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Ramana Ashtottaram

105. ओं देवतमाय नमः

om devatamāya namaḥ

Prostration to the best of gods, God supreme.

The Supreme is accessible to us here and now, like this morning's sun, not yesterday's or tomorrow's. This God of Every Day is immanent in us and the world right now.

106. ओं अमर्त्याय नमः

om amartyāya namaḥ

Prostration to the immortal one.

One consciously identified with Eternal Awareness and not the mortal body. This immortal spirit is present as 'I-I' within each one of us, but we forget it. Thinking of Bhagavan who never forgot it, we share his immortality.

Participation

The question is often asked by newcomers to the ashram: who is the teacher they can turn to now that Ramana Maharshi left this world in 1950? The normal response is: what need to look elsewhere when Bhagavan is still here? It is all very well for those who are convinced because of their own intimate experience of Bhagavan's Grace but for the sceptics, more especially those who are in desperate need of guidance, this is an unsatisfactory answer.

All of us who are devotees of Bhagavan know there is a subtle radiance ever available if one but remains still and listens quietly with an open heart and mind. The fact that people come again and again is ample proof that they do 'get' something so fulfilling that they eagerly want to return. What is this grace that satisfies the heart and quietens the mind?

The question the direct devotees of Bhagavan asked was what do we have now that the physical body of Bhagavan has been laid reverently and with great sorrow into the earth? All those close to him were lost in disbelief that their rock of certainty and wisdom had apparently disappeared. It should be remembered that being in Bhagavan's presence was not a grave affair where everyone sat

around him in hushed, fearful silence. Yes, there were times when he withdrew and everyone automatically kept quiet. And yes, during the chanting of the Vedas in the morning and evening Bhagavan 'went' somewhere far beyond the powers of anyone's mind to follow. But otherwise he was easily approachable. His kindness and spontaneous, welcoming smile were immediately apparent to all who came to him with a sincere heart. There are a few today who were alive then and remember those cheerful times with a contented smile.

For most of us, all we have are historical facts and none of the joy of being in his company nor the poignancy of his physical departure. What we do have today are the photographs, his published words and writings, the stories and the ashram. All these contain the possibility that could kindle a flame of inspiration in us. Perhaps with one of these forms we feel in ourselves for a moment whole and alive with the familiar but fleeting happiness of recognition.

Each time we open a page of his writing, verses or songs there is an opportunity for affirmation. We believe that by reading or chanting we engage with the same truth he endowed on those who surrounded him in the days of his physical presence. But words Bhagavan wrote or said are not dead if we allow them to enter us.¹ With our breath we make sounds that create anew the truths he revealed. With our intention we make fresh in the heart the words which empower us. It doesn't matter how many explanations, commentaries, anecdotes are available, they count for nothing if we fail to capture their intent and spirit.

What we are doing in fact is engaging in an inner adventure of wonder and participation. By this act of remembrance we are not repeating by mindless rote but are giving birth in ourselves to a sense of wonder, joy and a profound mystery. Because in the end, we do

¹ "True poetic practice implies a mind so miraculously attuned and illuminated that it can form words, by a chain of more-than-coincidences, into a living entity—a poem that goes about on its own (for centuries after the author's death, perhaps) affecting readers with its stored magic." Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997. p.478.

not find the ‘answer’ but rather, engage in a perpetual mystery. Those who think there is a magic pill that solves all misery are mistaken. There is however a growing inner confidence that Bhagavan’s grace will carry us forward though we are blind to the next step. We learn to trust that all will be well. Did he not say that if we take but one step then he will take the other nine?

There is a well-known quote from Albert Einstein that says it best:

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead — his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms — this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness.”²

We are reminded of some photographs taken of Bhagavan on sacred Arunachala where he gazes up at the hill in stunned awe. The 108 verses of *Aksharamanamalai* is a way of inscribing that feeling of wonderment in our hearts. It makes sense of the swirl of emotions we experience in Arunachala’s divine presence when it casts off the cloak of stone and reveals its majesty.

If ever we experience for a second that feeling of oneness it remains indelibly imprinted on our minds. It is always a beginning for there can be no possibility of accumulation and complacent satisfaction. Bhagavan’s grace is not a material we gather like some possession and hoard; it is a living presence. Each day, each moment we dedicate to our relationship with Bhagavan is a renewal of creative identification with his form and words. Each day is a new creation and with it we are brought back each time to the present and the right place by a gentle and sometimes, if needed, sharp jerk on the rope of remembrance to

² Einstein, Albert, in *Living Philosophies*, a collection of short statements by distinguished scientists, writers etc. Simon and Schuster, New York, originally published in 1931.

sustain ourselves. Right thoughts, right emotions are vital if we are to successfully follow Bhagavan's instructions.³

Bhagavan's poetry embraces us all. Though the original is in Tamil, even if we chant the verses with little initial understanding, we can soon enter the thrust of the verses till they throb in our veins. Poetry starts in silence, the silence of expectation, and it ends in another silence – if it speaks the truth – a fullness without measure. From out of our solitude we read or speak or chant till, in a subtle way we cannot explain, we are joined with something greater than whom we think we are, with our fixed memories, desires and fears. The walls dissolve and we experience fullness (*purna*). We are reminded of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: "That is full, this is full. Fullness gushes forth from fullness. Even after the full has been fully drawn upon, this full remains full."⁴

Our understanding of Bhagavan is mediated through words. His words are the vessel to express our longing, heart ache, love and joy towards that which we know in our heart of hearts to be true. It is the way of connecting when all our own collection of carefully accumulated words to describe the world and ourselves fail. It is an act of reciprocity and brings us into the right relationship with Arunachala. One way to strengthen this relationship is to set aside time and listen each day to the ashram recording of the Tamil Parayana.

The remarkable aspect of these songs is that they resonate and give us the gift of belonging to something far greater than we normally expect, hindered as we are with our unconscious *vasanas* or tendencies.⁵ It is an intimacy that is both private and participatory. It

³ "Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox (drawing the cart). Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs." *The Dhammapada*, Translated by Sangharakshita. Ch. One, verses 1&2.

⁴ *purnam adah, purnam idam purnat purnam udachyate; purnasya purnam adaya purnam evavasishyate* (Brihad. 5.1.1.).

⁵ There is a saying: "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

is a family feeling of belonging. Bhagavan joked that he left his family in Madurai and renounced the world and yet look at the family he now has at Arunachala. This is the paradox of Ramana Maharshi: a sadhu absorbed in *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi* yet a keen participant in the lives of those who came for solace. Nobody is left out who comes with a sincere heart.

When we read or speak the words they should come out of our body and mind. When we recite a verse we inhabit it. Through direct intention we bring the words alive and they leap out of our hearts. We become its speaker, its instrument. We let its heart-beat pulse through us as embodied experience. We now engage in a mutual participation with Bhagavan who is the precipitator of the verse. The words are the catalyst which breaks down the doors of separation for we have called from one side of the door to the other side and there is a response if we but listen, uplifts us.

Have you noticed that we cannot control the words once we start reciting them? They control and guide us if we but let go and trust. One cannot technically say Bhagavan's words are mantras but his hymns to Arunachala can have the same mesmeric effect. Even Bhagavan was profoundly affected when he composed *Aksharamanamalai* as if a dam had burst and a surge of divine inspiration overwhelmed him with a torrent of graciousness.

The problem, if it can be called that, is Arunachala is no meek mass of weak pity and saccharine empathy. It is a raw, remorseless power that buries itself in stone. It is not for the fainthearted. There is a mythic element to its presence which no reasoning or conceited explanations can subdue.

We know that Arunachala will devour us so there is a dance between us: we take two steps forward then hastily one step back after realising how hot the lava of grace burns. And so it should be because we would splinter into a thousand pieces if confronted directly with its naked eminence.

[Arunachala!] To stand opposed to your devotees, as if you raised the flag of battle, to kill them without killing, is your

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firm resolve. Having married you, how will I survive (after that as a person, an individual soul like the rest, and not die)?⁶

Luckily for us, kindness is the second nature of Arunachala. The myth of Parvati who merges with Arunachala Siva indicates to us that the masculine dominion is softened with feminine grace and compassion. Joined as one, Ardhanarishvara,⁷ is the perfect expression of that elusive fullness we seek within us. It is there before us as we sing Arunachala's praise. Arunachala's mysterious action in the cave of our hearts opens us up so that we may see we are truly joined in one heartbeat. ▲

⁶ Verse 24. *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* a detailed commentary by Muhavai Kanna Muruganar. Translated by Robert Butler, 2015. p.42.

⁷ The name *Ardhanarishvara* literally means 'the Lord who is half woman'. In the *Arunachala Mahatmya*, a section of the *Sanskrit Skanda Purana*, and in the *Arunachala Puranam*, the Tamil *sthal purana* of Tiruvannamalai, Parvati after unrelenting *tapas* at the feet of Arunachala, was granted a boon and requested Lord Siva to allow her to abide alongside him, 'limb-to-limb'. Lord Siva agreed. *Ardhanarishvara* is depicted as split down the middle with one half male (the right) and the other half female (the left). This form of Lord Siva symbolises the unity of opposites; the synthesis of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.

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Enlightenment: The Wonderland of Pristine Simplicity

Illumining the Nature of *Pratyabhijna*
through *Talks with Sri Ramana*
Maharshi

SWAMI TANMAYANANDA SARASVATI

Section A: Enlightenment — Getting Around the Word

Preamble: Enlightenment! It is just a word for most of us, is it not? The technically equivalent Sanskrit word is *Pratyabhijna*, meaning ‘Recognition of the Self’. But what exactly is it? Can its true nature be revealed directly by any number of words, however holy their source? Yet the very word itself — depending upon the maturity of mind and its depth of understanding — conjures myriad images in our minds. No description of the word Enlightenment is too farfetched in our attempt to elucidate it. Ironically the purport of the

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati received Vedanta *siksha* from Swami Tejomayananda, Chinmaya Mission and later *sannyasa diksha* from *brahmaleen* Swami Virajeshwara Sarasvati of Anusoni. In his *purvashrama*, he was a professor of metallurgical engineering in IIT Madras. He lives by the western slopes of Arunachala.

word Enlightenment is deeply embedded in a variety of traditional descriptions, yet it eludes our grasp in the domain of words¹ much like trying to balance a dollop of mercury in one's hands.

True, Enlightenment is a 'state of understanding' (the phrase is used in a highly qualified sense), a 'holistic vision' where pure Knowledge alone subsists as the ultimate Residue, that survives the dyad of relative knowledge and ignorance.² It must be emphasised that this is an 'understanding' which is not arrived at by clever logic or cerebral analysis but only through 'right seeing' (*samyak darsanam*), for our modes of knowledge operate with words that verbalise ideas and concepts, that are often preconditioned and inadequately examined. There is an exasperating incompetence about words when attempting to reveal the stuff that Enlightenment is made of. Are words then useless even for the purpose of gaining some clarity? Do we have to abandon them altogether and go for another tool, Experience, to unlock this tantalising mystery that hounds committed seekers?

The very word Enlightenment brings about a sense of helplessness in the matter, a sense of bafflement, sometimes even a sense of acute frightenment³ (of losing one's petty little self, i.e. individuality) but for some flippant, pedantic Vedantins skilled in glib oratory, it is just 'much ado about nothing; it is after all a huge joke'. Now shall we explore how Bhagavan Ramana's teachings in His own words help us solve the conundrum of this perplexing word?

The Mystery of Enlightenment

We shall presently see some relevant quotes from the Maharshi, which upon a casual perusal do not appear to lead us anywhere. But wait!

¹ Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.4. *yato vAcho nivartante aprApya manasA saba.*

² Adi Sankaracharya's *Dasaslokee, tat ekovasishtah sivaH kevaloham.* This means when everything that is non-Self about us is negated using the classical '*neti, neti vichAra*, what remains as the unnegatable Residue is the Self, which is Sivam.

³ Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, p.86-88. When Cohen was scared by the descriptions of *nirvikalpa samadhi* by Romain Rolland in his *Life of Ramakrishna*, Bhagavan assuaged his unwarranted fears, "Where does the terror come in, and where is the mystery in being oneself?" This echoes the famous *MANDukya KARiKA* (v.3.39) '*abhaye bhaya darsinah*' (some seekers ironically get frightened on the verge of entering the very Abode of Fearlessness, i.e. *Brahman*). See also Talk\$176.

Faith and patience are required in ample measure.⁴ The paradox of Self-knowledge is that it is declared by the shAstrAs to be the rarest of all human attainments⁵ and yet sages like Bhagavan and Ashtavakra celebrate it as the simplest of all knowledge and hence easiest to attain, even for the unlettered simpleton.⁶ One wonders where the catch is, and for those indefatigable sadhakas who diligently dedicate their time and energy to the task, they may well wonder what has gone awry in their search.

The Upanishads (*shruti*) and the purANAs (*smriti*) reconcile the apparent paradox of the opposing assertions, both of which are true but for different sets of seekers.⁷ For the wise ones (*uttama adhikAris*) endowed with inward gaze, Self-knowledge is easier than recognising the gooseberry fruit in one's palm. For the unripe seekers (*manda madhyama adhikAris*) with extroverted mind and senses, it is impossible to attain until they gain the fitness to turn their attention within. It is then a matter of mental maturity (*adhikAri bhedah*), as Bhagavan cites gunpowder igniting instantly while charcoal is slow.⁸

The secret of Self-Knowledge (*pratyabhijna*) is revealed to us by Bhagavan in disarmingly simple words: "Reality is simply the loss of the ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity. Because the ego is no entity, it will automatically vanish and Reality will shine forth by itself. This is the direct method ...[where] the final question is the only one and it is raised from the very beginning. No [preparatory] sadhanas are

⁴ Shirdi SaiBaba gave two keywords for sadhana: *shraddha* (faith) and *saburi* (patience). He likened them to the two wings of a bird, that correspondingly enable the seeker to fly in the spiritual firmament.

⁵ *Bhagavad Gita*, v.7.3, *manushyANAm sahasreshu kascit ... mAm vetti tattvatah* and v.7.19, *bahunAm janmanAm ante..sa mahAtma sudurlabhabh*.

⁶ *Collected Works*, 'Atma Vidya Kirtanam': *Aiyye atisulabham...and Ashtavakra Gita* v.1.4, *yadi deham prtakrtya...adhunaiva sukhee sAntah bandhamukto bhavishyasi* and v.1.11, *muktAbhimAni mukto hi...yA matih sA gati rbhavet*.

⁷ *Katha Upanishad*, v.2.1.1, *parAnchikhAni .. Avrttacakshuh amrtatvam icchan*.

And in *Lalita Sahasranamam*, v.161, *...antarmukha samArAdya bahirmukha sudurlabhabh*.

⁸ Swami, Narasimha, B.V., *Self Realization*, 2002, p.258. See also a similar reply to Major Chadwick's query in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Talk§155.

necessary for engaging in this quest. There is no greater mystery than this — viz. ourselves being the Reality we seek to gain reality.... It is ridiculous. *A day will dawn when you will yourself laugh at your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now.... it is a great game of pretending....* We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still, we do not know it. Is it not a wonder of wonders?”⁹

This seemingly innocuous passage itself needs much annotation to wake up to its transcendent depth. It is not as simple for us bemused sadhakas, as Bhagavan Ramana in His compassion makes it appear. For example, embarking on the sadhana of *vichara marga* itself presupposes a great deal of already accomplished austerities in past lives. Otherwise even the taste for pursuing this most direct path simply does not arise! To understand the moot question ‘Who am I?’ requires maturity and furthermore to *feel the burning question*¹⁰ with one’s whole being is given only to a blessed few! When all our past merits bring us to the feet of a Sadguru like Bhagavan, His Grace alone initiates us into the path of Self-enquiry, which then obviates earlier sadhanas or at best they are rendered supplementary (*gauNam*).

In his poignant, seminal book,¹¹ Arthur Osborne recounts how Bhagavan’s piercing look stole into his heart and set up the current of enquiry (without an iota of volition or even intent on Osborne’s part) when he providentially returned from the prisoner of war camp in Bangkok at the end of the second world war. This is a classic instance of the operation of Grace and, as Osborne rightly says, Bhagavan’s Grace has initiated countless seekers into this path of enquiry through such silent alchemy, a direct Heart-to-heart communion. For exceptionally ripe souls like Sri Muruganar, Bhagavan’s gracious look was enough to bestow Self-knowledge.¹²

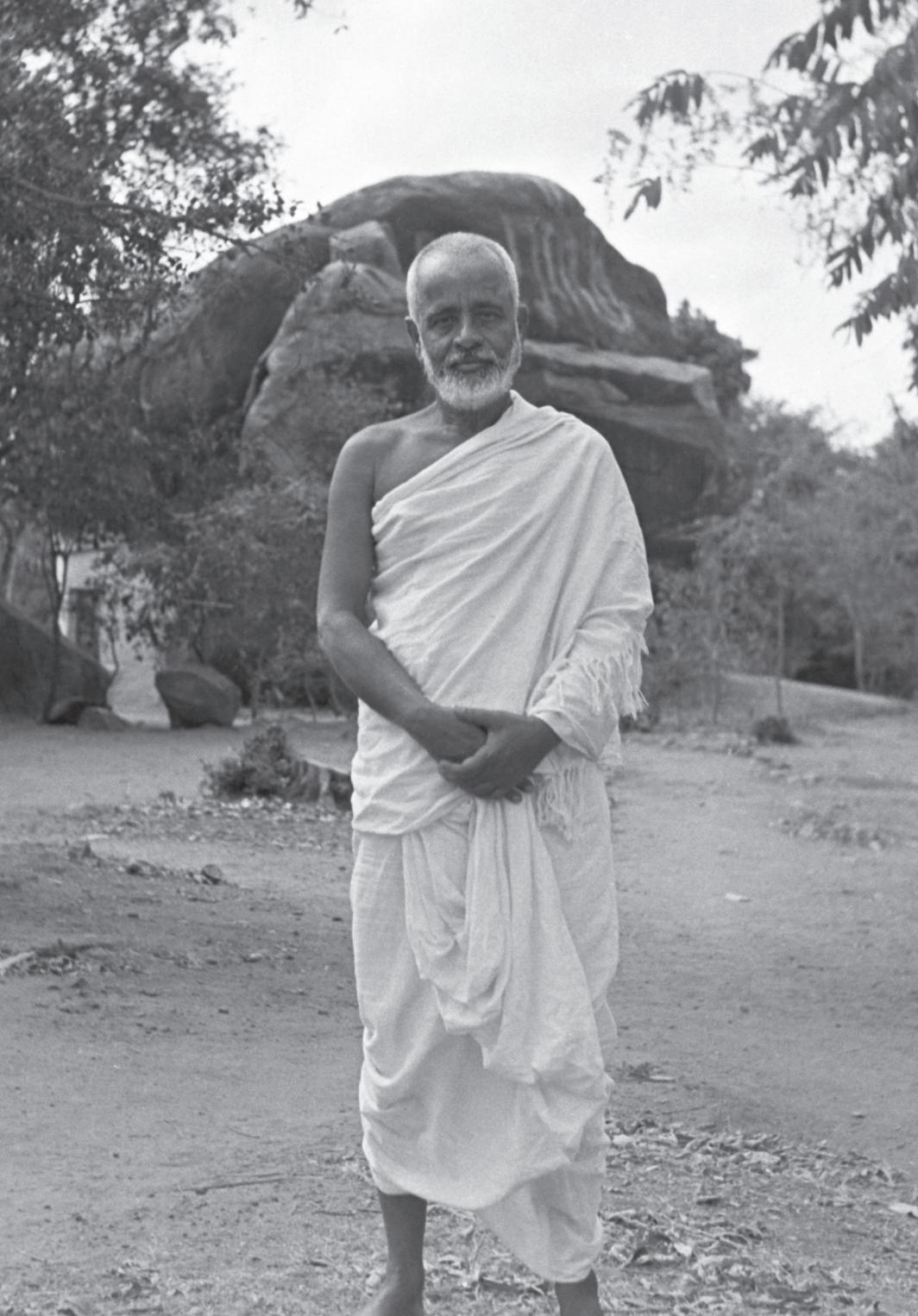
For Sri Tinnai Swami, Bhagavan needed to utter only one word ‘*Iru*’ (Be), not even His customary two words ‘*Summa Iru*’ (Be Still),

⁹ Ibid., Talk§146, p.134. Italics added.

¹⁰ See Michael Highburger’s lucid articles on Vichara in the *Mountain Path* (April 2007, pp.9-17 and January 2008, pp.9-21.)

¹¹ Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Arunachala*, 1994. pp.3-4.

¹² As recorded in *Ramana Puranam* and ‘*TirukkaNNokkam*’ in *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*.



Munagala Venkataramiah
The Compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

which was the celebrated teaching given by Lord Skanda to Saint Arunagirinathar centuries ago in Arunachala Temple. Sri Tinnai Swami subsequently remained in deep self-absorption (*sabhaja samadhi*) the rest of his long life, practically unknown to the world outside but radiating his blessings to a few fortunate ones who were magnetically drawn to sit quietly in his uplifting Presence.

Bhagavan Ramana's Words — A Mighty Heave Towards the Self

The classic dialogues of Bhagavan with seekers set forth in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* are a perennial source of inspiration and contemplation (*nididhyAsanam*) for all sincere aspirants (*mumukshus*). Here are a few germane selections in the context of Enlightenment.

“Why do you talk of Realisation? Is there a moment when the Self is not realized? There is no moment when the Self is not nor when the Self is realized... Even now you are Self-realized.” [Talk§280] “The feeling that I have not realized is the obstruction to realization, In fact it is already realized... Ignorance is the obstruction. Get over this ignorance and all will be well. The ignorance is identical with the ‘I-thought’. Find its source and it will vanish.” [Talk§197] “‘I AM’ is the Realisation. To pursue the clue till Realisation is Vichara.... But Realisation is nothing new to be acquired. It is already there, but obstructed by a screen of thoughts. All our attempts are directed for lifting this screen and then Realization is revealed. ...Vichara is the process and the goal also. ‘I AM’ is the goal and final Reality. To hold to it with effort is Vichara. When spontaneous and natural, it is Realisation.” [Talk§390]

“People would not understand the simple and bare truth – the truth of their every day, ever-present and eternal experience. That Truth is that of the Self. Is there anyone not aware of the Self? ... Because they love mystery and not the bare truth, religions pamper them... Wandering hither and thither you must return to the Self only. Then, why not abide in the Self even here and now?” [Talk§145] “Everyone knows ‘I am!’ No one can deny his own being... ‘The body is I’ is the error. This false sense of ‘I’ must go. The real ‘I’ is always there. It is here and now.” [Talk§96] “*Avidya nAsah* alone is Self-Realisation.

Self-Realisation is only *owpacharika* (i.e. only a courtesy). Realisation is only a euphemism for elimination of ignorance.” [Talk\$500] “Self is always realized. It is now obscured. When the veil is removed, the person feels happy at rediscovering the ever-realised Self. The ever-present Realisation appears to be a new Realisation.” [Talk\$490]

To understand deeply this teaching, we need to understand the setting under which they were enunciated. Firstly, as Osborne averred Bhagavan was the epitome of pragmatism, as were the great masters Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna. Like His illustrious predecessors, the Maharshi too had no use for sterile polemics and hair-splitting semantics. But whenever the seekers were sincere, erudite scholars themselves, He came down to their level and answered them using technical terms (*Vedanta paribhAshA*) and invariably illumined their understanding of shastras, since He spoke directly from His own experience (*svAnubhuti*).

Secondly, the teachings in *Talks* were not delivered as a well-arranged discourse to a discerning audience and hence no preparatory foreground or a logical, cohesive development of the topic can be expected in a compilation of direct answers to a broad spectrum of temperaments and degrees of maturity. We do see a measure of bluntness in the direct approach of Bhagavan, reminiscent of the *Zen koans*.

Understanding *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

Therefore for those with little background in Vedanta shAstrAs, exposure to *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* can be quite bewildering because they come with pre-conceived erroneous notions of ‘doing something all the time’ in order ‘to attain’ Enlightenment. From the very outset, Bhagavan rejects this twin-error of ‘doing’ and ‘attaining’ with regard to Enlightenment. Many masters exhort their followers to austerities like fasting, *mouna vratam* and practice of hatha yoga, pranayama, japa and so on. Bhagavan said cuttingly that when a seeker already wearied of doing all these sadhanas approaches a guru, perplexed as to how to get out of the birth-death cycle, to prescribe him further vigorous do’s and don’ts would be tantamount to prolonging the vicious cycle of karma and such a guru is a Yama

(Lord of Death) himself and not a deliverer from death. With a touch of humour, He added that such a guru can be as well called Brahma (Lord of Birth), as he only carries forward the disciple's birth cycles.¹³

Bhagavan never enjoined any exclusive or rigorous do's or don'ts (*vidhi-nishedha karma*) and nor did He condemn any of the traditional sadhanas which the seeker was already pursuing. Right from the beginning, He exhorts us to wake up from the delusion of samsara and bondage by constantly enquiring as to 'who' is bound and suffering, and 'who' is seeking liberation. The astonishing consistency in Bhagavan's life and teaching can be appreciated best by seeing that His very first work *NAnYAr?* opens with these words and his very last composition *EkAnma Panchakam* also reiterates the same teaching, with an added twist that even self-enquiry is part of his sleep of ignorance — though it helps one to wake up, just as the sight of a ferocious lion in a nightmare jolts the dreamer into waking state.

At the Heart of Self-Enquiry — *SUMMA IRU!*

That extra twist has the implication that Self-enquiry is also *mithya*. We are like the drunken man wondering about his whereabouts and very identity. Atma Vichara cannot be considered as yet another 'real action' because no *karma* can release you from *samsAra*. However, questioning the very sense of doership (the *kartA-bhoktA-samsAri* notion) is to be regarded as above the plane of all actions and it can be termed as Actionless Action or Supreme Action (as in a fast-spinning top, the axis remains absolutely still while intimately sharing the motion of the base). The purpose of enquiry 'Who am I?' is to silence the mind and put the seeker in the primal state of Being (*summA iru*). In that state of Self-abidance, enquiry itself subsides as it has served the purpose.¹⁴

When we are sufficiently soaked in the teaching of *Talks* for an extended period of time, and constantly reflect upon them in an undercurrent of daily life, there slowly emerges a deeper, concrete picture which resolves all spiritual confusions and results in great inner

¹³ op.cit., Talk\$601. See *Guru VAchaka Kovai*, v.271 ed. D. Godman, p.129-30 and *Ozhivil Odukkam*, v.123.

¹⁴ If enquiry were to be real or *satyam*, it should never vanish.

clarity. In our view, all the preceding sadhana is only a preparation to reach this point whence you shift gears. The practice of *vichara marga* (called as Maha Yoga by Bhagavan) gets deepened and acquires a focus with pin-point sharpness.¹⁵

Talks is indeed an incomparable treatise of *nididhyAsanam* because once you have understood Bhagavan's teachings, you can pick it up anytime anywhere and read a paragraph here, a *Talk* there or even a few lines that you may chance upon in any random page and it has the profound power to sink the mind with effortless ease into Self-abidance. It is truly a book for deep meditation.¹⁶

Section B: Cracking the Code Word that is ENLIGHTENMENT.

Two Principal Strains in Bhagavan's *Talks*

With these remarks we now come to examine what constitutes the recurrent *leitmotif* of Bhagavan's teachings in *Talks*. When one has been absorbed in *Talks* for a number of years which effects a purification of our understanding at a subliminal level, two basic strands can be discerned in these dialogues. The first one gives us the clarity about what constitutes Enlightenment; the second strand elucidates the immense value of Self-enquiry through the practice of a simulation of deep sleep state while one is awake; this is a unique methodology (*prakriyA*) of sadhana recommended by Bhagavan without any reservation as the panacea for all human sufferings (at any stage of sadhana). Both of them are indispensable for the success in our 'journey' to Self-realisation. This is summed up in the following words of Sri Bhagavan: "Unless intellectually known, how to practise it? Learn it intellectually first, then do not stop with that. Practise it."¹⁷

¹⁵ The treatise *Maha Yoga* by Who? (Lakshmana Sarma) is a brilliant work which presents Bhagavan's teachings in a cogent and comprehensive manner; yet it is treated only as a 'book of categories' (*prakaraNa grantha*) in Bhagavan's literature. It is useful for reflection (*mananam*) but has to be read fully to derive maximum benefit.

¹⁶ Sri Visvanatha Swami translated *Talks* into Tamil as *SriBhagavat VachanAmritam*, and it exerts a stronger impact on the native mind as Bhagavan generally spoke in Tamil.

¹⁷ op.cit., Talk§40 and §596.

The second major strain in *Talks* turns the attention of the seeker to the universal experience of deep sleep where he experiences no bondage or suffering whatsoever and has the recollection of a positive happiness in the dreamless sleep. As their very substratum this unadulterated Peace straddles all the three states of our existence (sleep, dream and waking). Bhagavan advises the seeker to simulate the deep sleep state in the waking state. This is the practice of ‘Waking Sleep’ (*jAgrat-sushupti*) which is to drop the mind completely in the seat of meditation but remain totally alert and aware.

Bhagavan assures that when this is sincerely practised, the power of the Self will eventually take over and destroy the primal ignorance (*mula avidya*) lock, stock and barrel.¹⁸ He says this is in fact the essence of self-surrender because the very mind is abandoned in favour of the Self.¹⁹ He therefore avers that the paths of enquiry (*vichara*) and surrender (*saraNAgati*) are but two sides of the same coin.

In summary, the two principal themes could be said to correspond to the ‘know-why’ and ‘know-how’ of *vichAra mArga* respectively. The ‘know-why’ of Atma Vichara constitutes the first stage in dispelling the chaotic understanding of the very ‘goal’ of Realisation. The next and final stage involves the methodology or the ‘know-how’ of Self-abidance, in other words, the practice of *jAgrat-sushupti*.

Where Bhagavan Engaged in Semantic Analysis with a Specific Intent

The ‘know-why’ delineates the path while the ‘know-how’ teaches us to actually walk the path. These two constitute the principal strains that

¹⁸ op. cit., Talk§197: “You need not eliminate the wrong ‘I’. How can ‘I’ eliminate itself? All that you need to do is to find out its origin and abide there. Your efforts can extend only thus far. Then the Beyond will take care of itself. You are helpless there. No effort can reach it.”

¹⁹ *Bh. Gita*, v.18.66, *sarva dharmAn parityajya... mAm ekam saraNAm vraja*. This is the celebrated *carama sloka* of the Gita with its final message of total surrender. Bhagavan explained it uniquely as: “The mind is the locus of all *dharmas* and *karmas*. So abandoning it is equivalent to renouncing all duties and concepts (about good and bad, right and wrong etc.) at one go because these cannot be renounced piece-meal or sequentially. Therefore reposing the mind in the depths of the Self, the One Reality (*ekam vastu*) alone constitutes perfect surrender!”

Bhagavan constantly hammers in *Talks*. The first one is indispensable to gain *paroksha jnAnam* (indirect/mediate knowledge) whereas the second one confers *aparoksha jnAnam* (direct, immediate knowledge)²⁰ which alone delivers us from the bondage of *samsAra*. As indicated before, Bhagavan rarely engaged in hair-splitting semantic analysis but when He did so on those few occasions, it was to convey a powerful message to knock out a fundamental wrong conditioning in the seeker.

For instance, Bhagavan's words quoted in Section A convey the profound teaching that Realisation is not something to be acquired anew after a strenuous sadhana, for anything which comes afresh is inherently ephemeral and shall inevitably pass away. Therefore Bhagavan never accepted the very word 'Realisation' *per se* of the Self. He avers that the Self is ever real, and Self being the only Reality, one does not have to make It real or 'real-ise' through sadhana.

He pointed out that the word unwittingly sends a wrong message that one has to 'real-ise' the Self or make it real by one's efforts. Bhagavan humorously remarked that we have only 'real-ised the world' meaning 'we have made the unreal world real', while ignoring the ever real Self.²¹ So Bhagavan repeatedly exhorts us to 'Unreal-ise the world and then spontaneously the Self will shine forth' from the muffled depths of our own being! In *NAnYAr?*, He says unless we recognise the world as a dream-like illusion, the true nature of the Self (*svarupa*) cannot flash forth within, just as the rope, cannot be recognised unless we shed the delusion of the snake superimposed on the rope which alone exists.

Similarly Bhagavan questioned the aptness of the popular word, equivalent to realisation in Sanskrit, '*sAkshAtkAram*', because the suffix '*-kAram*' implies 'action' or 'doing something' to bring about enlightenment. He said the Self is ever '*sAkshAt*', i.e., manifest and

²⁰This echoes Lord Krishna's assurance to Arjuna that He would give both indirect and direct knowledge of the Self. *Bh. Gita*, v.7.2, *jnAnam teham savijnAnam*. The former is the knowledge about the Self and the latter would follow as a matter of course, when total surrender is accomplished.

²¹Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2011. p.181.

shining all the time and all one has to 'do' is to drop the '*kAram*' or the 'pungency of action' with regard to Enlightenment.²² Bhagavan said in the practice of *jAgrat-sushupti*, one merely pays unremitting attention to the ever pulsating sense of 'I' in order to be eventually swallowed by its limitless expanse and thus be freed from the limitation of 'I am the body' consciousness. Such a consummation of the pursuit of AtmaVichara is truly experiential because it then becomes direct, immediate Knowledge (*aparoksha jnAnam*). It is not gained by mere intellectual mastery of Vedanta shAstrA or dazzling oratory or prolonged listening to such discourses.²³

Bhagavan Ramana – A Modern Day UddAlaka Maharshi

The *raison d'être* of Bhagavan's teaching is that 'all are already realised' because everyone's quest is already rooted in the awareness of the already existing Self but the problem merely pertains to the eradication of the deep-seated notion of ignorance that 'one does not know the Self'. This distinction, at first sight, appears intriguing and befuddles novice minds freshly exposed to Vedanta. But it is a fundamental paradigm shift in our perspective, which is indispensable to glide seamlessly into the core practice of AtmaVichara in its second stage. This is precisely why Bhagavan in jest said to the effect that we are merely pretending to be unenlightened and that all one has to do therefore is to give up this game of pretension.²⁴

To drive home this point, He said our predicament is similar to that of a fish living in the Ganges waters being scorched by thirst or that water itself feels thirsty.²⁵ The implication is clearly that ourselves

²² op. cit., Talk §565. See also *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, pp. 81, 125, 317-8, 328-9.

²³ Katha Up., v.1.2.23, *nAyam AtmA pravachanena labhyah na medhayA na bahunA shrutena*. The Self is gained only *when the mind elects to dissolve in the absolute silence of the Self*. That is the meaning of 'choosing the Self alone to the exclusion of all else'. See also *Ulladu NArpadu*, v.22, *madhikkoli tandu...*

²⁴ op. cit., Talk §146.

²⁵ op. cit., Talk §217, "You are neck-deep in water and yet cry for water. It is as good as saying that one neck-deep in water feels thirsty, or a fish in water feels thirsty, or that water feels thirsty." See T.R. Kanakammal's *Commentary on Upadesa NoolmAlai*, pp.498-9.

being the Whole (*purNa vastu*) all the time, we are endlessly chasing the mirage of wholeness outside. The Upanishadic Sage UddAlaka taught this same message to his son Shvetaketu who returned from his *gurukulam* after years of Vedic studies (*aparA vidyA*), with the puffed up pride of learning. When UddAlaka punctured his vanity with the query whether he learnt that Knowledge which renders everything else in the creation known as well, he simply blinked but candidly admitted his ignorance and surrendered to his father-cum-guru. He besought him to teach such a *vidya* if it really existed! Then Sage UddAlaka taught him *Sat Vidya* (which is *parA vidyA*) with various examples nine times over through the *mahAvAkya TAT TVAM ASI*²⁶ by which time Shvetaketu was illumined with *aparoksha jnAnam*.

The great saying YOU ARE THAT declares an already accomplished Truth and does not say that ‘You will become That one day in future after great sadhana’ (ie. ‘*Tat Tvam Bhavishyasi*’). Bhagavan lived all his life as the 20th century UddAlaka Maharshi, teaching this single invariable Truth *Tat Tvam Asi*. He never countenanced the delusion that realisation is a future event or, perfection a latter-day attainment, much less a Utopian dream. He asserted that the bodilessness (*asariratvam*) of the Self, a synonym for *mukti*, is a foregone conclusion²⁷ and enquiry is the direct method to destroy the delusion of *dehAtma buddhi*, which alone amounts to Enlightenment.²⁸

Unless this is understood deeply, the mind cannot be driven inward towards Self-abidance. Acceptance of this great teaching with total faith is the first step because *shraddha*²⁹ is a necessary condition

²⁶ *ChAndogya Upanishad*, Chapter 6 on *Sat Vidya*.

²⁷ op. cit., Talk§390, “*SamAdhi* means passing beyond *dehatma buddhi* and non-identification of the body with the Self is a foregone conclusion.” See also Talk §304, “...There was no body but only experience of happiness in sleep. That endures now too. The Self is bodiless.”

²⁸ op. cit., Talk §96, “‘I am the body’ is the cause of all mischief. This wrong knowledge must go. That is Realisation. (It) is not acquisition of anything new nor is it a new faculty. It is only removal of all camouflage.”

²⁹ *Bh. Gita*, v. 4.39, *shraddhAvAn labhate jnAnam tatparahadbigacchati*.

for paying attention to the Self within which is, as we have seen, the second and final step (i.e., practice of *jAgrat-sushupti*).

As Bhagavan often said, Truth always shines in our Heart with utmost simplicity, shorn of all complexities that are spun around the ego.³⁰ It is but natural that a jnani revels in that Wonderland of ultimate Simplicity, which clothes him with such sublime majesty that shames the regal splendour of even an emperor. Arthur Osborne put it aptly that even the most beautiful face on earth would appear trivial besides the sagely benign countenance of Bhagavan Ramana,³¹ for He shone verily as the embodiment of *Satyam Sivam Sundaram*. ▲

(to be continued)

³⁰ op.cit., Talk§96, “The ultimate Truth is so simple. *It is nothing more than being in the pristine state*. But people will not be content with simplicity; they want complexity.... Mature minds alone can grasp the simple Truth in all its nakedness.”

³¹ op.cit., Osborne. pp.29-30. “The majesty of his countenance was inexpressible, and yet...his face was the most human, the most living, one had ever seen.”

Beware of Rogue Websites Claiming to be Sri Ramana Ashram

The Ashram wishes to alert readers against scammers who are setting up fake websites with look-alike names such as www.ramanaashram.com. To first-time visitors they appear to be like ashram website offering accommodation, offering lessons on Self-enquiry and writing about the glory of Arunachala Hill but on close inspection their fraudulent intent becomes obvious as they ask for donation, charge 32 dollars per night for accommodation and display egg dishes contrary to ashram principles.

While we are working to shut them down readers can easily identify them by the absence of the official ashram email addresses such as ashram@sriramanamaharshi.org or stay@gururamana.org etc.

Please be aware that Ramanasramam does not solicit donations for any purpose whatsoever.

The official Ashram website is: www.sriramanamaharshi.org

Recollections

Part One

VILACHERI RANGA IYER

Recently Vilacheri Ranga Iyer's Notebook was recovered from the Ashram Archives. Ranga was a childhood friend of Bhagavan and in later years he came to Bhagavan for solace and guidance. At one point Ranga's astrology chart showed a difficult period would soon appear in his life. Bhagavan insisted that Ranga stay at the ashram and be near Bhagavan at all times. We have retained the original flavour of the text as much as possible.

My mother asked Palaniswami, who was standing near Bhagavan, if Bhagavan would take fruits. Bhagavan at once stretched out his hand and my mother peeled off the skin from a banana and placed it on Bhagavan's hand. Bhagavan graciously ate it. When next she asked Palaniswami if Bhagavan would walk, Bhagavan got up and walked a few paces. Many years afterwards Bhagavan referred to this occasion and with a smile told me, "I even thought of speaking to your mother then, but was afraid whether if I did so, she might be emboldened to drag me away by force to Madurai. I used to speak a word or two in those days to Palaniswami."

One day Bhagavan told me, "It was only your mother that came and saw me here first. Even my mother came only afterwards. Your

mother came to me around 1898 when I was at Pavalakunru. She was shocked to find the state in which my body was and cried and exclaimed, 'has your father's great hospitality and feeding of the poor brought about this and turned you into a Saint.' She could not bear to see Bhagavan, unwashed and with matted hair, sitting on the rocks. So she got down, took the train and joined us at Villupuram and told us of the pitiable sight she saw. Referring to this Bhagavan asked me, 'You all stayed away at Villupuram and sent only your mother. You thought why go and see this mendicant fellow? Is it not so?' I replied, 'Bhagavan apparently felt that we couldn't bear to see him in such a state and so did not give us the conviction then that he was God, an Avatar and a Jnani. So we couldn't come.'"

One evening Bhagavan took me to the top of the hill and showed me all the places of interest there, including the spot where the beacon light is lit up annually. After sunset we climbed down and slept for the night at the seven springs cave. I laid myself down at Bhagavan's feet. In a little while I saw Bhagavan everywhere in that place. After a while it ceased. I told Bhagavan what I saw. He remained silent. I imagined that was like Krishna giving *Visvarupa darshan* to Arjuna.

It seems one day when Bhagavan was roaming near the hill from the foot to the top, from morn till eve, when he felt hungry, an old woman with grey hair came that way with a pot of gruel (*kanji*), gave it to Bhagavan and asked him to drink it and that subsequently she disappeared. So Bhagavan said, "It occurred to me whether she could have been Mother Parvathi!"

Once when Bhagavan and I were going round the hill, Bhagavan told me, "Don't think this is just a hill of stones. It is a nest of caves in which reside many great saints." I replied, "That is apparently why you tell us going round the hill is so important!"

Bhagavan told me the following: "Once when I was at Skandasram and they were celebrating my Jayanthi, many people came up from the town. With them came a mongoose too. I imagined it was probably a pet reared by one of the visitors. But it came straight to me, got on my

lap, stayed there for a time, then went and inspected the room where things had been collected for the Jayanthi celebrations and the kitchen and then went away up the hill. It was of a golden hue. I didn't know which great saint came like that. Saints can come in any form they like." I thought within myself, "Crows, monkeys, squirrels, sheep, cattle, all dumb animals are somehow able to discern the greatness of Bhagavan and go to him for darshan. Only men with their reasoning faculty are not able to recognise his true worth."

One day I told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan has no Grace for me." Bhagavan replied, "Your statement is like that of a man who, standing in the huge floods of the Ganges, complains he is thirsty and desires a bottle of tap water may be sent to him from Tanjore." Bhagavan's Grace is always flowing. Those who are at thirst for Jnana can always go to him and get their thirst quenched. Bhagavan is always ready to give guidance to each devotee according to their fitness.

I used to pester Bhagavan frequently with my questions. So, one day Bhagavan said, "You are always asking questions. Some devotees come, sit beside me and realise what alone has to be known and will go away." I replied, "What is to be done? If you have a dunce for your son you will have to din and din into his ears and teach him." Bhagavan laughed and remained silent. I realized that many people became jivan mukthas by having Bhagavan's darshan. Who can describe Bhagavan's greatness?

One day Bhagavan told me he was where speech was not. Thereupon I asked him, "Why then do you speak." "Out of compassion, I have to speak," he replied. I realised then that Bhagavan was a Dakshinamoorthy and speaks only out of compassion for us.

Once a friend had come with us from Madurai to see Bhagavan. He was a great observer of all external form of *achara* (good traditional conduct). Bhagavan told us that a dog used to remain always before Bhagavan in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and that when it was pregnant, the ashram people would not allow it to deliver its litter at the ashram, but drove it away and that thereupon it went up the hill, brought forth its

pups, stayed a while there and except when suckling its little ones, used to come as before to Bhagavan and stay in his presence. When I and the above friend went for our food along with others in the ashram, after the food has been served, one of the pups came along and sniffed my friend's leaf plate. He laughed and did not touch the food. Bhagavan also laughed and related him the following story: Once Dattatreya took one of his disciples with him and went to meet his Guru. On the way he told his disciple, 'My Guru may come in the guise of a Fakir.' After mutual greetings, all three sat for taking meals. The Guru took out a piece of bread from his bag, soaked it in a bitch's milk, freshly drawn just then, took a portion of it himself and gave the rest to Dattatreya. Dattatreya in turn took a portion and gave the rest to his disciple. The disciple was disgusted and couldn't take the bread. So he had it with him for a while and then threw it away. After a while Dattatreya asked the disciple whether he took the bread. The disciple confessed the truth. Thereupon Dattatreya took a little out of the bread in his Guru's mouth, gave it to his disciple and asked him to eat the same. After narrating the above Bhagavan asked my friend to eat the food on the leaf plate before him and my friend ate accordingly.

Once Bhagavan's mother told me the following: "While we were at Skandashram, I went out one day, when I left Bhagavan was inside, lying down. When I returned I saw him sitting on the cot outside. But when I entered inside I saw him there also lying as when I left. I told Bhagavan what I saw, and he laughed and said, 'Why didn't you tell me at once. I would have caught the thief!'" This is one of the visions vouchsafed to his mother by Bhagavan.

One day I asked Bhagavan, "How many more lives would I have to pass through before I could attain jnana?" Bhagavan replied, "There is no such thing as time or space. In the course of an hour during sleep we have dreams in which we feel we have passed through many days and even years. On the cinema screen you see pictures of a film 1/8th inch broad transformed into big mountains, vast oceans and huge buildings. The world is not outside. As we see the tiny pictures on the film reflected on the screen through the lens, so (in the same



Vilacheri Ranga Iyer
(second from the right)

manner) we see the small world that is in the mind as a big world outside through the lens of our eyes.”

One day as Bhagavan and I were climbing the hill, Bhagavan told me, “You are always wishing for this or that. I on the other hand do not wish for anything.” He added, pointing to the place where buildings of the ashram now stand, “Bhaktas want to raise buildings here.”

Once I observed a Muslim talking to Bhagavan. I imagined he was having a talk on religious and philosophical matters. After he left Bhagavan told me, “You are sorely troubled as you have debts. I have,” he added laughingly, “a debt of Rs.500 because I have bought combs, soaps, mirrors etc in shops, besides grocery in provision stores!”

I learned that the previous Sarvadhikari [manager] of the Ashram had contracted all these debts. I was greatly distressed to hear this. So I went to Madras and told a rich bhakta of the state of affairs. He came to Tiruvannamalai, scolded the shopkeepers for having sold on credit things to a man who purposed to act for the ashram, and settled their claims by paying Rs.250.

Once when Bhagavan and I were conversing, Bhagavan told me the following: “There was once a Saint to whom crowds used to go under the impression he had wonderful powers. He used to tell them he had no such powers and that therefore they need not come and disturb him. Observing this, one bhakta of his took it upon himself to explain to all who came there, ‘this Saint has no powers. You need not come here.’ This pleased the Saint. He fell for this subtle form of flattery. Some have [been] freed. Some have a desire for fame. *Silarukku peraaasai; silarukku per aasai.* [Some people are greedy; some are covet fame.]

Once when I came to Skandasram from Madurai, I saw a monkey who came there with a host of monkeys behind, went to Bhagavan, sat on his lap, embraced him, grinned and appeared as if it was telling him something. Then Bhagavan turned to me and said, “He is telling me he has been crowned king by the monkeys today. Look at these monkeys sitting on the parapet wall. This one is his royal queen. The

next one is queen No. 2. The next one is his commander-in-chief. The next are his army!” There were about hundred of these monkeys and they created a big row, climbing and jumping from tree to tree and breaking branches in their jubilation. B stroked the head of the King fondly saying, “The lame boy has had his coronation. He has come to tell me the grand news.” He then told me, “When I was at Virupaksha Cave, this monkey, a small one then, was badly bitten by the monkeys and left behind. He fell down at my feet with many bite-wounds on his person. I took pity on him, attended to his wounds and tended him for a time. It then struck me he may one day become a king of the monkeys. That has happened now. Ordinarily a monkey touched by men will not be taken back into the monkey fold.”

One day at 4 a.m. Bhagavan woke me up to go to ‘Pandavatheertham’ to swim and disport ourselves there. Hearing this a Dikshitar who was sleeping nearby began scratching the floor. Bhagavan asked him to see if it was a spindle. Thereupon the Dikshitar explained Bhagavan was referring to the dream which he had just then. It seems he was just then dreaming that he was in his own village. That *Avani Avittam* [month and star when the sacred thread ceremony performed] was approaching and that to spin yarn for making sacred threads, he was searching for his spindle. The previous day I told Bhagavan, “Jnanis know the past, present and future.” Bhagavan replied, “That is a very small matter. They know what occurs in the waking, the dream and other worlds. But all worlds are only as real as this world. God has given all Knowledge to men, withholding from them only Knowledge of the future, even of the next minute.”

One day one Bhakta told another, “If you have Bhagavan’s darshan often, he will make you a mendicant.” The latter, who was a great Bhakta and who knew everything, pretended to be frightened and came to Bhagavan and complained, “It seems, if I came to you frequently, you will make me a pauper; I am getting a salary of Rs.1000 per month. What is to become of my wife and children if I lose this appointment?” Bhagavan replied, “Those who come to me will get each their wishes fulfilled.”

MOUNTAIN PATH

One day I told Bhagavan, “My father has no bhakti. He never went to temples or sacred places and rivers. But my mother was a great devotee. My father used to get attacks of malaria fever frequently. In these fevers my father used to tell me, ‘Look here, there is Parameswara on the Bull and camphor is being waved before him. Have darshan.’”

Thereupon Bhagavan related the following story: “In a certain kingdom the queen was always going to temples, bhajan parties and uttering the name of God. The king never took any part in all this. The queen was greatly concerned over this indifference of the king and prayed to God to convert the King to her ways.

“One day when she returned late after visiting temples and taking part in bhajans, and entered the bedroom, the King was sleeping on the cot, but the room was resounding with the name of God, Ram Nam. Carefully observing wherefrom the sound of the name of God came, she discovered it came from her husband’s heart. Thereupon she at once sent for the minister and told him that the gods had granted her prayer that the King should have bhakti.

“The next morning puja, worship and *naivedeya* should be done in all temples, attended with music, and that every house in the town should also celebrate the event with flags and music, as if it was a great day for great rejoicing. The minister ordered accordingly and the next morning the King saw all this rejoicing and heard all the music and worship in the temples and asked the minister why all that was happening.

“The minister told him of the Queen’s statement and order. Thereupon the King asked the Queen how she came to know of his bhakti. The Queen told him of how she heard *Ram Nam* proceeding from his heart the previous night. The King was greatly vexed that his secret bhakti had been made public and wanted to commit suicide, drawing his sword from its scabbard. The Queen sought his forgiveness and pacified him. ▲

(to be continued)

The *Bhagavadgita*: Its Relevance Today

N.K. DIVYA

Introduction

This article aims to discuss a few principal teachings of the *Bhagavadgita* insofar as they are applicable to our lives today, since a scripture, by definition, is timeless and self-renewing.

The *Bhagavadgita* comprises chapters 23-40 of *Bhismaparvan* of the great epic poem, the *Mahabharata*. Its universal acceptance and veneration by the population gave rise to at least three dozen *gitas* running the entire gamut of Indian philosophy from *Brahman* with attributes (*saguna*) to *Brahman* the attributeless (*nirguna*), from devotionism (*bhakti*) to pure monism (*brahmadvaita*), and from attachment (*samsara*) to renunciation (*sannyasa*). The more famous among them praising the attributeless Brahman include *Avadhutagita*, *Astavakragita*, and Sri Ramana Maharshi's special favourite *Ribhugita*. *Bhagavadgita* however remains the *Gita* with a capital G, and forms the third leg of the Hindu triple canon (*prasthanaya trayaya*), along with the principal *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutra*.

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General

Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom and it includes the metaphysical enquiry into the nature of reality as a whole and man's moral and spiritual endeavour to realise it. It satisfies the highest needs of life. This truth is enshrined in the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and *Brahma* (Vedanta) *Sutra* and, though their teachings are similar, their beginnings and methods are different. While the *Upanishads* stress the mystic or intuitional aspects of Vedanta, the *Sutra* emphasises the metaphysical aspects, and the *Gita* emphasises moral and spiritual purification. The *Sruti* and the *Sutra* contain the eternal foundations of Vedanta, and the *Gita* is the revelation of its divine founder. The supreme value of the *Gita* as the Song Divine is the note of harmony that it strikes among the fundamental problems concerning the approaches to nature, spirit, and God. Since the three are interrelated and are not mutually exclusive, the *Gita* is free from the defects of naturalism and absolutism. The philosophy of nature recognises in a realistic way the unity of *prakrti* and its value as the environment for the evolving self. *Gita* also implies that the panorama of nature is an interminable battlefield. Life permeates plants, animals, and microorganisms in soil, air and water. All are equally important for the harmonious functioning of nature. The *Gita's* spiritual philosophy is an enquiry into the nature of *Purusha* or *Atman* and the means to realise it. The moral theory is delineated from that fundamental quest.

Bhagavadgita

Bhagavadgita distils the essence of the teachings of all the *Upanishads*. It is widely read by spiritual aspirants all over the world. There is no gainsaying the fact that it has charted new avenues in Indian philosophical literature. The word *Gita* is derived from the root *gai* or *ga*, meaning 'to sing,' the passive form being *Gita*, 'that which is sung' or 'a song.' There are many *Gitas* in the epics and puranas, as detailed by Tanga Swami,¹ but none approaches the beauty and sublimity

¹ Tanga Swami, *Advaita Vedanta Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Madras: University of Madras, 1992). p. 49.

of *Bhagavadgita*. The author of the *Gita* is said to be Vedavyasa or Badarayana. It is hailed as *moksha grantha*, a treatise on liberation. It comprises 700 verses which are spread over 18 chapters, each chapter being a separate yoga. It adopts an integrated approach to the liberation of the soul through the disciplines of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *vairagya*.

In the *Bhagavadgita*, Krishna plays the role of a friend, philosopher, guide, and conscience keeper to Arjuna. He is an ideal friend, a great statesman, a strategist, a mentor, and a yogi. The battlefield symbolically represents the moral conflict between good and evil; Kurukshetra represents the Atman. The work is poetical and deals with the universal dialectic of the self, cast in the form of an ontological and metaphysical dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. It teaches how to follow the path of dharma while leading a normal life. It is addressed not just to Arjuna but to all humanity. "The yoga theory regards Kurukshetra as the body, the hundred cousins of the Pandavas as the hundred nadis, Arjuna as the soul and Krishna as *yogesvara* who controls the mind."²

The *Gita* is the quintessence of all Vedantic knowledge, *samastavedantasara sangraha*. The invocatory verses describe the *Upanishads* as cows, Krishna as the milker, Arjuna as the calf, and the *Gita* as the nectarine milk.

*sarvopanisado gavo, dogdha gopalanandanah
partho vatsah sudhir bhokta dugdham gitamrtam mahat.*

In a very clear and concise way, the supreme Lord Krishna describes the science of self-realisation and the exact process by which human beings can establish their eternal relationship with God. Krishna offers to Arjuna several divergent approaches to life and suggests that his immediate job is the one for which he has been trained, namely, fighting. It is also his *svadharma*, duty ordained for a *Kshatriya*. It is precisely this kind of eclectic approach to mentoring a student that makes him the fittest person to preach such a religio-spiritual classic.

² Srinivasachari P. N., *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gita* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2009), p. 3.

Arjuna is a typical example of a confused and indecisive human being in the face of a crisis.

The Teachings

The highlights of Krishna's teaching to Arjuna include, but are not limited to the following:

- In Sankhya yoga, the emphasis is on direct perception of the universal self through constant meditation.
- The significance of karma and jnana yogas is explained, with reference to the concept of avatara.
- Abhyasa yoga teaches the practice of dhyana culminating in the realisation of God as one's own self.
- Bhakti may normally mean devotion, but in the *Gita* it really signifies an amalgam of karma and jnana or action and knowledge.
- Mokshasannyasa yoga enjoins the performance of actions as service to the Lord, surrendering the results to Him.

The *Gita* presents us with the three original doctrines: first, the doctrine of *niskamakarma* or desireless action, with the allied concepts of *svadharma* and *lokasangraha*; second, the doctrine of *avatara* or incarnation, the descent of God in human form; and third, the doctrine of integral yoga as a comprehensive mode of *sadhana* (spiritual discipline).

a. *Niskamakarma*

Karma has a prominent place in Hindu mythology. There are two types of karma, *sakama* and *niskama*, the former being performed with a desire for something in return and the latter without any expectation of reward. The first type encompasses the notion of *abhyudaya* or universal well-being with its inordinate emphasis on *yajnas* and *yagas*, sacrificial rites and rituals, by which one could get everything here and hereafter. The fruits of such rituals however are temporary and inconsequential, so the other kind, the one performed selflessly, has been recommended by the *Upanishads*. This kind of karma leads to *nihisreyasa* or the highest good and entails renunciation of the fruit of all action. Arjuna is a sincere seeker after enlightenment, but he is still not qualified to follow the path of knowledge. Hence Krishna's

admonition that he has to work and that his salvation lies through the performance of the duties appropriate to his station in life. He should observe *svadharma* first. Abandonment of one's own duty is sinful. It's better to perish in the performance of *svadharma* than flourish engaging in an action that is alien to one's nature and nurture, and therefore dangerous. Furthermore,

*karmanyevadhikaraste/maphalesu kadacana
ma karmaphalabetur bhur/ma te sangostvakarmani* II, 47.

One has the right to do one's own work but never has a claim to the fruits of one's labours. And neither should one relinquish one's work. Karma here refers to selfless work, work done for the good of mankind. The results of actions are beyond human control. They are determined by the Lord.³

In this verse, therefore, Krishna's message is:

- You only have the right to perform your duty.
- Do not lay claim to the fruits of your actions.
- Do not be the cause of the fruit of the action, that is, do not claim agency for your actions.
- Neither should you renounce rightful action.

The lesson here is that, since we are always liberated, we should not let desires stand in the way of our emancipation from the cycle of birth and death.

b. Avatara

The doctrine of *avatara* or incarnation of God is another, original contribution of the *Gita* to Indian philosophical and religious literature. This concept is seen in *Rgveda* and the *puranas*, as in the ten incarnations of Vishnu. However, it is only in the *Gita* that it is given special prominence. The Lord takes on a human form in order to restore dharma by eradicating evil, which raises its ugly head from time to time in the world of creatures. Homeostasis needs to be established among the three *gunas* that underlie the creation.

This descent of the divine into the human frame can take place anywhere and at anytime, the sole prerequisite being the decline of

³ Cp. The first verse in Bhagavan's *Upadesasara: karturajmaya prapyate phalam*.

dharma. Sri Krishna categorically declares that one who is able to understand the significance of his birth and work as an *avatara* will attain liberation. This declaration implies that if one understands the Lord's love for humanity and one surrenders to His will, one is guaranteed to be liberated.

*paritranaya sadhunam/vinasaya ca duskrtam
dharma samsthapanarthaya/sambhavami yuge yuge* IV, 8.

The primary purpose of the *avatara* is *dharma samsthapana* or the establishment of dharma on a firm foundation. In the process, if need be, he will punish or destroy the wicked and protect the virtuous.

c. Integral Yoga

The colophon of the *Gita* says it as an *Upanishad* and a *yogasastra*. Yoga is a technical term which means union with God via a set of physical and mental disciplines. Though yoga is unitary, based on the different types of human minds — the active, the philosophical, the emotional and the psychic — it has been formulated in a four-fold manner, *karma yoga* (the path of work), *jnana yoga* (the path of knowledge), *bhakti yoga* (the path of devotion) for the emotional, and *raja yoga* (the path of psychic control) for the mentally disciplined. Each of these yogas opens up on the infinite horizon of truth and effects union with God. The *Gita* describes them all. Considering that Sri Krishna has taught all the four yogas to one and the same person, Arjuna, urging him to use his discrimination, it can be safely concluded that the yoga of the *Gita* is a comprehensive spiritual discipline integrating within itself all the four aspects. However, because of Arjuna's lineage and proclivities, *karmayoga* is better suited to him, and of course, Krishna wanted him to fight.

Relevance Today

The *Bhagavadgita* occupies a unique place in the *prasthanatraya*. Its balanced doctrines and human-centric messages have secured a special status for it in religious literature. The mind of an individual is conditioned by the environmental, social, and cultural influences at a given time. In recent times, there have been a number of psychological

interpretations of the *Gita*, emphasizing the fact that Krishna must have been some kind of therapist to tell Arjuna just what he needed to hear before he would fight. He goads him into action with this partially taunting motivational verse:

*klaibyam ma sma gamah partha/ naitat tvayyupapadyate
ksudram hrdayadaurbalyam/tyaktv'ottisha paramtapa* II. 3.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan translates it thus:

Yield not to this unmanliness. O Partha (Arjuna), for it does not become thee. Cast off this petty faintheartedness and arise, O Oppressor of the foes (Arjuna).⁴

And it did the trick — eventually. A man of character is never weak. He acts from a position of tremendous inner strength. He performs his duties to the best of his ability, no matter the consequences. We know that just about every football coach gives this kind of pep talk to his players before the big game. It's just psychology. Sometimes people have to be reminded about their inner strength when they are momentarily overcome by self-doubt. We are all subject to periodic despondency and loss of direction in life, and a Krishna would be most welcome in those situations.

Educative Value

Education is a “conversation transmission” and renewal of culture. It should help a person to earn his vocational aims, as also in the harmonious development of his mental faculties. The *Gita* helps to attain these aims. In the classroom of the battlefield, Krishna is the teacher and Arjuna the pupil. The educational concepts sought to be emphasized here include *dharma*, *svadharma*, *karma*, etc. Like an expert teacher, Krishna reminds Arjuna about his first and foremost duty as a warrior, namely military combat. *Sraddha* is the term used to inspire Arjuna, a term replete with references to faith, trust, dedication, and so forth.

The *Bhagavadgita*, to put it simply, is a multifaceted poem, applicable to everyone all the time. It exhorts us:

⁴ Radhakrishnan, S., *The Bhagavadgita*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2001). p.99.

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- To be courageous.
- To work with a clear plan and purpose.
- To use our powers of intellect to make better persons of ourselves through jnana and karma yogas.
 - To achieve excellence in any sphere of work that we undertake.
 - To live and let live and, above all.
 - To reach our highest potential by realizing our identity with the divine.

Conclusion

The *Bhagavadgita* is more relevant today than it has ever been. We know that our national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru regarded it as their constant source of inspiration. Sri Aurobindo lived by it and further developed the concepts of Integral Yoga and the Supermind. Just about every Hindu and many others outside the technical precincts of Hinduism read it for clues to their daily living and to derive strength from it in times of despair. If anything, the current age of scientific advancement and information explosion needs its truths that unfailingly comfort the harassed citizenry of the globe. The *Gita* is at once philosophical and pragmatic, spiritual and religious, this-worldly and other-worldly. Krishna remains the eternal teacher, friend, and mentor for us all.

Let me conclude this essay with a quote from the introduction to *The Bhagavadgita* by Dr.S.Radhakrishnan that attests to the poem's universal and continuing appeal:

“It is not an esoteric work designed for and understood by the specially initiated but a popular poem which helps even those ‘who wander in the region of the many and the variable’. It gives utterance to the aspirations of the pilgrims of all sects who seek to tread the inner way of the city of God... It serves even today as a light to all who will receive illumination from the profundity of its wisdom which insists on a world wider and deeper than wars and revolutions can touch. It is a powerful shaping factor in the renewal of spiritual life and has secured an assured place among the world's great scriptures.”⁵ ▲

⁵ Ibid., pp.11-12.

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Seventeen

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

3rd June 1978

Sadhu Om: People have many different types of attachments – to sense pleasures, wealth, family, nationality, caste, creed, social status, name, fame and so on – but Bhagavan has correctly diagnosed that the root of all attachments is our ego, which is our *dehabhimana* or fundamental attachment to a body as ‘I’. That is why he often advised us, ‘Investigate who it is who is longing and crying out for *moksa* (liberation)’, because if we investigate this, our ego will disappear along with both its body-attachment and its idea of liberation, which it was longing for so much.

[In answer to someone who remarked, ‘This *brahmastra* [supreme weapon] called ‘who am I?’ that Bhagavan has given us is so clearly the most powerful of all weapons, but because of our lack of *vairagya* [desirelessness] we don’t have the strength to wield it’, Sadhu Om

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.

replied:] That may be true for the present, but he who has been so compassionate to give us this weapon will certainly also give us the strength to use it. When a child is first given a slate and chalk he doesn't even know how to hold either of them, so his teacher holds his hands and guides them to write A, B, C and so on. Similarly, Bhagavan has given us this *brahmastra*, so he will certainly enable us to make full use of it.

5th June 1978

Sadhu Om: Knowledge is power or strength. We can see this even on a gross level: for example, human beings are more powerful than all other creatures only because of their knowledge. Likewise our *vasanas* [outward-going inclinations or tendencies] seem to be strong only because of our wrong knowledge about the world. That is, because we mistake the world to be real, our tendency to be attracted towards it is very strong. Therefore our *vasanas* can only be destroyed by correct knowledge.

What is actually real is only ourself, so true knowledge is only awareness of ourself as we really are, and since our awareness of ourself is nothing other than ourself, we ourself are true knowledge. Therefore to gain true knowledge we must attend only to ourself. The more we practise self-attention, the more we will gain a correct knowledge about ourself and the world.

Since real knowledge is only self-awareness, which is called *cit*, and since knowledge is power, which is called *sakti*, it is said that *cit* is the only real *sakti*, and that *cit-sakti* is the source of all other forms of power, which seem to exist and be real only because of it. Therefore, whatever Bhagavan says about true knowledge in verses 10 to 13 of *Ulladu Narpadu* applies equally well to true power. For example, when he says in verse 10, 'Only the knowledge that knows oneself, who is the first, [by investigating] to whom are that knowledge and ignorance, is [true] knowledge', he implies that only knowledge of the non-existence of the ego, who is the first to rise and who alone experiences knowledge and ignorance of other things, is not only true knowledge but also true power; when he says in verse 11 that knowing

other things instead of knowing oneself is not true knowledge but only ignorance, he implies that it is also not true power; when he says in verse 12 that that which knows (namely the ego or mind) is not true knowledge and that oneself alone is true knowledge, he implies that the ego (which alone knows anything other than itself) is not true power and that we ourselves alone are true power; and when he says in verse 13, 'Oneself, who is knowledge (jnana), alone is real', he implies once again that we ourselves alone are real power.

Likewise, since the term '*siddhi*' means 'attainment' and since it is also used to refer to any special power that one may attain, what he says regarding real *siddhi* in verse 35 of *Ulladu Narpadu* applies equally well to real knowledge. That is, when he says, 'Knowing and being *porul* [the one real substance, which is oneself], which exists as *siddham* [what is always attained], is [real] *siddhi*,' he implies that knowing and being oneself alone is real knowledge.

This is why he says in the sixth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), 'When one practises and practises in this way [turning one's mind or attention back towards oneself, its source or birthplace, whenever it is distracted away by any other thought], for the mind the power (*sakti*) to stand firmly established in its birthplace will increase'. The more we attend to ourselves, the more we will gain clarity of self-awareness, which alone is real knowledge, and in the bright light of such clarity the power of our *visaya-vasanas* (outward-going desires or inclinations) will fade away, because they derive their power only from our ego, which is the illusory knowledge 'I am this body'. This fading away of our *vasanas* is what he refers to in the tenth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* when he says, 'they will all be destroyed when *svarupa-dhyanam* [self-attention] increases and increases'.

When we first start to practise turning our attention back towards ourselves, the power of our self-attention will be relatively weak, so we will be able to notice the rising of any *vasanas* in the form of thoughts only after they have already swept us away. However with practice the power of our self-attention will increase, and the more it increases the more easily we will be able to cognise the exact moment that any *vasana* arises as a thought. If our self-attention is firm, our experience

at that moment will be that this thought arises only because I know it, so our attention will cling to ourself, the 'I' that is aware of the thought, and thus the thought will subside, being deprived of the attention that it needs to survive. Each time that we deprive any thought of our attention by holding fast to self-attention in this way, we are weakening the *vasana* that gave rise to it, and strengthening our love and ability to hold on to self-attention.

When practising self-attention in this manner, we should not be waiting or looking out for the next thought to rise, but should be focusing our entire attention only on ourself. If we look out for thoughts, they will definitely arise, because the nature of our mind is to expand in the form of numerous thoughts whenever we are not attending solely to ourself. If we try to attend only to ourself, whenever our self-attention falters even a little a thought about something else will arise, but if we are vigilant in our practice, we will immediately notice any faltering in our self-attention and the consequent rising of a thought, so we will immediately be able to turn our attention back to ourself before it is swept away.

Therefore self-attention is the only direct means by which we can gain the strength to abide firmly in and as ourself, the source from which we have arisen as this ego, and only by abiding thus can we weaken and eventually destroy all our *vasanas*. Our *vasanas* would be difficult to subdue and destroy only if they were real, but since they do not exist in sleep they are not real, and hence if we have sincere love to know who we really are, we can easily destroy them all merely by clinging firmly to self-attention.

As Bhagavan says in verse 18 of *Upadesa Undiyar*, our mind is just a collection of thoughts, and its root is only our ego, the primal thought called 'I'. And as he says in verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, this ego rises, stands and flourishes only by clinging to 'forms', which is another name for its thoughts about anything other than itself, so the only effective means to prevent the rising of our ego and its expansion in the form of numerous thoughts is to attend to it alone. That is, since we cannot rise and stand as this ego without attending to other things, if we attend only to ourself, this ego, it will subside

and disappear. This is what he means when he ends verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu* by saying, 'If sought [or attended to], this formless phantom-ego will take flight'.

Since this ego is unreal, like an illusory snake, it seems to exist only when we do not look at it carefully enough. Just as the snake will disappear if we look at it carefully, because it is really only a rope, our ego will disappear if we look at it carefully, because it is really only our formless and hence infinite self. Therefore it is only by attending to our ego, which is the root and first thought of our mind, that we can know it correctly – that is, know that it does not really exist – and only by knowing it correctly can we control or subdue it.

Thus the knowledge gained by self-attention is the supreme power by which we can conquer our mind, and since the entire world-appearance is just a projection of our mind, conquering our own mind means conquering the entire world – both this world and every other imaginable world. Therefore self-attention is the supreme undertaking, but since it is within the power of each one of us to attend to ourself, it is 'the direct path for everyone', as Bhagavan says in verse 17 of *Upadesa Undiyar*.

It is sometimes said that to conquer our mind we need to control all our desires, but we can control them only by knowing what desire really is. It is actually impossible to control desire entirely, because desire is love, which is the *priya* or *ananda* aspect of our real nature. That is, what manifests in our mind as numerous desires is only our love to be happy, and this love is the very nature of our real self, so it can never be controlled or conquered. Therefore the only way to conquer all our desires is to fulfil our fundamental love to be happy, which we can do only by knowing what we really are.

The desires we have for things other than ourself are endless, because whenever one such desire is satisfied, another will rise to take its place. Therefore we can never be satisfied by trying to fulfil our desires one by one. The root of all our desires is only our love for ourself, so we should redirect all our desires for other things back towards ourself by desiring and trying to experience only what we ourself really are. At present our self-love is scattered about in the form of numerous

desires, so it has become weak and fragmented. Therefore to make it whole and strong once again, we should focus it on its real target, which is ourself. By doing so, we will know what we really are, and then we will find that there is actually nothing else for us to desire.

Prayer is not futile, nor is it even just a temporary benefit. Our prayer is to our own self. It is the longing of ourself for ourself, and it will certainly bear fruit. After all, all this – the world, our life – is only a result of our past desires or longings. Some people get dejected because they pray for specific things and find that such prayers seldom seem to be answered, but eventually all our prayers will be answered in a better way than we can ever imagine, because all our longings will ultimately be fulfilled only when we know what we really are.

In the *Bhakti* chapter of part two of *The Path of Sri Ramana* I say that so long as a person in the third (a) standard is praying with one-pointed devotion to his beloved God for the fulfilment of all his desires, God may appear to him in form, but as soon as he is promoted to the third (b) standard – that is, as soon as he understands that he should give up praying to God to fulfil his petty desires and instead pray to him to give only himself – God will cease appearing to him in form. This is because God can give himself to his devotee only by teaching him that he is not any form but only the devotee's own formless self. Therefore God can often fulfil our longing more perfectly and effectively by not granting whatever we may pray for than he could by granting it.

So long as we are self-ignorant, we do not know what is really good for us, so rather than praying for whatever we think is good for us, we should pray only for what God wants for us, because he alone knows what is really good for us. As Bhagavan sings in verse 2 of *Sri Arunachala Padikam*, 'Your wish is my wish; that is happiness for me, Lord of my life', and in verse 7 of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai*, 'Whatever be your thought [or will], do that, my beloved, only give [me] increase of love for your pair of feet'. In one of the verses in *Sri Ramana Sahasram* [a thousand verses praying for *jnana*] I sing that he has given me more than I ever prayed for. ▲

(To be continued)

My Guru

JAYARAMAN RAJAH IYER

It was October 1968 and I was 12 years old. My parents, elder sister and I had come to Madras, from Pune to attend a cousin's wedding after which we went to Chengam, near Tiruvannamalai, where my uncle was working in TNEB as Assistant Engineer. One evening, he took us to Arunachaleswarar temple and then to Sri Ramanasramam where we were cordially received and told that we could have dinner after the evening Puja.

Soon the evening puja and Veda parayanam at Bhagavan's Samadhi commenced and I began to watch the proceedings with interest. What struck me was the presence of several foreigners among the devotees, wearing Indian attire and keenly attending the puja. This was the first time that I had seen so many foreigners in, what I assumed was a Hindu place of worship!

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Presently, a couple walked in. The man, who was unmistakably 'English', was dressed in a spotless white dhoti, while his European wife was dressed in a sari. There was a serene look on the man's face which, at that time, I was too young to notice clearly, but which I now recall vividly in retrospect. I was seated with my back to the wall in the gentleman's half of the hall, while the couple sat in front of me and a little to my left, but facing Bhagavan's Samadhi and watching the puja. They seemed to take no notice of me. Those were the times, when I was filled with nationalist feelings and hatred for everything British!

What infuriated me was the fact that a number of Hindus were saying 'Namaste' to the Englishman, who was returning the greeting. 'What's going on here?' I began to wonder. 'How can these Indians/Hindus be so naïve? Why are they showing such respect to this Englishman? Have they forgotten so soon the atrocities his people committed on our country? Who is this Englishman by the way? Whom is he trying to impress by wearing Indian dress? Could he be an agent of the East India Company? He should be thrashed and chased out of my country!' These were the precise thoughts going through my mind. Just then, to my utter shock, the Englishman slowly turned, looked at me and smiled. I was stunned!

Here I am entertaining the most hostile thoughts about a man and he was smiling at me as though he knew what was going on in my mind. Both shocked and embarrassed, I quickly turned my face away. Seeing him smile, his wife asked him what the matter was and he whispered something to her. Then she too looked at me, laughed and nodded! I immediately concluded that this was a dangerous place and wanted to get away quickly! My rational mind refused to believe that my thoughts could have been read and I was too young then, to know that this was no big deal for a realised person. On reaching home, I kept on asking my father why the Englishman had smiled at me. Just to shut me up, he said, 'Maybe because you are good looking. Why don't you think of something else?'

Soon the incident was forgotten and my next visit to Sri Ramanasramam was in October 2001, a clean 33 years later! After the 11th September attack of 2001, I was one of the many software

professionals who lost their job. As often is the case, adversity makes you turn Godward! This time, I got accommodation at the Ashram for four days. I bought a couple of books by one 'Arthur Osborne' at the Ashram bookstall and started going through them. At once I was struck by the author's sincerity and lucid style of writing. Then, when standing in the queue, at the Ashram dining hall, for my cup of tea in the afternoon, my eyes fell on the photographs of some ardent devotees of Bhagavan, including that of Arthur Osborne, who looked vaguely familiar. But I dismissed the thought from my mind. Again the next day, while waiting in the queue, the familiarity puzzled me. Then the whole thing came back to me in a flash – the encounter I had had with the Osborne couple, in 1968!

I began to read, nay study, every book by Osborne, even taking down copious notes. I tried to practise meditation as taught by Bhagavan and as so lucidly explained by Osborne in his various books and articles. My love for Bhagavan and Osborne began to grow, by the day. Whenever I got stuck in meditation, all I had to do was to pray to Bhagavan and then browse through a book of Osborne and I would find the necessary encouragement to continue the practice. Indeed, Osborne's *My Life and Quest* is a bible for every spiritual aspirant and a must read for every family man, with spiritual aspirations. The message of the book simply is that any human being, whether a sannyasi or householder can realise the self, provided one keeps up self-enquiry, persevering with tenacity, despite setbacks and hurdles on the path.

Now turning to Bhagavan's teaching, 'Who am I?' I feel, it is not merely a meditation technique, but a way of life. I am elated or disappointed at a turn of events – who am I? I am flattered or hurt by another's action or words – who am I? I am impatient at the progress I am making in meditation – who is impatient? I am disappointed at my children not heeding my advice – who is disappointed?

After practising thus for some time, the answer begins to appear within oneself as a 'current of awareness', which one needs to cultivate and nurture. One then finds one's whole life transformed, with peace pervading every walk of one's life. Does it eventually lead to self-

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realisation? But why this doubt – who is the doubter? Who am I? One's job is only to persevere. Grace would flow in, when one is ripe enough to receive it. As Bhagavan has repeatedly exhorted his devotees – all that is required of one is to just 'BE', not be 'this or that'.

There was a time, when like many of the present generation, I deeply regretted not having met and interacted with Bhagavan. But no longer. The books by Osborne and other devotees are ever available to give every sincere devotee all the encouragement and guidance that they may need on the spiritual path. The discontent has fallen away and the quest has begun in right earnest. Thank you Bhagavan and thank you Osborne! ▲

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Your lucific armies,
garnet mother, feral as death;
Brihatsenaa,
the Gods your grim generals,
sunflares in their chasmal hands.

Mahi, who are earth,
great, luxuriant mother,
all-fecund furrow;
scream of love in the boiling seed,
you are the endless birthing.

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.

Para Siva Vellam

Mahakavi Bharati's Flood of Transcendent Beatitude

SUBRAMANIA BHARATI
TRANSLATED BY J. JAYARAMAN

We can infer from Sri Devaraja Mudaliar's *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, the diary entry dated June 3rd, 1946, that the great Tamil poet Bharathiar indeed did once visit Maharshi Ramana, during the Skandashramam period (1915-1922). This is quoted below:

“G.V. Subbaramayya: Did Subramania Bharati ever come to Bhagavan?”

Bhavavan: I think he did once. It was when we were on the hill. One evening when only Sivayya [late Kutraalam Mauni Swami] was with me, someone came and sat for nearly an hour before me and then went away without saying a word. Later when I saw the pictures of Bharati, I thought it must have been he.”

‘JJ’ the Ashram Librarian, was a member of the editorial board of the *Mountain Path*, and contributed several articles, poems, translations and calligraphs under various pseudonyms. He has from the '80s actively served the Arunachala re-forestation pioneer movements.

Bharati quit the Tamil daily *Swadesamitran* as its Assistant Editor to join the Tamil weekly *India* in 1906. Following the Bengal Partition riots of 1905, he sought refuge in French Pondicherry owing to persecution of freedom-activists by the British powers. When the First World War was over in 1918, Bharati was granted safe residence out of Pondy, in his home town in Tirunelveli district. From 1920, upon the invitation of his penultimate employer, *Swadesamitran*, he resumed as its Assistant Editor at Chennai.

Sri Pe. Su. Mani, a doyen among relentless journal researchers, and who is still active, dug out from the archival issues of the *Swadesamitran* the fact that Bharatiyar's twin talks at the Arunachaleswara Temple precincts, of May 1921, had been reported in the issues immediately following the events, in *Mitran* issues of May 3rd and 5th under the banner 'Bharati in Tiruvannamalai'.

The first talk, on 'Common Commerce', was held opposite the Eastern Gopuram entrance on 2nd May 1921, and was reported in the newspaper on May 3rd.

The second talk, on 'India's Future', was held in the 16-Pillar Hall in the big Temple, on May 3rd and reported in *Mitran* of May 5th.¹

Thus that *silent communion of an hour* with Bhagavan Ramana could have taken place on May 1st 1921.

Sri Ilaya Raaja, renowned composer and ardent devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, had come across the *Day by Day with Bhagavan* entry a few years ago, and his curiosity was sufficient enough for him to wish to know which poem among Bharatiyar's body of work around the topic of *Jnana* and *Sakti*, would qualify as the one written following his undoubtedly inspiring, silent communion in Ramana *mauna* magic.

He conveyed his curiosity immediately to Sri Sundaram Anna, our President, who thought it fit to ask me for my input. The literary hound in me awakened and I sifted through the lot of those of

¹ See the Ashram's Tamil souvenir commemorating the 125th Jayanti in 2004. The salient points of Sri Pe. Su. Mani's research are available in *Annaamalaiyil Aanma Jothi* in Sri La. Su. Rangarajan's article, *Maharshiyum Mahaakaviyum*, p.52.

Bharatiyar's poems under Vedanta, and leaving aside occurrences of powerful single verses on advaitic *sahaja samadhi*, I zeroed onto *Para Siva Vellam* among those of sufficient 'weight'.

It is serendipitous, and stunning, that we are given a 'feel' of what Bharati found himself helplessly soaked in.

The Surge of Supreme Siva

A Surge there is named God by Vedic sages
 Encompassing all as Self; within and without
 Objects seen, considered in mind, held within
 As understanding – all arise off that
 Limitless, without separation, unattached
 As Being and Absence, confounding the clever ones.
 As pure space, as consciousness, as the cloud
 Raining diverse Energies; mating, dispersing atoms
 In dimensions gross and subtle and the casual
 Beyond, where all selfhood becomes Self.
 Devoid of particular self yet itself the sole one
 Standing all the same as multiple selves
 It is here, that many faiths proclaim as
 The omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient Person
 This it is that stands as Desire of those desirous
 As their fulfiller and the object and the provider
 As sight, the seer and the seen it abides
 Majestic frustrating full analysis.
 Though It has of itself become the all, the knowers of Truth
 Swear that but a rare one can know It.
 The seer of this is freed of taint, freed of sorrow
 The desirer of this realizes the fruit of all desirables.
 The perceiver of this Substance is done with obstructions
 Finding in all that accrues, the resident Joy
 All their needs met; rejecting nothing
 Them, the earthlings praise as the Master divine.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Wanting nothing they rule the world
Rejoicing within in solitary companionship of the One
A flood, dear brother, the desired One ever at hand
Surging from within, the spring of Immortality
The needed ruse to occasion this Eternal
Bliss-flood is indeed simple, very simple!
The act of attention; the phenomenon of thinking;
The direction within; and Reality is patent.
It is sufficient if one were to reinforce with feeling;
Praising the Divine omnipresence, gushing too from
Here within.
It is enough to repeat "Divine flood which has become all this
Is bubbling forth from within me." Feel thus.
That's enough!
No need for ochre robe, nor matted hair
Feeling conviction is sufficient to attain to the
Transcendent Reality.
No need for scripture, no need for cannon
No need for eulogy. Mind stilled in touch of feeling will do.
No place for tough tapas; none for practice of sadhana;
The thought given room "Siva is all that exists," delivers!
Let the mouth utter, "The One Sivam, transcendent,
Standing everywhere, as All, for all time, courses through
Me here!" That is ample!
Faith for the form, "The eternal Siva-flood of Self
Surges and flows through me."
Mind thus permeated, this conviction alone
will do!



KEYWORD

Praptasya Praptih

JOHN GRIMES

In Advaita Vedanta philosophy two types of attainment are spoken of: attainment of the not-yet-attained and attainment of the already attained. What has not-yet-been-attained, for instance the attainment of a new automobile, is achieved in space and time. It is attained by effort and produces a limited result, e.g., a new car. This type of attainment always involves both gain and loss. One gains a new condition and loses an old condition.

However, Vedanta also talks about another type of attainment. It is called, “obtaining the already obtained” (*praptasya praptih*) or, “getting rid of what you haven’t got”. To obtain the already obtained involves neither space nor time. One can obtain only that which one does not already have. Since one always is the Self, when one realises this fact, it is designated as ‘obtaining the already obtained’.

Realising, attaining, reaching the goal only have a figurative meaning according to Bhagavan Ramana. If the goal, Self-realisation, is to be reached, obtained anew, it cannot be permanent. The goal must already be there. Why? If an individual seeks to reach the goal with his or her ego, how can they reach it? The goal must have existed before the ego searched for it and when the ego is destroyed, what is

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there is only the eternal Self, as it ever was! Thus 'bondage' and 'release' must only pertain to the ego and not to the Self. Where duality exists, there bondage and release make sense. But, if there is no duality, if duality only exists in the mind or in the ego of an individual, then who is to be released and by what? When the mind ceases through Self-enquiry, it will be discovered that there is neither bondage nor liberation. Bhagavan said:

“If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now, but that it should be got anew. What is got afresh will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say, the Self is not reached. You are the Self. You are already That. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this ignorance, which consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, the mind, etc. This false identity must go and there remains the Self.”¹

The essence of Bhagavan's teaching which he persistently declared, again and again is, “You are That, here and now.” To the person who objects, “But is not my search proof of my having become lost?” the reply comes, “No, it only shows that you believe you are lost.” For, what are you in search of? How can you find that which you already are? A sage once said, ‘Let me tell you a simple fact. If you set aside your ego for a moment, you will realise that you, the traveller, are that which you are seeking. Everything is within you.’

Or, to word it another way, ‘Any seeking is a denial of the presence of the sought’. Lord Ramana remarked, “The word ‘liberation’ (*mukti*) is so provoking. Why should one seek it? One believes that there is bondage and therefore seeks liberation. But the fact is that there is no bondage, but only liberation. Why call it by a name and seek it?” The questioner adds, “True, but we are ignorant.” Bhagavan replied: “Only remove ignorance. That is all there is to be done.”² “All questions

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2006. §251.

² *Ibid.*, §359.

relating to *mukti* are inadmissible; because *mukti* means release from bondage which implies the present existence of bondage. There is no bondage and therefore no *mukti* either.”³

To understand Advaita’s views regarding moksha sadhana, it is crucial that one understand the distinction employed between the Absolute (*paramartika*) and the relative (*vyavaharika*) points of view.⁴ Without being absolutely clear regarding this distinction, it is likely that one will misinterpret the teachings. One must be absolutely clear that these two ‘levels’, two ‘truths’ are but a pragmatic device and do not mean that there are really two truths or levels. Reality is One though it can be viewed from two perspectives.

To illustrate point of perspectives with a simple analogy: From the sun’s perspective, the sun neither rises nor sets; there is neither darkness nor concealment nor varying shades of light. By definition, darkness cannot be where light is. However, from the perspective of an individual upon the earth, the sun rises and sets; there are both light and darkness and varying shades in between, and it is valid to label the sun’s light an enemy of darkness. Two seemingly contradictory propositions, both equally valid, and true (from different viewpoints), once their particular perspectives are correctly understood. Nevertheless, note that what is valid from one perspective is not from another. From the sun’s perspective, ‘all is light’. From darkness’ perspective, there is relative light and relative darkness, and every shade in between. The question is, ‘Which do you identify with; are you the physical body, or are you the Self?’ Further, contemplate, ‘Has the sun ever seen darkness?’

While Bhagavan acknowledges that distinctions appear unique and individual at the empirical level, all distinctions lose their distinct individuality from the Absolute point of view. That is, ‘All this is Brahman’ is absolutely true while ‘all this is individually separate and distinct’ is relatively true. What is true from one point of view or level of reality is not from another. However, this does not mean that there

³ Ibid., §362.

⁴ *Mandukya Karika* 4.25; *Brahma Sutra Bhasya* 1.1.11

are two realities, two truths. There is one Reality, as seen from two different perspectives. Sri Ramana held that one perspective is from the point of view of ignorance; it is relatively true, (the sun seemingly rises and sets), while the other point of view is from the perspective of wisdom (the sun neither rises nor sets). A person may see the sun traverse across the sky, and yet everyone knows that it does not move! Water is seen in a mirage, and yet there never has been water there, nor will there be, nor is there now.

From the point of view of ignorance of the Self, Advaita admits of numerous distinctions, while from the absolute perspective of wisdom of a sage, there is only Brahman/Atman, One and non-dual. Thus, “There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, and none liberated. This is the absolute Truth.”⁵

Bondage is not denied at the empirical level and, at the absolute level, the question of bondage does not arise. When all is one, for whom would there be bondage? The same holds true in regards to the seeking of freedom. It is all a matter of perspective.

Freedom is not a goal to be reached in some remote space by an actual movement, either mental or physical. The state of freedom is exempt from all change. This means that its character is natural and not phenomenal. It is independent and has its own intrinsic value. It does not need to be illumined for it is a light unto itself. As well, it does not fall within time. “*Moksa* is the state of freedom where the stream of time has stopped.”⁶

From the Absolute or Sage’s experience, individuals are neither bound nor free. Adi Sankara did not deny the human experience of bondage. What he did was to relegate it to the realm of empirical reality. It is really but a figure of speech to say that individuals become free. The true nature of the individual is always free and a real alienation is impossible. If alienation were real, it could never be overcome. However, due to the confusion born of ignorance, conscious realisation of this nature is not effected. Thus, a spiritual discipline is laid down in order to dispel the clouds of ignorance that (seemingly) cover the

⁵ *Mandukya Upanisad Karika* II.32.

⁶ *Chandogyia Upanisad Bhasya* 8.12.3.

Self. The illusion of the loss of one's Self is removed and its seeming recovery is spoken of as the attainment of freedom.

A question raised in Vedantic philosophy is this: Can you attain and keep what you haven't already attained, or, to put it slightly differently, can you attain what you already have? If you are going to get something that you didn't have before, what good is it? Since you didn't have it before and get it now, there is every possibility, if not actuality, that you'll lose it at some time in the future. Anything that comes necessarily goes; that is the law of the universe. And the question of getting what you already have is ridiculous, isn't it?

This so-called gaining of the Self has often been compared by Bhagavan to the gaining of a necklace supposed to be lost. A person imagines that she has lost her necklace while all the time it is round her neck. She goes frantically searching for it here and there. A friend comes along, enquires as to what was the object of her search, notices the necklace around her neck (the very person who is the victim of a delusion), and points out her error to her. She jumps with glee and joyfully exclaims, "I have got my necklace back." Did she ever lose her necklace? Did she gain it afresh now? She merely obtained the already obtained. Likewise, knowing the Self means being the Self, and not knowing it while apparently being other than it. A person wrongly imagines that something is lost, the Self, and that it must be found. A day will dawn when such a person will laugh at all their futile efforts.

Sri Ramana used various analogies and would relate each of them in his own wonderful way in order to illustrate this 'un-covering' of the always existent Absolute, this 'obtaining of the already attained'. There is the woman who, forgetting that her necklace is around her neck, goes anxiously in search of it. There is the prince who was abandoned in a forest in his infancy and grew up thinking that he was the son of a hunter. The third is about ten rustics who, upon crossing a river, each counted the other nine, and forgetting to count himself, bewailed the fact that one of their party had drowned. The last analogy is the donkey-lion analogy. In truth, the necklace was never lost, the prince was never not a prince, the tenth man was never drowned, and the lion was never a donkey. ▲



Old Hall, Sri Ramanasramam

D. Thyagarajan

Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verses 20, 21 & 22

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 20

The Lord who shines resplendently as the in-dweller of the heart is indeed the One who is extolled as Guhesan (Lord of the heart-cave). Once by continued practice of the meditation of Soham (I am He), the notion 'I am Guhesan' is firmly established, we realise that the 'I' notion which was identified with the body is false, and this illusion that you are the perishable body will be dispelled like darkness before the rising sun.

Commentary

Due to ignorance our body is mistaken to be the Self. Bhagavan posited in verse 24 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, there is a knot (*chit-jada-granthi*) between the Self and the non-self. Ignorance must first be destroyed if the knot is to be sundered and thus liberate the *jiva*. Bhagavan here teaches the method how the knot can be cut. Patanjali advocates the practice of *pratipaksha bhavana* to overcome the rise

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

of negative ideas. Bhagavan takes the idea to an exalted level. The notion 'I am the body', is to be countered by firmly establishing the idea 'I am the Self in the spiritual Heart' (I am Guhesan). When the idea *soham* (I am He) is firmly established, the false notion of 'I am the body' is automatically removed, just as the sunrise at dawn dispels the darkness of night.

Every act results in two-fold effect: one, the effect arising out of the nature of the karma, good or bad and the second, the greater problem of arising of vasanas (latencies or residual impressions) which impact the person to repeatedly engage in the act. Ignorance born of vasanas, leads to the mistaken notion of the body as 'I', this habitual notion of body as the Self. Due to repeated cycle of karmas, propelled by vasanas, it gets indelibly imprinted in the mind, causing further cycle of births and deaths. This can be erased only through right awareness of the *soham bhavana* (I am He). The idea *soham* is firmly established by continuous meditation on the *soham bhavana*, thus vapourising the opposite ignorant idea, 'I am the body'.

The same idea is also expressed by Bhagavan in verse 9 of *Upadesa Undiyar*. Here Bhagavan says, "The pinnacle of transcendental devotion that grants liberation is abidance in 'Being' (*Sat*) simply as 'I Am'." The ever-fresh pulse or *sphurana* of *Sat*, the state beyond the reach of any *bhavana* (attitude) is gained by virtue of the strength of ceaseless practice of meditation which imbues the aspirant with the strength to permanently abide in the Absolute.

Here Bhagavan uses a powerful example to illustrate how strong and committed should be the *soham bhavana* (the attitude 'I am He'). He says that it should be as firm, if not more so than the common ignorant notion 'I am the body'. Firmly establishing the notion 'I am He' counters and knocks out the false but habitual notion 'I am the body'. By constant practice of 'I am Guhesan' (the in-dweller of Heart cave) the idea is firmly established, the ego is finally overcome and Grace spontaneously pours forth.

We have to keep in mind that the *soham bhavana* mentioned here is not a mere mental repetition of the mantra *soham* (I am He). It is the

thought-less internalisation of the idea 'I am He'. It is the subsidence of ego in the Heart, giving up the notion 'I am the body'.

Bhagavan related the story of Gorakka from the *Prabhulinga Leela* by Sivaprakasa Swamigal. The story runs thus: Allama Prabhu, the great Saivite sage, was travelling to various places to impart Saiva Siddhanta to those willing to listen. At one of the places was the siddha Gorakka, who had achieved an indestructible corporeal body through siddhis and herbs. He proudly came to Allama Prabhu and declared that he had achieved an immortal body. Seeing his inflated ego, Prabhu told him, "You are saying that your body can not be touched by death and therefore you will not die. It indicates that you have got a mistaken notion that you are the body. Why do you assume the mortal body to be you and thus embrace the path of peril? Wise people surrender to Lord Siva to put an end to the cycle of birth and death, while you pray to Him to keep the body from extinction. It is as stupid as a sick person wanting to get a medicine that would keep the disease permanent. Therefore give up attachment to the body and seek His Grace for liberation."

But Gorakka did not pay heed to his advice. He wanted to demonstrate that his body is imperishable and asked Prabhu to strike his body with a sword. Prabhu did so. It did not pierce him but only bounced off which gave the sound of metal touching a metal. Gorakka beamed with pride. Then Prabhu gave the sword to Gorakka and asked him to pierce his body with that same weapon. Gorakka thrust the sword into Prabhu's body and astonishingly it passed through as if that was an empty space! Gorakka was stripped of his pride and falling at Allamma Prabhu's feet prayed for upadesa, which the gracious seer imparted to him.

Verse 21

When Rama put a question to Vasishtha: "That huge mirror in which this entire universe appears as an image, that which is indicated to be the heart of all beings, what is that?" The sage Vasishtha explained: "When we reflect on that, we will see that of the heart of all beings in the universe there are two kinds."

Commentary

We have seen in the commentary to verse 18 and 19 that the references are to the spiritual heart, not physical heart. This verse expounds this further. The heart spoken of here as the huge mirror of the manifest world is of two kinds: the non-dual Self or pure awareness is all pervading, shining effulgently. It is non-dual Being. This is the unalloyed Self, which is referred to as *soham* or 'I am He' in the previous verse. Though there is but one Heart, which transcends and is immanent in all, there are for general purposes, two kinds of hearts, one Real and another, unreal, which are mentioned here, in order to instruct the ignorant who have mistaken their body for the Self.

In reality, the corporeal body being an illusion, it is equally illusory to locate Heart in the body. Therefore Bhagavan, in the next verse goes on to delineate the characteristics of the spiritual heart. The Heart is the mega-mirror in which all creation is manifested, as described by Adi Sankara in the first verse of *Dakshinamurti Stotram*.

Verse 22

Vasishtha says, "What is to be accepted and what is to be rejected — I will explain the characteristics of these two. The organic heart, a physical entity in the corporeal frame, which is situated at a particular place in the body inside the chest area of the body, is that which is to be rejected. The heart which is incomparable and is of the form of Pure Consciousness or Awareness is that which is to be accepted. This you should know. It is both within and without. It is not that which exists only inside or only outside."

Commentary

Bhagavan here describes the nature of the two hearts: spiritual which is the only reality and the physical or pseudo-heart which is unreal. The spiritual heart is not a place in the limited body but is the unlimited Cosmic Consciousness or Self which transcends all time and space — the 'I Am'. It is devoid of all distinctions of 'inside' and 'outside'. It is all-pervading.

The pseudo-heart is an object of perception, as illusory as the body in which it is located. The spiritual Heart is omnipresent. It is the integral whole, Pure Awareness, absolutely tranquil, without a second. The spiritual Heart is both within and without, yet it is not within or without the body. The physical heart which perceives 'within' and 'without', spatial and temporal distinctions, and all differences, itself is a concept of thinking mind, whereas the spiritual heart is all-pervading and all-transcendent, beyond all differences.

The very first verse of the *Isa Upanishad* posits thus: "All things in the universe, moving and unmoving, are permeated by the supreme consciousness."

The same idea is beautifully expressed in Nammazhvar's *Tiruvoymozhi*: "He cannot be thought of as 'this' and 'not that'. He is the sentient and the insentient, in high and in low. He is in the senses, but not of them and is endless. Let us feel Him everywhere." And, "Would you say 'He is', then He is, and all this is Him; say 'He is not', then too He is, as the formless Awareness in all with the twin qualities of 'being' and 'non-being', He pervades all things and places forever."

Lakshmana Sarma wrote that Bhagavan once mentioned why we try to locate Self in a particular spot, "You know that you are! And it is a fact dhyana is by you, of you and in you. It must go on where you are. It cannot be outside of you. So you are the centre of dhyana and that is the Heart. A location is however given to it, only with reference to the body. Where are you? You are in the body and not out of it; yet not the whole body. Though you pervade the whole body, still you admit of a centre where from all your thoughts start and wherein they subside. Even when the limbs are amputated, you are still there; and with defective senses, you are still there. So a centre of consciousness must be admitted. That is called the Heart. Heart is only another name for the Self. The doubts arise only when you identify it with something tangible and physical. Heart is no conception, no object for meditation. But it is, as the seat of meditation, the Self and is alone." ▲



A Sane Answer to Atrocity

PHILIP PEGLER

No one can ever destroy the unity of the whole. This understanding or realisation does not come through head-learning but through quiet contemplation in a spirit of devotion or praise...If there were more contemplatives than there are, then the world would be saved...
— Henry Thomas Hamblin

This article is a heartfelt response to the savage turbulence presently being engendered world-wide by unbridled religious ideology and forms the Introduction to a new study by an unassuming Christian mystic, who was a fervent admirer of Ramana Maharshi. It is titled Meeting Evil with Mercy which is an Anglican priest's bold answer to atrocity. The book tells the absorbing story of Martin Israel, a Jewish doctor turned clergyman, whose prolific spiritual writings over three decades, earned him a devoted readership. An inspired preacher but unconventional too, Martin liked to expound the direct teachings of Sri Bhagavan from his London pulpit when moved to do so.

A devotee of Sri Ramana since the age of seventeen, British author Philip Pegler was resident at the ashram in the early 1970s. He has written frequently for *The Mountain Path* and his previous biography of nature mystic, Clare Cameron – a friend of Martin Israel – received coverage in this journal in 2013.

There is nothing imprecise about the hidden principles that govern the universe, just as there are no mistakes in the working out of natural law here on earth. Despite all agonising appearances to the contrary in a world of great beauty but immense sorrow, the unrelenting fact remains that we live in an absolutely just realm where cause and effect reign supreme. So much is wrong – injustice and grievous afflictions are plainly seen to be simply everywhere – and yet everything is just as it needs to be. How is this possible?

It is an inconceivable mystery for which there is surely no adequate explanation, but no one can ever destroy the unity of the whole. At least this wise saying by a little known but inspired twentieth century Christian mystic provides a positive way forward and offers some prospect of resolving the age-old enigma of why a loving God permits such widespread suffering.

Henry Hamblin, whose insightful saying introduces this article, was a seasoned English contemplative, who was writing just sixty years ago for a small but devoted readership. In the spiritual monthly magazine he founded and edited, 'Science of Thought Review', he was consistently able with the merest hint of incisive wisdom to deliver a succinct teaching superbly crafted for the moment in hand – and what he has to say here could hardly be more pertinent; it remains a distinctly apposite message for our turbulent age.

Yet Hamblin was a firm believer in 'the communion of saints' and never viewed himself as standing up alone for what is right. He clearly acknowledged that he belonged to a scattered brotherhood of enlightened mystics down the ages, who have always borne witness to Truth behind the scenes as they unobtrusively worked to sustain the world in prayer and selfless service.

Quietly insistent, these dedicated contemplatives – often martyrs for their faith – have urgently spoken out for everyone of goodwill whenever they have touched the true light within themselves in profound reflection and in all simplicity. They have ever upheld the perennial philosophy, expressing the essential goodness and wisdom at the heart of all the great world religions. In so doing they have provided a reassuringly sane and balanced response to the

barbaric atrocities seen throughout history and now witnessed to our consternation in our own day.

Faith is hardly amenable to reason, but even so what you notice around you depends on how you look. When you view things deeply with the eyes of love and in the light of faith, you will find signs of great goodness breaking through on all sides – clear evidence of a merciful background, which is the invisible foundation of all activity, whether wholesome or pernicious.

Silent and ignored, because it can only be intuitively known and defies scientific scrutiny, still this ground of being endures in the midst of both cynical disbelief and unquenchable hope. This deepest truth insists even in the midst of the heedless destruction of war – in pain too terrible to contemplate – but it can only be realised then in the obscure darkness of a faith unadorned by the niceties of creed or ritual and lit up simply by love.

Difficult as it is to accept as a basis for a realistic world view, nevertheless the background peace in the unseen ever remains untouched by vicious hatred, cruelty or oppression. In the manifest world on the other hand, things are ever changing – constantly in flux – governed it seems by an increasingly dangerous volatility. Here, in the challenging foreground of daily life where we all need to function, one crisis follows another. There is precious little time left to attend to the root of suffering, which is ignorance of the way things truly are in reality.

Nobody – whosoever they may be and whatever their station in life – is spared the fleeting pleasures and intermittent discomfort of physical embodiment. Modern living imposes a level of stress inconceivable to previous generations and our intransigent human nature does much to enhance our woes.

Yet in just the same manner as night follows day, so alert intelligence flows naturally from healthy living. We should never forget how much has been achieved with skill and unselfish dedication in the field of human endeavour. Nevertheless we can hardly deny the fact that some aspects of normal, contemporary living – currently regarded as acceptable and harmless enough – are in fact totally unsustainable and

even perverse because they are contrary to our best interests. Perhaps it is simply a denial of the straight facts of our human predicament through lack of clear seeing that is costing us most dear.

It is striking too how the simplest of questions are often the most difficult to answer. What is the wisest way to greet such apparently widespread indifference to things that really matter? How best may love be sustained in the face of hostility and hatred forgiven while maintaining utter integrity regarding condemnation of violence and the absolute requirement to stand fast in the face of oppression?

The answers are challenging in the extreme and do little to console us. Often it is suffering alone that will open our eyes to the deepest issues of life and death – while sometimes only absolute outrage at the atrocities we witness around us by way of the veritable bombardment of information from the mass media that invades our lives, will pierce the sense of apathy and open our hearts to God's mercy.

Ever wary of attachment to extreme opinions, we can at least always begin by taking a firm stand on the most noble of ideals. In such a restive and rapidly shifting era as our own, is it not the bounden duty of all of us who share these concerns somehow to find time in our busy lives to wrest out the space and opportunity to pay tribute to the highest good of which we can conceive – God, Reality or Truth – no matter how we may term it?

That much we can do, for whether we like it or not, the quality of life we need to foster as part of a global community depends on the nobility of our aspiration and willingness to cooperate with harmonious intent in furtherance of the cherished aim of establishing a society ruled by sane principles of justice and freedom. And to celebrate whatever is true and of good report, wherever it may be unearthed, is the best way to ease our pain and remove the heavy stone that blocks the source of creativity within us.

It is a tall order, but such a decisive action as making a solemn pledge to honour everything in our experience is enough to allow the waters of Life to flow unencumbered – and then all can be renewed in beauty despite inevitable hardship as we face up to our responsibilities with fresh courage.

We cannot predict what will happen when we finally stop resisting the forward thrust of living, because our surroundings and everyone we meet are affected differently by what we do and have their own freedom of choice to respond to our behaviour. Anyway we obviously do not live in isolation but truly belong to one another. Life is indivisible because everything is interrelated, and plainly there can only be one totality. The desperate tragedy of modernity is the essential fact that human beings are an inescapable part of reality – and yet we do not realise their innate solidarity and suffer accordingly from the unremitting and unacknowledged anguish that only the sense of separation from wholeness of being can bring.

The most important thing to remember is that we never need be afraid. Life is pure in essence and benign in purpose. How could the mysterious and mighty power, which created the universe, be other than supremely beneficent? Once we realise this, we are set free to become informed by mercy as we play a part in the unfolding of a more subtle and wondrous plan than anyone can envisage. It is an unobtrusive way of service to the wider community in a world entrancing in beauty but overwhelmed by strife and sorrow.

Then all will be well with us, but we need not imagine that our personal life will somehow end there or cease to unfold. Not at all – it will continue to be just the way it is, but now we shall view it differently as the great mystery of the unknown. It is a profound mystery about which we may never cease to wonder, even as we gain confidence to explore it in awe and delight – more wide awake than before, but less heedless and more responsive to the stark challenges we face.

There is always work to be done – the noble work of unassuming goodness – and it is within the scope of almost everyone to contribute in this way as best they can. Furthermore it is always this moment – the task immediately at hand – that claims our attention. For every single person in each living moment, there is no other place but here – and no time like the present. We are already living in eternity. It is certainly an uncomfortable paradox, but the best way to save the world is to realise, that at the most profound level, the world does not really need to be saved. ▲



Demystifying the Term 'Sphurana'

Part Two

MICHAEL JAMES

When we practise *atma-vichara* (self-investigation) what we are seeking to experience is greater and greater clarity of self-awareness until such clarity becomes absolute, and the only way to experience such clarity is to be keenly and vigilantly self-attentive. Therefore, just as clarity of self-awareness is our goal, so it is also the only means by which we can reach that goal, and hence, since it is just clarity of self-awareness, *aham-sphurana* is both our goal and the path to it.

We begin to taste a partial and imperfect kind of this *aham-sphurana* or fresh clarity of self-awareness as soon as we turn our attention keenly towards ourself in an attempt to experience who am I, and our experience of this *sphurana* deepens and becomes increasingly clear as we focus our attention more and more keenly upon our essential self-awareness, 'I am'. Thus during our practice of *atma-vichara* we experience varying degrees of *sphurana* or clarity of self-awareness.

Contrary to what some people imagine, therefore, *sphurana* is not some sort of ‘thing’ that we should aim to experience, because what this term denotes is not an object of experience but only a quality of experience, and the experience in question is not in any way concerned with any object or ‘thing’ but is only self-experience — an experience in which the experiencer, the experienced and the experiencing are all one. The quality of self-experience that this term denotes is its degree of clarity, which as we have seen can vary from the increased but nevertheless still partial clarity that we experience when we start practising *atma-vichara* or keenly focused self-attentiveness, to the complete and absolute clarity that we will experience when our mind is destroyed by the all-consuming light of *atma-jnana* or true self-knowledge.

Because the verbal origin of this noun *sphurana* has not been made clear in most English books, there has been a tendency to reify it (that is, to depict as if it were a thing), and hence some people have been led to imagine that it denotes some sort of thing that is other than oneself rather than simply a fresh condition or degree of clarity of the (metaphorical) shining of ‘I’, and thus they imagine not only that the word *sphurana* has a fixed referent, but also that that referent is something other than oneself. If they had instead understood the verbal origin of this word, and if they had been familiar with the variety of contexts in which Bhagavan used the verb *sphur* and its derivatives, they would have understood that he used *sphurana* to refer to any degree of fresh clarity of self-awareness that is experienced as a result of practising *atma-vichara* or self-attentiveness, and that since we can experience varying degrees of such clarity, including the absolute clarity that is *atma-jnana*, the referent of the word *sphurana* is not fixed but variable (at least in degree), and hence that the verb *sphur* and the noun *sphurana* were used by Bhagavan to refer not only to any partial degree of fresh clarity of self-awareness that we experience while practising *vichara*, but also to the absolute clarity of self-awareness that shines forth when the ego is finally destroyed.

A clear example of him using the verb *sphur* to describe the complete and final shining forth of oneself is verse 20 of *Upadesa Saram*:

*ahami nasabha jyahama hamtaya
sphurati hrtsvayam parama purnasat*

When 'I' [the ego] is annihilated, heart [oneself] spontaneously shines forth as 'I am I' (*aham aham*). [This is] *parama purna sat* [the supreme whole reality].

In the original Tamil version of this verse Bhagavan used the verb *tondrume*, which means '[it] certainly appears, becomes clear, springs up or shines forth', and in this Sanskrit version he translated this as *sphurati*, which in this context means '[it] shines forth, becomes clear or shines clearly'. Since what he is describing here is the spontaneous shining forth of our heart or true self as 'I am I', which we will experience when our mind or false 'I' is annihilated by *atma-vichara*, and since he emphasises that this is the one infinite reality, the *parama purna sat* or 'supreme whole being', in this context the verb *sphurati* obviously describes only the shining forth of the absolute clarity of pure adjunct-free self-awareness. From this it is clear that Bhagavan considered even this shining forth of absolute clarity of self-awareness to be a kind of *sphuranam* — the perfect kind in fact.

However, in most cases when he used *sphur* or any of its derivatives he did so to describe the fresh but still relative clarity of self-awareness that we experience during our practice of self-investigation (*atma-vichara*). As far as I can remember, he did not use any form of the verb *sphur* or any of its derivatives in any of his original Tamil writings, but in *Sri Ramana Nutrirattu* (his Tamil collected works) there is one text in which derivatives of this word are used several times, namely *Vichara Sangraham*, in which he uses the Tamil verb *spuri* four times (in sections 1, 9 and 10) and its noun form *spurippu* eight times (in sections 1, 2, 6 and 9), and in all these cases he used these words to denote the partial clarity of self-awareness experienced during the practice of self-investigation. However, before we consider any of these in more detail, it is important to remember that though *Vichara Sangraham* is included in *Sri Ramana Nutrirattu*, the ideas expressed in it are a mixture of ideas from other spiritual texts that Gambhiram Seshayyar asked him to explain and replies that he gave from his

own experience whenever Seshayyar asked for further clarification, so though the passages we consider may have been answers that he gave from his own experience, the conceptual framework within which he gave them and the wording that he used to express them were intended to suit the perspective from which the questions he was answering were asked.

In the first sub-section of section 1 of *Vichara Sangraham* he says:

[...] *vicarippadu eppadi? ennil, kattai mudaliya palum jadamana i-c-sariram, nan endru spurittu varangi varuma? varade. adalal, pinamana dehattai-p pinam pola-v-e irutti, vakkulum nan-endru sollamal-irundu, ippodu nan-ena vilanguvadu edu-v-endru kurmaiyyay vicarittal, appodu hirudayattil, nan nan endru sattam-illamal, tanakku-t-tane or vidha spurippu mattiram tondrum. adanai vidadu summa irundal, deham nan-ennum ahamkara-rupa jiva-bhodattai mutrilum nasam-akki, karppurattil patriya neruppu-p-pol, tan-um santam-ay-vidum. idu-v-e moksam-endru periyorgalalum surutigalalum sollappadukiradu.*

[...] If [anyone] asks how to investigate [this impure self-awareness that rises as 'I am this body'], [the reply is:] can this body, which is *jada* [non-conscious] like a block of wood, shine and behave as 'I'? It cannot. Therefore, setting down the corpse-body as a corpse, and remaining without uttering 'I' even by [physical or mental] voice, if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as 'I', then in [one's] heart a kind of *spurippu* [a fresh clarity] alone will itself appear to itself [or to oneself] without sound as 'I am I'. Without leaving that [fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate the sense of individuality in the form of the ego, [which experiences itself as] 'body is I', and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished. This itself is said by sages and sacred texts to be *mukti* [liberation].

In the first sentence of this passage the verb that I translated as 'shine' is *spuri*, and in the third sentence I translated *vichari* as 'investigate', *vilanguvadu* as 'it that shines' and *spurippu* as 'fresh clarity' (though I could alternatively have translated it as 'shining' or 'fresh shining'). *Spurippu* is a verbal noun, and is the Tamil equivalent

of the Sanskrit verbal noun *sphuranam*, but though Bhagavan does not actually use this Sanskrit word *sphurana* in *Vichara Sangraham*, in most English translations of it the Tamil word *spurippu* has been translated rather unhelpfully as *sphurana*, which for most readers is just replacing one unfamiliar word with another, without actually explaining its meaning in clear English terms.

The fact that Bhagavan says here ‘*or vidha spurippu*’, which means ‘a kind of *spurippu*’, confirms what I wrote above, namely that the term *spurippu* or *sphuranam* when used by him has a range of referents rather than a single specific one, because if its referent did not vary according to the exact context in which he used it, it would have been superfluous for him to say ‘a kind of’ (*or vidha*) in this context. The particular kind of *spurippu* that he refers to here is the partial kind of clarity of self-awareness that we newly experience during our practice of *atma-vichara*, and hence he says in section 2 (in a passage that we will consider in the final installment of this article) that it is not itself the *vastu* (the real substance that we actually are) but is only a precursor of the complete and perfect experience of it.

That is, when this kind of *spurippu* or partial clarity of self-awareness becomes complete and absolute clarity, it blossoms as true self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*), the direct or immediate (*aparoksa*) experience of the one real substance, which consumes and annihilates the mind or ego once and forever. Thus this final *aparoksa* experience of self is a *spurippu* of a subtly but nevertheless radically different kind. That is, instead of being just a partial or relative clarity, it is a complete and absolute one. Therefore, when Bhagavan sometimes said that *spurippu* or *sphurana* is our actual self (as recorded, for example, in §160 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*), the kind of *spurippu* he was then referring to was this absolute clarity of pure self-awareness or *atma-jnana*.

As we saw in the first instalment of this article, Bhagavan explained to Devaraja Mudaliar that the meaning of *spurippu* or *sphurana* is *vilanguvadu* (shining or being clear) or *vilakkuvadu* (making clear), so when he uses both the words *vilanguvadu* and *spurippu* in the third

sentence of this passage, he is using two words that have essentially the same meaning. In this sentence *vilanguvadu* means ‘what shines’ or ‘what is clear’ (though in other contexts it can also mean ‘shining’ or ‘being clear’), and *spurippu* means ‘shining’ or ‘clarity’, so ‘*ippodu nan-ena vilanguvadu edu-v-endru kurmayay vicarittal, appodu hirudayattil, nan nan endru sattam-illamal, tanakku-t-tane or vidha spurippu mattiram tondrum*’ can be translated thus:

[...] if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as ‘I’, then in [one’s] heart a kind of shining (*spurippu*) alone will itself appear to itself without sound as ‘I am I’.

If we carefully consider the meaning of what Bhagavan says here, it is obvious that the kind of shining that is denoted here by the word *spurippu* must in some way be different to the kind of shining that is denoted by the words ‘*ippodu nan-ena vilanguvadu*’, which mean ‘what now shines as I’ or ‘it that now shines as I’. What then is the difference between these two kinds of shining? Since there is and can be only one ‘I’, in both cases it must be the same ‘I’ that is shining, so the difference must lie in some quality of its shining in each case.

Now we experience a body (or more generally a person or body-mind complex) as ‘I’, so what now shines as ‘I’ is not just our pure ‘I’ but our pure ‘I’ mixed with extraneous adjuncts such as this body and mind. In other words, what now shines as ‘I’ is our confused experience ‘I am this body’, and hence due to its confused mixture with adjuncts, its shining is in some sense lacking in clarity. That is, though we clearly experience that I am, we do not clearly experience what I am.

Therefore, when we investigate what it is that now shines as ‘I’, which we can do only by trying to focus our entire attention only on the essential ‘I’ in the compound experience ‘I am this body’, we will begin to experience ‘I’ in isolation (or at least in a relative degree of isolation) from the body and other adjuncts with which it is now mixed, and hence instead of experiencing ‘I am this body’, we will begin to experience ‘I am only I’, which is what Bhagavan meant by the words ‘*nan nan endru*’ (as ‘I am I’) as opposed to ‘*nan deham endru*’

(as ‘I am [this] body’). In other words, we will begin to experience ‘I’ more clearly as it really is. This is what Bhagavan meant when he said, “then in [one’s] heart a kind of shining (*spurippu*) alone will itself appear to itself without sound as ‘I am I’” (*appodu hirudayattil, nan nan endru sattam-illamal, tanakku-t-tane or vidha spurippu mattiram tondrum*).

So long as we are attending to and thereby experiencing anything other than ‘I’, ‘I’ shines in a mixed and confused form as ‘I am this body’, but when we try to experience only ‘I’ by attending to it alone, it begins to shine more clearly in its pure form as ‘I am just I’. Therefore the kind of shining or *spurippu* that Bhagavan refers to here as ‘*nan nan*’ or ‘I am I’ is a relatively clearer and more precise experience of ‘I’. Hence by carefully considering the meaning of this third sentence of this passage, we can understand that what Bhagavan means here by ‘*or vidha spurippu*’ or ‘a kind of shining’ is only a clearer shining of ‘I’, or in other words, a fresh clarity of self-awareness.

This is why I wrote earlier in this article that in the context of Bhagavan’s teachings *spurippu* or *sphurana* generally does not mean only clarity of self-awareness but more specifically a fresh clarity (or fresh degree of clarity) of self-awareness. ‘I’, our self-awareness, is always shining, but so long as it is mixed and confused with anything other than itself, it is not shining sufficiently clearly, so to enable it to shine (or be experienced) more clearly we must try to attend to it alone and thereby exclude from our awareness all other things. When we thus try to attend to ‘I’ alone, we will experience it more clearly, and this increased clarity is what Bhagavan meant by the terms *spurippu* or *sphuranam*. ▲

(To be continued)



The Celestial Foil to Bhagavan's Mahanirvana

14th April, 1950 According
to Vedic Astrology

GAYATRI DEVI VASUDEV

The Ashram management approached Ramana devotee Gayatri Devi Vasudev — editor of Modern Astrology magazine and former editor of the Astrological Magazine — to hear her opinion on Bhagavan's Mahanirvana according to the principles of Vedic Astrology. In commenting on the main divisional chart (navamsa), among other things, Gayatri Devi said that in her 43 years studying jyotish, she had “not come across such a configuration.” The following pages contain a brief look at this great moment from the jyotishical perspective.

My father, Dr. B. V. Raman, who revived and resurrected Jyotisha (Vedic astrology) in the 20th century, treated it as an academic subject that could be studied like any other such as physics, maths and literature. He and I shared a deep and abiding devotion to Bhagavan, the great sage of Tiruvannamalai. Father would often recall his meeting with the Maharshi in 1938 and the sense of peace and well-being he experienced in his presence which never left him.

The circumstances that took my father to Bhagavan were unusual. My great-grandfather, Prof. B. Suryanarain Rao, who pioneered astrological journalism was the mainstay of a large extended family of nearly forty members. He had passed away in March 1937. My

father had always been dutiful and caring but now he was left with taking care not only of his own immediate family by a large concourse of relatives. His grandfather had been greatly pained to have to close down *The Astrological Magazine* which he had founded in 1926. But father restarted it in September 1936 and its revival delighted my great-grandfather to no ends during the last six months of his life. But my great-grandfather's death saw the lands in our family village auctioned away. Printer's and other bills mounted and the financial situation became very bad. There were more children now and father's own family was growing. Everything seemed to press in around him.

One night, my father had a dream in which Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great sage of Tiruvannamalai, appeared to him and asked him to come to Tiruvannamalai. Father departed the very next day and came to Sri Ramanasramam. He was given a small thatched shed with another devotee who was the editor of a periodical called *Sind Observer*. In the evening my father went to the hall where the Maharshi was reclining on his sofa. He introduced himself as the grandson of Prof. B. Suryanarain Rao. The sage gently smiled and made a sign for him to sit. Soon it was time for dinner and father was fortunate to find himself sitting next to the sage who spoke to him kindly in Telugu.

"Swami, I need your blessings," my father said, meekly. "Everything will be alright," Bhagavan assured him.

These words were like a soothing balm to my agitated father who, as a young man of 26 years, was facing problems on every front.

Later, the Ashram Sarvadhikari Chinnaswami, a saintly man himself, and the Maharshi's brother, placed a chart in my father's hands and asked him, "How is this chart spiritually?"

A glance at it was sufficient to show it must be the chart of the Maharshi. Explaining the planetary positions to the Sarvadhikari, father said, "The chart appears to be of one who is at the peak of spiritual illumination. An intense mental and spiritual struggle would have been overcome before perceiving the Reality."

The answer greatly pleased the Sarvadhikari. The chart was indeed the Maharshi's.

THE CELESTIAL FOIL TO BHAGAVAN'S MAHANIRVANA

Father later discussed the Maharishi's horoscope in detail based on the particulars provided by the Sarvadhikari in his book, *Notable Horoscopes*. It has also been dealt with by me in *The Astrological Magazine* (1936 – 2007) wherein I highlighted the planetary positions during Bhagavan's death experience and which was also carried in these pages some years ago. Every major event in the life of an illumined soul such as Bhagavan's has significant patterns of the *navagrahas* (the nine planets) that clearly reflect the nature and importance of the event.

Mahanirvana

April 14, 1950 was no exception. A brilliant column of light rose from the humble environs of Sri Ramanasramam in the holy town of Tiruvannamalai blazing into the night sky even as countless devotees across the country watched in awe and trepidation. The time was 8.47 pm (IST)¹ when the deeply spiritual sign Scorpio was ascending the eastern horizon with its ruler Mars in Virgo with *kaivalyakaraka* Ketu (natural significator of the Ultimate) aspected by the 9th lord *dharmastanadhipati* Moon from the 5th house, the house of spirituality (Chart 1). The Sun, the *atmakaraka*, symbolizing the soul of the universe, had just entered his sign of exaltation Aries

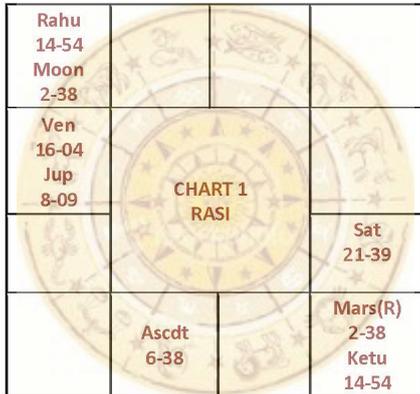
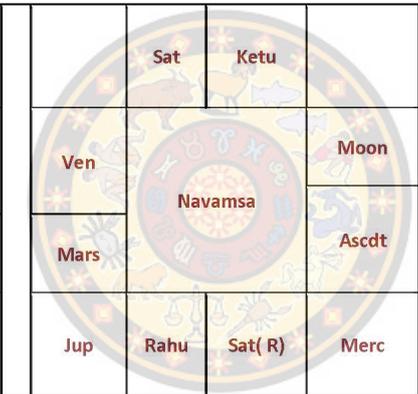
Rahu 14-54 Moon 2-38	 <p>CHART 1 RASI</p>		Sat 21-39	 <p>Navamsa</p>		Moon
Ven 16-04 Jup 8-09			Mars(R) 2-38 Ketu 14-54			Mars
	AscDt 6-38		Jup	Rahu	Sat (R)	Merc

Chart 1: Mahanirvana: April 14, 1950 20h. 47m. at 12 N 12, 79 E 06

¹ The famous French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson, knowing what the meteor signified, immediately consulted his timepiece and noted the time which agreed with others who had done the same.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Sat 18-30	Mars 23-24		Ketu 25-21 Moon 29-51	Jup		Ketu	Moon
Jup 17-55	CHART 2 RASI			Merc	Navamsa		Ven
Rahu 25-21 Sun 17-02	Ven 1-55 Merc 24-33	Ascldt 2-18		Sat	Mars Rahu	Ascldt	Sun

Chart 2: Birth chart: Dec 30, 1879 at 1am 9 N 50, 77 E 50.

and was in a state of great dignity and strength being in *vargottama navamsa*², in his state of highest abidance.

This planetary pattern provided the perfect celestial foil for Bhagavan to give up the physical body that had shackled the supreme Consciousness, his true Self, for over seven decades. The weekday was Friday whose lord Venus was also *vargottama* in Aquarius, the sign of the pitcher symbolizing the quenching of the spiritual thirst of humanity. Very appropriately, Venus was with the *jnanakaraka* (natural significator of supreme knowledge) Jupiter.

The interesting feature here is of the Moon situated in Purvabhadrapada in Pisces, a *nakshatra*³ which, ruled by Jupiter and being in the last sign of the zodiac, stands for *moksha* or final liberation. This *nakshatra*, it is to be noted, is the *trijanma tara* or the trinal *nakshatra* of Punarvasu, the Maharishi’s janma *nakshatra* (Chart 2), both ruled by Jupiter. Punarvasu lies in the airy sign of

² *Navamsa* or the chief divisional chart (D-9); *vargottama* from *varga* (meaning ‘division’) + *uttama* (meaning ‘best’) is when a planet occupies identical *rasis* in both the main chart (D-1) and the *navamsa* (D-9).

³ *Nakshatra* or lunar mansion, one of 27 segments along the ecliptic whose names indicate the key asterisms in each area of the fixed heavens.

Gemini which very appropriately shows the path of jnana which is what Bhagavan showed and gave the world through the path of enquiry, 'Who am I?'. This subtle connection between the birth and release *nakshatras* leaves little doubt of the Divinity that took shape in the form of Bhagavan in answer to the cries of devotees around the world for spiritual succour.

Looking at the *navamsa* which is an integral part of the horoscope and more important than any other *shodasavarga* (16 sub-divisional charts), the planetary arrangement is simply staggering. Every single planet obtains unusual dignity and strength reflecting the core event occurring under this design. The Sun is exalted in Aries, the Moon occupies the deeply spiritual sign Cancer, which is also his own sign, Mars is in his sign of exaltation in Capricorn, Mercury also is in his exaltation sign, Jupiter occupies his *moolatrikona* (own sign) in Sagittarius, Venus is *vargottama* in friendly Aquarius, Saturn is in Libra in his sign of exaltation and both Rahu in Scorpio and Ketu in Taurus become extraordinarily strong by virtue of obtaining *neechabhanga*⁴ from multiple strong sources. This unusual pattern can mean nothing but a supreme spiritual event occurring under it.

All said and done, no astrological or other rational explanation can do justice to Bhagavan's life and transition for he is beyond words, beyond the grasp of the intellect and the mind. This analysis is a simple act of devotion at Bhagavan's feet. ▲

⁴ *Neecha* (meaning 'debilitated') + *bhanga* (meaning 'annulled') means the debilitation is cancelled, a feature that gives dignity and strength to a planet's placement.



The Path of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj In His Own Words

D. SAMARENDER REDDY

During the latter part of twentieth century all spiritual roads seemed to lead to a little tenement in Bombay (now called, Mumbai). In residence was none other than Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, a jnani (realized soul). He felt he was earlier “a commoner, a humble tradesman, with little of formal education . . . [with] life [of] the common kind, with common desires and fears.” It was only through his “faith in [his] Guru and obedience to his words” that he realized the truth.

Spiritual seekers from all over the world flocked to him for guidance. His teaching was based solely on his own realization of the truth. His enunciation of it, however, bears striking resemblance to the Upanishadic and Advaitic tradition, though he was unschooled in it. He never did read any scriptures. He always spoke uncompromisingly from the absolute standpoint. It was very rarely that he made a concession to stoop down to the muddled level of the spiritual seeker. Truth as per him is “undefinable and indescribable, except in negative terms” – the all-too-familiar Upanishadic strain of ‘neti, neti’ not this, not this). Reality has ‘nothing to

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do with concepts'. He did make use of some familiar terms like 'awareness' and 'consciousness' in his teaching. But, he gave such terms a slightly different slant. Hence, it can be tricky to tease out their exact significance. However, it is superfluous to try to find in his talks a logical and complete metaphysical system, because there are other texts which serve that purpose. This is especially so since he did not write anything but merely responded to his interlocutors. He has to be read more for the inspiration he gives and the disabusing he does of all our false notions. That said, a close reading of his talks reveals that he does have a systematic method for arriving at the truth. This article is trying to point out that method in Maharaj's own words.

The following 25 small extracts are from the book I Am That; they are in order as per a plan. They delineate step-by-step the method he is preaching – the whys, the hows and the wherefores. His main message is that, to realize the truth one should pay attention to the certain and bare feeling one has of existing or being, the pure 'I am'. This sense of 'I am' is one uncontaminated by any identities that form one's empirical personality or ego.

The Gurus usually teach the sadhanas [spiritual practices] by which they themselves have reached their goal, whatever their goal may be. This is but natural, for their own sadhanas they know intimately. I was taught to give attention to my sense of 'I am' and I found it supremely effective. Therefore, I can speak of it with full confidence. [1]

My Guru ordered me to attend to the sense 'I am' and to give attention to nothing else. I just obeyed. I did not follow any particular course of breathing, or meditation, or study of scriptures. Whatever happened, I would turn my attention away from it and remain with the sense 'I am'; it may look too simple, even crude. My only reason for doing it was that my Guru told me so. Yet it worked! Obedience is a powerful solvent of all desires and fears. Just turn away from all that occupies the mind; do whatever work you have to complete, but avoid new obligations; keep empty, keep available, resist not what comes uninvited. In the end you reach a state of non-grasping, of joyful non-attachment, of inner ease and freedom indescribable, yet wonderfully real. [2]

I simply followed his [Guru's] instruction which was to focus the mind on pure being 'I am', and stay in it. I used to sit for hours together, with nothing but the 'I am' in my mind and soon peace and joy and a deep all-embracing love became my normal state. In it all disappeared – myself, my Guru, the life I lived, the world around me. Only peace remained and unfathomable silence. [3]

I was a simple man, but I trusted my Guru. What he told me to do, I did. He told me to concentrate on 'I am' – I did. He told me that I am beyond all perceivables and conceivables – I believed. I gave him my heart and soul, my entire attention and the whole of my spare time (I had to work to keep my family alive). As a result of faith and earnest application, I realized my self (*swarupa*) within three years. [4]

There is the body and there is the Self. Between them is the mind, in which the Self is reflected as 'I am'. Because of the imperfections of the mind, its crudity and restlessness, lack of discernment and insight, it takes itself to be the body, not the Self. All that is needed is to purify the mind so that it can realize its identity with the Self. [5]

It is the 'I-am-the-body' idea that is so calamitous. It blinds you completely to your true nature. Even for a moment do not think that you are the body. Give yourself no name, no shape. In the darkness and the silence, reality is found. [6]

You know on contact [with sensory experiences] that you exist – 'I am'. The 'I am this', 'I am that' are imaginary. [7]

Our usual attitude is of 'I am this'. Separate consistently and perseveringly the 'I am' from 'this' or 'that' and try to feel what it means to be, just to be, without being 'this' or 'that'. [8]

The sense 'I am' is your own. You cannot part with it, but you can impart it to anything, as in saying: I am young, I am rich, and so on. But such self-identifications are patently false and the cause of bondage. [9]

MOUNTAIN PATH

The sense of being, of 'I am', is the first to emerge. Ask yourself whence it comes, or just watch it quietly. When the mind stays in the 'I am' without moving, you enter a state which cannot be verbalised but can be experienced. All you need to do is try and try again. After all, the sense 'I am' is always with you, only you have attached all kinds of things to it -- body, feelings, thoughts, ideas, possessions etc. All these self-identifications are misleading. Because of them you take yourself to be what you are not. [10]

Best is the simple feeling 'I am'. Dwell on it patiently. Here patience is wisdom; don't think of failure. There can be no failure in this undertaking. [11]

Turn within. 'I am' you know. Be with it all the time you can spare, until you revert to it spontaneously. There is no simpler and easier way. [12]

Refuse all thoughts except one: the thought 'I am'. The mind will rebel in the beginning, but with patience and perseverance it will yield and keep quiet. Once you are quiet, things will begin to happen spontaneously and quite naturally, without any interference on your part. [13]

Just stay put in the thought and feeling 'I am', focusing 'I am' firmly in your mind. All kinds of experience may come to you – remain unmoved in the knowledge that all perceivable is transient, and only the 'I am' endures. [14]

Just keep in mind the feeling 'I am', merge in it, till your mind and feeling become one. By repeated attempts you will stumble on the right balance of attention and your mind will be firmly established in the thought-feeling 'I am'. Whatever you think, say, or do, this sense of immutable and affectionate being remains as the ever-present background of the mind. [15]

Establish yourself firmly in the awareness of 'I am'. This is the beginning and also the end of all endeavour. [16]

Even the sense of 'I am' is composed of the pure light and the sense of being. The 'I' is there even without the 'am'. So is the pure light there whether you say 'I' or not. Become aware of that pure light. [17]

For a seeker of reality there is only one meditation – the rigorous refusal to harbour thoughts. To be free from thoughts is itself meditation... You begin by letting thoughts flow and watching them. The very observation slows down the mind till it stops altogether. Once the mind is quiet, keep it quiet. Don't get bored with peace, be in it, go deeper into it. [18]

Hold on to the sense 'I am' to the exclusion of everything else. When thus the mind becomes completely silent, it shines with a new light and vibrates with new knowledge. It all comes spontaneously, you need only hold on to the 'I am'. [19]

Give your heart and mind to brooding over the 'I am', what is it, how is it, what is its source, its life, its meaning. It is very much like digging a well. You reject all that is not water, till you reach the life-giving spring. [20]

The door that locks you in, is also the door that lets you out. The 'I am' is the door. Stay at it until it opens. As a matter of fact, it is open, only you are not at it. You are waiting at the non-existent painted doors, which will never open. [21]

Relax and watch the 'I am'. Reality is just behind it. Keep quiet, keep silent; it will emerge, or rather, it will take you in. [22]

Once you have seen that you are dreaming, you shall wake up. But you do not see, because you want the dream to continue. A day will come when you will long for the ending of the dream, with all your heart and mind, and be willing to pay any price; the price will be dispassion and detachment, the loss of interest in the dream itself. [23]

The desire to find the self will be surely fulfilled, provided you want nothing else. But you must be honest with yourself and really want nothing else. If in the meantime you want many other things and are engaged in their pursuit, your main purpose may be delayed until you grow wiser and cease being torn between contradictory urges. Go within, without swerving, without ever looking outward. [24]

Try to be, only to be. The all-important word is 'try'. Allot enough time daily for sitting quietly and trying, just trying, to go beyond the personality, with its addictions and obsessions. Don't ask how, it cannot be explained. You just keep on trying until you succeed. If you persevere, there can be no failure. What matters supremely is sincerity, earnestness; you must really have had surfeit of being the person you are, now see the urgent need of being free of this unnecessary self-identification with a bundle of memories and habits. This steady resistance against the unnecessary is the secret of success. [25]

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No.99 The Perceived Cannot be the Perceiver, p.498. 23] Ibid, No.97 The Mind and the World Are Not Separate, p.484. 24] Ibid, No.34 Mind is Restlessness Itself, p.139. 25] Ibid, No.98 Freedom from Self-identification, p.487. ▲

Mountain Path, A Song at First Light

Upahar

Clouds are drifting on the hillside,
trees are singing in a morning breeze,
and you're listening to the river,
moving as the river of boundless peace.
Silence opens like a flower,
a cup of rainbows overflows within,
and you're leaning to the presence,
kneeling in the presence of the one you are.

*Wandering in this realm so fair,
trust the way to lead you where it's going;
white bird sails without a care,
she trusts the wind to take her where it's blowing.*

Beloved dancer in the halls of dawn,
all beings held now in your first wild light,
shining in your vision, waking to your rhythm,
all creation sways.
O, lovers of the ancient pathways,
born into beauty in the fields of grace,
I'll meet you in His footsteps,
I'll greet you before time begins. I'll meet you Here.

*Though skies may turn and thoughts must flow,
day spin again its insubstantial story,
yet love to love will laugh and bow;
sing, here to here and now to now, the Glory.*



Maha Nirvana Room

D. Thiyagarajan

Cosmic Tapestry

DOUGLAS HALEBI

My first teacher, Uncle Noah said words of wisdom that are now embedded in my bones: “If a star came down from the heavens and unleashed hailstorms and lightning on the Earth, we would perhaps consider it a miracle. But I would have said that the world is already miraculous. We know that the light of distant stars takes millions upon millions of years to reach us, and that we are seeing these stars not as they are now, but as they were countless eons ago. So the heavens were set in place before man ever roamed the earth or drank water from an icy stream. Is all of this not comparable to the miracles of the prophets (*anbiyya*) and the saints (*awliyya*)?”.

Why do we not see the miracle in front of our own eyes, instead of concentrating on things we've never seen and know nothing about?

Douglas Halebi writings are based principally on the rich and intricate narrative traditions of his paternal relatives, who are descended from a parent-group of Domari Gypsies in the Near East. He had a fateful meeting half a century ago with his Uncle Noah, who became his *palalikanina*, patron or sponsor, with whom he shared an insatiable love of beauty and a quest for purer, deeper and richer meaning in all things.

The Earth is a miracle in itself, and man is here to revel in its beauty and rejoice in its never-ending renewal, even though this Earth is also flawed, imperfect and, in some ways, impoverished. And it doesn't need men who travel on flying carpets, or raise the dead, to make it rich in tenderness and marvel, a home where man may dwell for a time and begin to ponder the beauty of life, the meaning of all his sorrows and the haste with which we depart from this abode. So listen to the wisdom of your ancestors, preserve the purity of the epics and the romances laden with tradition, but also find your own destiny, pursue your own calling, and never stop thirsting for more life and more understanding. Whether you are 100 years old or only a boy, be alive, love life, drink it in like the water of a cool stream in a barren land.

According to the Juki, divine revelation is woven into the very fabric of the universe. It emanates from the dew that glitters and shines in the morning grass, as from the birds that serenade the rising sun and the full moon that “pours light into the darkness of the forest.” Some have contrasted this revelation in nature with more formal, explicit lines of spiritual authority and especially with the mantle of universal mastery claimed by the priests and the theologians of various religions. Juki lore, however, sees no contradiction between the authority claimed by the great religions of man and the narrative heritage of the tribe, replete with love of ‘the celestial forest’, the terrestrial world and the endless flowering, withering and renewal of the entire earth.

No doubt it could be said that the whole rhythm and flow of ancestral existence, with its veneration of sacred custom and its deep and abiding love of life, is a kind of ‘religion’ in itself, but without being explicitly called such. And that this ‘religion’ is compatible, for some, with all the great and enduring spiritual traditions that flourish in this world. However the tribal elders did not consider themselves in desperate need of a certain dogma or creed, since everything in existence is permeated with divine content and comprises a partial manifestation (*ju'zi*) of an infinite reality, beyond the power of man

to define, fully understand and so to limit. And they sometimes compared different religions to works of art and poetry, each one as complete and self-contained as the most beautiful painting or the most sublime and instructive oral epic. The painter, they said, was not meant to quarrel with the poet, but to follow his own calling.

“Love the painting, love the poetry and song of religion, love its vast processions and its sacred rites. But also love the flowering orchard, the golden sun and the still pond where a distant star is sometimes reflected. And know that we will never be able to explain everything, no matter how many wells of knowledge we drink from. Know that man himself, and the Reality all around him and within him, is deeper, vaster, richer than any of the theories yet devised to explain it all away. Know that the grand venture of man is only beginning and that we have the astonishing privilege of partaking of it this very moment, here and now, before the hour and the day fade away forever. Know that we were meant to savour this fleeting life, consider it a thing of exquisite beauty, adorn and embellish it as much as we can...”

Such were the words of the tribal bards, Jibril, Nuratin and Magrupi. They also warned us that this most perfect rose, life, lasts but a single instant in the history of the whole world. Then it withers and fades away. There was no time to seek out an absolute knowledge: we had to see life as ‘the lilting melody of an old village song’, sweet and mournful, full of bitterness and sorrow because of ‘the pain of the Gypsies’, but also tender, compassionate, bearing witness to an incurable love of the beauty of the world. And for them nothing was easier than to drink in this beauty, as if it were a well-fortified red wine that intoxicated man when he paused, lingered over it, permitted it to instruct and solace him. Beauty was given to us in the butterfly with sun-golden wings, the tiny song bird that dipped its beak into the water of a cool, sweet fountain, the swaying form of a maiden with a face of milk and honey, and the wonderment of a child seeing green grass, tall trees and distant stars for the first time. Everything was an *aya*, a symbol or portent of the mysterious force that created

the universe. And everything was meant to instruct us, to make us see the whole world as if it had come into existence only an instant ago and was drenched in the sanctity and grandeur of the Garden of Eden.

“Do we not love the Castle of the Franks (Europeans or Westerners) that looms on a mound near Homs?” Uncle Noah had asked rhetorically. “And do we not consider the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus a poem in stone, or perhaps a whole symphony? Why would anyone try to desecrate these treasures? Is there no civilization left in the world today?” He said that those who reduce every discussion to the limited sphere of political or religious dogmas “are like the governor who asks the frog why it croaks and how it can find peace on a mere pond. Or like someone who stands in the midst of an ancient forest and can find nothing of worth in it.”

A vital, authentic spiritual tradition, according to Noah, isn't the imposition of dogma by force, but the memory of a sacred past and recognition of its beauty and pathos within ourselves. Truth cannot be imposed on man by force and remain authentic: it must be given freely, as an infinitely precious gift, like water that is given to the thirsting Earth when it falls from the passing clouds.

‘Tradition’ is not dogmatic authority; it is the creative, ever-fecundating life of the spirit. ‘Authority’ belongs to a different domain, a social, external reality. In a living, vital tradition, Truth is not ‘proven’ by theological arguments; it is seen in the light that pours out of it. And so it is with irresistible poetry, the themes of all great philosophy and the beauty of trees, stars, river-oaks and rose-gardens.

Man is inundated in impression from a thousand sources of revelation: but he is easily distracted, even by very petty concerns. And so it often happens that he is no longer open to the miraculous, the incomparable gift of life itself, or to the enchantment and wonder endlessly poured over the world, ‘since the beginning of time’. And man was meant to traverse the entire earth, drinking the water of knowledge from all its wells, wounded, stirred and enriched by its vastness and variegation and the unique destiny of every people and every culture. (Every *nasiya*, nation or tribe, having its own destiny,

its own mission in life.) And there are no tribes, and no religions, whose destiny lies in ‘devouring the rest of mankind’. The calling of every people is latent in its very life, like butter in milk. And it is not ‘petrified dogma’ that reveals such a destiny to a given *nasiya*, so much as it is self-discovery, and discovery of the Other, in the course of living a life.

Without reservation Uncle Noah, the bard Magrupi and various other mentors proclaimed it ‘the destiny of the Gypsies’ to journey to the ends of the earth, ‘tasting the sweetness and sorrow of the nations’, possessed of an insatiable, all-consuming thirst for freedom and open space, prefiguring the universal human quest for the infinite, or God. It also lies in dispersal across time and space among various host nations, *kapire* or non-Gypsies. Nuratin, known as ‘the master of bards’, said that Gypsies were meant to enrich and embellish their own culture by becoming exposed to the art, life, music, history and poetry of the whole world. That every corner of the earth can replenish the Juki. That there is no shortage of art, or life, with lessons to give.

But, he insisted, “It all depends on us, on our ability to accept what is offered. We have learned lessons from the Cedars of Lebanon and the Sacred Oaks of Besan. The stones and the lanterns of the Western World are waiting for us now, like Hamra Street in Ras Beirut. Waiting to offer young, rapacious hearts new treasures of understanding, when they are ready to listen, grateful to these lands for what is given, as we are grateful to the trees that hang down from Mount Hemit and the snow that covers the Mount of Cedars.”

Even he, however, insisted that such a worthy heritage cannot be understood from a perusal of mere dogma, but by absorbing the values of ‘the ancient shades’, or ancestors, and understanding that they express timeless and universal verities of our very existence. And that it is life that validates religion and the quest for deeper, purer, more sublime meaning in all things. It is not the proclamations of the ‘authorities’ at second-hand that validate life and renders it precious. He added, as was customary, that many would stay in the East, “where

water of life and bread of life has been spread out before us, like the Feast for the Departed and the Mass or *Quddas* called ‘Remembrance of Christmas Eve’, ‘Dukhrana Laylat al-Milad’.”

My beloved old teachers conceded that authoritarianism in religion is a reality in terms of social practice. But it is in the transmission of spiritual verities, and in the delicate process of elevating the attention of the spiritual novice, that Truth and Beauty are made living and whole.

For the Juki, then, revelation is a twofold phenomenon, manifested in the Sacred Texts of great religions and the commentaries they inspire, but also in ancient tribal lore and in an ardent love of life and virgin nature. For nature, herself, is an endless, ever varying theophany sent to man to guide him. Many views of such things are possible, however, Aunt Rihani offered us her own assessment when she said that “our customs and ways connect us to the ever flowering, endless reality of life and how we are able to experience it anew, generation to generation.” And she used the example of a Juki marriage, when the bride and groom face one another on bended knee. A thin, crepe-like bread, coated in honey and sprinkled with almonds, is placed on the right knee of the groom and the left knee of the bride. Each one eats the bread of the other, indicating that their two lives are now more deeply intertwined, immersed in a greater totality that encompasses them both. This part of the wedding must be observed in all times and places, or else it will be seen as an invalid and tainted union.

But it is not part of the intimate, unique process of spiritual discovery that is given to each soul in its turn, in the course of living an unrepeatable and therefore precious existence. Man has the latent capacity for inner renewal and discovery, for a ‘knowledge’ which is itself an illumination of life, carrying the adept from one level of awareness to another, as he ‘travels’ on the spiritual path, learns that all creation is a kind of sacred lore, a mystical repast that honours life, sanctifies tradition, and in certain cases comprises a rapturous communion between God, man, and the cosmic tapestry spread out before us yesterday, today and always. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

A-U-M

Awakening to Reality

Gaudapada's *kArikA-s* on the *Mandukya Upanishad*

Theories of Creation

DENNIS WAITE

A-U-M, Awakening to Reality, is a study of the Mandukya Upanishad and the 215 verse commentary (kArikA-s) by Gaudapada, the paramguru of Adi Sankara. Dennis Waite has become one of the leading lights in the West with his clear and judicious approach to Advaita. He has published a number of authoritative books on Advaita and this latest book now being excerpted in the magazine, is perhaps the best available for seekers who are looking for a reliable overview of traditional Advaita. Publisher: Mantra Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-78279-996-2. Format: Paperback. Pages: 420. List Price: £20.99, US\$36.95, Rs. 1,467.

This is the topic most often associated with Gaudapada's work, with elements of the discussion occurring in all four chapters, despite the fact that it does not occur explicitly in the Upanishad itself. He introduces the subject in K1.6 although K1.6 – 9 are ostensibly commentary on the sixth mantra of the Upanishad, which talks about

the macrocosmic aspect of the deep-sleep state – *Ishvara*. He addresses only the second part of this mantra, which says “*This is the source of everything; assuredly the place of the arising and dissolution of all beings.*”

He says that it is clear that there has to be a source for everything that exists and concedes that, effectively we have to acknowledge that *Ishvara* is that source, as claimed by the Upanishad. Before embarking on a detailed consideration of all that this entails, beginning with some of the theories that were around at the time, it is worth pointing out where all this is going to lead: there is and can be no such thing as creation!

To return to the bangle, chain and ring metaphor yet again, we can change the bangle into a chain. We might therefore be said to be ‘creating’ a chain out of a bangle. But all we are doing is changing the form of the substrate – gold. We cannot create or destroy the gold. (Note that any discussion of nuclear fusion or fission would be going beyond the bounds of this metaphor! Advaita has nothing to do with physics or chemistry.)

Given that true ‘creation’ is not possible, all that we can suggest is that everything already exists and always will exist. If something ‘appears’ when it seemingly was not there before, we are obliged to say that it was there before, but in an ‘unmanifest’ state. An example of this given in the scriptures is a tree ‘appearing’ from a seed. Here, we now know that the ‘unmanifest’ form is the DNA in the nucleus of the seed; all of the instructions for making the tree are contained in encoded form, ready to be activated when food, water and light are provided. Another way of putting this is to say that the tree was in ‘causal’ or ‘potential’ form in the seed. Similarly, as far as the universe is concerned, we could say that everything was in a potential form prior to the big bang. But it would be wrong to say that nothing ‘existed’.

Note that the DNA explanation is clearly only possible in the light of scientific knowledge not available in ancient times. And, more significantly, DNA is still strictly speaking ‘manifest’; it is just that it requires quite powerful microscopes to establish this! And it has to be remembered that this is only a metaphor! It is not being

suggested that the ‘code’ for the universe is held in some sort of pre-Bang computer (where would such a thing be?). It may actually be more helpful to think of the universe being ‘created’ as a result of our own ignorance, in an analogous way to how we ‘manufacture’ a snake out of what is really only a rope.

Shankara adds that everything has to have a substratum. Continuing with the rope-snake metaphor, prior to our seeing the snake, we could say that the snake had its existence as the rope. We would never see the snake if it were not for the rope. Similarly, everything in the world, prior to its appearance, has to have its existence in a cause. This cause we give the name of *Ishvara* (or *prANa*, as this is called in the *kArikA*). This is why we are able to say ‘All this is *brahman*’ – one of the famous sayings (*mahAvAkya-s*) of the Upanishads. The appearance itself, of course, is only name and form of *brahman* and is therefore *mithyA*.

A note of warning must be issued in respect of this assignment of *Ishvara* as a ‘cause’ for the universe. We have already seen above that the very notion of ‘causality’ is meaningless on analysis. The idea also tacitly assumes that there was a time ‘before’ creation. Since the concept of time is something only empirically meaningful within the context of a universe, it is a mistake to think of a ‘time’ before creation at all.

Theories of Creation

Gaudapada just briefly mentions some of the other views on this, without going into any detail or offering any arguments against them. Some people are creationists, believing that the universe is a demonstration of God’s power or glory, while others think that is only an illusion or a dream. (K1.7) Shankara cites the example of people witnessing a magician performing an illusion such as the Indian Rope Trick. In the version described by Shankara, the magician appears to climb the rope, engage in a fight with limbs being chopped off and falling to the ground! It is supposed that the one who climbs the rope is unreal, because the real magician remains hidden from view on the ground. The audience just enjoys the spectacle; they know that it is a trick and only naïve children would think that it is real.

The second half of this verse refers to the notion that ‘creation is brought about by time’ but most of the commentators make no attempt to explain what is meant by this, other than suggesting it refers to astronomers and astrologers. Bhattacharya¹ points to mantra 1.2 in the Sevashvatara Upanishad, which seems to explain it better than anything. This says that: “*Time, the inherent nature of things, design, chance, the elements, primordial matter, individual awareness – these are to be considered as the cause (of the universe). But not even a combination of these can be the cause, for they are themselves effects.*”² It seems to me that this can be understood as evolution and Darwinian selection; i.e. it all ‘just happens’, as the result of natural change as time goes on, with God taking no part in either its initiation or development. The key point to note is that there is no explanation here as to how the universe came into being in the first place.

The other, more frequently encountered ‘explanation’ for creation is that it is for God’s enjoyment or sport (K1.9). The word *lila* may well have been encountered even by those who have never heard of Advaita. It means ‘play’, ‘amusement’ or ‘pastime’. But Gaudapada immediately rejects this, asking how it could possibly be that the absolute Consciousness, which is entirely unlimited, complete and in need of nothing, could have desires to satisfy. Desire is synonymous with limitation. Swami Chinmayananda³ gives the analogy of someone who has just enjoyed the most sumptuous meal imaginable and is entirely replete being offered some new dish of food. There will not be the slightest interest, no matter how tasty this might seem at some other time.

The ‘explanation’ that creation is for God’s enjoyment raises another paradoxical point. We know that there are wars and famines, and suffering in the world for all sorts of reasons. How could we explain this if we accepted a God who creates for His enjoyment?

¹ Bhattacharya, V., *The Agamashastra of Gaudapada*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1943.

² Kali, Devadatta, (Trans. & Comm.), *Svetasvatropanisad: The Knowledge That Liberates*, Nicholas Hays, 2011.

³ Chinmayananda, Swami, *Discourses on Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1953.

He would have to be a sadist! Consequently, the Lord could have no motive for creating the world. As Gaudapada puts it: “*What possible purpose could there be for Him whose desires are always in the state of fulfillment?*”

So what explanation does Gaudapada offer? Much more will be said about this below but, at this point (K1.9), he simply says that what appears to be the creation is simply His very nature. The consensus seems to be that Gaudapada is saying here that, as far as the phenomenal (*vyavahAra*) is concerned, we can say that *mAyA* is the ‘cause’ of creation. (In fact, he refutes every view of creation later and some commentators think that this view here is simply another one of the many theories he is listing and rejecting. To avoid any danger of being misled, this is probably the safest policy!)

In respect of the view that creation is His nature, Swami Chinmayananda has a metaphor; this time it is the ocean with its waves. He says that we cannot say that the waves are ‘created’ by the ocean but rather that it is simply the *nature* of the ocean to have waves on its surface. They are restless and in a continual state of flux while, deep down, the vast body of the ocean is totally unaffected by them.

More will be said about *mAyA* later. It is often spoken of as though it were a positive force wielded by God to delude us into believing in something that is not there. But that is not a fair explanation, implying either entertainment or deception. Gaudapada does not actually use this word here anyway but simply says that creation is *svabhAva* – His natural disposition, in the same way that heat is the nature of fire.

But this does, on the face of it, entail a similar problem to that above regarding suffering; it will mean that God too owns all of this suffering. It is difficult for us to conceive that He could be ‘all-bliss’ while simultaneously having all the suffering of the world.

The explanation is that the world is *mithyA*. Just as we (our waking selves) are unaffected by any suffering that might take place in our dreams, so the non-dual reality is unaffected by apparent suffering in the world. The dream is *pratibhAsa*; the gross universe is *vyavahAra*; the reality is *paramArtha*. A metaphor encountered in the scriptures is that of a person in the bright sunlight casting a shadow. The shadow

might 'collide' with a wall or 'fall into' water but the person casting it (as well as the shadow itself) is totally unaffected by it.

Creation according to scripture

Having briefly looked at the sort of theories that are usually considered in respect of the creation of the universe, Gaudapada now begins his demolishing process by seeing what the scriptures say. His own methods are primarily to use reason and logic so that there can be no argument. Traditionally, however, especially with respect to aspects that are outside of our own direct experience, teachers refer to what is said in the scripture. This source is believed to contain answers to those questions which cannot be answered by recourse to perception and inference. The scriptures contain truths which were 'revealed' to ancient sages and have been passed down from teacher to disciple ever since.

Such an approach is anathema to many people, especially any that have come across so-called fundamentalists, who believe literally in what is said in the Bible, for example, irrespective of how ridiculous it might seem to modern science. But the attitude taken here is quite different. Gaudapada actually states (K3.23) that we should only accept anything that is stated there if it is also supported by reason. The intended meaning of the word 'faith' is that we put our trust in something (that we have good reason to trust) *provisionally*, until such time as we can verify it ourselves.

Shankara also makes the point (in his commentary on K3.15) that scriptural statements such as these are not intended to be taken literally; they are figurative only. And he cites the example of the supposed discussion amongst the 'senses' as to which was the most important. [Prajapati (their father) suggests that each sense should depart the body in turn so that they can find out. The loss of speech, sight, hearing and mind each had the effect of the body's registering their respective absence but carrying on without them. But as soon as *prANa* (the breath) prepared to leave, all the others realized that they could not survive without it and acknowledged that *prANa* was the most important.] Shankara says that the story is obviously only

intended to be taken figuratively; we should not imagine that the texts intend us to believe that the senses converse or have a father! The texts on the creation of the world should be regarded similarly.

The other example that Shankara uses is that of 'cooking food'. The point is that whatever is being prepared may not be edible initially, e.g. rice grains. So, when we say 'I am cooking food', it is a figurative expression, being cognizant of the fact that, by the end of cooking, it will be edible. Thus, for example, when the scriptures speak of the 'difference' between the *jIva* and *brahman*, it is figurative only – this position is not different from what we believe already. It is done in the knowledge that the later teaching will show their identity.

Nevertheless, Gaudapada maintains that the 'bottom line' teaching of the scriptures is that there has never been any creation. Accordingly, before attacking the notions of creation using logic, Gaudapada wants to show that the scriptures themselves also support what he is about to say.

He begins (K3.23) by pointing out that, on the face of it, there seem to be statements in the scriptures for both sides, namely some that state there is a real creation and some which say that it is only apparent. Most of the Upanishads seem to have something to say, often going into elaborate details as to sequence and mechanism. Consequently, we have the situation where the Dvaitins (dualists) claim that creation is real, whereas the Advaitins say that it is apparent only, like the worlds we create in our dreams. Of course, we (Advaitins) may acknowledge that some scriptures do seem to say that creation is real but we can argue that it is part of the *adhyAropa-apavAda* teaching device.

Irrespective of this, however, the main point is that scriptural statements cannot be taken out of context. The whole section in which a statement occurs must be read before drawing any conclusion. Shankara gives the example of the 'sheath' model used in the Taittiriya Upanishad. Here a statement is made that the sheath made of the vital force, *prANamayakosha*, is the *Atman*. This, of course, is nonsense. But the next verse says that, well actually, *Atman* is not this sheath but the mental sheath, *manomayakosha*. No it isn't! And so on. The entire section has to be read together to get the whole story.

Then Gaudapada makes the point, mentioned above, that we should never accept what is unreasonable; we always have to analyze the whole and apply reason. When a scriptural text makes a statement regarding the creation of elements, people etc., but later makes another statement to the effect that there is really no creation, then we have to conclude that the ‘creation’ to which it referred initially is only an apparent one. An apparent creation is equivalent to no creation at all. There is no denying that we see a seemingly separate world but it is a *mithyA* world, being only name and form of *brahman*.

Gaudapada gives four examples of statements from the Upanishads to the effect that there is no creation (despite those Upanishads having previously said otherwise).

In K3.24, he refers to Katha Upanishad 2.1.11 – “*there is no diversity here (in the creation)*” and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.5.19 – “*the supreme being is perceived as manifold on account of mAyA*”. And he refers to the Taittiriya Aranyaka 3.13.1 (the part also known as Purusha suktam) – “*unborn, he (brahman) appears in many ways (by the power of mAyA)*”. (This is part of the Yajurveda – the four extant Vedas are massive texts which contain all of the ritual and mystical aspects as well as the philosophical Upanishads. The Aranyakas are called the ‘Wilderness Books’ in English, the name being given because, according to Wikipedia, they contain dangerous rituals which had to be performed in the wilderness! The word *AraNyaka* means ‘forest’.)

Gaudapada is effectively pointing out here that, because the Upanishad has made it clear that turlya is changeless, has nothing to do with the world and is itself unborn, it therefore cannot really produce anything. Therefore, the world must be an appearance only, as in a magic show. Consequently, it follows that there can be no real creation at all. Thus, his theory of *ajAti vAda* (the doctrine that nothing whatever has been ‘born’) follows from these scriptural extracts as well as from the logical reasoning which he is about to give.

In K3.25, he references quotations from two more Upanishads. The Isha Upanishad (12th mantra) says that “*They who worship the Unmanifested enter into blinding darkness, but those who are devoted*

to the Manifested enter into greater darkness.”⁴ The detailed analysis of this mantra is not relevant here. The point is that the word ‘Manifested’ refers to *hiraNyagarbha*, which is the first stage in the model of creation being referred to. This *kArikA* says that by effectively negating *hiraNyagarbha*, the quoted reference is thereby negating the whole of creation. The word used for *hiraNyagarbha* is *saMbhUti*, which means ‘the most powerful’. Anandagiri gives the analogy of the best wrestler being defeated by a challenger. As a result of this, the challenger automatically becomes the best himself; there is no need to fight anyone else.

The other reference is to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (3.9.28.7) which asks about the cause for the (re)birth of man: “*Who should again bring him forth?*” Gaudapada says that this is denying that there can be any real cause for creation. Shankara again refers to the rope-snake metaphor, saying that the snake has not been created by anyone; it simply arises out of ignorance and disappears as soon as this is dispelled. Similarly, there is no cause or origin for the person (the ‘embodied Self’ or *jIva*). And he points to another scriptural reference which states effectively the same thing: *This intelligent Self is neither born nor does It die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from It. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying, and ancient. It is not injured even when the body is killed.* Katha Upanishad 1.2.18.⁵

The next *kArikA* (K3.26) points to the well-known phrase in Advaita ‘*neti, neti*’, meaning ‘not this, not this’ (strictly ‘*neti*’ means ‘not this way’, ‘not in this manner’, or ‘not thus.’). This also comes from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and is used to negate all of those things that we might think ourselves to be.

At the beginning of the related section of the Brihadaranyaka (2.3.1),⁶ it is stated that “*brahman has only two forms – gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, perceptible*

⁴ Gambhirananda, Swami, (trans.) *Eight Upanishads with Commentary of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, 1958.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Madhavananda, Swami, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad with Commentary of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, 1965.

and imperceptible.”Simplistically, therefore, when the Upanishad repeatedly utters the pronouncement ‘*neti, neti*’ in later mantras, the first ‘*neti*’ negates the gross aspects of the universe, i.e. tangible, material aspects (*mUrta prapa-ncha*), such as the physical body. The second ‘*neti*’ negates subtle aspects (*amUrta prapa-ncha*), such as the mind and intellect. (‘*mUrta*’ refers to ‘shape’ or ‘form.’) Whatever we can experience, see or think cannot be who-we-really-are, since there is always a subject witnessing these things. I am the consciousness-witness which remains when there is nothing to experience, as was seen when discussing the deep-sleep state in the analysis of the Upanishad above.

Recognizing what we are not, in this way, we realize what we are. When the delusion of the snake is removed, the truth of the rope is known (as long as we do not then think it is a crack in the ground!) Once all Self-ignorance is removed, Self-knowledge is revealed.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.26 says: “*The Self is that which has been described as ‘Not this, not this’, It is imperceptible, for it is never perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached; unfettered, for it never suffers and it does not perish.*”

Shankara explains that this mantra thus negates all duality, which is only superimposed on the *Atman* as a result of ignorance. Anything that we can grasp mentally has a ‘birth’ and can be negated. Mantra 7 of the Upanishad says that *turIya* is *agrAhya* – not ‘graspable’; it has no attributes or characteristics at all. He says that the earlier descriptions of a dualistic creation were only the means (*upAya*) to lead to realization of the true nature of reality, which is the end (*upeya*). Ignorant people unfortunately tend to take the means as the end itself.

Ironically, and apparently ridiculously, it is possible to make the statement that: “*after rejecting all the mUrta and amUrta forms of the Atman (i.e. all the ‘obvious’ things, like ‘I am the body’ and ‘I am the mind’), and negating all the superimposed duality, what remains is the Atman.*”⁷ Anandagiri makes this statement as his comment

⁷ Dave, J.H., *Thirteen Principal Upanishads, Vol.II. Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada Karikas*. Bharitya Vidya Bhavan, 1990.

on K3.26. It is remarkable how similar this is to the statement by Conan-Doyle's Sherlock Holmes that I have been quoting in all my books: "*when all has been investigated and rejected, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*" Anandagiri goes even further: "*all that falls into the class of comprehensible (dRRishya) is established as unreal,*" i.e. whatever you can understand is false; what is real will always be beyond comprehension!

But, lest you should give up at this point, the import of this must be realized. You should never confuse means with ends. And it is not that, for example, you should make the mistake of the neo-Vedantins and think that the *nirvikalpa samAdhi* that it is possible to attain after many years of practice in meditation is what is meant by enlightenment. You should not think either that what is said by the Upanishads is the absolute truth. Words exist only in the empirical realm; the absolute truth is forever ineffable. This teaching is provided to lead you and point you in the right direction. The final leap is up to you.

To quote the penultimate paragraph from Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus Logico Philosophicus': "*My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.)*" And, in case you should think that Wittgenstein is being extraordinarily insightful and original, here is what Gaudapada said over a thousand years earlier (K4.60): "*That which is indescribable by words cannot be discriminated as true or false.*"

The means to the end does not itself have to be real. The 'dream tiger' metaphor was mentioned a few pages ago. The tiger may not be real but nevertheless serves to wake you up!

(K3.15) Gaudapada effectively summarizes all this in an earlier verse(!). He acknowledges that there are various descriptions of creation in the scriptures. He refers to 'earth, iron and sparks', which abbreviated terms acknowledge the fact that there are differing descriptions in various Upanishads. (The earth and iron examples are

from the Chhandogya Upanishad 6.1.4 – 6.1.6 and the sparks from the Brihadaranyaka 2.1.20.) Shankara says this is a device to make the intellect realize that *jIvAtman* is identical with *brahman*. First of all, the scriptures tell us that the world and *jIva*-s have been created. This naturally begs the question of who created them and prompts us to say that *brahman* is the cause. Further analysis, however, shows us that there is no world or *jIva* separate from *brahman* and we are forced to conclude that they are not an ‘effect’ of *brahman* at all. The reality has to be beyond both cause and effect – and non-dual. There is no ‘multiplicity’.

Shankara even suggests that the fact that there are many different versions of the creation is evidence that they are only a provisional explanation, to be taken back later as our understanding grows. He says that there would have been one single, consistent, version in all the different sources if creation had been true and the world a reality. It is not possible to imagine any other useful purpose for them otherwise.

(K3.16) Gaudapada goes on to say that the scriptures, out of compassion for seekers’ differing levels of attainment, enjoin them to meditate on such ideas as part of their mental preparation. Students need to be ‘high grade’ before they are able to take on board the concept of non-duality as a credible reality. He segregates those who are not yet ready into low and medium grades and implies that both need to begin with an effective belief in duality and follow the sorts of practices stated in the earlier portion of the Vedas – the *karmakANDa*. Eventually, they will graduate to readiness for the true teaching.

The low grade students worship a personal god (who is regarded as a ‘product’ of *brahman*); medium grade worship *nirguNa brahman* as the cause itself; but high grade students know that they themselves *are brahman*. ▲

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Two

Kabir Rebels Against Circumcision

NABAJI SIDDHA

Nabhaji cried in joy, “O immortal souls, who have conquered the lord of death! Listen further avidly.”

While their days were spent happily, Kabir’s parents planned to perform circumcision on Kabir as was their custom. After making the necessary preparation for the ceremony, they informed the *kazi*, their priest. Kabir asked him, “What a strange custom is this?” The priest said, “This is a tradition meant for our purification.”

“Is this practice applicable to women also?”

The kazi replied in an amused tone, “This is only for men.”

“O kazi, then what about purification for women?”

“They are purified by initiation”, said the exasperated priest.

“Why can’t men also attain purity by initiation?” pursued Kabir.

“O Kabir, bestowal of Grace and circumcision are for men. God has ordained it so. Don’t be obstinate,” said the kazi sternly.

Kabir argued further, “If you say, it is a purificatory rite willed by God, I disagree with you. In the very first instance, God would

not have created impurity, then where is the question of purification ordained by Him? If there is impurity, then it is not created by God. Impurities are man-made and so also are purificatory rites.”

The kazi said emphatically, “This command was given to us by our ancient Father Ibrahim. You were not even born then. How can you talk with such certainty? However, Ibrahim passed this ritual down his bloodline. Since we are born in his lineage, we follow this practice to get rid of our impurities.”

Kabir exclaimed, “O! O! it is like a blind person leading another blind, finally both ending up in a deep pit. One sheep falls into a well and the rest of the herd throw themselves into it! You lead people astray by imposing rituals, which are not logical. Similarly you talk tall about monotheism or non-dualism without direct experience and guide the ignorant, pushing them further into the morass of obtuseness. Blind practices do not steer people towards enlightenment. I am not going to follow this custom. If you can, then teach me the way to salvation.”

The kazi was impressed with Kabir’s intelligence. However, he said, “The bigoted king imposed it on our ancestor because of his prejudice against him, not for any misdemeanour. You are young and immature. What can you understand of the exalted path of Knowledge? What will you gain even if I talk about it, while you refuse to accept even this basic practice?”

Kabir rejoined, “By learning about the ultimate Knowledge, one can be rid of the vanities and afflictions of this earthly life of birth, death, disease, sense pleasures, ego, attachment, fear of failure, fear of death, etc. and immerse oneself in blissful waves of direct experience of the nameless, formless, self-effulgent Brahman.”

The kazi was beside himself with wonder, “Ah! Ah! This boy is a repository of knowledge. He is so precocious. He will not go through this ceremony, I am sure, however much we try to talk him into it.” Now turning to Tamal, he said, “There is no point in my hanging around here. Since you are his father, it is your duty to convince him. You can send word to me afterwards.” After the kazi left, people

assembled there also dispersed. They were equally astonished at Kabir's astuteness and intrepid behaviour.

His parents spoke to him with great concern, "O my son incomparable! You are a guileless child! It does not behove you to contradict our elders or run down our own religion. Is it right to defy one's own tradition?"

Kabir said firmly, "O my beloved parents! I swear I cannot conform to a practice that has no relevance to higher life."

Tamal jumped in fury at this reply and shouted at Kabir, "You rascal! Let me put an end to your life right now. You have no regard for the words of elders, friends and relatives."

Frightened by his father's rage, Kabir bolted from that place. But the maternal love of Jijabibi endured, she searched for him hither and thither and seeking him out of his hiding place, advised him to pay heed to elders. On seeing Kabir's stubbornness, she too was overcome by anger and said, "You talk so smart as if you have reached the shores of learning. Then, apply your scholarship to life and start earning your livelihood. Till then, I am not going to serve you any food at home. Pick up that bundle of silk yarn, work on the loom and weave a cloth out of it."

Nabhaji continued, "O my friends! Mighty seers! The appearance of glorious Ibrahim on this world stage took place to uplift humanity. This evil world being ignorant of his greatness, subjected him to its ways of rites and rituals. He also humbled himself, undergoing certain rites only to uphold the truth; otherwise, he was capable of reducing even the mighty kings in a trice to ashes. When noble souls undergo some trials, we can only attribute it to destiny." ▲



EXPERIENCE OF BHAGAVAN
At the Age of Six

MAHARISHI realized the
dharma, still at school. He took
reached the goal.
described how this happened.
years before I left Madras for
change in my life. took place.
I was sitting alone in a room
my uncle's house. I was
and on that day there was
my health. But it was
th overtook me. I was
of health. It was
account for it. I
reason the
and began
not occur to
of friends. I
self, there and
fear of death

TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

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

To proclaim amidst tears and sobs the holy scriptures, which are the means expressly designed to make us still; to perform religious rituals; to sit in meditation with the body stretched and contorted in postures designed by the mind – all these things are a comedy show designed for the entertainment of *jnanis*.
(131)

Who has attained liberation by studying and learning the holy texts, which themselves are insufficient to contain all the religious systems with their commentaries and interpretations? To do so is like going to the lengths of covering the sky with a

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>.

canopy and the earth with leather when setting out on a journey, instead of simply wearing sandals and taking an umbrella. (132)

The words ‘holy texts, which themselves are insufficient to contain all the religious systems with their commentaries and interpretations’ translate the Tamil, *camaya vatham manam pothata cattiram*. The word *camayam* means religion, and *cattiram*, Sanskrit *shastra* means, in this context, *sacred book* or *composition of divine authority*. Each religion, be it Buddhist, Jaina, Saivite or whatever, has its own set of these sacred books, which contain *vatham*, Sanskrit *vada – thesis, proposition, argument, doctrine*. These in turn become the subject of commentaries and discussions as to their true meaning by learned scholars and holy men, often over many centuries. These exegeses are known as *yutti*, Sanskrit *yukti – reasoning, argument, proof, inference, induction*. Here the word *manam – mind* is used to signify the latter, a case of metonymy, (*akupeyar* in Tamil), figurative use of a word, with the source of the reasoning (the mind) being used for the reasoning itself.

The task of someone who tries to fathom all the arguments of all the different religions in the hope that such a process will finally lead him to liberation is as hopeless as that of someone who, instead of carrying an umbrella on his journey, tries to mask the entire sky with a canopy, and instead of wearing sandals, tries to cover his entire path with leather. The wise disciple adheres strictly to his guru’s teaching, using it in the same way that the traveller employs sandals to protect himself from thorns and stones, and an umbrella to shield himself from the heat of the sun.

The supreme reality is not known [objectively], since, when you become pure consciousness, and then become the One that makes this consciousness known, both of these come to an end. Wicked wretches! How then can you hope to experience that reality through the false understanding in which you grasp it for a while with the ego-consciousness, then let it go again? (133)

When the disciple comes to realise that his nature is pure consciousness, the realisation arises within him that he is also the source of that consciousness, that the two are not different. At this point the house of cards which is the triad of *knower, known and knowledge* collapses, discriminating knowledge ends and he remains as the non-dual Self. How then can the concept of the Self or Sivam remain? Therefore, if even those who have realised the Self are themselves quite incapable of experiencing that state as something separate from themselves, how ludicrous is it that those who have not known the Self should claim to be able to do so?

In the latter part of the verse, what is being referred to are the phenomena experienced sometimes as a result of prolonged spiritual practices, and sometimes spontaneously, in the form of visions of gods and saints, heightened visual, mental and emotional experiences and so on. Such experiences are never permanent, in spite of attempts to prolong them and regain them after they are lost. On these grounds alone they are therefore known not to be the experience of reality which is being sought.

Since the destruction of your ego-consciousness is His wish, you should consider its loss to be your own goal also. Know that *ajnana*, ignorance, consists in not knowing how to achieve this loss. False one, hear then the means of the destruction of your ego-consciousness! (134)

The 'He' in the first line is of course Sivam, the Self, the supreme reality. Although one cannot talk of the Self as possessing desire in a literal sense, it is a way of expressing the innate sense that it is in the nature of the Self to manifest itself in the individual consciousness, overcoming whatever barriers it finds in its way, transcending it and annihilating it. It is this innate sense that inspires the spiritual quest in the first place. The problem for the individual is that, having sensed that the loss of the ego-consciousness is the desired end, he is at a loss as to how to achieve his goal, since the only tool at his disposal is the very ego-consciousness he is trying to destroy.

MOUNTAIN PATH

When a stick of firewood is burnt up completely there is no more smoke or flame, and when a disease is cured, the medicine that was taken to cure it disappears with it. Similarly your ever-ramifying actions are at the level of the mind [and will end when the mind ends]. Why then do you attempt to unite [with the Self by means of those actions]? Simply remain as pure subject, without a second, just as a smaller shadow is subsumed in a greater one. (135)

In the first comparison the log of wood is compared to the actions of the individual, and the smoke and fire to the mental faculties and ego-consciousness of the individual. When actions cease there will be no more mental activity and ego, just as when the log is consumed there will be no more smoke and fire. In the second comparison, the disease is compared to the ego, and the actions of the individual to the medicine. When the ego subsides into the Self there will be no further actions, just as when a disease is cured there will be no further need for the medicine that cured it. In Siddhanta actions with their fruits are the consequence of succumbing to the illusion of the ego, and they are also ultimately a means for the removal of that illusion.

Translated literally, the last sentence means, 'Remain (*nil*) with that which is opposite (*ethir*) having gone (*poj*), as a shadow is hidden.' In other words, remain without the duality of *knower and thing known*, which is the habitual mode of the mind. Since the mind arises out of the Self, and is fundamentally no different from it, all it needs to do to realise its unity with that Self is to cease its discriminating activity, at which point it will be no different from the Self, so long as it does not resume its discriminating activity, just as a smaller shadow is subsumed in a larger one until such time as it moves beyond the boundary of the greater shadow.

You are the consciousness that perceives, and I, the Real, am the consciousness through which you perceive. Once you begin to investigate these, they will begin to loosen their hold. When they finally fall away, you should feel a degree of shame and

not attempt to look back at me, thinking 'I'. Rather should you remain still, like a pot sunk in the ocean. (136)

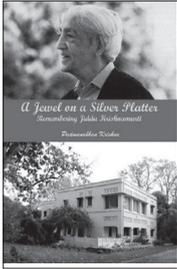
In the state of ignorance the ego, though possessing no reality of its own, attempts to usurp all the powers of the Self, ascribing them to itself, saying, *I did this, I did that*, and so on. When the individual *jiva* begins finally to gain some insight into its own nature, it is revealed as an imposter and disappears. It is often therefore described figuratively as 'feeling shame' and 'hanging its head' when its duplicitous game is revealed. See v. 30 of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Ulladu Narpadu*, for example:

As the mind, seeking inwardly through the enquiry 'Who am I', reaches the Heart, and as the one known as 'I' bows its head in shame, the One appears spontaneously as 'I – I'.

When the disciple begins to sense the illusory nature of the ego and the world view it generates, and these begin to fade in the light of the Self, the remnant of the ego-self feels a natural temptation to move its attention to the Self instead, attempting, as it were, to bring it into focus, as though it were a mental creation like itself, and to grasp it as formerly it had grasped the false. In this verse the ego is being advised to know its place, show some humility and allow itself to be subsumed in the Self, *amizttu karakam pol* – *like a pot sunk in the ocean*. A pot on the bottom of the ocean no longer has any function; it can no longer be used to hold, dispense, or divide up water or any other liquid. Similarly the mind, when subsumed in the Self, can no longer function other than as the Self. The *jnani* is like the pot in the ocean; his body and mind, if they can still be called that, function as the Self only, and have no reality or function apart from the Self. ▲

(To be continued)

BOOK REVIEWS



A JEWEL ON A SILVER PLATTER:
REMEMBERING JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI
by Padmanabhan Krishna. Pilgrims Publishing.
Rs590. 416pp. ISBN: 9789350760567. www.pilgrimsonlineshop.com

The author of this riveting book had the good fortune to be chosen by the great teacher J. Krishnamurti (K) a few months before he departed, to head, guide and nourish his Rajghat Education Centre, Varanasi, an institution on a sprawling 350 acre campus where even senior people had not had great success in shaping it as K would have wished. In K's own words, Krishna was one of the very few people in whom he had complete trust for among other sterling qualities of head and heart, "He said what he meant and meant what he said." Time had proved how prescient K was in his choice. Krishna has proved himself to be not only a highly successful educator *à la* K but also as one who lived by the words of a Master who was indeed a Guru non-Guru (or was it the other way?) and as one who ably transmits the great teaching by the way he lives and by his undistorted, unpretentious, straightforward and crystal-clear exposition in spoken and written words.

The gifted scientist that he is, Professor Krishna has done an admirably meticulous planning of the book which demands attentive reading and is also a page turner. In the inaugural chapters of the book which is written in a simple, lucid, jargon-free manner he deals with K as he knew him and with how he was persuaded to accept a situation which seemed a Goliath, albeit benign, to his David without his sling. These chapters show Krishna and his wife Meenakshi breaking down. As Kahlil Gibran wrote in his diary Krishnaji was indeed 'the Lord of Love'. From the transcript of K's dialogue with three scientists, Professor David Bohm, who had worked with Einstein, Asit Chandmal, Computer Scientist and Professor Krishna, the author

of the book under review, we realise how a sage, who knows himself, is a super scientist. With uncanny clarity, K can show how thought is ego, is time, is sorrow. Elsewhere he showed how the ending of sorrow is the beginning of wisdom which is love. One wishes the author had included a section on K's dialogues with students for one always felt that there are few things in life as beautiful as K's discussions with students.

Then follow what look like verbatim reports of his interviews with four people who were close to K, for periods ranging from 15 to 60 years. Krishna comes out as an expert in framing questions and has drawn the best out of the interviewees, namely, Achyut Patwardhan, the Gandhian socialist and Quit India hero; Radha Burnier, the Theosophist who later became the international President of the Theosophical Society (TS) and for whom K had very great affection; Vimala Thakar, who politely declined K's offer to try and cure a chronic ailment but later accepted it after being chided by the great Gandhian and Sarvodaya prophet Vinobaji who wondered how she could not recognise a Christ-like personage, and finally Mark Lee, the Founding Director of K's Oak Grove School, Ojai, whose love and loyalty to K were only matched by K's love and affection for him.

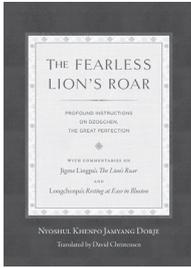
Though more light seems to be thrown on K the man — the healer of body and mind, one who was utterly selfless, one who had extrasensory perception, one whose body and mind had been prepared for an extraordinary teaching to flow through it to humanity, one who was a normal human despite his exceptional consciousness, one whose immaculate purity was not diminished by the Rosalind phase of his life, one who lived and departed fearlessly, etc.— than the teacher in these four *entretiens*, yet adequate light has been thrown on one or two crucial aspects of K's teaching at some point or other.

For instance, Achyutji has elucidated at length K's very original teaching on attention and has pointed out how K has not only taught more in this regard than any other Master in the past or present anywhere in the world but has also tirelessly highlighted its importance for more than fifty years in his talks and dialogues in various continents. Radha Burnier has authoritatively dispelled wrong notions in regard to K vis à vis the TS. He did not walk out

on the TS though he did show his back to half-baked Theosophists. It cannot be denied that K was a rare lotus which bloomed on the Theosophical stem. Vimala Thakar affirms the eminently practical quality of K's teaching and asks if it can transform her life, can it not those of others. Mark Lee can ask similarly too for K did have the Midas touch on him. The sections on K's jokes and anecdotes are very welcome inclusions. The sections on K and theosophy and K and Annie Besant show how K was ever true to the theosophical credo that there is no greater religion than Truth and how the relation between K and Mrs Besant was till the end one of boundless mutual love and how K had justified her unwavering faith in him as a World Teacher in the making though she did not live to see him blossom into one of the greatest teachers in history.

In the concluding dozen succinct chapters, the author deals with the salient features of K's teaching like the Pursuit of happiness; Global violence and individual responsibility; Is there a path to Truth?; Is ego real or illusory?; Relationship without conflict; Right action; Holistic living; Right education; and Is K's teaching practical or only great philosophy?. The most impressive aspect of these chapters is that Professor Krishna sees the teaching of which K himself said: "Sir there is no such thing as my teaching, you don't have to understand the teachings; you have to understand yourself," as one which is absolutely simple and within the reach of everybody – of 'the man in the street' as René Fouéré, the French writer and K's interpreter during his talks at Saanen wrote – especially every student in the classroom. Krishna examines the teaching not from the viewpoint of a philosopher, scholar or intellectual or even of the scientist that he is, but from that of one who has sound common sense, an open and receptive mind, a willingness to learn from everybody seeking the means to sane living and harmonious relationship. K wanted people to be simple without getting complicated and showed the majesty of humility, the grandeur of simplicity, the wisdom of innocence and the sacredness of goodness and wanted teachers and students to be lamps unto themselves. Professor Krishna comes across in this book as one ever alive to this exhortation.

— Susrushu



THE FEARLESS LION'S ROAR by Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje Snow Lion, an imprint of Shambhala Publications, Inc. Boston 2015, \$24.95. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781559394314 .

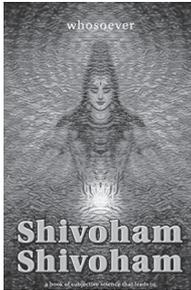
This Snow Lion imprint from Shambhala is their most recent contribution to their large collection of translations and commentaries of seminal Tibetan Buddhist texts; in this volume it is *The Fearless Lion's Roar* by Jigme Lingpa (1729-98) and *Resting at Ease in Illusion by Longchenpa Rabjam* (1308-63), both lineage masters in the Dzogchen teachings of the Nyingma (their sublime and highest teachings on non-duality). In addition, biographical material is provided about the two masters followed by an overview of the entire path. There is an aliveness and a relevancy and even intimacy about these teachings as they are based on the actual oral teachings given during the three year retreat at Thegchog Rinchen Ling in France in the 1980s to committed practitioners including the translator and editor of this volume, David Christensen by the renowned Dzogchen master Nyoshul Khenpo. Thus this work is very much a lived experience and I would imagine an ongoing process.

The complete title of the text is *The Lion's Roar that Vanquishes the Diversions and Errors of the Hermits Who Meditate upon the Heart Essence*, so what is under discussion here are the numerous misunderstandings of the practitioners as they proceed in their practice and gain some knowledge and experiences. But herein lies the most pervasive error: "(to) consider their mere intellectual understanding to be genuine meditation. And so, there are many who go astray by attaching conceptual labels (to experience)." (p.137) In contrast to all these common errors the author offers some very pointed descriptions of the right view; for instance on calm abiding meditation (*shamatha*): "The coarse and subtle thoughts are naturally pacified in and of themselves. The nature of mind, free of the waves of discursive thoughts, has an abiding aspect that is vividly clear and wakeful, self-illuminating self-awareness. Misunderstanding this, thinking

that calm abiding is a mindless vacant state, is an error.” Regarding insight meditation (*vipassana*) he says, “It is the recognition that both stillness and movements are the natural reflection of the essence of your awareness. It is clear and aware without grasping — that’s it! Otherwise if you do not understand this and investigate stillness and movement, it is an error.” (p.140)

And on ‘ordinary mind’: “It is said to be immediate awareness, which is untainted by either faults or good qualities, left as it naturally is. It is sustaining the continuous flow of awareness. Misunderstanding this, to identify it as your ordinary, autonomous, mundane thinking is an error.” (p.141)

The beauty and unique gift that is the Dzogchen tradition as exemplified by this book is the utter simplicity of the goal accompanied by the most precise and detailed knowledge of the entire process and all presented by the most kind and generous masters. We are most fortunate to have such texts and teachers. — P. Gong



SHIVOHAM SHIVOHAM by Whosoever. Osho Dhyana Leela Foundation. HB Rs495, 224pp. www. ISBN: 978-8192461274. oshomysteryschool.com

Whether we like it or not the teaching of Rajneesh or Osho is now firmly established in India and round the world. Purists may balk but the fact remains Osho has influenced a generation with his radical views that severely upset traditionalists. His organisation is spreading with whole new generation of the young, up and coming, well-educated Indians who see his message as a new light which make sense in an era that has seen the slow decline in influence of conservative culture and religion.

‘Whosoever’ was one of the earliest disciples of Rajneesh and has become a guru in his own right. *Shivoham Shivoham* contains twelve

talks given during a retreat in 2007. The retreat had regular periods of meditation and six guided meditations which are in the appendix to the book. The book is atypical in its presentation and layout with each paragraph separate and centred rather than left aligned. It is obviously the intent of the publisher to make the reader slow down and savour each paragraph. The book's intent is not to inform with new information or facts but to make the reader enter the spirit of the talks, much as JK did in his talks. The book tries to inspire the awareness that we are not separate individuals but indivisible from the whole.

The book derives its name from the poem by AdiSankara entitled *Atmashatkam*. The poem is a declaration by a *jnAni* who declares his identity with Lord Siva or *Brahman*. The reciter lists what he (or *Brahman*) is not. He is neither the body or the mind, nor is he that which is attached to the world, and this includes the intellect, the senses, the practices of life and the experience of birth and death. He then declares that he pervades the universe, and is pure consciousness and bliss. By implication, he is the *Atman* and *Brahman*.

We all have pondered over our existence which is why we read such magazines as the *Mountain Path* and follow the teaching of Ramana Maharshi. We all have asked with insistent urgency 'Who am I?' and 'Where have I come from?' We first look for 'facts' as if for example, one could find the essence of a person in a biography of so called physical details of where they were born, what they did and what they said. We cannot locate their core, and in the same way, it is useless to read spiritual books unless we see the invisible finger which points beyond the words. No amount of knowledge will 'get' us there.

This is the basis of this book. To lead us on a journey whereby our questions as to the mystery of life and our universe, are not answered in the usual fashion with solid explanations but rather 'Whosoever' shows us how we can see for ourselves. Whether he is successful is up to the reader to discover. It is not a book to read from beginning to end but one to dip into. It is different and may not appeal to all but for those who do respond, it will open new vistas, new insights as to why and how we may see truly. This is why Osho was born and 'Whosoever' follows in his steps. — Christopher Quilkey ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Obituaries

There were an unusual number of deaths of devotees in the past months. We honour the memory of the following:

Dr. Narayana Reddy, the veterinary doctor who treated Cow Lakshmi in 1946-48, merged with Arunachala on 13.12.2015 at Tanapalli near Tirupati, at the age 107. In 1946 while serving as Government Touring Veterinary Assistant Surgeon at Tiruvannamalai, Dr. Reddy made several visits to the Ashram and treated Cow Lakshmi and other cattle. He said Cow Lakshmi's digestive condition had been caused in part by devotees' indiscriminate, if well-intended, feeding of her with all sorts of delicacies. Dr. Reddy visited the Ashram whenever he was free in the mornings or evenings. After retiring in 1966, he continued to make regular visits to the Ashram and as a gifted orator, remained an active speaker. Dr. Reddy attributed his longevity to clean habits and a vegetarian diet.

Sri S.Guruswamy, president of the Ramana Kendra, Madurai left us on 19.12.2015. He first came in contact with Bhagavan in Delhi in 1964 when Prof. K. Swaminathan invited him to a *satsang*. He first visited the ashram in 1971 with his wife Seethalakshmi and daughter, Kala. In serving Muruganar he felt such happiness. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Delhi Ramana Kendra Building and was also responsible for the establishment of Ramana Kendra, Madurai in 1987. After retiring from the Meteorological Department at Delhi, he came to Madurai in 1990. From that day onwards till his passing, he served the Ramana Kendra Madurai with great devotion.



Dolly Kolah (born 1928) had been a busy executive in Poona when she first came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1967 in what was a case of love at first sight. She thereafter visited the Ashram each August. In 1973, she attended on Muruganar and was blessed to be at his side

as he was absorbed in Bhagavan. Bhagavan and Arunachala became Dolly Ma's life-long focus and in the 1980s she left her career and made Tiruvannamalai her permanent home. Her vibrant personality made her popular among devotees and all savoured the warm hospitality of tea invitations. She took special interest in the Ashram gardens and assisted in planting trees within the Ashram premises. In 2011, failing health forced Dolly Ma to return to her Mumbai home where, on 3rd January this year, she peacefully passed away. Although physically Dolly Ma was in Mumbai when she breathed her last, her spirit remains with Arunachala and Bhagavan. She will be remembered with great affection by devotees.



Sri La Su Rengarajan, aged 85 years, well-known Gandhian scholar and Bhagavan devotee, passed away at Chennai on January 18, 2016 after battling bone cancer for several months. He leaves behind his wife Smt. Lalitha Rengarajan who attended on him with immense care.

La Su Ra, as Rengarajan was known as a writer in Tamil and English. He started his career as an Assistant Editor at *The Indian Express*, Chennai. In 1955. He then moved to New Delhi and worked as Officer on Special Duty at the Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works at the I & B Ministry, of which his mentor, Prof. K. Swaminathan, was the Chief Editor. He retired as a Joint Director and returned to Chennai and wrote on Mahatma Gandhi and also translated in Tamil some books on Bhagavan. In 1994, he helped the former President Sri T.N. Venkataraman, who was known as Swami Ramanananda after he took *sannyasa*, in writing his autobiography in Tamil. La Su Ra did a Tamil translation of Professor Swaminathan's book *Ramana Maharshi* for the National Book Trust; two of Arthur Osborne's books; and T.M.P. Mahadevan's *Bhagavan Ramana*. In Chennai he edited the Gandhian monthly *Bharata Mani* and the literary monthly *Kanaiyazhi*. He was the general editor of the five volume *Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* in Tamil. He was known and admired for his

amiability, simplicity, hard work and, of course, his lifelong devotion to Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagavan.

Smt. Savitri Sabhahit was born in Gokarna, Karnataka in December 1937 and first visited Sri Ramanasramam on Deepam Day in 1981. She served as a teacher in the Education Department in the Gokarna/Kumta area. In 1995, she took retirement and came with her husband to Tiruvannamalai where she served in the Ashram library. In late 2015, she became bedridden. At 7pm Saturday evening, the 6th of February, she uttered her last words, “Ramana, Ramana” and in the presence of her caring family, peacefully merged into the heart of Arunachala. She is deeply missed by her husband, son, daughters and devotees who esteemed her gentle, self-effacing and loving nature.

Born in Tiruvannamalai in 1974 **Sri Manikantan** was very close to Arunachala from his earliest years. From childhood, his father made a point of carrying him along to temple festivals and on giripradakshina. An inborn faith cultivated by a pious father served the child in good stead and the boy succeeded in every endeavour, including his early and higher studies. Eventually he became a professor of chemical engineering and was loved by students. At sunrise and sunset he could be found at the *abhishekams* in Arunachaleswarar Temple where he also served voluntarily. The swollen humps on Manikantan’s shoulders testified to his devotion as one of the bearers of the temple *utsava murtis* during Kartikai Deepam and other temple festivals. By virtue of his single-minded devotion and exemplary faith, this Devi Upasaka was blessed to be put in charge of Sri Ramanasramam’s *Alankarams* during the annual *Navaratri* festival, and on *Jayanti* and *Ardhana* days and served as priest at the Ashram’s *Sri Vidya Homam*.



On the 8th February, at the exact moment of the *Mahodaya Punya Mubhurtha*, utterly selfless Manikantan was absorbed into the Lord at 6.40 in the presence of the Arunachaleswara Temple Deities at Ayyankulam Tank. He will be sorely missed by family, friends and students alike. ▲