?

“Maharaj: The common things of life I experience just as you do. The difference lies in what I do not experience. I do not experience fear or greed, hate or anger. I ask nothing, refuse nothing, keep nothing. In these matters I do not compromise. Maybe this is the outstanding difference between us. I will not compromise. I am true to myself, while you are afraid of reality.”<sup>9</sup>

It is not that being a householder was advocated as a path, but in the context of the Navnath Sampradaya of Sri Nisargadatta, being a householder was not an obstruction; rather it was an opportunity for renunciation in action. Maharaj was not enamoured with being a householder, he did not take himself to be any designation whatsoever. On the other hand, he had no patience for people who had cloaked themselves in spiritual imagery; he was ruthless about tearing down

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<sup>9</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (First ed) (M. Frydman, Trans.; S. Dikshit, Ed.). Durham, N.C.: Acorn Press. p.171.

all images and attachments. If he was leery of householders it was of the opportunity for attachment and ego involvement that would ensnare them. He felt that householders could discharge their duties with complete dispassion and compassion. In a dialogue in *I Am That* Chapter 63 Maharaj spoke about living:

“Maharaj: ...There is only life. There is nobody who lives a life.

“Question: That we understand, yet constantly we make attempts to live our lives instead of just living. Making plans for the future seems to be an inveterate habit with us.

“Maharaj: Whether you plan or don't, life goes on. But in life itself a little whorl arises in the mind which indulges in fantasies and imagines itself dominating and controlling life.

“Life itself is desireless. But the false self wants to continue — pleasantly. Therefore it is always engaged in ensuring one's continuity. Life is unafraid and free. As long as you have the idea of influencing events, liberation is not for you: The very notion of doership, of being a cause, is bondage.

“Question: How can we overcome the duality of the doer and the done?

“Maharaj: Contemplate life as infinite, undivided, ever present, ever active, until you realize yourself as one with it. It is not even very difficult for you will be returning only to your own natural condition.

“Once you realise that all comes from within, that the world in which you live not has been projected onto you but by you, your fear comes to an end. Without this realisation you identify yourself with externals, like body, mind, society, nation, humanity, even God or the Absolute, but these are all escapes from fear. It is only when you fully accept your responsibility for the little world in which you live and watch the process of its creation, preservation and destruction that you may be free from your imaginary bondage.”<sup>10</sup>

This dialogue illustrates how Maharaj stands beyond all concepts, even spiritual ones in the course of living life. Meditations such as this are the core of the practice of the householder.

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<sup>10</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, Op.cit., p.298.

Many westerners came to meet Sri Nisargadatta in India, held certain preferences for living a spiritual life in India, rather than the overtly materialistic life in the United States and Europe. Maharaj would send many home to confront these issues. He felt that one was able to realise and abide as the Self, anywhere, in any circumstance. He would push the westerner to look deeply within his or her own circumstance as in *I Am That* Chapter 72:

“Question: ...What is it that brings me again and again to India? It cannot be only the comparative cheapness of life here? Nor the colourfulness and variety of impressions. There must be some more important factor.

“Maharaj: There is also the spiritual aspect. The division between the outer and the inner is less in India. It is easier here to express the inner in the outer. Integration is easier. Society is not so oppressive.

“Question: Yes, in the west it is all *tamas* and *rajas*. In India there is more of *sattva*, of harmony and balance?

“Maharaj: Can't you go beyond the gunas? Why choose the *sattva*? Be what you are wherever you are and worry not about gunas.

“Question: I have not the strength.

“Maharaj: It merely shows that you have gained little in India. What you truly have you cannot lose. Were you well grounded in yourself, change of place would not affect it.

“Question: In India spiritual life is easy. It is not so in the west. One has to conform to environment to a much greater extent.

“Maharaj: Why don't you create your own environment? The world has only as much power over you as you give it. Rebel. Go beyond duality, make no difference between east and west.”<sup>11</sup>

He wanted us to understand that we could practise and realise at home; we did not have to continue these dualisms at all. With such encouragement, Maharaj literally pushed people out the door of the satsang room. He had no desire to have an ashram; his only desire was to show people how to be as they truly are.

Having been inundated with Western seekers in the 1970s and 1980s Maharaj became both affectionate towards us and critical of our

<sup>11</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, Op.cit., p.353.

approaches. He criticised our approach and at the same time showed us the way to deal with our particular temperament in this dialogue:

“Question: Am I allowed to smoke in your presence? I know that is not the custom to smoke before a sage and more so for a woman.

“Maharaj: By all means, smoke, nobody will mind. We understand.

“Question: I feel the need for cooling down.

“Maharaj: It is very often so with Europeans. After a stretch of sadhana they become charged with energy and frantically seek an outlet. They organize communities, become teachers of yoga, marry, write books, or anything except keeping quiet and turning their energies within to find the source of the inexhaustible energy and learn the art of keeping it under control.

“Question: I admit that now I want to go back and live a very active life, because I feel full of energy.

“Maharaj: You can do what you like as long as you do not take yourself to be the body and the mind. It is not so much a question of actual giving up the body and all that goes with it, as a clear understanding that you are not the body, a sense of aloofness, of emotional non-involvement.

“Question: I know what you mean. I have passed some four years ago through a period of rejection of the physical; I would not buy myself clothes, would eat the simplest of foods, sleep on bare planks. It is the acceptance of the privations that matters, not the actual discomfort. Now I have realized that welcoming life as it comes and loving all it offers is the best of it. I shall accept whatever comes with a glad heart and make the best of it. If I can do nothing more than give life and true culture to a few children — good enough; though my heart goes out to every child, I cannot reach all.

“Maharaj: You are married and a mother only when you are man-woman conscious. When you do not take yourself to be the body, then the family life of the body, however intense and interesting, is seen only as a play on the screen of the mind, with the light of awareness as the only reality.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Maharaj, N. (1973). *I Am That*. Op.cit., Part II, pp.233-4.

Maharaj is critical here, and is unerringly accurate in describing how western spiritual aspirants behave after a dose of intense spiritual practice. He keeps pointing us to complete dis-identification. He wants us to go deeper. He does not want us to appear dis-identified, he wants us to see and be only That. He is speaking here from his own experience, how he handled being businessman, husband and the father of four.

Sri Nisargadatta also speaks a lot about desire and fear. People seem tossed about by desire and fear, even in relation to the Absolute. He encouraged people to directly look at what the Truth is and not fret unnecessarily. This actually is also found in the teaching of Sri Bhausahab Maharaj and Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, as well. That an inordinate amount of life's energy can be wasted by anxiety and fear is observed by Maharaj in *I Am That*, Chapter 98:

“Question: How do we learn to cut out worries?”

“Maharaj: You need not worry about your worries. Just be. Do not try to be quiet; do not make ‘being quiet’ into a task to be performed. Don't be restless about ‘being quiet’, miserable about ‘being happy’. Just be aware that you are and remain aware — don't say ‘yes, I am; what next?’ there is no ‘next’ in ‘I am’. It is the timeless state.”<sup>13</sup>

Sri Nisargadatta has had enough experience to know how easily one can get caught up in endless concerns, both worldly and spiritual. He puts them all to rest with his wisdom sparkling with that potent shakti with which he delivered the message. He would drill right to the heart of each questioner and shake them till they awoke. He was a tiger who knew no fear.

Maharaj communicated his direct experience to all who came to see him. He continued to live his life based on Self-knowledge. He was not enamoured by any aspect of life, he dealt with life as it was necessary, always situated in complete Self-knowledge. This spontaneous dealing with life, in full detachment and wisdom was perfectly in keeping with the transmission down through the ages.

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<sup>13</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, Op.cit., p.508.



Each guru in the Navnath Sampradaya transmitted the Truth in ways that those around would be able to assimilate, in ways that were in accord with the societal influences of the time. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj made the transmission more direct, a form of inquiry, of discrimination with more emphasis on Vedanta and its classic methods of understanding. This transmission made an impact on Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sri Ranjit Maharaj and Sri Bhainath Maharaj, his three enlightened disciples who lived in Bombay or as it is now known, Mumbai. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj seemed to potentiate the transmission, yet carried on certain accepted religious traditions, especially for his Indian disciples. He still gave mantra initiation, with the underlying point being that the mantra was more than sound; it was the Absolute Itself which could reverberate throughout life in all circumstances. He may have sometimes used these practices but always brought the seeker to the most absolute perspective. In *Consciousness and the Absolute* he answers a question regarding *nama-japa*:

“Question. I am practising *nama-japa*, is that all right?

“Maharaj. Recite the sacred name, that is all right, but the important thing is to recognize and understand what is the principle by which you know you are and by which you perceive everything else. You must look at yourself, get to know yourself. The riddle of spirituality cannot be solved by your intellect. At the most, your intellect can provide you with livelihood.

“Whatever you try to become, that is not you. Before the words come out, before you say ‘I Am’, that is you. You must be concerned only with yourself. Don’t worry about anybody else. What are you?”<sup>14</sup>

Always directing the disciples towards the Absolute is evident in this conversation from the book *Nothing is Everything* Maharaj had with a visitor:

“Question. We worship Gods like Rama and Krishna. Were they human beings just like us? If so, we can also strive to be like them?

“Maharaj. They were just like you. If you call them incarnations, you are also incarnations. That is the greatness of consciousness

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<sup>14</sup> Maharaj, N., Op.cit., *Consciousness and the Absolute*, p.42.

THE NAVNATH SAMPRADAYA AND NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ  
in human form. The only requirement is its proper use under the guidance of the Sadguru.

“Question. Although the Truth is simple, some people undergo great hardships for Self-realization.

“Maharaj. If a disciple does not have any doubt about his Sadguru’s teachings, he realizes the highest in no time. But such is a rare case. Full faith in one’s consciousness works wonders. In the initial stages, people are told to chant mantra and do bhajans. They also achieve but after a long time.”<sup>15</sup>

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was somewhat of a departure from the traditional Navnath Sampradaya because he came in contact with many European and American seekers. However, the Navnath Sampradaya had always embraced people of different castes, classes, genders and even religions. Maharashtra is a region with a long and powerful spiritual history with many illustrious saints and sages whose message invariably had a gritty, inclusive urgency that appealed to the farmers, craftsman and traders, aside from the priests and scholars. Think of Ramdas, Tukaram and Jnanadeva. Couple that fertile past with Mumbai which is a complex cauldron of Marathis, Parsis, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Tamils and Malayalis to name but some of the distinct ethnic groups in India, each with their own rich traditions who live in usually amiable, close contact in the tight geography of that cosmopolitan megacity. All this made for a society that is open to new ideas and just as important, had the tenacity and drive to accomplish much. In this hothouse bloomed a rare flower known as Nisargadatta Maharaj who audaciously reached out beyond the cultural, social and religious confines of his forebears.

Maurice Frydman brought Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj to the attention of the world. Although Maharaj did adapt a different mode of instruction for his Western disciples, through the question and answer format, his transmission was the same for all. The irony of a totally unlettered man being one of the most eloquent exponents of non-duality was not lost on those who came to see him. He was

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<sup>15</sup> Maharaj, N. (2014). *Nothing Is Everything*, Op.cit., p.229.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

a perfect teacher for those who came to see him because he was accessible in so many ways. He was accessible by being in the midst of the noisiest city on earth. He was accessible in that he had freely given of himself, spiritually, while selling bidis. This free offering of himself continued unabated in his home on Ketwadi Lane. He was available because he had no pretence whatsoever and was intent on unmasking all spiritual fraud. He was available because at the heart of his detachment was unconditional love.

After Sri Nisargadatta became sick in the late 1970s, his transmission continued but he lost all patience with spiritual imagery and intellectual fencing. His later discourses are piercing and diamond-like in their ability to dismiss the disingenuous and dilettante questioner. Most of all, he truly wanted us to awaken as he had. In *Consciousness and the Absolute*, edited by Jean Dunn, in one of his last talks, Maharaj said:

“I do not want meek and humble disciples, I want them to be powerful as I am. I do not make disciples, I make Gurus.”<sup>16</sup>

These powerful words are a reminder of the true purpose of the Navnath Sampradaya. One thing for certain, in India, the Nimbargi-Inchigiri Sampradaya branch of the Navnath Sampradaya has taken root and flourished and this is because it is flexible and has the interests of the genuine seeker at heart. It is not engrossed in perpetuating a set of rituals or formulae but promulgates a living tradition. It is a fire that burns bright when fed with the aspirations of a sadhak. Perhaps, the Navnath Sampradaya will take root here in the United States and Europe, amongst those who are on fire with a secret fervour and are quietly enquiring amidst their busy daily lives. ▲

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<sup>16</sup> Maharaj, N. (1994). *Consciousness and the Absolute*, Op.cit., p.100.

## KEYWORD

# Hridaya

JOHN GRIMES

Reflect for a moment. Bhagavan Ramana was just sixteen years old; basically a normal village boy virtually devoid of any religious vocabulary. He had never heard the terms: *Brahman*, *Atman*, *moksha*, *sadhana*.

One day, at the age of sixteen, he spontaneously lay down in a first floor room of his uncle's house, held his breath, kept his lips tightly closed, and a death experience happened to him. He did none of this consciously. As the experience unfolded, he enquired, 'Who am I (who is dying)?' and a force arose in him and took possession of him. "'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'? This body is silent and inert. But I felt the full force of my personality and even the sound 'I' within myself, apart from the body. So 'I' am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but

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the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

From that moment on, the ‘I’ or Pure Consciousness was experienced as the only Reality; and this experience never ceased. Years later, when Sri Ramana was speaking of this event, he said: “Absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to this time.”<sup>2</sup> Whether his body was engaged in talking, walking, sitting, eating, or anything else, it would forever more be centered on the Imperishable.

Incredibly, Sri Ramana’s experience was unmotivated. He recalled: “I knew nothing of life and had no idea that it was full of sorrow; and I had no desire to avoid rebirth or seek release, to obtain detachment or liberation.”<sup>3</sup> True, his awakening was set in motion by a ‘sudden fear of death’, but it should be noted that this fear appeared suddenly, spontaneously. The boy was not consciously seeking to avoid death or seek a solution to life’s problems. From that moment on Sri Ramana remained perpetually, continuously absorbed in that force.

Bhagavan Ramana’s life and teachings were an incredible confirmation of both the Upanisadic teachings as well as the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. However, in an interesting twist in this instance, Sri Ramana’s teachings are the primary revelation and the Upanisads and teachings of Advaita are a confirmation of his awakening because they are found to be in accord with his teachings! It is a wonderful phenomenon that the words of Lord Ramana, in numerous instances, are virtually the exact words found in the Upanisads, in the teachings of the Sages, and a host of others. What is remarkable is that Lord Ramana had no knowledge of the ancient teachings before his Self-realisation and only came to learn of them many years after.

Without a vocabulary to describe what happened to him, it took some time for him to develop one. He said, “I had read no books other than *Periapuranam*, my Bible lessons and bits of Tayumanavar

<sup>1</sup> Narasimha, B.V., *Self-Realization: The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Chap. ‘Born Anew.’ pp.11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.12.

or *Tevaram*. My notion of God (or Isvara as I called the Infinite but Personal Deity) was similar to that found in the Puranas. I had not heard then of Brahman, samsara, etc. I had no idea then that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything, and that myself and Isvara were both identical with it.”<sup>4</sup>

As we know, following Sri Ramana’s great awakening, he moved to Arunachala. After about two years there, due to Palaniswami, a young spiritual aspirant, Bhagavan acquired a familiarity with some basic texts of Advaita Vedanta. It was through these texts that he discovered corroboration of his own experience and a vocabulary began developing.

Sri Ramana began to use many terms to indicate the Reality (all of which were synonymous). He called it the Self, *sat-cit-ananda*, *Jnana*, *Turiyatita*, *Svarupa*, *Sahaja sthiti*, and the *hridaya* (Heart). A literal translation of *hridaya* is, ‘This is the centre’ (*britl*/centre+ *ayam*/this). Bhagavan said, “The Heart is not physical; it is spiritual...It is that from which thoughts arise, on which they subsist and where they are resolved. The thoughts are the content of the mind and they shape the universe. The Heart is the centre of all...That is the Heart. Brahman is the Heart.”<sup>5</sup>

A devotee raised a question about the Heart. Did Bhagavan feel the Heart as the point of Realisation in his first or early experience? Bhagavan replied, “I began to use the word after seeing literature on the subject. I correlated it with my experience.”<sup>6</sup> Another devotee asked, “How do you say that the Heart is on the right, whereas the biologists have found it to be on the left?” Sri Ramana replied, “Quite so. The physical organ is on the left; that is not denied. But the Heart of which I speak is non-physical and is only on the right side. It is my experience, no authority is required by me. Still you can find confirmation in a Malayalam Ayurvedic book and in *Sita Upanishad*.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (compl.) *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk\$97.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Talk\$134.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Talk\$4.

Bhagavan said: “I had been saying all along that the Heart centre was on the right, notwithstanding the refutation by some learned men that physiology taught them otherwise. I speak from experience. I knew it even in my home during my trances.”<sup>8</sup> This was further confirmed by Bhagavan after a subsequent death experience on the Hill. He related, “I had a very clear vision and experience. All of a sudden a light came from one side erasing the world vision in its course until it spread all round when the vision of the world was completely cut out. I felt the muscular organ on the left had stopped work, I could understand that the body was like a corpse, that the circulation of blood had stopped and the body became blue and motionless. Vasudeva Sastri embraced the body, wept over my death, but I could not speak. All the time I was feeling that the Heart centre on the right was working as well as ever. This state continued 15 or 20 minutes. Then suddenly something shot out from the right to the left resembling a rocket bursting in air. The blood circulation was resumed and normal condition restored.”<sup>9</sup>

Sri Ramana used the term *hridaya* not to imply that there is a particular location or centre for the Self but merely to indicate that the Self is the source from which all appearances manifest. He experienced the spiritual Heart on the right side of his body while maintaining that in reality it is ‘located’ both everywhere and nowhere. It is like Bhagavan’s being everywhere but more powerfully here. He is nowhere for he never had a form.

According to Sankara, one’s Heart is the temple (*adhithana*) of Brahman, of the Self, and it is there that Brahman is experienced; it is the seat of *Brahmanubhava*.<sup>10</sup> Sri Ramana said, “Therefore, it is stated that what is called the heart is no other than *Brahman*. Moreover, for the reason that *Brahman* shines in the hearts of all souls as the Self, the name ‘Heart’ is given to *Brahman*.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Talk§408.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Talk§408.

<sup>10</sup> *Taittiriya Upanisad Bhasya* II.6.1; *Brahmasutrabhasya* I.3.25; *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* III.9.23

<sup>11</sup> *Self-enquiry*, Section 9.

“In the recesses of the lotus-shaped heart of all, from Vishnu downwards, there shines as Absolute Consciousness the *Paramatman* (Supreme Spirit) who is the same as Arunachala or Ramana. When the mind melts with love of him and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart wherein he abides as the Beloved, the subtle eye of Absolute Consciousness opens and he reveals himself as pure Knowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

Sri Ramana said in regards to where the Heart is located, “The Heart is used in the Vedas and the scriptures to denote the place whence the notion ‘I’ springs. Does it spring only from the fleshy ball? It springs within us somewhere right in the middle of our being. The ‘I’ has no location. Everything is the Self. There is nothing but that. So the Heart must be said to be the entire body of oneself and of the entire universe, conceived as ‘I’. But to help the spiritual practitioner, one has to indicate a definite part of the universe, or of the physical body. So the Heart is pointed out as the seat of the Self. But in truth we are everywhere, we are all that is, and there is nothing else.”<sup>13</sup>

Again, regarding the location of the Heart: “The Heart is not physical. Meditation should not be on the right or the left. Meditation should be on the Self. Everyone knows ‘I am’. Who is the ‘I’? It will be neither within nor without, neither on the right nor on the left. ‘I am’ — that is all. The Heart is the centre from which everything springs. Because you see the world, the body, and so on, it is said that there is a centre for these, which is called the Heart. When you are in the Heart, the Heart is known to be neither the centre nor the circumference. There is nothing else. Whose centre could it be?”<sup>14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001. ‘Arunachala Ramana.’ p.142.

<sup>13</sup> Venkataramiah, M., *Talks*, Op. cit., Talk§29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Talk§273.



Ashram Old Dining Hall

# Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's  
Commentary

Verses 17,18 & 19

S. RAM MOHAN

## Verse 17

Since the Almighty Himself is carrying the world-burden, the pseudo self or ego, assuming to bear it, is like the sculptured figures caricatured on the temple-tower, appearing as if it is bearing the weight of the tower on its shoulders. If a person, travelling by a railway carriage capacious enough to carry heavy burdens, suffers by carrying his luggage on his own head (instead of placing it on the carriage floor), then, whose is the fault?

## Commentary

**W**hat the wise sadhaka should do is to be far from all cares and worries by surrendering to God with perfect confidence all of

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those cares, including his care for his corporeal frame, his family and so on. If he does not do so, he cannot pursue the quest with single minded zeal. This being so, it is ridiculous, says Bhagavan in this verse, to add to such burdens by taking up ambitious programmes for the uplift of the world. These burdens naturally belong to God, as He is the creator, sustainer and nourisher of all. No wise man would ever take upon himself such a burden and if he ever tried to do so, would have little success. Bhagavan has always taught that if one believes in God, then he must leave all matters to that Power. He has also said, that the right service anyone can do for the world is to set a good example by transcending his or her ignorance or ego.

It should be noted that here Bhagavan styles the *jiva* (soul) as the imitation-self or pseudo-self. The soul or *jiva* is none other than the ego-sense, which is unreal. The Real Self is the Supreme Being Himself (Pure Consciousness) who shines in the Heart as 'I-I'. The soul is no more than a reflection of the Real Self in the *buddhi* (intellect), which has no independent reality. Therefore the soul is designated as *chidabhasa* (mutated consciousness).

This does not mean that one must do no service at all to the world. It may be done as a mode of self-discipline and worship of God, manifest in the form of world and its populace, as explained in verse 5 of *Upadesa Undiyar*: "Worshipping with adoration whatever is perceived by the eye in the whole Universe, viewing it as the manifestation of the Lord in the eight-fold form, is worship of the Lord Himself and is the true form of all worship." Such worship will not aggravate ego.

Here it would be instructive to note of what Bhagavan has said in verse 9 of *Arunachala Pancakam*. "Oh Supreme Lord! What have I gained by trying to be separate from Thee? Bearing the weight of the world on my head so far is quite enough. I want no more of it." By remaining separate from God the soul gets caught in the web of *samsara*. The devotee must ever be diligent in seeking to put an end to this false separateness, which is the cause of all his miseries. To give room in the mind for other cares means so much less room for love of God.

To a lady who asked Bhagavan: “What can we do to help the world?” Bhagavan replied, “Being unable to free ourselves from samsara, we have to take refuge at the feet of God and surrender all our cares to Him. He knows how to take care of the world. He who wants to take such a burden on himself betrays his belief that God is not governing this world properly.”

On another occasion, Bhagavan explained the true nature of self-surrender. A young man came to Bhagavan in a frenzied state of mind and said that God had appeared before him and told him that he should surrender himself entirely to God and thereafter He would accomplish great things through him. Based on this, the youth said to Bhagavan that he had surrendered himself totally, yet God had done nothing as He had promised! Bhagavan told him: “If your self-surrender be true, then all the rest belongs to God to do as He wills. You have no right to find fault with Him and say that He has betrayed you. If you do so, then your surrender is not true.” The young man realised his folly and calmed down.

Diving into the Heart by means of the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ is the direct path to liberation. However, there could be starting problems for the sadhaka to directly launch the quest. The prerequisite for this is the purification of the mind which leads to the annihilation of *vasanas* (latent tendencies) in the mind. In *Vivekachudamani* vasanas are said to be of three kinds: the vasanas of the world, of the body and of learning. To remove these vasanas, one should practise devotion to God or Guru, thus becoming worthy to be the recipient of Divine Grace. Devotion is nourished by the practice of *upasana* (meditation).

Bhagavan has shown in *Upadesa Undiyar* that devotion is of two kinds. *Aniya bhava* is devotion with a sense of difference. But in *ananiya bhava* the Absolute is regarded as the Dweller in the Heart.

Since He dwells in the Heart-cave, He is styled as ‘*Guhesan*’ (Dweller in the Cave). To meditate on Him thus is the highest form of devotion. Before delineating this devotion, Bhagavan, in the next two verses describes the dwelling place of God, which is the Heart.

**Verse 18**

Among the six organs of varied hues, situated in the chest between the nipples and above the abdomen, the Heart is one, of two-fingers-breadth, to the right of the centre of the chest.

**Verse 19**

Its mouth is closed, and in the space within it is an orifice in which resides the dense darkness of *vasanas* and desires. Dependant on ignorance as their fulcrum, all the great nerves of the body are connected to it. It is the home of life, mind and the Light of Consciousness.

**Commentary**

The Heart described here by Bhagavan is different from the palpable physical heart composed of flesh and blood vessels, which is on the left side. The spiritual Heart is on the right side. It is the seat of life, mind and Consciousness. It is shown to be the source of the world-appearance of which the body is a part. This light is the Truth of the Supreme Being vibrating in the Heart as 'I-I'.

The experience of the Self is said to be of two kinds. In one kind there is no awareness of the body. In the other there is awareness of it. This latter kind is the one that is experienced by the *jivan-mukta*. This experience of the *jivan-muktas* occurs in the *sahaja* (natural) state and hence it does not hinder their awareness of the body and their activities in the world.

Correspondingly, their body-consciousness does not affect their experience of the Self. This we understand from the explanations given by Bhagavan.

S.S. Cohen notes Bhagavan's reply to a student who wondered how God, who is immanent, can be confined to the Heart. Bhagavan told him: "God is said to reside in the Heart in the same way as you are said to reside in your body. Yet Heart is not a place. Some place must be named as the dwelling of God for those who take their bodies for themselves and who comprehend only relative knowledge. The fact

is neither God nor we occupy any space. . . . *Atman* or *Paramatman* is that from which the body is born, in which it lives, and into which it finally resolves.”<sup>1</sup>.

Bhagavan points out that because the Self is in the Spiritual Heart, whenever one points to himself as ‘I’, he gestures to the right side of his chest. Bhagavan also referred to the *Sitopanishad*, to an Ayurvedic treatise called *Ashtanga Hridaya* and a statement in the Bible to fortify this. He also referred to his second death experience at *Amai Parai* (Tortoise Rock on Arunachala hill) when his physical heart stopped for about twenty minutes while the Spiritual Heart on the right continued working as well as ever. <sup>2</sup> ▲

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, 2012. p.99.

<sup>2</sup> See Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk\$408.

## Notes to Self

Upahar

Inestimable form of things;  
 time, and the whirling stars;  
 the dancing, dying bodies; children of earth,  
 our clamour and cry;  
 river of thought in the shadowland of dream —  
 Love, none of this can veil you.

Invisible the root of this appearing,  
 unthinkable the flower;  
 within, without; belonging still to no-one,  
 and yet most gladly, marvelously here.

Knowing, unknowing; the empty heart mysteriously  
 abounding; a moon though clouds, a blossoming —  
 Love, all of this reveals You.



Mother's Temple Vimana

Martin Wolff

# A Divine Hospital of Medication through Meditation

SHILPI VIRUPAKSH DAVANAGERE

It is now way back – twenty five years ago – that an intimate spiritual bond got established between us and Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. We first visited Ramanasramam in the year 1990. Fifteen of us reached Tiruvannamalai from Davangere, Karnataka, by bus to have Bhagavan’s darshan. It was as if Bhagavan himself had invited us to his abode.

I had had many divine experiences by then, and at the time my mind was always in an ethereal state. These cosmic experiences were so new and strange that I felt like exclaiming “What, what is it...?”, just as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa did when he first had divine experiences. The differentiation between the real and the unreal (*Eshwara* and *Nashwara*) was vivid in my being. The quintessence of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s sayings – the ‘I’ manifested everywhere; and

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there nothing existing other than the divine 'I' – became part of my consciousness, leaving me in a permanent state of joyousness (*ananda*).

My Satguru, Sri Shishunaala Sherief, was a mystic and divine master from a small village in Haveri district. Through his spiritual songs and divinity, he made it a well-known place in India. His songs are always very dear to me and ever hover on my tongue. Sri Shishunaala Sherief says, "Know yourself" (*Ninda nee thilako*). Guru Ramana's philosophy begins with the same thought – "Who am I?"

As I crossed the arch of Sri Ramanasramam, a deep silence enveloped me, in which I felt I ever abided, having been there many, many ages and that I would be there forever. I felt that the ashram could give the true seeker the experience of being in Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Siva, and perhaps an even better one. A seeker like myself, who is still in the bondage of the physical body, would find it difficult to control mind and body in a challenging place such as the Himalayas. The cold and the scarcity of food and water would distract me.

In Tiruvannamalai I realised that Lord Siva, Kailashpathi himself, had incarnated on earth as Sri Ramana. My quest, yearning, delusions and dualities were quenched by the master's divine grace and mercy, elevating my mind to a deep state of meditation. I found no difference between Sri Shishunaala Sherief and Sri Ramana Maharshi. I realised that it is Lord Siva who dwells in the lotus hearts of both souls.

In the ocean of life with its enormous ebbs and tides Bhagavan drew me into the deep ocean of silence. Later I received his guidance and teachings through his writings. His words were like an oasis in the desert. Advaita is not easily understandable, but Bhagavan made it sound familiar and easily attainable. This is what makes him a unique master. More than his words and teachings, Sri Ramana himself became very dear to me. He is a true father, a loving mother, a divine friend, an eternal satguru. His simplicity, desirelessness, freedom from all passions, and his teaching that only the 'I' exists and nothing else, his state of ever-abiding in the 'I' made a deep impression on me.

Sometimes my heart wept and melted, looking at the photos of Bhagavan when he sat on the hot rocks of Arunachala, caring nothing

for the sun's heat that scorched his human form. At his ashram he fed us with delicious food, and soothed our bodies and souls under cool roofs. Such motherliness makes my heart melt and tears come to my eyes. We are indeed fortunate to have a father and master like Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

Bhagavan silently summons us every year. We, a group of ten to fifteen, come once or twice a year and stay for three to four days in Ramanasramam under his divine care. Bhagavan takes us into deep meditation, immersing our karmic minds in the divine waters of the invisible Ganges, eliminating all obstacles and washing out the impurities of the mind, to realise the only 'I'. In the twenty-five years that we have made our annual journey to Tiruvannamalai we became acquainted with Ramanasramam, Arunachala hill, the Arunachala temple, the Giri Pradakshina route and the railway station which brings us to him. Beyond these places we never felt the need to go, as the whole world lies within Ramanasramam.

For many years we travelled by bus from Bangalore to Tiruvannamalai. About two years ago, we were pleasantly surprised to hear that a train from Kurla to Yashvanthpur would continue on to Pondicherry, through Tiruvannamalai. It seemed that Ramana himself had organised a train from Davangere to Tiruvannamalai. Is not this a true example of Bhagavan's affection and grace towards his devotees?

Sri Allama Prabhu, the great *shiva sharana* (devotee of Lord Shiva) of the 12th century in Karnataka and Nijaguna Shivayogi of the 15th century, were masters and *jnanis* and were praised and loved by Sri Ramana. Bhagavan read the writings of these two great personalities and sometimes guided his devotees by narrating instances about them.

Like the sixty three Tamil Nayanmars, the *siva sharanas* of the 12th century were devotees of Lord Shiva, who strove only for his love and grace and created a spiritual atmosphere wherever they went. The period of the Sharanas is considered a period of great spiritual revolution. People of all castes and creeds came together to attain the knowledge of bliss and were transformed into Maha Shiva Sharanas. They wrote about their spiritual experiences and their way of life in verses called *vachanas*.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Allama Prabhu was the first leader of the assembly (*shoonya simhasananadheesha*) at the Anubhava Mantapa, the place where the Shiva Sharanas met every day and shared their spiritual experiences. He guided many devotees on the path of advaita. One of his *vachanas* is as follows:

*Karpuradha giriyamele aragina kambaviddhudha kande,  
Aragina kambadhamele hamsaviddhudha kande,  
Kamba bendhu, Hamsa haariththu noda, Guheshwara.*

Guheshwara is his Ankitha Nama  
The Lord of the great secret.  
I found a pillar of wax on a mound of camphor,  
I found a swan on the pillar of wax,  
The pillar burnt and the bird flew away, Guheshwara.

Here, the mound of camphor represents the mundane world, the pillar of wax represents the human being, and *hamsa* – the swan – represents the self. When the body consciousness is burnt, then the self is awakened towards liberation. One day, as I was circumambulating Bhagavan's shrine, my mind withdrew into itself and my eyes closed without my knowledge. My tread slowed, and I was plunged into deep meditation. I sat in the left corner of the Samadhi, deep in the self, unaware of the surroundings, place or time. Another day, at dawn, in one of the rooms in Ramanasramam allotted to us, sitting on the bed, I kept gazing at Arunachala Hill through the window. Watching the hill, my mind and eyes were stilled, and I could not withdraw my sight from the vision of Arunachala. I sat like this for hours, drawn inwards into deep meditation. When I regained consciousness of the outer world, it was dusk. I had lost myself in the Self the whole day, as Sri Guru Ramana says. During recent visits, such a state of meditation persists as long as we stay in Ramanasramam. These deeper meditational experiences were beyond anything I had imagined.

Bhagavan was ever in the state of Samadhi (awareness of the Self) from his 17th year to his 70th, and even in the absence of his

mortal body, he exists everywhere in Ramanasramam and its vicinity. This made a deep impact on me and is perhaps the cause of my experiences.

We have been to several ashrams all over India. But Ramanasramam stands unique and is the true ashram for sadhana towards liberation or self-realisation. There is no place for ego, money, worldly matters or other mundane activities. The ashram can aptly be called *Kalpatharu*, as it satisfies the yearning of seekers in search of true silence, meditation, peace, and self-realisation.

Though Sri Ramana Maharshi is not in his mortal body, he still is regarded as the monarch of the place and the ashram is run as per his wish and guidance. People from various corners of the world, who are his devotees and true seekers of knowledge come here to stay and have his darshan. They relish the love and grace of the master and experience the joy and bliss found nowhere else. Devotees stay in the ashram for three to four days and return to their homes. Some are fortunate enough to stay there permanently. *Parayana* (chanting of the Vedas), *Narayana seva* (feeding the poor and the needy), meditation, *prasadam* for devotees, circumambulating the Hill and the Guru's Samadhi are some of the regular routines in Ramanasramam; and Bhagavan's presence is experienced in all these activities. His presence is also seen in the acts and deeds of all who serve in the ashram – the cooks, labourers, ashramites running the library and the management personnel. It is his discipline, philosophy, simplicity and perfection in every act that is reflected in everyone, and it assures us of his continuing presence. Silence speaks more than words and there resides a deep calm and peace everywhere.

Sri Ramana Maharshi has become the breath of our life, and without him we cannot exist. He is our philosophical deity. Meditation occurs spontaneously in the vicinity of his Samadhi. A serene feeling always exists within the premises of the ashram. He condenses all thoughts, liquidates them and silences the mind. He becomes the discoverer of the 'I' in us. There are thousands of masters in the world who are giving *diksha* and *upadesa*. Sri Ramana never thought himself

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as a master or as one who gives *diksha* and *upadesa* to devotees, but directed his devotees towards the path of self-realisation just by his presence and divine silence.

There is a saying, “The presence and divinity of a *sharana* is best experienced and witnessed after death.” Guru Ramana left his mortal body in 1950 and his presence is even more alive and more intensely felt now. He who did not care for food, clothing and shelter. He who just wore a loin cloth, begged alms and burnt himself in the scorching sun without awareness of the external body, now so affectionately and caringly provides us with cool rooms and delicious food, and envelops us with the blanket of self-knowledge. Guru Ramana is the supreme example of a real Guru. We truly forget the presence of the overcrowded, ego-driven, ignorant and messed-up world outside us. It is a wonderful surprise that such a secluded place exists on this earth, that can enlighten and elevate us above all *vasanas*. Ramanasramam is not an abode for worldly people. One must have practised intense penance in previous lives in order to step into such an ashram and have spiritual experiences.

Ramanasramam is the ultimate destination for a true seeker of the Self. I see the devotees in the ashram, and I can in no way think that they are ordinary people. I feel the presence of great *rishis*, *sadhus*, and *jnanis* among them. The devotees who have come from far off lands in search of such a destination, dedicating their lives at his feet, truly belong to this place. I feel inferior to them when I see them chanting *Sri Rudram* and singing Tamil *parayana*. Guru Ramana shows no discrimination between the rich and poor, black and white, literate and illiterate, East and West and showers his grace through his divine look according to each person's inner capacity and yearning.

I bow in thanks to Lord Guru Ramana Mahadeva for having created this divine temple of self-knowledge for his devotees on this earth. ▲

# Demystifying the Term 'Sphurana'

## Part One

MICHAEL JAMES

*The original version of this article was written at the request of Alasdair Black, the editor of the newsletter published by the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK, and was published in their Autumn 2013 newsletter. Later in response to various questions that Michael was asked about aham-sphurana in the comments on his blog, happinessofbeing.blogspot.com, he enlarged upon what he had written for that newsletter and posted an expanded version of this article there on 1st July 2014. This present article is adapted from that expanded version.*

*In response to other questions that he was asked on this and other related subjects Michael also wrote two other articles, entitled 'Self-awareness: 'I'-thought, 'I'-feeling and aham-sphurana' and 'A paradox: sphurana means 'shining' or 'clarity', yet misinterpretations of it have created so much confusion', which he posted on his blog on 8th and 12th July 2014 respectively.*

In English books on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, and also among many of his devotees and followers, a lot of mystery and confusion seems to surround the Sanskrit word '*sphurana*', so much so that some aspirants agonise over whether or when they are

going to experience the mysterious and elusive thing that this word is imagined to denote. In this context, therefore, the first thing that needs to be clarified is that what we are seeking to experience when we practise *atma-vichara* or self-investigation is not anything mysterious or previously unknown, but is only 'I', ourself, with which we are already more familiar than we are with any other thing.

We already experience this 'I', of course, but what we are now trying to experience is not anything other than it, but is just this same 'I' but with a greater degree of clarity — in fact, with absolute clarity. At present the clarity with which we experience 'I' is less than perfect, because we experience it mixed with other things that we mistake to be 'I', such as our body and mind, and hence our current experience of 'I' is confused and clouded by our experience of those extraneous adjuncts as 'I'. Therefore, though we clearly know that I am, we do not clearly know what I am, so Bhagavan advises us to investigate and find out who or what we actually are.

What then is the meaning of this term '*sphurana*', and why did Bhagavan occasionally use it? Unsurprisingly, all that this word denotes in the context in which he used it is just *clarity of self-awareness* — the very clarity that he advises us to seek. Therefore *sphurana* is not anything other than 'I', but is only the greater degree of clarity with which we are now trying to experience 'I'.

In the context of Bhagavan's teachings, just as *vichara* (investigation or enquiry) means by default only *atma-vichara* (self-investigation or self-enquiry), *sphurana* means by default only *aham-sphurana*, the 'clear shining of I'. Just as the shining of a light is not other than that light, because if a light did not shine it would not be a light, this clear shining of 'I' is not other than 'I', because if 'I' did not shine (that is, if it was not experienced by itself) it would not be 'I'.

However, in contexts other than Bhagavan's teachings, the Sanskrit word *sphuranam* has a much broader range of meanings, such as shining, glittering, sparkling, twinkling, flashing, shining forth, springing to mind, appearing, starting into view, breaking forth, manifestation, quivering, trembling, throbbing, vibration or pulsation. In short, anything that shines, appears, manifests, becomes

clear or makes itself known can be called a *sphurana*. In the context of Bhagavan's teachings, however, many of these meanings of *sphurana* are obviously not applicable, because 'I' does not sparkle, twinkle, quiver, tremble, throb, vibrate or pulsate, since it is essentially just being, not something that moves in any way or does anything. The things that we mistake to be 'I', such as our body and mind, do move and act, but 'I' itself just is and does not move or do anything.

Though the term *sphurana* does have various meanings, not all of its meanings are applicable in any given context, so which of its meanings are applicable is determined by the particular context in which it was used. Therefore which of its meanings is or are applicable in the context of Bhagavan's teachings? When Devaraja Mudaliar asked him the meaning of *sphurana*, he replied, 'It means விளங்குவது or விளக்குவது'.<sup>1</sup> விளங்குவது (*vilanguvadu*) and விளக்குவது (*vilakkuvadu*)<sup>2</sup> are both verbal nouns (from the verbs *vilangu* and *vilakku* respectively), or to be more precise, participial nouns, as for example is *ulladu*, so just as *ulladu* can mean either 'what is' or 'being', *vilanguvadu* can mean either 'what shines' or 'shining', and *vilakkuvadu* can mean either 'what makes clear' or 'making clear'. This then is what he meant by *sphurana* when he coined the term *aham-sphurana*, so *aham-sphurana* means the shining of 'I' or the making clear of 'I'.

Obviously 'I' does not shine in the same way that a physical light shines, so in this context 'shining' is not used literally but metaphorically. That is, in this context the basic metaphorical meaning of 'shining' is 'being experienced', so whatever is experienced at any given time can be said to be 'shining' at that time. Since 'I' is not only the only thing that is always experienced, but also the only thing that is experienced by itself, it is not only ever-shining but is also the only thing that is self-shining.

However, 'shining' in a metaphorical sense means not only 'being experienced' in general, but more specifically 'being clearly

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002. 24-3-45 Afternoon. p.5.

<sup>2</sup> The precise diacritical presentation of these two words are: விளங்குவது (*vilāṅguvadu*) and விளக்குவது (*viḷakkuvadu*).

experienced'. Thus the more clearly a thing is experienced, the more brightly it may be said to be shining. It is significant, therefore, that though the basic meaning of *vilanguvadu* is either 'what shines' or 'shining', it also means either 'what is clear' or 'being clear', so in the case of *aham-sphurana* or the shining of 'I', *sphurana* or 'shining' simply means 'being clear' or '*being clearly experienced*'.

Since what is always more clearly experienced than any other thing is only 'I', it may be said to be the most brightly shining of all things, but so long as its shining is mixed with the shining of any other things (all of which are illuminated only by the light of 'I', which is a metaphorical way of saying that they are all experienced only by the conscious thing called 'I'), it is not shining sufficiently clearly. In order to shine with complete clarity, 'I' must shine alone — that is, it must be experienced on its own, in the absence of all other things. When it shines alone, in complete isolation from all other things, it shines clearly, and this clear shining of 'I' alone is what Bhagavan sometimes described as *aham-sphurana*.

Since a light is a light only because it shines, and since it shines only because it is a light, it and its shining can never be separated from each other, and in fact its shining is nothing other than it itself. Therefore the two basic meanings of *vilanguvadu*, namely 'what shines' and 'shining', both actually denote the same thing. For example, in the case of *aham-sphurana*, 'I' is both shining and what shines. That is, shining or being clear — and hence in this sense *sphurana* — is the very nature of 'I', because if it did not shine (that is, if it were not experienced by itself) it would not be 'I'. Therefore *aham-sphurana*, the 'shining of I' or 'clarity of I', is nothing other than 'I' itself.

When a light shines, not only does it make other things clear, but it also makes itself clear, and likewise whatever else shines (whether literally or metaphorically) thereby makes itself clear. Therefore, when Bhagavan said that *sphurana* means *vilanguvadu* (shining or being clear) or *vilakkuvadu* (making clear), what he implied is that it actually means both simultaneously, because by shining or being clear 'I' is making itself clear.

This is why anything that makes itself clear, such as a light, a sound, a throbbing, a pulsation, a vibration, an explosion or anything else that appears, manifests, springs into view or strikes the mind, can be described as a *sphurana*. However, no such things can be *aham-sphurana*, because *aham-sphurana* is the shining of 'I' alone. Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between *aham-sphurana* and every other type of *sphurana*, because any other type of *sphurana* is conditional, since it depends on 'I', whereas *aham-sphurana* is unconditional, since it depends upon nothing other than itself.

That is, a light, a sound, a throbbing or anything else other than 'I' can make itself known or clear only if there is an 'I' to whom it is making itself known or clear, so there can be no *sphurana* of any such thing unless it is experienced by 'I'. In the case of *aham-sphurana*, on the other hand, what experiences the 'I' that makes itself clear is only that very same 'I' itself, so it does not depend upon anything other than itself. Therefore *aham-sphurana* is the only self-shining *sphurana* — the only *sphurana* that experiences itself.

After Bhagavan explained to him that *sphurana* means *vilanguvadu* (shining or being clear) or *vilakkuvadu* (making clear), Devaraja Mudaliar went somewhat off-topic by asking, 'Is it not a sound we hear?' Since his original question was about the meaning of the word *sphurana* in *aham-sphurana*, it was not relevant to then ask about a sound, unless he imagined that *aham-sphurana* is somehow a sound of some sort. However, just as *aham-sphurana* is not literally a light, it is also not literally a sound, but just as it can be described metaphorically as a light, it could also (at a stretch of the imagination) be described metaphorically as a sound, so it seems that Bhagavan replied implying that it is not a sound that we can hear but a 'sound' (figuratively speaking) that we become aware of. That is, the nature of 'I' (*aham*) and hence of the shining of 'I' (*aham-sphurana*) is silence, so if it is described metaphorically as a 'sound', it is a 'soundless sound', and hence it cannot be heard but can only be experienced in silence.

In English books on the teachings of Bhagavan, though the noun *sphuranam* is used, the verb *sphur*, from which this verbal noun is

derived, is not used, whereas in Sanskrit he used this verb (as he did for example in verse 20 of *Upadesa Saram*, where he used it to describe the shining forth of oneself as 'I am I' after the ego is destroyed by self-investigation) perhaps as frequently as he used its noun form, *sphuranam*, and in Tamil he sometimes used its equivalents, *spuri* or *puri*. The Sanskrit verb *sphur* means to shine, be bright, be clear, be evident, make itself known, flash to mind, appear clearly, become visible, manifest, arise, shine forth, burst out plainly, start into view, spring, dart, flash, sparkle, glitter, gleam, glisten, twinkle, twitch, tremble, throb, palpitate, jerk or kick (and thus it is etymologically related to the English words *spurn* and *spur*, which like it are believed to be derived from a Proto-Indo-European root meaning to twitch, push or kick). In Tamil the frequently used verb *puri*, which means to shine, be manifest, be clear or be understood, and its much less frequently used form *spuri*, which tends to mean more specifically to strike one's mind, are both derived from this Sanskrit verb *sphur*.

Since some of these various meanings of *sphur* and *spuri*, such as to shine forth, spring into view, become clear or strike one's mind, imply an experience that is somehow new, one of the connotations both of these verbs and of their various derivatives, such as the verbal nouns *sphuranam* in Sanskrit and *spurippu* in Tamil, is newness or freshness. Therefore in the context of Bhagavan's teachings, *sphurana* generally does not mean only clarity of self-awareness but more specifically a fresh clarity (or fresh degree of clarity) of self-awareness.

Hence, after Bhagavan explained to him that *sphurana* means *vilanguvadu* (shining or being clear) or *vilakkuvadu* (making clear), if Devaraja Mudaliar had asked, 'But is not 'I' always shining or making itself clear? In what sense, then, is *aham-sphurana* any different to the ordinary shining of 'I' that we already experience?' he would probably have replied by explaining that the term *aham-sphurana* does not denote merely the ordinary shining of 'I' or the ordinary manner in which it makes itself clear, but more specifically a fresh and more clear shining of 'I'.

As Sri Sadhu Om used to say (punning on the words 'new clear' and 'nuclear'), *sphurana* is a new clear awareness of ourself. Just as the

potentially destructive power of nuclear energy is released by splitting an atom, the all-destroying power of this *sphurana* or new clear self-awareness is released by splitting the ego-atom — *the cit-jada-granthi* or knot that binds the conscious (ourself) to the non-conscious (a body) — by means of keenly focused self-attentiveness.

Until the final moment when the ego is destroyed completely by absolute clarity of self-awareness, we do not actually split this *cit-jada-granthi* entirely, but even while practising self-attentiveness we are beginning to split it, and thus we experience a less than perfect kind of *sphurana*, a fresh but still partial degree of clarity of self-awareness, which will not have the power to destroy our mind entirely, but will gradually undermine it by weakening its *vasanas* or outward-going inclinations. Only when we experience absolute clarity of self-awareness, which is the perfect kind of *sphurana*, will its full power be released, thereby destroying not only our mind but also its entire creation, the appearance of this vast universe that comes into seeming existence whenever it rises, as Bhagavan is recorded as saying.

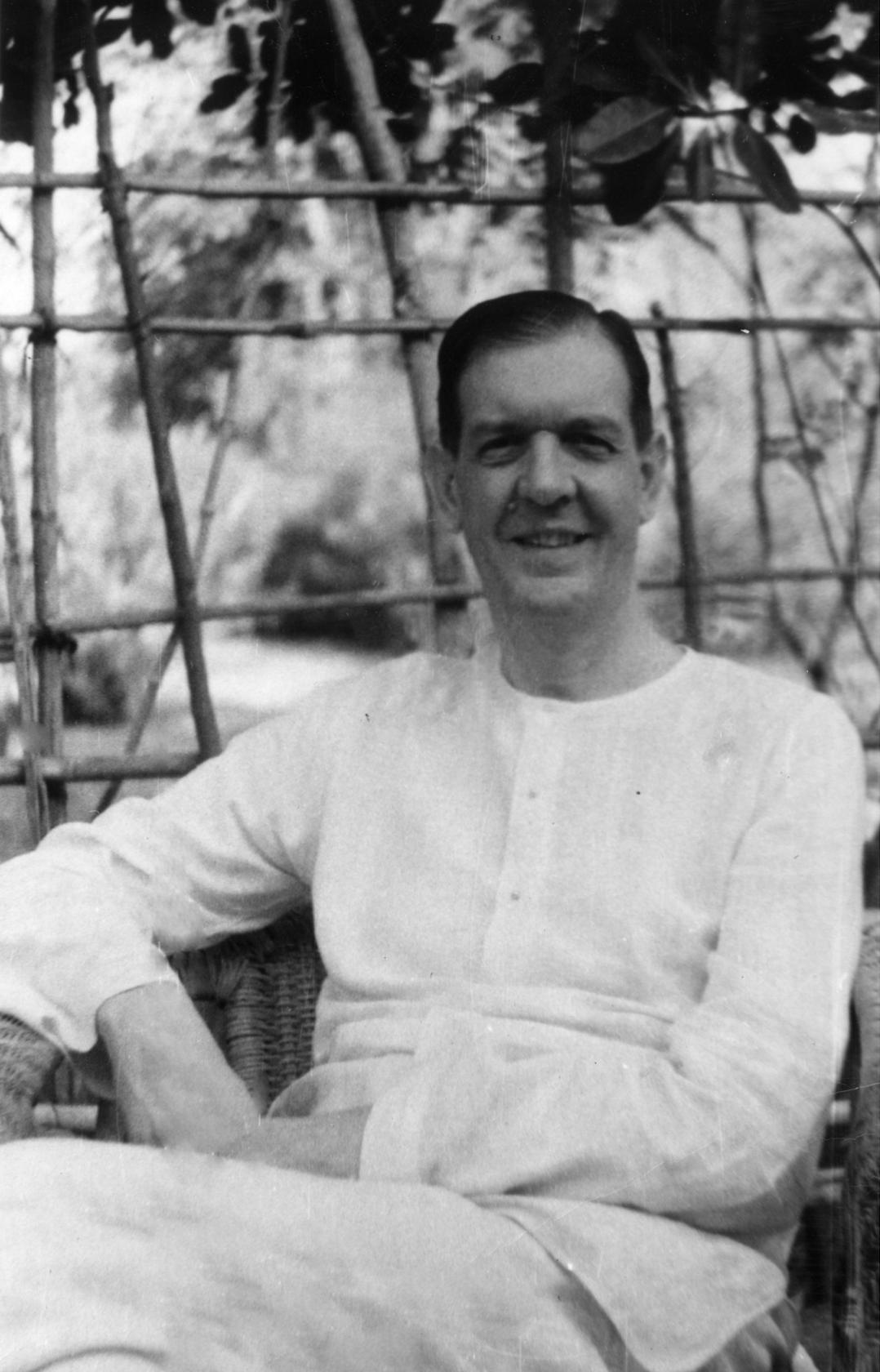
“The spark of *jnana* will easily consume all creation as if it were a mountain-heap of cotton. All the crores of worlds being built upon the weak (or no) foundation of the ego, they all topple down when the atomic bomb of *jnana* comes down upon them.”<sup>3</sup>

This ‘spark of *jnana*’ or ‘atomic bomb of *jnana*’ is the absolute clarity of self-awareness, which is the perfect variety of what Bhagavan sometimes called the *aham-sphurana*. ▲

(*To be continued*)

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<sup>3</sup> Mudaliar, Op.cit., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*. 22-11-1945, Afternoon. p.49.



# The Best of Friends

## Bhagavan and Chadwick

### Part Two

LOUIS BUSS

In the first part of this article, we saw that Alan Chadwick was a priest who missed his vocation then went aimlessly wandering the world, as if forever in search of the treasure he had lost. On 1st November 1935, he finally found it. Once he'd entered the Old Hall and set eyes on Ramana Maharshi, his wanderings were over. If the beginning of his life had been one enormous question, then now his great thirst for spiritual answers was finally to be satisfied. A few of his early conversations with Bhagavan were public events which have found their way into the Ashram literature, but most were private affairs of which no record remains. All we can say for certain is that, having found the great fount of spiritual certainty he'd been seeking all those years, Chadwick drank his fill.

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.

All this, of course, was just what most people go through on first encountering Bhagavan and his teachings. All of us come to him with some baggage carried over from our former lives, and there is usually some last intellectual business to be transacted before we can settle down to work under his guidance. Like Chadwick, we all start off by asking questions. Then, like him, we all fall silent.

The record in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* suggests that by the time he moved into his cottage in February 1936, Chadwick was already running out of questions. Soon, although he still spent hours every day meditating in the Old Hall, Alan might hardly say a word to Ramana from one week to the next. This silence only meant that their friendship was entering a deeper and more significant phase. Bhagavan was consolidating his place at the centre of Chadwick's life, and the Englishman's attention was fixed on him with ever mounting intensity. Yet the world outside the Ashram had not yet been completely forgotten, and it had certainly not gone away.

Duty and loyalty were the keynotes of Chadwick's character. When war had broken out in 1914, he had hurried straight home from Canada to enlist. Second Lieutenant Chadwick had thus been the very first officer gazetted into his battalion; Major Chadwick was eventually to be the very last of them to leave it. Now once more the old soldier found himself in a distant land whilst conflict brewed in Europe. This time, though, his duty would not be so clear-cut. If the worst happened and war finally broke out, Chadwick would find himself facing an agonising conflict of loyalties. The prospect was so unbearable that, as catastrophe drew ever closer, he couldn't even bring himself to look at a newspaper. As best he could, he tried to pretend that none of it was happening and focus on his spiritual practice. Unfortunately, Adolf Hitler didn't cease to exist just because one Englishman in Tamil Nadu (the Madras Presidency of his day) tried to pretend he wasn't there. And no matter how determined he was not to look at the paper, Chadwick was one day unable to shut out the awful news that Britain was at war with Germany.

Chadwick was a member of England's officer class. From the earliest age, he'd been brought up in a code of duty and honour similar



Chadwick in front of the Old Hall during Bhagavan's Lifetime

to that of the Japanese samurai. When England was threatened, the privileged few were expected to set an example, leading from the front and laying down their lives without a moment's hesitation. Although he was now too old to enlist, Chadwick's first reaction, his programmed reflex, was to hurry back and help in whatever way he could. But this time the irresistible force of duty was blocked by the immovable object of Ramana Maharshi. Was Chadwick to leave the great treasure he had won after all those years of searching and wandering? And if he left it, would he ever get it back? Was he to put his King before his Guru, his country before his God? The dilemma was not helped by Ramana's own refusal to get involved. Alan's obedience was such that he would endure a toothache rather than visit the dentist without Ramana's explicit permission. The complete loyalty he'd once given to the British army had now been transferred to Ramana Maharshi. Without marching orders from his new commanding officer, Chadwick could not quit India. And Ramana refused to say the word.

So Chadwick gritted his teeth and stayed in the Ashram, but it was far from easy. He was not the only Englishman who refused to quit India after all, and in this great crisis the Indians took out their frustrations on him, crowing over every Allied setback and missing no opportunity to tell him that London would shortly fall. Chadwick found this so maddening that he decided to take a vow of silence, just to make his tormentors leave him alone. But Bhagavan told him this was a bad idea, and so the plan had to be dropped.

Denied the refuge of silence, Chadwick sought solace in poetry, and it is to this crisis that we owe some of his best-loved works. The poet bemoans his exile, his inability to return home, and mourns over all he has given up. He curses himself for his own failure to make any spiritual progress. At times he all but curses his beloved Bhagavan for the terrible limbo in which he finds himself. But in the end the poems are celebrations of what the war had proved: his friendship and love. For perhaps even Chadwick didn't realise just how hopelessly devoted he had become to Ramana Maharshi until England called, and he found himself unable to answer.

The writing of poetry may have provided a few moments of solace, and it has bequeathed to future generations a little treasury of religious devotion, but it was hardly enough to solve Chadwick's agonising dilemma. In the summer of 1940, whilst England faced her greatest ever peril, Chadwick's health collapsed. The timing is not certain, but the evidence suggests that he fell ill during the Battle of Britain itself. Whilst a handful of young pilots saved the world for democracy, Chadwick lay stricken in his little room, too sick even to complete the short walk to the Old Hall and see the man for whom he'd betrayed his country. Any Englishman who fell so seriously ill at the height of the Indian summer stood in danger of his life. So the symbolism is perfect: Chadwick's fate, like England's, hung by a thread. Eventually, after a fortnight that must have seemed like an eternity, Alan's best friend came to visit him, appearing at the doorway of the little cottage on his afternoon stroll through the Ashram. Yet Chadwick's reaction suggests that it was more than a friend he saw. The relaxed informality of those early visits was gone. Now Chadwick's hair stood on end and he made weak efforts to rise from his sick-bed so that he could fall at the feet of his Lord.

After that apparition, Chadwick recovered and resumed his visits to the Old Hall. England herself was saved. Denied the air superiority he needed to mount a full-scale invasion, Hitler launched the Blitz. So, while London was reduced to rubble, Chadwick sat and meditated in the Old Hall. He must have known that nobody was going to thank him for this. No Englishman was going to admire him, or even understand what on earth he was doing. As for the Indians, though they might be his friends on a personal level, many were against him as an Englishman. Alan, in short, had given up the world for Ramana. And at some point during the crisis he was called upon to formalise the sacrifice.

It all came to a head when a notice appeared in the press saying that British nationals were required to report to the British Society. Of course, Chadwick still couldn't bear to look at a newspaper, and might have missed this summons entirely if Bhagavan hadn't spotted it and brought it to his attention. Chadwick duly reported as required,

and the inevitable duly happened. Although he was too old to fight, Chadwick was certainly not too old to make himself useful. As a former Major and pioneer, he was too valuable an asset to be left mouldering in some Indian hermitage whilst England was bracing herself for invasion. The War Office accordingly summoned him back to London. Chadwick had been called up.

So far the agonising conflict of loyalties had been purely internal, with Chadwick's God and his country wrestling for his soul. But now the call of duty was more than a matter of mere loyalty and sentiment. It was a legal obligation which brought the irresistible force into direct contact with the immovable object. Remaining in the Ashram was both absolutely imperative and completely impossible. If Alan Chadwick was trapped in such an insoluble dilemma, the only way out was to stop being Alan Chadwick at all. So it was that to dodge the call-up this most loyal of Englishmen renounced his passport and took Indian citizenship. Then, in March 1942, just a few days before his fifty-second birthday, he took the last step and renounced his name itself. From now on, he would be not Alan Chadwick, but Sadhu Arunachala.

So it was a different man who emerged at the end of the war, with a different nationality, a different name and a very different future. Until now, Chadwick had always cherished the hope of one day going home, of seeing England, family and friends again. When he'd arrived in the Ashram, it had never for a moment occurred to him that he might be exiled here for the rest of his life. Yet when the chips were down, Chadwick found again and again that he simply couldn't bring himself to part from his Guru, his best of friends. Without the war, he might never been called upon to prove the depths of his devotion. But he had demonstrated it now, to Bhagavan, to future generations, and perhaps also to himself. Perhaps without the war, Alan would never have realised just how hopelessly attached he had become to his dear Ramana. Perhaps he could only really understand it by being called upon to give up all he had. When it was all over he must sometimes have looked at the ruins of his life and wondered what on earth had happened. What he had lost compared to what he had gained.

Chadwick had suffered his own personal Blitz. But at the end of it all, rising like St Paul's Cathedral from the rubble, towered the enduring figure of Ramana Maharshi. The surrounding devastation only made that beloved shape seem more grand and triumphant, more familiar and dear.

It was not in Chadwick's nature to give public expression to his feelings. But he did from time to time write in praise of Bhagavan, and in doing so gave the occasional inadvertent glimpse into his inner world. A newspaper article which appeared in 1948 gives some idea of how much Ramana meant to him by the end of the war:

'Sometimes when I walk into the Hall I see my mother come back to life, sitting in front of me. The same expression of welcome; the same loving interest in the look with which I am regarded as I take a seat. It is almost uncanny.'

After all he'd suffered and all he'd lost, it was perhaps only natural that Alan's devotion should have risen to such a pitch that he now literally saw Ramana as his mother. The true miracle was Bhagavan's ability to respond with all a mother's love. This is more amazing still when we consider that he was simultaneously occupying the same central place in the lives of so many others. All of them made equally gigantic emotional and spiritual demands upon him, and all of them were mysteriously satisfied. Chadwick was just one of countless devotees, and they all had similar stories to tell. The difference was that, since the majority were ordinary people with families and careers, most of them had something other than Ramana in their lives. Even those few who'd renounced everything to settle in the Ashram were mainly Indians, and thus had at least retained the basic comfort and security of feeling at home. But the various foreigners, as well as Chadwick, although he should now technically be called an Indian himself, would never feel completely at home again. He had not even learnt to speak Tamil, since Bhagavan had advised him that this would be a useless mental distraction. So there must have been times when Chadwick, like any foreigner, felt like no more than an overgrown child, excluded from the adult world, bewildered and at a loss.

All in all, it is little wonder that in a post-war poem we find him describing Ramana as his 'sole staff and stay.' This was more than poetic exaggeration. It was a plain statement of fact, which makes us more inclined to believe Chadwick when he goes on to say 'And when Thou goest I would also go.' If Ramana was all that Alan had left in the world, then a world without him would be utterly desolate. There would be nothing left to hope for but death. For although Chadwick must have heard and understood Bhagavan's often repeated insistence that he was not the body, yet on a mundane level how on earth could he survive in a world without Ramana Maharshi?

When he wrote those words, Chadwick could have had no idea how close the final parting was. Yet Ramana was already being taken from him by degrees. In those post-war years, just as the Maharshi's health and vigour slowly declined, the crowds flocking to the Ashram swelled. With more and more people clamouring for the blessings of an ailing saint, rules and restrictions were put in place to limit access and thus conserve what little strength he had. Chadwick must ruefully have remembered those early days, when he'd been able to wander into the Hall whenever he felt like it and have Bhagavan all to himself for a couple of hours, but now Alan could hardly exchange a few words with his best friend, let alone spend time alone with him. Yet what little contact he had was still enough. A word here and there, one look of love from the radiant figure on the couch, was all the sustenance he needed. That was all he asked for, and if life had just gone on like that, it would have been enough. But then, in 1949, just a few short years after the ending of the war, the cancer appeared.

Chadwick's world was ending. Soon those few words and those loving looks, which were the epitome of all he had to live for, would be withdrawn. Yet during the final illness, his only concern was to minimise Bhagavan's own suffering. He staunchly opposed futile medical procedures which would only prolong the agony, and on the eve of the final operation he actually went down on his knees before Bhagavan, begging him to spare himself the pain. Bhagavan's response took Chadwick's breath away: the doctors had gone to a lot of trouble, and it would be a pity to disappoint them now. So he put



Chadwick in front of Cow Lakshmi Samadhi

himself through the ordeal for them, but of course it did no good, and in April 1950 the figure of Ramana Maharshi was gone.

Now history began to repeat itself. When he'd lost his priestly vocation and dropped out of Oxford, the young Chadwick had been able to think of nothing better to do than to wander aimlessly round the world, endlessly moving from country to country and from job to job. Now once more Chadwick had lost his anchor. Now once more the Good Shepherd had hidden himself from view, and once more the lost sheep drifted aimlessly away. The other devotees abandoned the ashram as well, fulfilling the ancient prophecy that when the shepherd is struck down, the sheep shall be scattered. We do not know exactly where Chadwick went during this period, though Benares has been mentioned. He certainly does not seem to have left India, and indeed the globetrotting of former years would not have been so easy without his British passport. But the last place in the world where he wanted to be was Sri Ramanashram, so empty and desolate now, filled with such painful memories of his friend.

But, although Chadwick left the ashram intending never to return, Bhagavan drew him back. Exactly how this happened is not clear. What we do know is that Chadwick was among the very first of the scattered sheep to return. And now at last he began to understand the very first lesson Bhagavan had taught him on that glorious morning in 1935. On that fateful day when he'd stepped into the Old Hall and set eyes on Ramana Maharshi for the first time, Chadwick had had the peculiar feeling that they'd always been together. In some strange way, through all his wanderings, Ramana had been there. For though the Good Shepherd may hide himself from time to time, disappearing behind a tree or the brow of a hill, he never abandons us, and we are never really alone. In the trauma of Ramana's death, in the agony of losing the best of friends, Chadwick had somehow forgotten that first teaching. But when he recovered his senses and returned to the Ashram, he gradually realised that Bhagavan was still there, just as he had been on that wonderful first morning. The fact that he had hidden himself from view once more made not the slightest difference.

Indeed, as time went on Chadwick came to believe that Bhagavan's presence was actually more powerful than it had been before.

So Chadwick settled back down in his little cottage and devoted the remainder of his life to helping the Ashram survive as a living spiritual centre. It is to his efforts that we owe the existence of the Veda Patasala and the regular performance of the Sri Chakra puja at the Mother's Temple. In a more general sense, he encouraged the others to return, writing articles and spreading the good news that Bhagavan had not really gone anywhere at all. Yet it was an uphill struggle for much of the 1950s. They were dark and difficult times for the Ashram, which naturally had fewer visitors and less money than before. Add to this an endless succession of court cases and battles over Bhagavan's legacy and it must have seemed at times that the Ashram could not survive.

The current President was often away at college in those days. He remembers returning to the Ashram at the end of term and finding that there was only one person in the temporary shed that had been erected over Ramana Maharshi's samadhi. It was his old friend Alan, the English exile, the one lost sheep who had nowhere else to go.

'The only person sitting in the small thatched shed would be Chadwick. He would be sitting quietly.'

And that is how I like to think of Chadwick still. His mortal remains lie buried next to his cottage, but if there is one place his ghost would haunt, it would surely be Bhagavan's shrine. Perhaps he is there even now, floating silently round and round with the other devotees, or sitting in the corner with a phantom meditation belt around his knees. After all, if there was one thing Chadwick's extraordinary life had proved, it was that he found it impossible to tear himself away from Ramana Maharshi. So he is surely there in spirit still, refusing to leave his Master's side even in death, ever the best of friends.

In April 1950, when the Good Shepherd seemed once more to vanish from the world, Chadwick must have thought that he would never see that beloved form again. Yet the two of them were to be mysteriously reunited at the end. For as Chadwick himself lay dying

## MOUNTAIN PATH

in hospital, he saw a radiant figure at the doorway, beckoning him to come away.

If Chadwick had given the apparition a name for those who stood around his deathbed, he would have revealed something about himself, but nothing at all about the mysterious One who had come for him. All we can assume is that, whatever guise he appeared in, it was Bhagavan who came for Chadwick at the end. ▲

## The Lap of Love

Ana Ramana

Let me, O God, be most intimate with my own heart.

Relieve me of the crust congealed in crevices.

Lure me into the lap of love

Where you and I abide as One,

And always have.

Why do I resist?

Who is it hides from her real home?

What dream of me keeps me from your truth?

Don't let me stray like a wild dog,

Gnawing on the bone of illusion.

My one wish is for you —

To fall into your arms, O my Beloved,

To rest in the quiet of your charms.

What is this dream of life but a chance to die

Into the light of your Pure Being?

Let me live as That, while breath still courses through.

I lay my head at your lotus feet,

O Holy Master.

One gaze from you and I am free.

I close my eyes now

That I may truly see.

# The Bliss of No Want

VASKO KOHLMAYER

When you ask people what they want from life most respond with something along the line, “I just want to be happy.”

Desire for happiness is without question a universal psychological instinct. It is the most intensely felt of all human aspirations. Regardless of our culture, race or gender the ultimate goal of our lives is fundamentally the same: We all want to be happy.

This fact has been noted by some of the greatest thinkers across the ages. Some 2300 years ago, the Greek thinker Aristotle stated, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.”<sup>1</sup> More than two thousand years later, the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote, “Happiness, though an indefinite concept, is the goal of all rational beings.”<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*. Ed., trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge University Press, 1996. p.68.

The author worked as a journalist writing a Christian column for an online section of the *Washington Times*. An encounter with the teachings of Sri Ramana brought on a period of spiritual turmoil, and he eventually stopped writing as his worldview underwent a profound transformation.

French scientist and mystic Blaise Pascal observed, “All men are in search of happiness. There is no exception to this, whatever different methods are employed.”<sup>3</sup>

Happiness is the overriding aim of human existence and its attainment the central mission of our lives. It is the desire for happiness that actuates most of our actions: Almost everything we do is intended — in one way or another — to bring us closer to this goal.

Even though the lives of a doctor, a religious hermit, a polar explorer, a bank robber, and the CEO of a multinational corporation may bear little resemblance outwardly, their actions are driven by the same motivation: They all do what they do, because they believe that it will bring them closer to happiness.

But surprisingly enough, even though happiness is the paramount objective of everyone’s life most people actually never attain it. To see that this is so, we only need to ask ourselves this: Out of all the people we have met and known how many could we say were truly happy in the full sense of the word? How often do we come across people who exhibit a lasting sense of contentment, satisfaction and peace that are the hallmarks of genuine happiness?

To see how this paradox affects us personally we can simply ask ourselves: Despite our best efforts have we ourselves achieved the happiness we have been pursuing for so long? If we are truly honest, few of us would probably answer in the affirmative.

This makes for a remarkable state of affairs: Billions of people across the world are engaged in the pursuit of happiness, and yet only a small handful ever actually achieve the goal. Happiness is universally sought but rarely attained.

This can only mean one thing: There is something fundamentally wrong about the way most of us go about pursuing the supreme objective of our lives.

### **Sri Ramana: “Happiness is your nature”**

When asked about happiness Sri Ramana gave a seemingly startling answer. He insisted that there is no need to embark on an outward-

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<sup>3</sup> Pascal, Blaise, *Pensees and Other Writings*, 2008. p.51.

bound pursuit of happiness, because happiness is already our nature. All we need to do to experience it fully is to turn within.

"[I]n order to gain that happiness which is one's nature and which is experienced in the state of deep sleep where there is no mind, one should know one's self. For that, the path of knowledge, the inquiry of the form 'Who am I?' is the principal means."<sup>4</sup>

Sri Ramana said, "Happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realise the Self to open the store of unalloyed happiness."<sup>5</sup> He told those who came to him for guidance, "As the Self is not outside but inside you, you are asked to dive within, instead of going without."<sup>6</sup>

Regrettably, only relatively few people have been able to benefit from this sagacious advice. This is not surprising, because Bhagavan's assertion is so sharply at variance with the way we normally think that it seems nearly impossible to believe that what he says may be true.

Nevertheless, it would be wise to at least give Sri Ramana the benefit of the doubt. After all, he does not ask us to blindly accept his words on faith. He only asks us to look and see for ourselves. Regardless of how improbable his words may seem, if we summon the courage to follow his counsel we may yet discover that what he says is indeed true.

### **The parable of a treasure hunter**

The following story illustrates our situation. Imagine a boy who has always been told that a precious treasure lies buried on a remote island. Having heard all the wonderful tales, the boy makes the decision that one day he will go and find the treasure for himself. What he does not know, however, is that the stories he has been told are false.

When the boy grows up he journeys to that faraway place and starts digging. He keeps working feverishly for many years driven by the futile belief that the more he digs the closer he gets to his goal. Then one day he comes across an old man whom the islanders hold

<sup>4</sup>'Who Am I?', *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001. p.36.

<sup>5</sup> Venkataramiah, M.,(compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §3.

<sup>6</sup>Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002. 8-10-46. p.325.

in high esteem. The wise man informs him that no treasure is buried on the island. He then tells him the treasure he is looking for is to be found under the foundation of his house back at home.

How the seeker proceeds is entirely up to him. But of this he can be certain: The success of his quest is entirely dependent on his looking in the right place. If he chooses to dig in the wrong spot he will never find what he is looking for no matter how long or hard he tries.

Like the treasure hunter we too have been searching long and hard for the precious treasure of happiness. Then one day we come across Sri Ramana who informs us that the treasure is not to be found in the places where we have been looking. Instead he tells us to go back home to our own selves. He claims it is there, at the very core of our own being, that we will find that which we have been seeking.

Each of us must decide how we receive this information. For most people this is not an easy decision to make. Since our earliest time we have been told and taught that happiness resides in the good things of this world: wealth, material prosperity, professional and social success and such. Bhagavan's instruction seems so far-fetched and so at variance with our customary way of thinking that most people — even those who otherwise respect and admire him deeply — are psychologically unable to accept the possibility that what he says may be correct.

But to help us overcome our skepticism we should consider the character of the one who gives the advice. Sri Ramana was known as a person of profound insight and impeccable integrity. We can, therefore, be reasonably certain he would not advise us to do something he has himself not found to be true in his own experience.

To help us along not only does Sri Ramana Maharshi point to the place where happiness is to be found, he also indicates the way that leads to the treasure. “No want is the greatest bliss,” he says. “It can be realised only by experience. Even an emperor is no match for a man with no wants.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to Sri Ramana, the royal road that takes us back to ourselves — to the bliss and happiness

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<sup>7</sup>Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Gems From Bhagavan*, 1999. p.6.

that are our nature — leads through relinquishment of our wants and desires.

### **The happiness equation**

Even though Sri Ramana's contention that bliss and happiness are a result of non-desire may sound far-fetched at first, its truth can be shown by a simple thought experiment.

Let us pause for a moment and just try to imagine how it would feel if we really and truly did not want anything. How would it feel if we did not want to acquire anything, if we did not want to achieve anything, if we did not want to change anything?

How would it feel if we were completely content and satisfied with the way things are?

The answer is contained within the question itself: If we were completely contented and satisfied, we would be perfectly happy, since contentment and satisfaction are the very hallmarks of happiness.

As long as we do not want anything except what is now before us, we cannot but be happy. This is because a state of mind in which we are free of wanting implies that we are fully contented and satisfied with our condition and circumstances, which is just another way of saying that we are happy.

Therefore, all that is required to attain happiness is only not to want anything. To put it another way, happiness is the inevitable consequence of giving up desire.

This can be expressed schematically as a simple equation:

You minus desire = happiness.

It also holds true the other way around:

Happiness = you minus desire.

In other words, happiness is ourselves without wanting anything. Happiness is what is left when we shed our wants.

What this shows is that happiness is really our nature. It reveals itself the moment we give up our desires. If we cease wanting objects, situations and persons the happiness and bliss that exist at the core of our being will well up in our experience. This is how Sri Ramana

put it: “Happiness is inherent in man... bliss is not added to your nature; it is merely revealed as your true and natural state.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Grace on the path**

The question is how does one enter the state of non-desire. Obviously, the simplest and most direct way would be through a clear recognition that nothing in this world can ultimately satisfy or fulfil. Bhagavan himself made this point repeatedly. In response to one questioner, he said, “What happiness can you get from things extraneous to yourself? When you get it, how long will it last?”<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion Sri Ramana used the story of the Buddha to illustrate this idea:

“When he was in the palace with all possible luxuries in the world, he was still sad. To remove his sadness, his father created more luxuries than ever. But none of them satisfied the Buddha. At midnight he left his wife and child and disappeared. He remained in great austerity for six years, realised the Self, and, for the welfare of the world, became a mendicant. It was only after he became a mendicant that he enjoyed great bliss.”<sup>10</sup>

But even though we may see this truth intellectually, our conditioning and habitual ways of thinking make it difficult to firmly integrate this insight into the fabric of our being. Deep inside we still tend to harbour desire of one kind or another thinking that its fulfilment will finally bring the happiness we seek. Despite repeated disappointment, the human mind seems to be constitutionally unable to fully grasp the futile nature of such wanting.

There is good reason to believe that human effort can only go so far and that in most cases divine assistance is required to make that last step.<sup>11</sup> Many people have testified that it was an infusion of grace

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<sup>8</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks Op.cit.*, Talk§3.

<sup>9</sup> Osborne, Arthur, *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, 2014. p.26.

<sup>10</sup> Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 2006. Letter ‘164: Greatness of Non-Attachment.’ p.365.

<sup>11</sup> The expression ‘last step’ is used as a concession to the way things appear to the mind. It has been said many times by sages that divine assistance is required at every step that a human being takes along the path of liberation.

that provided that final push by presenting before their eyes and hearts the reality of their condition.

### **The story of Radovan**

I have come across a striking real-life example of this not too long ago. It happened to my brother Radovan one late afternoon as he was travelling home from work. At the time he was going through a difficult period in his life. He was in the midst of planning a relocation to a different country in order to take his child out of an environment that was detrimental to her well-being. Not knowing how his plan would work out or even how he would provide for his family in the new place, Radovan was feeling severe pressure from several sides. That afternoon he was particularly eager to get home quickly, but as he was driving he came upon a traffic jam that eventually forced his car to a standstill. There were so many things to take care of and here he was stuck in traffic. A despair began mounting in his mind.

But then, as he was staring at the column of cars in front him, a question suddenly arose in his mind. It was a strange question, one that had never occurred to him before.

The question was this: “What would I need or want if I were to die tonight?”

This question impressed itself powerfully and vividly on his mind. For the first time in his life Radovan truly felt that death was real and that he was subject to it. He felt as if this question was somehow a harbinger of his own death and that he might, indeed, die that night.

The disturbing premonition caused all his mental powers to gather together with a great sense of urgency. His whole being focused on this question as if the answer to it was the key to the whole mystery of his existence.

And then, after a few minutes of intense focus, the answer suddenly came to him in a moment of great relief and clarity. In that moment, he saw that even if he were to die that very night there was nothing he would want, because he already had everything he ever needed. He saw clearly and beyond doubt that there was nothing in this world that could make him more whole or complete than he already was.

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Upon realising this a great spring of happiness seemed to burst open deep within his being. Wave after wave of nearly uncontainable happiness kept rolling through his body and mind. He broke into an ecstatic laughter mixed with tears of joy. Never before had he experienced such intense ecstasy and rapture. This lasted for a long time and even though it eventually diminished in intensity its afterglow has never really left.

What Radovan experienced that afternoon was nothing other than the truth of Sri Ramana's statement, "No want is the greatest bliss." The instant he saw that he neither lacked nor needed anything all his desires dropped away including the desire for life itself. All that remained at that moment was his bare nature stripped of all wants. And that was precisely the point at which the gates of bliss broke wide inside of him. Suddenly and unexpectedly while sitting behind the steering wheel of his car he found himself in Paradise.

"The Kingdom of God is within you," said the Good Shepherd from Nazareth a long time ago. In a flash of revelatory clarity these words became a reality for Radovan even though he himself was not a believer. But one does not need to be a believer to experience the inherent bliss of one's being. All that one needs to do is to give up the assumption that one needs external things in order to be happy.

That afternoon my brother experienced the greatest bliss of all: the bliss of 'no want'. As Sri Ramana said so many times, happiness is our very nature. It is only the belief that we are something else, that we need something in order to be happy, that prevents us from experiencing the bliss that we truly are. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

# The Yoga of the Uncontradictable: Meditative Absorption vs. Ultra-mystic Realization

PAUL BRUNTON

*Paul Brunton (1898-1981) presents the spiritual teachings of the East in a form that speaks clearly to the mind and the heart of the 21st century spiritual quester. During his youth in London, Paul Brunton experienced profound mystical and occult development. An ardent seeker of Truth, he was led to travel first to India and Egypt, and then around the world, to meet teachers and engage in spiritual research. In his books, Paul Brunton infuses traditional teachings with wisdom and a broad perspective gained through his own inner inquiry and unfoldment. He offers guidebooks that lead the aspirant step-by-step to that greatest of all treasures, the Higher Self, or Overself. The following discussion is adapted from The Wisdom of the Overself, the chapter titled 'The Mystical Phenomena of Meditation', where he explains the difference between the exalted yogic stage of meditative absorption (nirvikalpa samadhi) and ultra-mystic realization (sahaja samadhi).*

In the opening chapters of *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, there was stated, somewhat briefly and incompletely, certain problems connected with what yogis usually regard as the culmination of all their efforts — the trance state. They concerned its temporary character, its failure to stabilize its own exceptional but fugitive insights, its results in unfitting a man for further social existence, its creation of an attitude of complacent indifference toward the welfare of others, its persuasion of the yogi to withdraw permanently from society and its inability to show ethical improvement at all proportionate to the effort involved. These problems must now be provided for. But this term ‘trance’ has some unmystical associations in the spiritualistic-seance sense, some unfortunate ones in the Western consciousness and some ugly ones in the medical consciousness. Indeed, it carries with it offensive pathological suggestions of danger and is freely used in connection with the unpleasant phenomena of insanity.

But the peak state of right meditation is not a morbid or unhealthy or dangerous one, as a trance is usually thought to be, but rather one of special exaltation and emotional happiness. It is a fruit of mental discipline, not of mental aberration. The average Western reader is likely to form a wrong notion of what is meant here by such a term. He is more likely to catch the correct meaning if the term “reverie” is used instead but here again there is the implication that reasoning processes are still actively working, albeit in a vague dreamlike way. *Samadhi*, the Sanskrit word under discussion, has also been translated by Orientalists as ‘ecstasy’.

This too may be misleading when we remember that its highest stage is entirely thought-free. Therefore it may be less likely to lead to misunderstanding if we here use ‘self-absorption’ as an equivalent and refrain henceforth from using the term ‘trance’ altogether. What is meant is a rapt absorption of the thoughts in the essence of oneself and a profound immersion of the feelings in indescribable felicity. If used at all for yogic experiences the word ‘trance’ ought to be reserved for those cataleptic states which consummate the efforts of practicants in the final phases of the yoga of body control, with which we are not here concerned for such a path can never directly

lead to that realization of the Overself which is the proper goal set out in these writings. The unconscious state attained by this system is not regarded as desirable or necessary on the path which is unfolded here. It would indeed be useless. The trances of the hatha yogis, of the faqueers who permit themselves to be buried alive for a few hours or days, render the man unconscious just as the 'I'-thought falls back into its source within the heart. When it returns, he has had no more spiritual benefit than he has had from ordinary sleep, whereas in the higher self-absorption of mystical meditation the ego merges back into the heart while fully conscious.

Nobody need be frightened away from the practice of meditation therefore by the belief that it is beyond the reach of all but a select few or that it will be necessary for them to fall into a trance in the sense of a fainting away into unconsciousness. On the contrary, the practice itself is not only within the capacity of all but seeks a state of fuller consciousness, a psychological condition of expanded awareness.

The first problem of self-absorption is its fleeting character. Whether in its lightest phase of soothed nerves, its intermediate phase of suffused sense-free reverie, or its final phase of full absorption, world-remoteness, and self-mergence, it is always labelled with impermanence. The mystic may climb all the foothills and summits of a divine existence during this experience but he has always to descend them again. His way yields magnificent glimpses of growing breadth and luminosity but it does not yield a permanent foothold. He cannot hibernate forever in self-absorption even if he wants to. Or as the Chinese mystic, Lao Tsu, put the problem: "One cannot remain forever standing on tiptoe."

Consciousness cannot be kept on the stretch of formal contemplation all the time; it can only enter this condition at intervals. The interior immobilization is not an enduring one and their trances are transient — this is the constant complaint of the few mystics who have cared to analyse their own experience.

Many Western mystics, like St. Gregory and St. Augustine, and not a few Eastern yogis like Vivekananda, have mourned this fact that they could not maintain what they believed to be the highest

stage in mysticism, the stage of complete withdrawal from sensations and thoughts, for more than a few minutes or a few hours but always had to fall back again to their prosaic everyday condition. St. Bernard too has well described this recoil in his own melancholy words: "All these spiritual powers and faculties began to droop and languish as if the fire had been withdrawn from a bubbling pot. Then my soul was necessarily sad and depressed until He should return."

The discontinuance of the experience is always something which the mystic cannot control or prevent. Consequently he is faced by the difficulty of bringing it into smooth adjustment with the necessities of his bodily existence, a difficulty which he never really overcomes. Philosophy, perceiving this, remarks that his particular method of approach has reached a point where it has exhausted its serviceableness to him and that Nature has consequently hoisted a warning signal. But philosophy alone can interpret this signal for him. The mystical experience must be brought to completion by the unfoldment of a profounder insight and not left with its ultimate end unattained.

Thus its very transiency becomes useful eventually to make the mystic aware that this cannot be the final goal itself and to make clear to him that he has yet to advance in a different direction. The hidden teaching most emphatically affirms that the state of self-absorption is not the supreme objective for mankind, however much the common run of yogis may assert the contrary. It is only when waking that the person is fully projected by the Overself whereas when dreaming it is only partially projected whilst when sleeping it is not projected at all.

Therefore it is only in the fully awakened state and not in an entranced one—which corresponds to dream or sleep—that the higher purpose of its limitations can be recognized and the widest consciousness of reality attained. Hence although he may or may not have to pass through trance on his upward way the aspirant certainly does not have to pass through it when he reaches the crest. The fourth state of consciousness is something which, in its finality and fullness, persists at all times and does not depend on transient trances for its continuance.

The second problem by which the mystic self-absorption is beset — its failure to stabilize its own exceptional but fugitive insight, its inability to provide an ever-active awareness of reality — is also solved only by philosophy. To understand this we must first understand that out of the repulsion and compulsion of a strongly-held world-view, the meditator of necessity deliberately turns his back on his external environment, forsakes and spurns his earthly existence during the inward progression towards his spiritual self.

He first discovers or grasps the existence of the intangible invisible imageless Mind during a rapt contemplation, where he becomes intensely absorbed within himself in utter forgetfulness of the external world. So intense is his concentration that eventually all sensations and thoughts vanish, all mental images pass away, and he abides in a great void, where no-thing is and where he is, in theological language, merged in pure Spirit. But the mind can no more rest permanently in this void than the breathing lungs can rest permanently in a complete vacuum. The individual thought-waves soon swing inexorably back into the ocean of universal mind, his absorption breaks, and the world is precipitated once again into his consciousness. He can abide there only for a while for he is then driven out of the mystical Garden of Eden by the symbolic Angel with a flaming sword. Hence this cannot constitute its ultimate goal.

The yogi who attains this point may strive hard to retain it by plunging himself anew in prolonged absorption but he can recover it again only by disregarding the world and retreating into himself once more. Yet all-wise Nature will have none of it and hurls him back as often as he tries. Misunderstanding her intent, he strives all the more, ascribing his inability to wrong causes and failing to learn its hard lesson that Nature has built the flesh for instructive experience, not for stultifying desertion. The finite world is insistently there. He cannot annul it permanently although he can do so intermittently. He may and usually does console himself however by arriving finally at the belief that whilst in the flesh this is as far as man can go and that perfect liberation will come after death.

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Mere mental quiet is an excellent thing as a step on the upward way but it is not the true transcendence. The mental blank which is so often the absorption state of ordinary yogis is not the same as the self-understood awareness which is the absorption state of the philosophic yogi. The peace of the first may easily lead to world-fleeing weakness and lethargy whereas the peace of the second can only lead to world-helping strength and inspiration. To look at this state from the outside only and to believe that both enter into a similar condition is to be guilty of a grave misapprehension. The diffuse drifting negativity of the first is inferior to and different from the discriminative intelligent alertness of the second. The one merely refrains from thinking. The other actively engages the thought-free consciousness in understanding its own nature. The one is all flowers but no fruit. The other is all flowers and all fruit.

Hence in *The Supreme Path*, a text of rules for aspirants compiled eight hundred years ago in Tibet and still highly cherished there, the warning is plainly given that: "The stillness of inactive thought-processes (in the individual mind) may be misunderstood to be the true goal, which is the stillness of the infinite Mind." The key to this extremely subtle situation is therefore twofold. First, the possession or absence of metaphysical knowledge. Second, the mental attitude with which the contemplative enters the state of self-absorption. These factors are firmly intertwined and cannot be separated from each other for the second depends naturally on the first.

The moment when wakefulness turns into dream or sleep is, we now know, a highly critical one. The general direction of the consciousness at this moment can determine the character of the dreams or the sleep which will follow it, and can indeed transform either the one or the other into something entirely superior. The moment when thinking activity merges into complete self-absorption is likewise highly critical. The general direction of consciousness can then also determine the character of the state which follows it.

The mental attitude at such a time is truly creative. The mystic passes through this moment intent only on his *personal* reactions to the experience, carried away by his *personal* feelings of its great delight.

He is made very happy by it and can never afterwards forget it. But he has left his task only half-done, a melancholy fact which is attested by his return sooner or later to the ordinary prosaic state to stay there. Owing partly to this personal reference and partly to his metaphysical ignorance and consequent unpreparedness, he enters into the state of contemplative self-absorption like a man walking backward through an open door into a room, keeping his eyes stubbornly fixed on the familiar place he has started from and refusing to look where he is going. Just as this man will only half-know where he is even when he is inside the room, so will the mystic be only half-aware of the nature of pure Mind even when he is immersed in self-absorption.

Moreover this personal reference causes his preconceived views and dogmatic beliefs merely to be left temporarily at the threshold of Mind, as it were, and not to be held in its purifying flame; hence they are picked up again when he emerges once more from the experience. If however meditation is practised jointly with the philosophic training, that is, if it no longer remains a merely mystical exercise only but is informed by rational reflective knowledge, then the erroneous view of reality can never revive again because the pure being will be experienced *as it is*.

Bliss is present in both cases but in the one its satisfying character becomes a hindrance whereas in the other it does not. Both have touched reality but one has touched its quivering surface whereas the other has penetrated to its immutable depth.

Thus there is a large difference between the states arrived at by the two methods, whose surfaces are so deceptively the same but whose results are so strikingly apart. The yogi empties out the contents of his consciousness blindly and ignorantly and then passively accepts the vacuum. The illumination by pure Thought overwhelms him with its dissimilarity from all previous experience and dazzles him with its lustrous mystery. He has opened the mystical eye within himself but has not fully understood what it is that is fitfully presented to it at set times and during formal meditations. It has yielded total forgetfulness of space-time limitations but his body is still within them and his consciousness must still return to his body. When he has to return

and pick up his thoughts of the world again, the descent fills him by its contrast with a sense of abysmal difference. Hence he regards the world as being the very negation of reality and the chasm which separates them as being uncrossable. So he lets the great prize slip from his hands, through a despairing sense of being utterly unable to hold both within consciousness at the same time. Henceforth he is a dualist, an upholder of the belief that reality can be attained only in trance and that the world is Matter standing at the opposite pole to Spirit and so a snare or an illusion to be despised.

The harsh ascetic who scorns it or the dreamy mystic who ignores it is always puzzled at the end of his own path how to relate his spiritual triumph with the universal life which surrounds him. He does not know how to do so and consequently disposes of the problem by pretending it does not exist. All this arises because his method of approach does not attempt to deal with the problem of the world but ignores it. He banishes reason and shuts his eyes to the supposedly material outside world. Hence he has no means of relating it to the undoubtedly immaterial inside world which he so blissfully experiences.

The philosophic student, however, studies the nature of matter and discovers it to be a manifestation of Mind. Through such mentalistic reflection he comes to perceive that all the different evolutionary explanations of the universal existence are true only from the relative point of view; that all the elements, principles, energies, substances, and processes out of which, it is taught, the universe has grown are themselves mental manifestations; and that just as water cannot be different in *reality* from the oxygen and hydrogen of which it is composed, no matter how different it is from them in *appearance*, so these images of earth, water, air, and fire cannot be essentially different from the Mind out of which they came.

In this way he establishes himself thoroughly in the comprehension of the ultimate mentalness and hence the ultimate oneness of all things and permits no appearance to dislodge him from this intellectual position. He is imbued with the fact that with every breath and every thought he is co-constructing this universe with the World-Mind

and that therefore, in the *New Testament* phrase, “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

The mystical exercise in which he engages himself is not a blind one. He overcomes the world-idea by absorbing it. He utilizes the reason to go beyond reason but he does not dismiss it prematurely. He not only discovers pure Thought but also meditates reflectively upon his own discovery. When he empties out the contents of consciousness he does so with open eyes, holding steadily to the understanding that they are the froth and foam thrown up by reality and not essentially different from it.

After the vacuum is filled by the presence of pure Thought, he returns to them with less and less sense of having to cross an abyss of difference, with the consequence that he has less and less difficulty in bringing them into relation, continuity, and harmony with his previous meditation experience. He trains himself to bring this reflective attention directly into his everyday active existence and to insert it continuously into whatever thoughts may engage his awareness and whatever deeds may engage his body. He disciplines his consciousness to hold the body-thought without identifying itself with it, to function through the five senses without ceasing to function in the infinite Mind.

As he continues to unite metaphysical reflection with mystical contemplation there suddenly arises within him out of their fusion a new faculty which has neither the limitations of reasoning intellect nor the one-sidedness of mystical emotion but is actually superior to both. This mysterious state of consciousness is called in Sanskrit “that which is all-full,” a reference to its completeness and finality. It yields an enlightenment beyond that of ordinary yoga.

Its actual realization takes place in the twinkling of an eye, as it were. For the long preliminary course, the ardent preparations, finally reach a crisis when an upheaval in the aspirant’s whole nature suddenly occurs. It is as though a hard shell, which encases his inner being, breaks asunder and frees it. But despite the sudden arisal of this insight like a flash of lightning it has not yet achieved its own fullness and needs time in which to mature. Unless it is effortless and

natural and continuous, it is not the final and most revelatory degree. The moment there is the slightest strain towards being or knowing, that moment there is a descent from the true insight, a degradation of the true existence. Such a state of effortlessness can of course arise only after a long novitiate. The enduring transcendental awareness can come only through unremitting mental toil throughout the day to keep the Real ever in focus. It is the long-ripened, slowly-grown fruit of vigilant watching over the attention as an unbroken process of harmonizing the Unmanifest Mind with its ever-appearing ideas.

Thus the proficient is not only able to get a true glimpse of Reality but, because he gets it with intelligent understanding, he is also able to stretch out these glimpses more and more into his ordinary worldly life. Finally they are stretched at full length into all the twenty-four hours of the day and night. Thus they are stabilized and made permanent and henceforth he dwells in unfettered unity. With this attainment the ultra-mystical training of the philosophic path completes itself. The thinking activity which still continues is not quite the same as it was formerly.

For it is now an illumined activity. Thus the ultimate aim is not to suppress thinking and sit in prolonged solitary trances. It is not even to keep the mind free from thoughts but from their tyranny, to bring it to understand the true significance of their characteristic manifestations as "I" and the world, and to make the man effortlessly ever-conscious of his own innermost essence alongside of his personal existence. Once he thoroughly enters into the fourth state the sage is never able to escape from it again. Whether awake or asleep, in repose or at labour, he is *held* abidingly by its enigmatic transcendence. The fourth state if fully attained is continuous throughout the other three. It does not vanish with the oncoming of either bodily sleep or bodily wakefulness. It is effortlessly retained in the sense that a man in the wakeful state effortlessly retains his personal identity.

There is no desire here to underrate the great worth of even the mystic's achievement but it may be said that whereas he attains a partially true insight the philosopher attains a perfectly true one. Nature wants the mystic to rise from a merely emotional understanding

to a calmly intelligent one which will never be *contradicted* by its own lapse or recoil into a lower condition. Both the imperceptibly changing thoughts of outside objects and the incessantly changing thoughts of the thoughts of objects, that is, both things and imaginations, take their original birth and find their eventual death in this essence of Mind, which itself persists formless, changeless and *uncontradicted* by anything else which has ever arisen or could ever arise. In spite of the innumerable forms under which it manifests itself Mind-essence never gives up its own eternal identity.

An illusion may be contradicted by subsequent experience; an appearance may be denied by enquiry; but *the Reality can never be negated in any way, nor the Truth contradicted*. Therefore the method of cultivating the higher faculty of the mind which blooms into such deeper unshakable insight bears the traditional name of 'The Yoga of the Uncontradictable'.

At the bottom of all the stream of thoughts the philosopher perceives always the divine Thought. Without falling into trance, without closing his eyes, without shutting his ears and without folding his legs like the ordinary yogis, he successfully keeps his awareness of the immaterial, formless, matterless Reality. When he can transcend the need of trance he arrives at the perception that the differences between Thought and thoughts, the distinctions between Mind and its manifestations exist only from the standpoint of human beings and not in these things themselves; that everything is gathered up in a sublime unity in God; that everything is a *manifestation* or *representation* of reality, and that in very truth the whole world is a showing-forth by God.

Thus the ultimate state to which evolution tends and man attains is one of conscious rest in Mind but not one of conscious idleness, one where sense-activity survives but not its tyranny, one where being continues but not domination by personal being and one where the wheels of thinking whirr on but do not run away with the thinker himself.

It is only such an abiding insight which can thoroughly penetrate the sensuous world-appearance and make one permanently realize that it is not radically different from the Void itself. This explains

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why two inspired little treatises intended for *advanced* theosophical aspirants contain certain paradoxical statements. The one, *Light on the Path*, based on an old Egyptian source, first gives the admonition: “Seek the way by retreating within,” and then, only after this has been done, gives the further admonition: “Seek the way by advancing boldly without.” The other, *Voice of the Silence*, based on an old Tibetan source, tells the developed aspirant: “Thou hast to study the voidness of the seeming full, the fullness of the seeming Void.”

With this the student arrives at the grand climax of all his ultra-mystical endeavours and must bow in awed homage not only before the sacred emptiness from which all things flow, not only before the holy darkness which is the source of all light, but also before the visible world which is so secretly and ineffably rooted in God, before the incessant activities and living processes which make up the beginningless and endless history of this marvellous universe itself.

Men marvel at this or that new thing which science discovers *in* the world but they do not realize that the greatest marvel is that the world itself should exist at all. Whoever sees that every atom of this earth scintillates mystically within the all-containing universal life, whoever comprehends that there is no spot from which the One existence is absent, realizes that the human adventure is as sacred as anything else. He understands too that man’s everyday existence is itself as mysterious, as momentous and as miraculous as the unseen and ineffable existence of any archangel could be. The concept of this transcendental insight for those who have comprehended its significance must necessarily be the most stupendous one ever gestated in the human mind. And yet such supreme sagacity, such a mature and complete penetration into the fundamental character of all existence is really nothing more than the natural *intelligence* of man brought to its best pitch. ▲

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# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter One

### The Advent of Kabir

NABAJI SIDDHA

As the sun rose on the horizon over the sea that surrounds the earth like the cosmic disc of Lord Vishnu and on which wavelets play in joy, the great Siddha Uddhava and others completed their morning ablutions. After their daily rituals, they approached the revered Nabhaji, who had written about the glorious lives of noble saints like Kabir in Hindi for the uplift of humankind and prayed to him as follows, “O sage of great austerity! Will you gladden our hearts with a narration of the holy life of Kabir?”

Overjoyed by this request, Nabhaji’s face shone like a fresh blossom and he addressed them thus, “O great seers who have attained the Highest through yogic ways! My beloved ones after my own heart! Who wouldn’t rejoice in recounting the story of Kabir, who effortlessly transcended maya that swallows in one gulp even the mighty Trinity and demi-gods?

“O blessed ones! In the great city of Varanasi, which shelters ascetics who have overcome sense-cravings in the perishable abode of

the body, vanquished the mighty army of senses, thoughts, six inner enemies, pairs of opposites, shattering into pieces the chariot of desires as well as the charioteer of egocentric *jivahood* with the sharp arrow of discrimination and who revel in the ineffable bliss of the Self; the holy city where dwell renunciants, united with the Self, i.e. *Brahman*, and who, forsaking the home of shallow relationships, deserting the fair maiden of lust, wedding the noble woman of desirelessness, reside in the forest of solitude; the sacred land, where the blemishless ones live, having become absolute rulers of the body and its conditioning sheaths; there lived on the bank of sacred Ganga a Muslim called Tamal, forbearing in nature, who had shunned evil-doers, steadied the wavering mind by fixing it on the Impersonal and who performed worship with devotion five times a day regularly. Though belonging to Islam, he did not slaughter animals for food, but adhered to non-violence, looking upon other lives as his own.

“He earned his livelihood as a weaver without harming any life form. Recommending the same to his folks, he led a life of honest labour. He looked upon God alone as his companion and courted the company of sadhus, serving them with love. Having erased the ego, he interacted with people in a selfless and loving way. He lived with his wife Jijabibi, leading a life of contentment, devotion and compassion.

“Once, a saint was pleased with their service. On learning that Jijabibi was distressed at being childless, he blessed her to beget a child, endowed with all the auspicious qualities, devotion and spiritual knowledge. Filled with delight, Jijabibi informed her husband of the saint’s blessings. However, Tamal scoffed and remarked, ‘O my beloved! Is it possible for you, who have already stepped into the threshold of old age, to give birth to a child? Even if it becomes possible, can such a child ensure liberation to us? Your wish for a child will land us in trouble. Aren’t you ashamed of harbouring such a desire? We should cherish the virtue of harmlessness as our child, fostering which will ensure our redemption.’

“O dear husband, even God’s promise may not come true, but a saint’s words are never uttered in vain,” Jijabai replied with unabated enthusiasm.

“My dearest, while the scriptures enjoin us to give up the threefold desires of land, riches and woman, why are you gripped by this craving for a child? There is no chance that we will ever become parents of a child! No wonder, being a woman, you are so gullible!” chided her husband.

“O lord of my life!” Jijabibi said, “don’t you know that in the past saints have caused many impossible things to happen? They have made the Sun God himself descend to this world and brought a dead child back to life and so on! Is there any limit to their powers? I am positive that his blessings on us will bear fruit!”

“O ignorant woman, you have often heard that one should reject forthwith the base desires of this world and take to higher goals of life. It is utter folly to demean yourself and seek petty, ephemeral things from sadhus who dwell in the realm of eternal life. Even after your long association with me in a life of devotion and Godward life, your mind still hankers after worldly desires, just as a person who bores into a mountain only to catch hold of a mouse! Your scriptural knowledge has not helped you with a forward-looking mind. Get rid of this wish that binds you to this world.”

With this final advice, Tamal left home and walked by the bank of the river Ganga carrying a bundle of yarn. Guess what met his eyes and ears? Along the bank of the river, he saw some people muttering earnest prayers to Mother Ganga for the boon of a child. He felt disgusted, “This obsession for a child is indeed strong in people. No wonder Jijabibi has such a fixation. The power of maya deludes people with lowly desires and momentary pleasures. It is difficult to erase the dense darkness of ignorance in the ordinary people. O God, how is Jijabibi going to be freed from the mesh of desires and attain to Your feet? Why did You keep her childless? It is better for me to live in solitude and engage in meditation than to spend my life with a deluded partner.”

While he was walking absorbed in these thoughts, the ball of yarn slipped from his hand and rolled off into the river. He lamented, “Alas! Thinking of the child, I have lost the yarn. The birth or death of a child causes only sorrow. Are sadhus mere fools to seek eternal

life in lieu of the pleasures of parenthood? If they entertain such a wish, it will be like a calf joining the company of piglets and behaving like them; or a sadhu associating with a layman and neglecting his austerities; or a greedy man losing the principal, in his avarice for higher interest. Likewise, I have lost the basis of my livelihood, while absorbed in thinking of a child! Aha... ha... I could have fed fifty fakirs with the earning from this yarn and enjoyed bliss thereby. Oh, engaged in futile thoughts, I have walked a long distance into the deep forest and become tired. Now, having entered the forest, I should not repair my steps back to the city. Doing penance in the forest is much superior to living with a discontented woman. Ah! I see a small hut over there.” Tamal, entering the hut, sat down in prayer. Singing adorations of God, he became deeply absorbed.

Now, O Siddhas, listen to the unusual turn of events! While Tamal was in meditation, Lord Narayana in Vaikunta addressed the great sage Suka, “O great being beyond maya, O all-forgetful avadhut, I would like you to take birth in the womb of Jijabibi, wife of Tamal, who is a virtuous man living in the holy city of Varanasi. Your incarnation will produce great wonders in the city. You will guide many souls to the path of devotion and knowledge.”

“O Lord”, said Suka in a mournful voice, “why are you trapping me in the maze of illusion called samsara? How can I survive, forsaking Your company and the state of Self-knowledge? It is by Your grace that I have seen through the play of maya. You are compassion incarnate. If You would remove the veil of maya even for a brief moment, all the beings in the universe would be released from bondage. If You don't want to do that directly, You just have to command me, by the strength of which I will reveal Your glories to the mortal world and chant Your divine Name among people, thus dispelling their ignorance.”

“O great ascetic, there are particular ways of protecting the world in different ages. If I follow your suggestion, it will not be in the interest of the world. If you descend into the world with your naked body and parrot face, the world will make fun of you and you will fail in My mission. Moreover, those who condemn the worship of

demi-gods, saints and idols, will not leave you in peace. Therefore it will be better to follow my advice.”

Suka protested, “O Lord, I may give up my life, but I will not enter a womb again.”

“O Suka, don't you know that in the wombs of meritorious women I incarnated as Vamana, Parasurama, Rama and Krishna? We the Trinity and Adishakti intend to enter yet another virtuous woman's womb. If you doubt my word, you can verify from them.”

At that moment Shiva, Brahma and Adishakti appeared before Suka and confirmed the Lord's words that They would soon be taking birth as the children of Vithoba Pant and Rukmabai.

“O Lords and Divine Mother! You hold the power of *maya* in your grip. Therefore, even if You enter the womb, You will remain pure like the lotus leaf untouched by water. You, omniscient Lords, can incarnate in any way and yet remain immaculate; whereas, if *maya* touches me, I will not have the strength to overcome it. Have you not sent, in the past, the celestial nymphs to test my dispassion?”, cried Suka in distress.

The Lord replied, “O Suka, then take the form of an infant and descend onto the waters of the river Ganga and become the child of Tamal.”

Suka asked, “O Lord, should I establish the truth of Impersonal Spirit on the earth or spread the glory of Your divine Name?”

Lord Narayana replied, “O king among ascetics! There is a new Faith already founded on non-dualism. You have to moderate its one-sided avowal of Truth and harmonise the Personal and Impersonal aspects of the same Truth. Thereby, you will facilitate more tolerance and acceptance in the minds of radicals.”

On Suka's request to elucidate the non-dual aspect, the Lord replied, “Non-dualism is complete union with Godhead which is indivisible, undifferentiated, attributeless, self-sustaining, blemishless and indestructible. It is the unmoving, immutable, eternal, formless and nameless *Brahman*. It is the witness or illuminator of the three states of existence. It pervades everywhere, permeates everything and is the Source of all relative existence, from which everything else

emanates; just as gold, earth, cotton, iron, and stone form the raw material for ornaments, pots, clothes, implements and sculptures respectively.

“There can be neither *maya* nor the *trigunas*, nor the universe of name and form in the absence of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is *Sat-chit-ananda*; It is infinite, causeless, self-effulgent, superconscious and transcendental. It is universal, auspicious, pure, beyond scripture, inexplicable, perfection and Lord of all creation. *Brahman* is the First Cause. Union with *This* is real bliss and ultimate liberation. To be unshakeably fixed in the Impersonal means to be completely content with drinking the sweet nectar of Immortality, like the chakora bird which is supremely happy in drinking only the rays of the moon. In such a state, one loses all body-consciousness, ‘I’ is erased, all sensory-clamour is subdued, all bodily movements of walking and talking are reduced to a minimum and one remains self-contained. Internally one is cool and full of light, like the cool rays of the luminous moon, abiding in the state of perfection, freed from worldliness.”

Delighted with this exposition, Suka bowed to the Lord and entered the river Ganga as a small babe endowed with the thirty-two branches of learning. The beauty of the infant charmed the heavenly gods. The Lord submerged the child under the water a few times. As water entered its nose and mouth, the baby was bewildered and disoriented, thus losing memory of its past existence as Suka. The child, carried away by swirling waters, howled in agony. In the meantime, the Lord entered the mind of Tamal and created love and attachment for a child in his heart.

Disturbed by a child’s cry, Tamal rose from his meditation and muttered to himself, “Oh! what is this, a child’s cry from the direction of the holy river? In this wilderness? Lo, behold! a child is floating near the bank, as radiant as a million suns! Jijabibi is indeed a woman of great austerity! What a wonder is this?”

Rushing to the river, he rescued the child from the fast flowing waters. As he held the baby tight in his embrace, he became rapturous, “O pretty boy! What a divine form is yours! My incomparable, inexpressible treasure! O radiant child with a beauty that will uplift

the world, O showers of grace, O jewel of celestials! How did you find your way into my arms? What a blessing you are to me! Is it not said, even jnanis who have transcended *maya* cannot resist the innocent charm of a child? You came all the way to this forest only to give me the joy of rearing you, my beloved!

“My luck is like that of a person finding nectar while searching for water; or finding a pearl while looking for shells; or meeting a chaste woman in place of an immoral woman; or a royal life bestowed on a beggar; or finding a wish-fulfilling tree instead of the bitter neem tree; or the blessed company of saints instead of profligates; or precious stone instead of a pebble; or getting the vision of God while worshipping a devil; or being absorbed in God-thought in the midst of sensual thoughts. In my case, on losing the yarn, I turned to meditation; while deep in meditation, I gained this delightful baby! Let me take the child home! O Protector, how can I thank You for this blessing?”

Praising God all the way, he rushed home dancing in joy, “O darling woman, it appears that someone left this lovely bundle in the waters of Ganga only to remove your heartache and put an end to my meditation. O charming baby, joy-permeated child! O Jijabibi, we have the rare fortune to find a child endowed with the thirty-two aspects of learning. You are a worthy woman; the saint’s words have come true. Can you smell the sweet fragrance emanating from the child?”

He was astounded at how the sight of the child had melted his stony heart.

Jubilant at the saint’s grace, Jijabibi lost herself in the fount of happiness. With unbounded love she held the infant close to her bosom. That very instant, by God’s mercy, milk started oozing from her breasts. She felt herself to be its real mother and started feeding the baby. She was unable to focus her eyes on anything else, and the baby became the centre-point of her life. Day after day in that exalted state of love, she fed him, bathed him, dressed him, decorated him with jewels, put him in the cradle and sang sweet lullabies, “O apple

of my eyes, you are the crown-prince and others are your servitors.”

She spent her days immersed in this ocean of bliss and oblivious to the external world.

Tamal's joy was like that of King Dasaratha on the birth of Sri Rama and of Vasudeva on the birth of Sri Krishna. He named the child Kabir since a perfume of that name wafted from his body. He invited friends and relatives for the naming ceremony and arranged a grand feast. In this way Kabir grew up in that home, lavished with great love and care.

Once, Indra had entrusted the celestial maiden Rambha with the task of luring and hindering Suka's penance. She failed in her attempt; on the contrary, she was attracted by his radiance and beauty. Defeated in her mission, she was ashamed to return to her celestial abode. She waited for an opportunity to fulfil her wish to unite with him. When Suka came into the world as Kabir, she followed him, taking birth in the same religion as a beautiful girl by name Sundara.

When Kabir's parents happened to see her one day, they decided that she was a worthy companion for Kabir. They approached her parents with gifts of ornaments and fine clothes, which pleased them. Later they took Kabir in all his finery to their house and requested the betrothal of their daughter to Kabir. Both parties agreed to unite Kabir and the girl in wedlock. The betrothal ceremony took place with great joy. ▲

### Errata

Regarding the article “And Another Thing...” published in the October-December 2015 issue, pp.20-21, we wish to clarify the statement that Mrs. Osborne asked Bhagavan for the recipe for idly batter. She actually asked for the speciality of the ashram, which is the condiment called idly powder (*idli podi*) that is mixed with oil and served with the iddies at breakfast.

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN

AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 4 Transcending [the Path of] *Kiriyai*

*In this chapter the author explains how addiction to the path of ritual activity, performed without true insight, constitutes in the end a barrier to realisation, in a similar way that yoga was shown to do in the previous chapter.*

Instead of remaining still, realising that the world of the *tattvas* is inert, and remaining free of all contact with it, [seeing nothing] like the eye of a dead ram, they invoke [the presence of the gods], perform worship to them, call upon them as ‘The Absolute Perfection’, seek them out [in holy *sthalas*], and, [when they cannot find them], roll on the ground [in despair]

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

and weep. Their actions are akin to the grotesque dance of a  
band of demons. (122)

In the first part of the verse, the Tamil says literally ‘placing and raising up’, referring to the setting up of images of the gods, and the invoking of their presence in those images. This is glossed by TCS as follows: *Using the personal consciousness to invoke in an image the presence of the absolute perfection of Sivam, which remains on the destruction of that very personal consciousness, to meditate upon it repeatedly, and in this manner perform puja to it.* In other words, since Sivam, the Real, is revealed only upon the destruction of the personal consciousness, it is entirely self-defeating to employ that personal consciousness in an attempt to invoke that Reality through ritual practices.

The *jnani* is entirely free of the discriminating consciousness and is therefore not aware of the world of people and objects that others see: “...the eyes of the jnani are likened to the eyes of a dead goat; they are always open, never closed. They glitter but they see nothing, though it seems to others that they see everything.” [Ramana Maharshi quoted by Suri Nagamma in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 26th October, 1947.]

In those who, wearied by ritual activities, come to him asking for instruction, the illustrious One fosters the bliss of the Self, so that they dwell in silence. He is the true guru. As for the rest, know that, in so far as they cause the slightest movement in the minds of their disciples, they will be like Brahma, the creator of worlds, and the Lord of Death. (123)

‘The Illustrious One’ is a translation of the *ceemaan*, which is a Tamil form, based on the nominative *shrimaan* of the Sanskrit word *shrimat*, meaning (*one who is*) *possessed of fortune, fortunate, auspicious, wealthy, prosperous, eminent, illustrious, venerable.* Here the guru is meant, as possessing the greatest wealth of all, the knowledge of Sivam.

When the mind arises, the world arises with it, and when the mind subsides, the world is no more. Therefore the false teacher will be like Brahma, the creator of the worlds, in so far as his instruction causes movement in the minds of his disciples, and he will be like Death, in that he condemns them to the repeated death and birth of the illusory mind-body complex, as the mind continually arises and subsides by turns at the prompting of the false guru's instruction.

Imagine the devotees of the god of Fire, grinding up ginger to ease the god's indigestion, covering him with straw [to keep him warm], and agonising [over their previous neglect] as if buried under a mountain of sorrow. To whom might we compare such people? To those who would try to wash water, bury their own shadow, or measure it [using their own foot]? (124)

In Indian medical systems such as Ayurveda, the element fire, personified in the god Agni, is seen as the force at work in the process of digestion, causing the food to be broken down and digested. Ginger has been recognised as a cure for indigestion in many cultures since ancient times.

These actions and their fanciful motives – trying to cure Agni's indigestion with ground ginger, and trying to keep him warm with straw – are given to emphasise the ironic nature of ritual acts, in which the Supreme Reality is imagined to be suffering from some kind of need or lack, to which the person performing the ritual or puja arrogates himself the role of providing the remedy. Since, as far as we know, the motives ascribed to these actions here are not the actual motives of the persons who perform those rituals and *pujas*, the first sentence has been prefaced by the words, 'Imagine that...'

Those stupid teachers [of ritual worship] do not realise that when we have to cross a river in spate or make a long journey on foot, there is no suffering for the water, nor for the road, but only for those who swim that water and walk that road.

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They might as well tell you to stop up the mouth of a river in space, raise a ladder to reach the heavens or grab the feet of the wind. (125)

The teachers who purport to offer salvation by means of ritual worship are called *murkkar* – *the foolish, the ignorant*. Just as a river in space cannot be stopped up with earth, Sivam, the infinite all-embracing reality, cannot be contained by any form, such as an idol or statue; to try to reach it through form-based meditation and so on is pointless because it exists already within and without as the very ground of our being, just as it is futile to try to use a ladder to reach the ether, which already contains all things within itself. Since it transcends all forms, there is no use trying to grasp it by performing rituals of various kinds, just as it would be no use ascribing form to the wind and then trying to grasp a part of that form.

Will even those who travel the heavens at will require a support? Are the heavens like the deep ocean to them, that they need to navigate it like a helmsman on a ship? What work do time and space perform? Similarly, can there be deeds performed by a perfected *Siva yogi*? (126)

One who has mastered the eight *siddhis* can travel to wherever he wishes in space through the power of his mind. He would have no need of any support to aid him. Similarly the *Siva yogi* who has attained oneness with the Self has no need for aids such as rituals and puja to attain that which is already his.

Expanding on the previous analogy, unlike the captain of a ship upon the ocean, the siddha yogi would have no need to plot a course through the heavens and use a set of instruments to get to his destination. Similarly the *Siva yogi* has no need to form some concept of Sivam and then set about trying to attain That which he already is. In any case he no longer requires, nor possesses, the instruments furnished by the *tattvas* in the relative world, the senses, and the organs of thought and action, which are the attributes of the ego consciousness.

Just as time and space provide the unmoving ground for all the phenomena that unfold in the manifest world, the *jnani*, as the Self, provides the unmoving ground for the whole of the apparent creation, including time and space. TCS glosses: *The faculties operate in the mere presence of that Siva yogi, who is united with the fullness of reality. He himself does not engage with any of the faculties to perform any kind of work.*

In fire itself there is nothing of the firewood, and in ghee there is no longer any milk. Similarly, *jnana* abolishes delusion as surely as the sun dispels darkness. Therefore it is given the name 'Destroyer of Actions'. This being so, can there be any performing of degrading actions by *janis*? (127)

In this verse *jnana* is called 'Destroyer of *kriya*.' The word *kiriyai*, Sanskrit *kriya*, has the meaning *act, action* in a general sense, in addition to the specific sense of *religious practices and rituals*, which are the subject of this chapter. The word is intended to be understood in both senses here. Just as firewood is annihilated in the process of burning and milk is annihilated in the making of ghee, all actions are annihilated in the arising of *jnana*. The sense of doership is an illusion of the ego-consciousness, the *jiva*. The *jnani*, freed from that ego-consciousness upon the attainment of *jnana*, is no longer affected by this delusion, and remains as one with the unmoving screen of the Self upon which the world-appearance unfolds.

Even if *jnana* is attained through actions, it will not endure, just as all things that are born from a womb are destined for destruction. Your thoughts of grasping the Cause of all things [through your actions] is like trying to roll up ten million suns in a blanket of darkness. (128)

Here it is stated that, even if a degree of *jnana* is obtained through ritual actions, it will not be permanent and will disappear again in time. Thus it is suggested that, though the paths of *cariyai*, *kiriyai*

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and *yokam* are necessary for the disciple to attain sufficient maturity to be able to find a teacher who can bestow *jnana*, they cannot by themselves bestow that *jnana*. The *jnana* that arises through actions must necessarily pass away, just as all creatures born from the womb are destined to die.

If, desiring the state beyond even bliss, you say you will engage in actions to attain it, will the true *jnanis* not ridicule you? Will anyone choose walking as a means of getting to sleep? Your holy scriptures, *pujas* and *samadhis* are an aberration to true *jnanis*; they are no more than a collection of conditioned mental states, *maya's* cohorts. (129)

The expression 'state beyond bliss' is a translation of the word *cukathitam*, which is the Tamil form of Sanskrit *sukhatita* (*sukha* – bliss + *atita* – beyond). The bliss experienced on the loss of the ego consciousness is transcended in the final state of liberation, which is therefore the state beyond bliss.

The words 'a collection of conditioned mental states' translate the expression *caar potha kottiram*. *Kottiram*, Sanskrit *gotra* has as its root meaning *a protection or shelter for cows, a cow-shed, cow-pen* (*go* – cow + *tra*). This meaning is expanded to mean family, race, lineage, and, amongst other things, genus, class, species. The verb *caar* means to lean upon, rest in or on, be attached to, be connected to, and *potham*, Sanskrit *bodha*, means *knowledge, understanding, intelligence*; therefore *caar botham* is *knowledge that is attached to, dependent on* something else, in this case, the mental faculties and the organs of sense and action. There is only one consciousness, which, when pure, merges with the Self, but when contaminated by *maya*, flaunts itself as a separate ego-consciousness.

If it be said that bliss is in the ending of all actions, then we shall hardly need to assert that suffering is in the arising of actions. Whatever actions we do perform, we should perform them according to the example of those whose only concern is

to feed and clothe the body, taking no pleasure in them, like a barren woman [with no prospect of bearing children]. (130)

The great ones, the realised sages, see the world as false and therefore seek nothing from it other than the bare essentials required for their physical survival in the world, namely food, clothing and shelter. They have no attachments in the present, and therefore create no *karma* to bind them in the future. In this sense they are like a barren woman who, deprived of the ability to have children (the main reason for her existence), has no offspring to care for in the present, nor any expectation of having any to care for in the future. ▲

*(To be continued)*

## Total Quality Management

D. Samarender Reddy

I wonder if my mind  
 Has come with a life-time warranty  
 That enables me to exchange it,  
 Since I suspect, something seems awry.  
 Preferably one with the same memories,  
 Though I can get along just fine  
 without some of them.  
 And, ideally the latest model  
 For I would assume  
 Godji would have become better  
 At manufacturing minds  
 Experienced as he must have become  
 Since he last created mine.  
 If not, I wonder to whom I can complain  
 That Godji has not followed  
 Total quality management.

## BOOK REVIEWS



Yogic and Vedic Heritage FESTIVALS OF BHARATA: translation by Prof. K.S. Sridharan et al of original in Kannada by Sri Sri Rangapriya Sri Srih. Published July 2015 by BHARATA Samskruthi Prakashana, Lalbagh Road, Bangalore-560027. Rs.895/-, pp.736. email: bsp11g@gmail.com

The learned and saintly author begins by quoting the great poet Kalidasa's saying 'human beings are lovers of festivals'. This is especially true of Indians who worship many gods, one God and God as the Self and there are festivals celebrating every god and many natural phenomena. However, the author deals only with twenty-four festivals and gives ample space to each festival in this bulky, well-researched, well-edited book. Though a Vaishnavite saint, he has dealt with Saivite festivals also and with the same reverence as he shows to Vaishnavite festivals. He was a fine Sanskrit scholar and professor and the value of the book is enhanced by the numerous apt quotations from a variety of Sanskrit texts though not always accompanied by a translation.

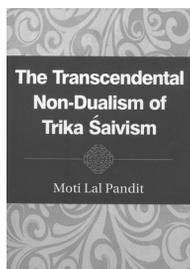
The revered author evinces his love for etymology in various places, the very first naturally being the Sanskrit word for festival, viz. Utsava. 'Utsoote harsham iti utsavaḥ' (that which produces *harsha* [joy] is *Utsava*, festival.) Not only a Sanskrit scholar but evidently an adept at logic, the author clears many doubts about many festivals, misconceptions about the status of the beings who are the object of worship and celebration and effectively deals with all criticisms voiced and not voiced.

The wise men of ancient India knew astronomy, astrology and mathematics, besides a host of other subjects, and it is amazing how accurately they calculated the exact date and time each festival had to be celebrated and meticulously went into the minutiae of the iconography of each deity. The sage, erudite author, soaked as he is

in the Bharatiya tradition, is, true to that tradition, meticulous and thorough in dealing with the subject of his book and succeeds in his object of showing the reader the significance, spirit and sacredness of the festivals and proving that they are not merely sugar and milk-intensive affairs as they seem to tend to become, but, if properly observed in the manner exhaustively detailed by him, would be productive not merely of *harsha* (joy) but deep inner *Ananda* (bliss).

The text is printed in big types easy to read and there are beautiful pictures in colour of each deity dealt with in the book. The glossary at the end of the book will be very helpful to readers. For those who are interested in religious festivals and their astrological, religious and cultural significance the authors have put together a meticulously detailed book that may prove to be a benchmark in this field. The book is a valuable asset.

– T.V. Chandramani



THE TRANSCENDENTAL NON-DUALISM OF TRIKA SAIVISM by Moti Lal Pandit. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2015. Rs. 795

The basic principle of Kashmir Saivism is that ‘nothing exists which is not Siva’, or, to word it differently ‘Consciousness alone is Real’. It is in and through Consciousness that human beings are empowered to think, discriminate, remember, and realize who they really are. This book is a presentation and analysis of the non-dual philosophical system known as Trika Saivism. It is beyond me why every author of a book on Kashmir Saivism that I have ever encountered spends a lot of effort incorrectly expounding Advaita Vedanta theories and then criticizing the same in a (fallacious) endeavour to then show how Saivism is superior to Vedanta as a philosophy. In the first chapter, on almost every one of its 31 pages, the author makes statements like, “Brahman of Advaita is inactive, passive, inert, nihilistic, incomplete,” etc. Nowhere is there the presentation or understanding of Advaita’s two perspectives (*paramarthika/vyavaharika*) regarding the Absolute.

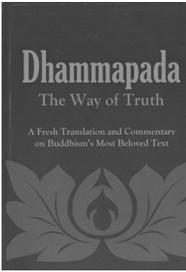
Alas, I am still waiting for someone to write a book on Kashmir Saivism that presents its doctrines and lets them stand on their own merits without attacking other philosophies. Kashmir Saivism is a beautiful philosophical system itself and need not attempt to inaccurately belittle other philosophies when it presents its doctrines.

The two philosophical schools of Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Saivism are really not so far apart, and if one finds what is implicit in some of their doctrines and renders them explicit, this will become obvious. Both maintain that Reality is Consciousness; Saivism claims that nothing exists which is not Siva/Consciousness while Advaita claims that nothing exists which is not *Brahman*/Consciousness. Other theories include the jiva is essentially Consciousness; the theory of *abhāsa* (appearance); *jivanmukti*; the Absolute is transcendent, ineffable, etc.

In this book, Pandit has clearly expounded and explored some of the central themes found in Trika Saivism: Its *spanda* theory, *prakāsa* and *vimarsa*, the process of manifestation of the categories, the spiritual hierarchy, bondage and liberation, and the *Sakta-Saiva* perspective. What the book doesn't do is to probe deeply into the Trika's presuppositions and consequences. Though it appears to make a number of dubious claims as far as other systems of Indian philosophy are concerned (especially in regard to Advaita Vedanta), its presentation and analysis of Trika Saivism makes a useful introductory book regarding its main philosophical principles.

Moti Lal Pandit has written a number of books on Trika Saivism: Besides this book, there are: *From Dualism to Non-dualism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Trika system*; the *Trika Saivism of Kashmir*; *The Philosophical and Practical Aspects of Kashmir Saivism*. Any one of them may serve as a general introduction to the basics of Trika Saivism. — John Grimes

DHAMMAPADA THE WAY OF TRUTH A Fresh Translation and Commentary on Buddhism's Most Beloved Text by Peter Feldmeier. Buddhist Publication Society Inc. PO Box 61, 54 Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Price not mentioned, pp.160. bps@bps.lk and www.bps.lk ISBN: 978-995-24-0401-6



The Dhammapada is one of the great spiritual classics of the world. Its wisdom is applicable to all on their quest for Nibbana, enlightenment, or whatever other name people give to the ultimate experience. There are many, many English translations already available and with this addition one wonders why. After checking through some of those, particularly Acharya Buddhharakkhita whose version was also published by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy first in 1959, I found a liking for this latest addition which is plain and at times a little awkward but nonetheless, quite effective. The Buddhharakkhita is more polished and expansive while the Feldmeier is understated and has not taken undue licence. The Dhammapada is a Theravada Buddhist text which all schools of Buddhism accept as it gives a broad fundamental understanding of Buddhist tenets. The Dhammapada has survived so long for a reason: its aphorisms inspire and address many Buddhist concerns. It is not unusual for monastics to memorise the entire text, just as many may do with the Bhagavad Gita in Hinduism. There is a soul-stirring ring in the text rich with metaphors, word play repetition, and resonant combinations of sound that make the text a delight to hear if done well by Theravada Buddhist monks. The Dhammapada is a text for right living. It constantly emphasises skilful action and awareness of the subtle repercussions of *kamma* (karma).

Feldmeier gives a general commentary after each of the 26 chapters that is both informative and appealing. He writes for the layman and his love for the text shines through.

Here are some verses from the book:

Verse 1. “All phenomena are preceded by the mind,/Created by the mind,/And have the mind as their master./If one speaks or acts from a corrupted mind,/Suffering follows as the cart-wheel follows the ox’s foot.” Verse 33. “The mind is wavering and unsteady,/ Difficult to guard, hard to restrain./The wise one sets it straight,/As a fletcher straightens the arrow’s shaft.” Verse 63. “A fool who considers himself foolish is,/In this, like a sage./But a fool who is proud of his cleverness/ Is truly called a fool.”

— Christopher Quilkey ▲

# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## **Tamil Nadu Weather**

After many years the North East monsoon was bountiful and Tamil Nadu received heavy rains throughout November. Chennai had one of the wettest Novembers of the century and broke an all-time rainfall record. Chennai has crossed 1,025 mm of rainfall for the month. According to the Meteorological Department, November 1918 was the wettest month as the city received 1088.4 mm of rainfall. Officials recall that Chennai recorded 970 mm of rainfall in November 1985 and 1077.1 mm in October 2005. Schools and colleges in Chennai remained closed for over a week.

The mountain stream behind the Ashram is flowing and Pali Theertham, the tank adjoining the ashram, is full. The nearby Sathanur Dam reservoir which supplies water to Tiruvannamalai reached Full Reservoir Level (FRL) and the District Collector has issued flood warning to the people living along the Then Pennai River in Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram and Cuddalore districts. The water level in the 119 feet dam had reached 114.3 feet, which meant that the Sathanur Dam had some 6,294 million cubic feet (mcft) of water in store as against the capacity of 7,321 mcft.

## **Karthikai Deepam**

Though it rained heavy right through most of the Karthikai Deepam festival it did not deter devotees of Sri Arunachaleswarar. The principal Car festival was celebrated on the seventh day of the ten-day Karthigai Deepam festival in Tiruvannamalai with much elan and enthusiasm on Sunday the 22nd November. The five decorated wooden cars carrying idols of different deities moved along the Mada Streets with devotees braving the rain to pull the heavy ropes on the cars. The first car of Lord Vinayaka began its procession by 6.45 a.m. and the car carrying Lord Muruga started its procession by 10.15 a.m. The procession of 'Big Car' with the idol of Sri Arunachaleswarar was delayed due to heavy downpour. However the procession started by 2 p.m. and reached back to its position by 7.15 p.m.

Sunshine broke out in the morning of the final day of the festival when the *Jyothi* (fire) was lit on top of Arunachala at 5.57pm. The sunshine continued right throughout the day and devotees enjoyed the unusual sensation of being dry! It is said that one and half million devotees performed *girivalam* (circumambulation of the hill) on the day. There were expectations that the crowds would be smaller this year due to the rain but devotees started pouring into the town from morning by special buses from different parts of the State.

### Obituaries

**Sri Canaganayagam Shanmuganayagam** (affectionately known as Shan), who came to Bhagavan in the 1940s, passed away at the age of 96 on the 10th August 2015 in Sri Lanka.

In his personal attitudes of respect and good-will, his humble demeanour and devotion to spirituality, Shan is a person of a singular mould. He effortlessly created affection and gratitude due to his efforts to make his society and country a better place for all beings though his generosity of spirit.

As a young man he first had the darshan of Bhagavan in 1943 when he came to India from Ceylon. In 1946 he again came to Bhagavan and his questions and Bhagavan's answers are recorded in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* on 11-1-1946. He had received an extraordinary measure of Divine Grace. Shan touched many who came to see him by his unique 'connectedness' with the Divine, as if it were something utterly natural and available to anyone that may seek it and deserve it. There was not the slightest trace of pride about him as he enjoyed the rare felicity of essential and spontaneous harmony with himself and the world.

**Smt. Malati Venkatesan** passed away on 2nd November 2015. A totally surrendered Ramana devotee who regularly came to the Ashram, she was a trustee of the MOHAN Foundation and Tamil Nadu Kidney Research Foundation (TANKER). She had suffered for over two decades from kidney disease and had dedicated her life to helping others



in the same situation. She was a kind mentor and visionary who was courageous in her decision-making. It is due to her efforts that so many lives were saved. She was recently awarded the prestigious 'Shanmukhananda Ruby Jubilee Health Care Award' by Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the former President of India.

**Admiral R.H. Tahliani, PVSM**, aged 85 was absorbed in Arunachala on 14th October, 2015 at the Army Hospital, Gurgaon. He leaves behind his wife Smt Meera and sons Tarun and Anuj and daughters, Urvashi Tandon and Gayatri.

Admiral Tahliani had started visiting the Ashram ever since he read Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* and he found his Master and never looked back. He and Smt Meera, a perfect match to him in devotion to Ramana, have been visiting the Ashram regularly for decades, both soft-spoken, affectionate and courteous to one and all, ever a very welcome presence at the Ashram.

Not long after his retirement after a distinguished service, as the Chief of the Naval Staff of India, Sri Tahliani was appointed Governor of Sikkim. He held the position for 4 1/2 years and was loved and admired by one and all. A man of integrity beyond cavil, Sri Tahliani was active as a crusader against corruption after he retired from public life. He was so devoted to Bhagavan that he took care to ensure that he lived by the words of Bhagavan in all circumstances. Frugal like an ascetic, he would help anyone who was in need. He evinced maturity and a sense of responsibility even as a teenager. After his father passed away, the young lad of 17, as the eldest of eight children, took a job in the Royal Indian Navy to educate his brothers and support the family.

Highly mature, responsible, resolutely upright, gentle but firm in his convictions, friendly to everyone though rather shy and, above all unswerving in his devotion to Bhagavan, the Admiral has now gone Home to the lap of his Father Ramana, whose name he kept muttering in his last days. ▲

