

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM | 2 |
| EDITORIAL Home | 3 |
| LIVING WITH THE MASTER Kunju Swami | 9 |
| ENLIGHTENMENT: REVELLING IN THE ETERNAL EXPERIENCE Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati | 25 |
| THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION Sadhu Om | 37 |
| KEYWORD: UPADESA John Grimes | 43 |
| POEM: THE NAMES OF LALITHA Ramesh Menon | 47 |
| ULLADU NARPADU ANUBANDHAM: VERSES 23 TO 27 S. Ram Mohan | 49 |
| POEM: QUARRELLING WITH THE LORD Neera Kashyap | 52 |
| THAYUMANAVAR V.S. Krishnan | 53 |
| THE SHINING OF MY LORD Muruganar | 65 |
| A PILGRIM'S LOG Ravi Iyer | 75 |
| DEMYSTIFYING THE TERM 'SPHURANA' Michael James | 89 |
| HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN Padma Venkataraman | 95 |
| BOOK EXCERPT: DAY AND NIGHT ON THE SUFI PATH Charles Upton | 101 |
| MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: THE LORD COMES TO KABIR Nabaji Siddha | 107 |
| OZHIVIL ODUKKAM Kannudaiya Vallalar | 113 |
| BOOK REVIEWS | 120 |
| ASHRAM BULLETIN | 126 |

Ramana Ashtottaram

107. ओं सेनान्ये नमः

om senānye namaḥ

Prostration to the Commander of the army.

Skanda is the Lord of the divine Hosts vanquishing the demons of evil tendencies, latent and patent; born of the ego. When the Self destroys the ego, the battle is won.

108. ओं पुरुषोत्तमाय नमः

om purushottamāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Supreme Person.

Bhagavan is the supreme person present as the sovereign awareness in all persons. He is thus the *purushottama* who as Awareness unites all persons in one common being. Awareness-Bliss, the great God Siva, the magnetic Mountain Arunachala, the pure awareness shining as 'I-I' in every human heart — all these are names and forms of one *Purusha*, the only *Purusha*, whose most glorious *vibhuti* and active manifestation in our age is Sri Ramana.

Home

We all are in exile. It is the condition of our lives. We are all seeking or waiting for that time when somewhere, somehow we can discover and rest secure in our own home, the place where we instinctively know we belong, whatever or wherever it may be. Although we may be unsure of its shape, size or location, every single one of us is aware at some deep atavistic level that home exists and we are searching for it.

Though we pretend we know what we want, it is rare that we do truly know. We indulge in babbles; we read books and think we understand; we distract ourselves with daydreams and wishful thinking. Our vision is clouded as we seek for what we think is home. We are full of concepts about enlightenment, bliss, glory, power and knowledge as if we are conversant with the potency of these ideas.

That trenchant observer Kabir sang:

If parroting the name of Rama brought salvation,
Then saying *sugarcane* should sweeten the mouth,
Saying *fire* burn the feet,
Saying *water* slake the thirst,
And saying *food* would be good as a belch.
If saying *money* made everyone rich,
There would be no beggars on the street.¹

¹ Kabir Trans. A.K. Malhotra, in *Eating God, A Book of Bhakti Poetry*, ed. Arundhati Subramaniam, Penguin, Ananda, 2014. p.66.

MOUNTAIN PATH

We all strive for that home where we may rest content, fulfilled, secure and loved. It rarely happens, perhaps because what we are convinced is the answer to our prayers is actually a vision cobbled together of all our various fantasies. Our true yearning is for home, but that longing becomes diffused and degraded until we know we want, but we are less sure of what it is that we want.

Life is defined by movement. Nothing stands still for long, even the food we love best if eaten continuously would become repulsive just as our sense of heavenly peace would turn unutterably dull. The wheel turns and it does so usually when we become complacent with our fate. Then we tend to be thrown off our hard won balance into turmoil by a new invasive and unavoidable element. It just takes a sharp word, rude manners or slothful ignorance by others to turn our heads inside out with indignation or uncontrollable anger. Life is prodding us to move on. So in this normal sense, home as we desire it is not a physical place, it is a state of mind. Who has not returned to a childhood home and not felt a stranger? All that made it home is the feeling of comfort and security and that now only exists as a memory.

Is home then a person or an emotion or a thriving ideal? If a person or perhaps a family, is it because it is familiar or is it somewhere special where we feel most at ease? Or possibly where we are intensely alive and fulfilled? If it is a person then does it matter where we physically are as long as the other person or persons are there in our hearts and minds? But people age and die. So that is not permanent.

Is Bhagavan a person? We would like to think so but tremble when we pull aside the veil that separates us from the fire of his eyes which see us all too clearly.

It is said that home is where our heart is. We expect home to be where everything is understandable and in its place. For many of us home is Arunachala and the ashram, for there is in that hill and collection of buildings a sense of belonging we cannot fully articulate. We feel that is where we should be. But unfortunately, more often than not, it is impossible for most of us to actually remain there due to family obligations, employment commitments, health considerations or even the fact that the very air we breathe is fighting us as though in summer

one were being melted in an oven. We envy those who have the good fortune to reside there. Many feel that being at Arunachala would be the ideal solution for their restlessness, for everything seems to stop in that sacred atmosphere and rest in a sense of harmony. Our worries, our fears, our desires, pale in significance in the presence of that power. We dream of being at Arunachala where everything will be perfect.

This is not so. Firstly, Tiruvannamalai is far from an idyllic place to live for reasons anyone who has stayed for any length of time will tell you. Second, once we have surrendered to that higher power in whatever form it may assume, we are where we are because that is the best place to learn. Once we have established that Arunachala is our *sthala*, our place, our home, it is our responsibility to keep it spotless. And by that, one means the heart and mind. We are no longer careless tourists.

When people came to Bhagavan either out of devotion or curiosity, they were treated with great courtesy. Once someone has decided that Bhagavan is their guru and is accepted on some mysterious level of existence invisible to others, then the obligation to behave correctly and meticulously follow instructions begins. Bhagavan may be a benign grandfather who cares for his family, but he is also a strict master who expects, no, demands the very best from a *sadhaka*. There are no excuses, no evasions. If we do our best, more cannot be expected and any weaknesses will be forgiven out of the bounty of his compassion. But try we must. Bhagavan knows us much better than we know ourselves and he also knows that we are capable of much more than we realise. If we were lost at sea and felt we could not swim another stroke so we must drown, Bhagavan would give us the courage and endurance to carry on until we reached land; we would however have to make the initial effort to reach the shore.²

² "If we perform *sadhana* to the limit of our abilities, the Lord will accomplish for us that which is beyond our capabilities. If we fail to do even that which is within our capabilities, there is not the slightest fault in the grace of the Lord". *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 8, verse 192 quoted in *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*; Trans. By T.V.Venkatasubramanian, R. Butler, and D.Godman. p.186.

Ananda Mayi Ma was asked why do we forget (*pramada*) what is good for us? Why do we forget our higher purpose, God and guru? In an expansive gesture with arms wide open *indicating this entire world that surrounds us* she exclaimed, “*This is the kingdom of forgetfulness, therefore you forget!*” She was emphasising the essential need for *sadhana* as the remedy for the human condition of forgetfulness.

We are faced with a world full of distractions that our mind is only too willing to indulge in if given the opportunity. After all, that is what the mind is composed of: a mass of thoughts and feelings with no fixed centre. Our task is to centre our thoughts into one continuous flow of pure thought (*aham vritti*). If we see our home as being exclusively Arunachala Ramana, well and good because we can easily focus our attention just by the remembrance of physically being there.

Memory is a powerful tool that can immediately make us watchful. The senses of smell and sound are particularly strong in this respect, the waft of *agarbathi* or jasmine all mixed up with the sounds of peacocks calling or the notes of the Vedic chanting or Tamil *parayana* take us there. That is why in part we publish so many photos of the ashram precincts in the magazine.

For in the mind there is no distance. In one leap we can transcend all barriers. We use the energy of memory to fuel one-pointedness. In sadness, in joy, in any strong emotional expression we have a potent instrument to bridge the gap between where we are and where we would like to be. Above all, is the heartache of longing for the Beloved.

The mind is like a smooth plate; its purpose is to contain things. Thoughts are like knives, forks and spoons. They are knobbly and generally unstable especially when you carry them on an empty, flat plate. It requires concentration to keep them from tumbling off. Have you ever noticed a skilled waiter who carries plates through a crowded restaurant? He is mindful and his progress through the room is like a ballet of consistent, premeditated motion. We should be like that waiter: aware of where we are going and at the same time fully mindful of what we carry.

Lalla the Kashmiri woman poet and mystic of the 14th Century, wrote in one of her *vakhs* (sayings):

Whatever my hands did was worship,
 Whatever my tongue shaped was prayer.
 This was Shiva's secret teaching:
 I wore it and it became my skin.³

Our enemy is forgetfulness. Everything we do should be done consciously, here, now. All our devotion, all our hours of silent meditation are for one purpose: to remember. It is of the utmost importance to gather our thoughts into one continuous stream of unbroken awareness. It is here Bhagavan's Grace is indispensable.

Arthur Osborne wrote in his autobiography:

"The specious theory that Bhagavan was not a Guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace. Moreover, I now perceived that, far from his teaching not being practical guidance, it was exclusively that. I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of sadhana, of the path to be followed. It was that and only that he was here to teach!"⁴

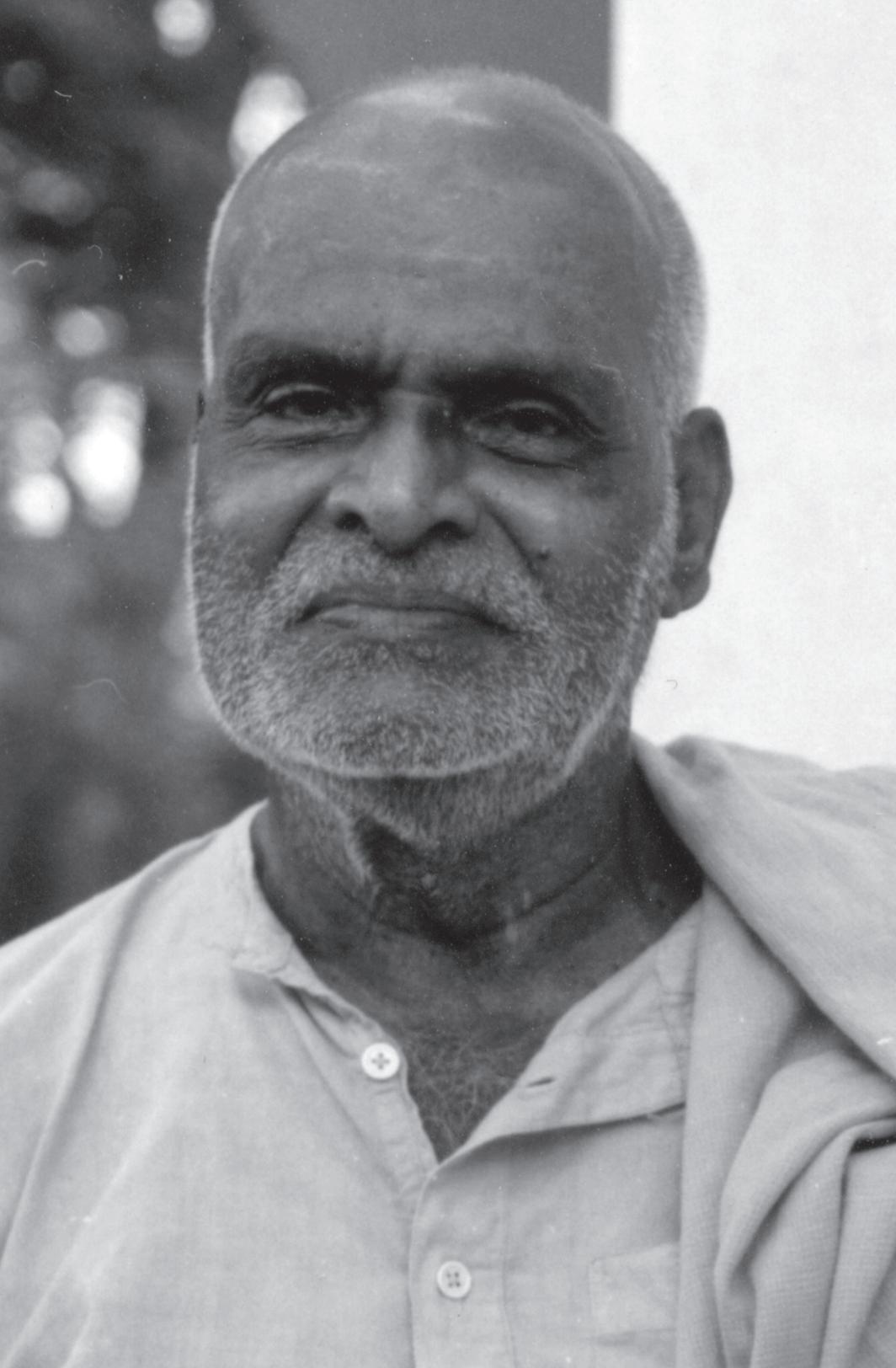
Our habitual indifference to anything but immediate gratification is the reason we are in exile. When death comes it will not be a pleasant experience if we are not ready. In very blunt words: we have a choice to either die unknowing like an animal, or in denial like someone who has gone through life and learnt nothing, or soar above on wings of discrimination and detachment, glad at last to be going home. The answer is obvious. May we too one day sing with Bhagavan:

Arunachala!
 What a wonder of your grace is this,
 That you entered the home of my mind,
 Dragged me from it by force,
 And imprisoned me permanently
 In the abode of your Heart,
 Without any possibility of escape.⁵ ▲

³ Lalla Yogini. Trans. Ranjit Hoskote in *Eating God, A Book of Bhakti Poetry*, p.175.

⁴ Osborne, Arthur, *My Life and Quest*, 2008. pp.91-2.

⁵ Verse 3. *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* a detailed commentary by Muhavai Kanna Muruganar. Translated by Robert Butler, 2015. p.8.



Living With The Master

Reminiscences

KUNJU SWAMI

TRANSLATED BY P. RAMASAMY

The ashram intends to publish in 2016 a new, more complete translation of Living With The Master, the popular reminiscences of Kunju Swami, a close devotee of Bhagavan. The first four chapters of the new translation are given below.

A blessed bee am I to hover, ever in close proximity of the lotus that is verily the twin feet of Lord Annamalai, and drink deep of the nectar therein. Twice blessed indeed, to partake of the ambrosial grace of my Bhagavan, Guru Ramana, who, ever abiding as the Atman-Self, also led others on the path of deliverance. It is my fortunate lot to have thus been twice blessed.

Endowed At Boyhood with God's Gracious Gifts

I am the third child to my parents, Raghavan and Ponnukutti, of a middle-class farming community, born in January 1897 in the village of Cherakodu that lies between Palakkad and Chittur towns in the Kerala region. Until my third year I grew up like any other child, showing nothing to mark me as being different from other children.

After that I would, it seems, sit quiet in some place, neither joining other children of my age in play nor crying or throwing those childish tantrums. This uncharacteristic behaviour of mine naturally puzzled my father who then showed my horoscope to my maternal uncle, an expert astrologer. My father wanted him to divine the planetary influences that would account for my odd behaviour.

On perusing my horoscope this uncle of mine was struck with wonder and delight! He said to my father, “To beget a child such as this one, so full of the wealth of divinity, is more than what our family of modest standing deserves! Therefore, in bringing up this child, you should show every care in matters of food and ceremonial cleanliness.” My father was much pleased to hear this pronouncement. He was well learned in Vedantic texts such as *Kaivalya Navaneetham*. On the one hand, he evinced a keen interest in philosophic texts of Vedanta and, on the other, held a deep faith in God.

I was sent to the thinnai-school of my village when I was nearing six where, to some extent, I managed to learn to read my vernacular Malayalam and to write it on palm leaves.¹ From my seventh year on, my father used to take me with him daily to bathe in the village pond. There, I would see Vedic Brahmins bathing in the adjacent *ghats* [the pond’s shoreline earmarked into exclusive bathing segments for the various social groups of the village], chanting mantras while standing waist deep in water. Their sight kindled in me a keen desire to do it like them.

The desire persisted and soon turned into an obsession when one night Lord Siva appeared in a dream. With matted tresses of hair, body smeared all over with sacred ash, and wearing a string of rudraksha beads,²

¹ Thinnai is the raised veranda, open to the street, forming the entry to traditional South Indian street-houses. In small villages children were sent to this single-class-single-teacher ‘school’, that functioned on the thinnai of one of the larger houses of the village. They would be taught the alphabets and basic arithmetic tables. During Kunju Swami’s childhood all that most children got was their ‘schooling’ at the thinnai-school, which would generally last just a year, or two at the most.

² A sacred seed that forms a part of Siva’s costume, literally meaning ‘Siva’s eye’. These roundish beads are strung and worn around the neck by devotees of Siva as a mark of their devotion to Him, and would also double as a rosary.

He pronounced the *panchakshari* (the five-syllabled *na-ma-si-va-ya* mantra) in my ears, three times in succession. On waking up, however, I was unable to recall the syllables, being too young to remember it. The whole of the next day I felt grieved, as though I lost a treasure that I had obtained. I went to bed that night overcome by disappointment and longing. The Lord again came that night in my dream and repeated the mantra! This time I listened with attention and, from then on, I took up ceaseless mental chanting of the *panchakshari* mantra.

While so, I began to feel a compulsive desire to possess a *vibhuti* pouch.³ In those times, only Brahmins and ascetic-sadhus used to carry this pouch. I was now in a dilemma – on the one hand not daring to ask any one for a *vibhuti*-pouch, and on the other, being unable to overcome my longing to possess one. Once again, the compassionate Lord Siva, as Gangadhara, came forward to quench the burning thirst of a tender child.

Again appearing in my dream, He informed me that there were a few coins lying underneath a particular huge tree, by the very shore of the pond where I bathed daily. The Lord advised me to pick them up and use them to buy the cloth-pouch. Telling no one, I rushed to the pond next morning immediately on waking and made a search under the tree. And what wonder! I did find three quarter-ana coins [an ana = one sixteenth of an Indian rupee of those times] lying amidst its twisted roots. Grabbing them with delight, I washed them clean of mud and took them home. To avoid being caught shopping by anyone I waited until dark, then visited a store and enquired the price of a *vibhuti* pouch. It came as a surprise when I was told that it would cost three-quarter anas! The exact amount I had unearthed from under the tree! I tendered the change, bought the pouch and kept it with devout care at home.

It was a divine miracle that the Lord God thus made me his vassal even at that tender age. He deigned to fulfil my wish yet did not provide more than what I required! No doubt it was a portent of

³ A thin pouch of cloth half filled with sacred ash, folded and kept always in their person by devout Saivites.

things to come – a monastic, frugal living all through my life. Since those distant childhood times to this day, Bhagavan continues to protect me from the desire to possess more than what is essential for my minimal needs. One day my father chanced to see my vibhutipouch and wanted to know how I came in possession of it. When I told him what had happened he was amazed. His affection and care towards me grew all the more for it.

A year went by when yet another desire sprang up in me. This time it was to have a string of rudraksha beads, an unusual wish that I dared to express to no one. This wish of mine too was fulfilled by the Lord Almighty thus: it was my daily habit at that time to go to bathe in the pond along with a playmate of mine. One particular day, while on our way to the pond, my friend exclaimed, “Oh! I forgot to do something which my father had asked me to!” So saying, he left me. As I continued my walk alone, I saw a large-sized lotus lying on my path. When I picked it up with curiosity, I was astounded. A rosary of *rudraksha* beads, strung in gold, lay aglitter in the hub of the unusually large flower, the largest one could have ever seen. Filled with tears of ecstasy, I looked around but could discover no one who could be a likely claimant to it.

With pious fervour, I brought it home and showed the rosary to my father telling him how I had chanced upon it. My parents and others were just awe struck. I began to wear the string of rudraksha always around my neck. Later on my brothers deposited it amidst other articles of worship in the family prayer room. My heart swells with piety whenever I recall Lord Siva’s boundless compassion, which had been a veritable *kalpaka* tree to me.⁴

I was around ten then. In the neighbouring village a mile away, some Tamil *pandits* [scholars of the scriptures and the literary canon] had arrived. They were reading out the celebrated Tamil religious epic *Thiruvilayadal Puranam* [a narrative of the sixty four divine sports of Lord Siva at Madurai, written by Sage Paranjyoti] and discoursing on it in the Malayalam language. My father, coming to know of it,

⁴ A legendary celestial wish fulfilling tree that grants every wish of those under it.



Bhagavan watches as Kunjuswami feeds the monkeys

took me with him to attend their discourses. I fervently listened to them. After returning home, my father said, "All right, recount to your mother now what you heard!" And I could relate the entire thing, free of errors too. My mother was happy and proud of her little son.

This recounting became a daily practice for the duration of those discourses. It also resulted in my father taking me to several other venues of such discourses. Hearing about the faculty of my accurate memory and verbatim retelling, people from nearby villages began inviting me to their place to listen to my narrations.

Some years went like this, when one Kodumudi Swami, a celebrated saint, came on a visit to the Kerala region. All that he wore was a loincloth. He belonged to the sectarian worshippers of Bhairava [Lord Siva in his fearsome aspect]. This Kodumudi Swami could perform feats of occult powers. Crowds of people thronged to have his *darshan* [sacred sighting of a deity or a saintly person]. My father too wanted to go and take me along to see this godman, but I did not go as I was not interested. I felt that when the Almighty Siva himself appeared to me as my Guru, giving me initiation by mantra, what need have I to visit godmen?

A few more years went by. I had turned sixteen at that time. Some three miles away an ascetic had come to stay and was teaching Vedanta to a few elderly persons. My father, who had happened to go there on some personal work, came to hear of it. He thought that it would not do for me to go on delivering discourses and chanting sacred mantras. He felt that, like siddhis [occult powers gained through yogic disciplinary practices], these exercises of mine too would not endure. What would stand me in good stead, he thought, would be to listen to explications of Vedanta, ponder over them, and then turn myself to unremitting meditation. But he was apprehensive that I would refuse to go to see this master, even as I was earlier unwilling to meet Kodumudi Swami.

So, he met this scholar-ascetic, briefed him about me, said that he shall somehow persuade me to meet him, and requested the Swami to prevail upon me to attend his Vedantic discourses. Without telling me what had transpired, he then asked me merely to accompany

him where he was proceeding on some business. Taking me to the Swami and after sitting with me for a while he left, saying, “You just wait here. I am going out now and shall return in a while.” I waited, unwillingly though. Some minutes elapsed when the Swami, turning towards me slowly, enquired about myself. He then tactfully sent away all the others sitting there. Addressing me now, he said, “To go on delivering discourses and earning others’ appreciation would be of no avail. Yogic *siddhis* might give you occult powers but they too are incapable of giving you *mukti* [spiritual liberation]. Instead, you would do well to listen to lessons on Vedanta, study them and master their essence. That alone would lead you to the experience of the Reality that is the atman. So, what do you intend to do?” he asked. I replied, “You decide on whatever you deem fit for me.” To this, the Swami said, “I will not thrust anything upon you. I shall teach you what you, on your own, desire to learn! I am well versed in the sacred epics, reading the future, supernatural art, medicine and Vedanta. Of these, I would impart to you what you choose to learn.”

When I still could not make up my mind the Swami decided to draw lots. Miraculously, ‘Vedanta’ fell to my lot! He was greatly pleased and said he would forthwith start his instructions, that day being an auspicious period. He then wrote out the following six verses from *Kaivalya Navaneetham* on a palm leaf and asked me to read them aloud. He listened and then asked me to return home, learn the verses by heart and come again next day at the same time:

Kaivalya Navaneetam

Prologue

2. I worship ever-shining Pure Consciousness, which manifests as Brahma, Vishnu, or Mighty Shiva, according as He creates, preserves or withdraws (the universe), and also as the countless individual beings; yet It remains ever-free and perfect, as the blazing sun over the ocean of Bliss.

6. All the ancient sages drew from the boundless ocean of milk, namely Vedanta and filled their pitchers, their works. I boiled them all (on the fire of the Master’s words), churned them (with the churn of enquiry into the self) and I present this Cream of Emancipation to all.

The Exposition of the Truth

8. The sages say that there are four prerequisites for realization of the Truth: (1) *Viveka*: discrimination between the temporary (therefore unreal phenomena) and the permanent (therefore the Reality, i.e., the noumenal); (2) indifference to the enjoyment of pleasures here or hereafter; (3) the group of six qualities and (4) the longing for Liberation. The six qualities are *sama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titiksha*, *samadhana* and *sraddha*. Of these, *sama* is control of mind; *dama* is control of the senses; *uparati* is cessation of activities (relating to caste, creed, family etc.); *titiksha* is control of passions, and includes endurance; *samadhana*, according to the sages, the settling down of the mind to reflect on the Truth, as revealed (by the scriptures and the sages); *sraddha* denotes faith in the Master and the scriptures. Such are the meanings of the six terms of this category.

11. No one can achieve anything in the world without being properly equipped for the task. For the same reason, only those who are equipped with these four categories of prerequisites can gain illumination. A novice cannot get it so readily. If so gained, it follows that the person has been successively purified in countless incarnations in the past. (*Kaivalya Navaneetam: The Cream of Emancipation. An Ancient Tamil Classic* by Tandavaraya Swami. Trans. Swami Ramananda Saraswati.)

I began memorizing the verses even during my walk back home. When my father asked me what had happened I reported everything to him and then recited those verses from memory. I could in this way learn a hundred verses by heart within a fortnight of attending “class.” My father then pointed out that memorizing the verses was not enough and advised me to learn their meaning too from my master. Thus I learnt the entire text of *Kaivalyam* along with its meaning.

A visitor came to see my Swami during that time. He was Rangaswami Goundar, known to all as Samiar Gounder, from the village of Pudupalayam in the Pollachi Taluk [an administrative sub-division of a district within a state]. Seeing me with my guru and coming to know from my father of my spiritual leanings, he took me, along with my guru, to his home in Pudupalayam, where we remained for a period as his guests. One day there, I asked my guru while he

was alone, “I am unable to experience yet the samadhi state that is described in *Yoga Vasishtam*. Should I just go on with my reading of texts on Vedanta, or is there something more that I should do?” The Swami replied that reading and understanding those texts was not enough, and that I would have to start practising certain disciplinary mental exercises. He instructed me how to practise those drills. Accordingly, I started practice of meditation exercises, simultaneous with listening to Vedanta lessons. Some time went by in this manner but I could still not get any spiritual experience. Again, I asked the Swami what I had to do. He advised me to continue with more intensity and by maintaining silence of speech. He assured me that I would certainly be rewarded with exalted states.

By now a few months had gone by since my stay at Pudupalayam. I decided to return home and continue my practice back there, so took leave of the Swami. Back home, observing silence, I practised rigorously but could make no progress. I continued in a state of limbo for a couple of years, losing my earlier poise, but not gaining any new ground. While so, my guru, after undertaking a tour of several places in Tamil Nadu, now returned. In his entourage came some wealthy, influential persons, and with them the Gounder of Pudupalayam too. The Swami now made a pronouncement that he shall enter into *jeevasamadhi* [entombment while alive] on a particular day of a particular month a year from hence. He added that these wealthy folk had come to erect, in advance, a cave-like tomb at the proposed samadhi site.

The building of a large tomb was afoot, at a site three miles from my village. The Swami, obtaining my father’s permission, took me to be with him. There he declared that I was his prime disciple and that after his *jeevasamadhi*, I would succeed as the head of his mutt [a religio-spiritual institution founded by a saint]. I was put off by all this ostentation and publicity mongering. My mind was restless. A few months passed and I could no longer stand it. In anguish, I blurted out to the Swami, “So much time has gone by but I am unable to experience Self-realisation. Are there no realised souls living today, like the Maharishis [great sages] of yore who had lived during the ancient times of the *Yoga Vaasishtam*?”

To my query, the Swami replied, “Oh yes! There lives a sage in Tiruvannamalai whose name is Ramana Maharshi. He attained the experience of *jnana* [ultimate spiritual knowledge] at the age of sixteen and abides ever in that state. I visited him and had his darshan.” I was amazed at this news, and felt as though struck by a surge of electric current. It was an exhilaration the likes of which I had never before felt. So excited was I, I wanted to fly to Tiruvannamalai at once.

Instantly I sought the Swami’s permission to proceed there, much to his annoyance. “I shall be entering *jeevasamadhi* six months from now. You ought to be present here to take care of things then. After that, you are at liberty to go where you please,” he admonished me. I was in a state of despair when a friend of mine from my neighbouring village came to see me. His name was Ramakrishna, a year or two older than me. He had a special affection and regard for me on account of my spiritual disciplines, which he too was after. He was of a wealthy family and arrangements by his elders were under way to conduct his wedding. But he was least inclined towards matrimony and one day he came to me to seek a way out of this imminent tangle.

I immediately told him, “I hear there is a sage in Tiruvannamalai known as Ramana Maharshi. I myself feel an intense longing to go to him but I am tied up for the next six months by my guru’s orders. Therefore, you set out forthwith for Tiruvannamalai. Later on I shall join you. As soon as you reach there write to me all about the sage and the spiritual teaching you receive from him.”

With these words I put him on the train myself. Two days later his relatives came to me looking for him and asked, “Where is he gone? Only you must have sent him away.” I replied, “I did not send him on my own. He asked me for directions and I told him. He has gone only to Tiruvannamalai.” A week later I received a letter from Ramakrishna, accompanied by a portrait of Bhagavan and a copy of Bhagavan’s *Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai*. Seeing Bhagavan’s portrait filled me with joy and peace.

The pre-determined day of my guru’s entombment was nearing. There was an increasing swell of people and uproar and excitement all

around. Beginning three days prior to the event predicted, the Swami partook of only a diet of milk. D-day came, and policemen had to be deployed to control the surging crowd of onlookers. Afternoon at three, the Swami marched down the samadhi-cave. At close proximity were myself, his foremost disciple, members of his family and others intimate with him. The Swami now said, “My head will keep shaking for a while. When its shaking stops, close the tomb with this huge stone slab.” We waited to carry out his instructions. Half-an-hour went by and then an hour. Still nothing happened. The Swami, who could no more bear to sit in, rose up, came out, took to his heels, and vanished into the mass of onlookers. Abusing him and calling him a fraud, the disappointed crowd dispersed.

Along with some others I went in search of him and discovered him under a tree in a nearby grove. He was rattled and visibly in distress. He said that it was not his intention to dupe the public. He had duped himself with the conviction that he would bury himself in *jeevasamadhi*. “Now the untoward has happened” he said ruefully. He said he was now proceeding on a visit to Samiar Gounder of Pudupalayam after which he would go on a pilgrimage to Palani, and return after the dust settled down. “You all go back to your respective homes. We shall meet later on,” he told us.

He advised me to continue with my listening to Vedanta teachings and practising meditation. He departed early the following morning. Thus ended the misadventure of the *jeevasamadhi* of Elapulli Kuppandi Swami. Though the Swami’s attempts at preplanned interment ended in a fiasco, it was from him that I came to know of Bhagavan Ramana’s spiritual stature. I am thus indebted to Kuppandi Swami for the opportunity of reaching out to Bhagavan and basking in spiritual bliss.

Miraculous Coincidences During My Trip to Tiruvannamalai

My parents were happy to have me back home. A couple of days passed but my thoughts were ever-fixed on reaching Tiruvannamalai. The wherewithal to undertake the trip was still a question when my father called me all of a sudden and queried, “Do you owe money to anyone, expenses incurred for boarding, during your stay with the

Swami?” Well, that was it! I lied saying that some amount was due. At once he handed me five rupees and asked me to settle the dues first thing in the morning. Thus came the resources to undertake my longed for trip! I justified to myself that uttering a harmless lie did not matter when it came to attaining a lofty goal. With my conscience thus put at ease I rested for the night, but the night went by in wakeful expectation. At three a.m., I left home informing no one. It was the month of January in 1920. Obsessed with an intense desire to have darshan of my Bhagavan, I just packed one extra set of *dhoti* and a towel for change of dress. I felt certain that I would never again step back into that erstwhile home of mine. So I fell prostrate – by way of salutation to my home and my parents – rose and departed.

To avoid being spotted by any known persons at the Palakkad railway station, I headed for the nearby small station of Kanjikode. There I was informed that the train towards Tiruvannamalai would arrive only in the evening. I waited with anxiety lest I be spotted by someone known. So keen was I to see Bhagavan I felt no thirst or hunger. I bought nothing to eat, in case all of the five rupees was needed for train fare.

When I demanded a ticket to Tiruvannamalai, I was issued instead a ticket only up to Katpadi junction [some fifty miles short of Tiruvannamalai]. I was told that tickets to Tiruvannamalai station were not being issued. I took my seat in the train when all thoughts forsook me and I was not aware of even the passing of the night, as my mind was transfixed on the single thought of Bhagavan’s darshan. The train reached Katpadi junction at 4.00 a.m.

On alighting I was informed that the train to Tiruvannamalai was at 6.30 a.m. I waited, watching trains come and go. At 6.00 a.m., I went to the ticket counter for buying my ticket. It was a jolt to me when they said that my train had already departed, half-an-hour ago. The next train was only at six in the evening! It was a moment of desperation. After a while my mind calmed down and I came to terms with the situation. I had eaten nothing since the previous day’s morning. I now bought some *elandhai* fruit [jujube or zizyphus] for half-an-ana, getting more

than a quarter of a large measure for the price. The whole day went by, alternating between consuming a few fruits and drinking water from the tap. That took care of the problem of my meal!

When evening came, I approached the ticket counter half an hour in advance – only to be told that tickets to Tiruvannamalai station would not be issued! This information, the reason for which I could not guess, left me stunned. An elderly man by my side, seeing my plight, called me and queried the reason for my despair, and came out with a solution. He said, “There has been an outbreak of plague in Tiruvannamalai, but the epidemic has now lost its intensity. Still, the railways have not resumed issuing tickets to that station. You can, instead, buy a ticket to Tirukoilur [which was some twenty miles beyond Tiruvannamalai] and board the train. On the way, this train would anyhow halt at Tiruvannamalai to unload mail bags. You too can detrain under cover of darkness.”

This piece of advice came as a great relief. I tendered all the change I had and asked for a ticket to Tirukoilur, but the amount was still a quarter-ana short for the price of the ticket. Thoroughly vexed, I retired to a corner of the platform thinking only of Bhagavan. And Oh! What compassion! I spotted a quarter-ana coin lying nearby between the tracks. Grabbing it with all haste I rushed again to the ticket counter. My train steamed into the station just as the ticket fell to my hand. I was wonderstruck at Bhagavan’s act of grace towards this poor boy. It was undoubtedly a miracle that I had been meted out with the exact amount I needed, no more, no less! Maybe it was a ruling from Bhagavan that those coming under his grace would be provided with just the barest necessities!

Around nine that night the train puffed into Tiruvannamalai station. No lights were burning and only from the conversation of passengers I knew which station it was. I watched if anyone was alighting from the train. A person sitting opposite descended into the darkness and I followed suit. It now came as a revelation to me that missing the morning train was itself an outcome of Bhagavan’s grace! Had I taken that train, I could not have disembarked at Tiruvannamalai in broad daylight. I simply followed the other

passenger not knowing where he was heading. Nor had I any idea of the distance I covered following him.

At last, my 'guide' stopped when he came by a *mantapam* [road-side resting halls, open on the sides, built to provide shelter to travellers in transit]. With his towel, he whisked the floor clean of dust and lay down to sleep. I too followed suit and instantly fell blissfully asleep. Two days without food and overcome by exhaustion, yet I was thrilled at having arrived at my destination. When I awoke, it was about 5 a.m. There was no sign of my 'guide'. Ahead there stood the hill Arunachala, in full view.

Recalling to mind the letters of Ramakrishna Swami, the friend whom I had earlier dispatched here, which described landmarks to reach Bhagavan's ashram, I reached the foot of the hill immediately behind the Arunachaleswar temple. There I saw steps leading up the hill, but at three different spots. They left me puzzled. Taking a chance, I ventured up the steps on the right side. A little way up I could see a building and approached it. There I saw a person, [the well-known Jada Swami] attired in ochre with tresses of hair reaching down to the floor. Having seen Bhagavan's photograph before, I knew that this man was not he and bolted back down the steps. I believed at that time that ascetics wearing long tresses would throw curses at you when disturbed. I now took the flight of steps in the middle. A little way up I came across a tank (the *Paadatirtham*) and saw two people standing by its bank (later I learnt that the two were Tambiran Swami and Kamakshi, Mudaliar Patti's son and daughter in law).

I asked them the way to Bhagavan's place of residence. Seeing exhaustion writ all over my face and hearing my Malayalam accented Tamil, they said in a sympathetic tone, "Poor chap! You are exhausted. Take a dip in this tank and proceed up this path and you will reach Bhagavan's place (Skandasramam). Remain there. We will be bringing food up which we will share with you." Accordingly, I had my bath and was cleansed of all dirt on my external physique. But, I still had to be cleansed of all the muck inside and gain inner purity, so I sped up, even as a calf fondly rushes headlong towards its mother cow.

Darshan of the Sat-Guru

While on my way up I began formulating mentally, the manner of saluting and the mode of my general behaviour while in the presence of the guru. I resolved that the very first words that the Master addresses to me, I shall take as his *upadesa* [spiritual instruction]. Reaching Skandasramam, I stood enthralled at the sight of Bhagavan. At that moment, my friend Ramakrishna Swami, Perumal Swami and Akandananda — all three were prostrate before Bhagavan. Needless to say, I joined them in salutation.

Ramakrishna Swami was surprised and happy to see me. He at once introduced me to Bhagavan, saying, “This man comes from my place, where he has been following an ascetic discipline since childhood.” Bhagavan looked at me nodding his head in approval. Asking me to remain there, the other two left. Later, I learnt that they had gone down to bury one Annamalai Swami of Arani town, who had been serving Bhagavan and had died of plague.

I could hear sounds of weeping from an inner room. I turned to see a grief stricken old lady saying amidst her cries, “Alas! This gem of a boy Annamalai is now gone! What cruel injustice!” Someone was sitting near her. Bhagavan turned towards them and said, by way of consolation, “Why do you grieve? Another young man has now come to fill his absence.” At that time, I could not understand the significance of those words, but could only much, much later. I learnt that the lady inside was none other than Azhagamma, Bhagavan’s mother and the other one was his brother, Niranjanananda Swami.

It was now eight a.m., when Ramalingam Pillai, known popularly as Pinnalur Turiyanandan, called me near and handed me a bowl made of baked clay. Himself taking one, he sat down to eat along with me, under a *naaval* tree [jambolina]. Bhagavan sat on a raised platform nearby, with a bowl in front of him. Venu Ammal, the sister of Echammal who had been offering cooked food to Bhagavan every day, served us rice and *rasam* [pepper soup]. And we had our repast.

The Guru’s Behests Are His Upadesa

Some time passed. Bhagavan and I were now together, alone, but he did not say anything to me. I just knew that this was an important

moment in my spiritual instruction. He took a scoop of flour in a ladle from out of a small tin container near him, transferred it into a cooking utensil, added water to it from his *kamandalam* [water pitcher made of gourd-shell kept by sadhus], then placed the utensil on the charcoal brazier next to him, which was then doing duty as room-warmer. Watching silently I waited, imagining it to be some concoction of a body tonic, and hopeful of being served a helping.

Bhagavan kept stirring the contents until it was cooked to a gruel-like consistency, and then took the vessel off the fire. He poured some of its contents onto a plate, and then rose and lifted a basket that was kept upside down. From underneath, four tiny puppies came springing out and rushed towards the plate, trying to lick the gruel down. Lest the hot gruel should burn their tongue Bhagavan tried to restrain them but could not succeed.

Bhagavan, who had until now not uttered a word to me, said, “Hold all the four on!” I at once grabbed the four puppies. As the meal cooled down, he said, “Let go one by one.” As I had earlier determined to seek the deeper meaning of his words, I took his first command to mean, “Hold on to the four *mahavakyas!*”⁵ That would be my master’s very first spiritual instruction. I took his second bidding to mean that I should give up all attachments. I let go of the puppies, one by one. They lapped up their meal, and with bellies filled, tottered off when one of them urinated. Getting up at once, Bhagavan poured some water over the mess and wiped the spot clean with a rag of gunny sack.

I became restless wanting to do the cleaning myself but controlled the urge, not daring to do something unbidden. Bhagavan returned to his seat. Now, it was another one’s turn to urinate. Seeing my quandary, Bhagavan said, “Wipe it clean!” I rose up and washed it clean with water. I took his third ‘commandment’ to mean, “Cleanse your mind and keep it spotless.” These ‘commandments’ of Bhagavan gave me a pervading feeling of peace and joy. ▲

⁵ 1) *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is Brahman); 2) *Aham Brahmasmi* (This Self is Brahman); 3) *Tat Tvam Asi* (That thou art); 4) *Ayam Atma Brahma* (I am Brahman that is both individual and cosmic).

Enlightenment: Revelling in the Eternal Experience

The Magnificence of *PratyabhijnA*, the Experiential Awakening

SWAMI TANMAYANANDA SARASVATI

Preamble

In the last issue, we saw how Bhagavan Ramana in His dialogues with seekers in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* shed light on the real nature of the so-called Enlightenment and the principal means to unravel its mystery. We discovered the paradoxical truth that though He was recognised as a great sage of modern times who perpetually dwelt in *sahaja samAdhi*, He was consistently engaged in de-mystifying the nature of spiritual Awakening, called *PratyabhijnA*.

Rendered as ‘Recognition of the Self’, this accurate translation does simplify the meaning of the term in the linguistic sense. Let us construe this recognition as merely an intellectual appreciation of

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati received Vedanta *siksha* from Swami Tejomayananda, and later *sannyasa diksha* from *brahmaleena* Swami Virajeshwara Sarasvati. In his *purvashrama*, he was a faculty member in IIT Madras, where he published over 35 research papers. He has lived at Arunachala since 2002.

the highest Truth as revealed in the Upanishads, we would do well to recall an anecdote in Lord Buddha's life.

When Buddha attained Enlightenment under the *bodhi* tree in Bodhgaya and then proceeded to Saranath for delivering his first sermon that commenced his life-long spiritual ministry, people were awe-struck by his unearthly effulgence. Wondering whether he was a divinity descended on earth, they queried him as to who he was, for he seemed far too godly to be one among them.

The Buddha answered with prescience and simplicity that he was neither a *deva* nor a visitation or apparition from any celestial domain and was as much a normal human being as they were but the perceived difference lay in his having awakened to the Reality of his true nature. Thus he came to be called the Buddha, meaning 'the Awakened One'. Such was the spell he cast that multitudes of seekers and animals too stood transfixed in his powerful presence of Self-absorption. Even the elements of nature like plants and trees reportedly became still in his vicinity.

Defining the One True Experience

Such a phenomenon was observed in Bhagavan Ramana's *sannidhi* (presence) too. As Paul Brunton wrote with compelling beauty, words lost their narrow grip and relevance, and the mind lost its habitual infatuation with the thinking process in His presence. All the profound questions Brunton carefully had gathered lost their urgency. This illustrates the power of *PratyabhijnA* and the spontaneous consequences of it as an Experiential Awakening.¹

In the graphic, yet matter-of-fact description of his Death Experience, Bhagavan Ramana reveals the riveting attention brought upon the Self shining as the spiritual Heart, in the wake of his intense enquiry that lasted perhaps less than half an hour. In the aftermath of this transformative Awakening, his life-long dwelling on this witnessing Presence without a pause during all the external changes

¹ *ULLadu NArpadu Anubandham*, v.29, "Just as on earth with the onset of spring, all vegetations come alive with brilliant greenery and fresh beauty of rich foliage and flowers, even so the sage who has recognized the Truth in his heart will shine with great lustre, mighty intelligence and power." (trans. from *Yoga VAsish Tam*, Ch.5.76, v.20).

of his physical existence, bore testimony to the magnificence of *PratyabhijnA SamAdhi*, extolled as such in the sacred lore.

Later Bhagavan defined such an abiding Self-Awareness as the only True Experience (*anubhava*), being eternal, changeless and self-luminous. He averred that it is a misnomer to call all ‘perceptions and feelings’ in the empirical plane (that fall within the purview of sensory and mental domains, *indriya-mAnasa pratyaksha*) as ‘experiences’.² For, they are entirely dependent on the Self which illumines them by virtue of being pure consciousness. Self-Experience (*sAkshi-pratyaksha*) is truly the ‘mother of all relative/empirical experiences’, which are mere cognitions (*prateeti*) and do not qualify as ‘experience’ *per se*.

A Quick Recap of Part One

We saw in the last issue that Bhagavan constantly reiterated two principal insights: Firstly, understand the nature of Realisation to be the Essence of one’s own Reality and secondly, devote yourself to the unremitting practice of Self-abidance as the very means to recognize that Reality as the Self. These two strains of Bhagavan’s teachings were then elucidated as the ‘know-why’ and ‘know-how’ stages in the practice of Self-enquiry. The first strain of Bhagavan’s teaching pertains to clarity in the understanding of *vichAra mArGa* in its subtler aspects and therefore this would correspond to *paroksha jnAnam* (as it is derived from a thorough analysis of the ‘know-why’ stage).

After successfully assimilating this, a *mumukshu* is expected not to rest on mere comprehension of the path (and indulging in preaching to others) but is advised by Bhagavan to plunge sincerely into the second stage of actual practice of *Atma-nishtA* (Self-abidance), which is called *jAgrat-sushupti* during the period of *abhyAsa* (which corresponds to the ‘know-how’ stage).³ Bhagavan states that this alone can eventually bestow *aparoksha jnAnam* (direct knowledge) that releases the seeker from the travails of *samsAra*.⁴

² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk\$92 and Talk\$469.

³ *Ibid.*, Talk\$227, “For the worthy disciple, the work lies within himself, not without.”

⁴ *ULLadu NArpadu*, v.22, ‘*madikkoLi tandu...*’ and v.27, ‘*NAn udiyAduLLa nilai...*’

Traditionally indirect or mediated knowledge (*paroksha jnAnam*) of the Self is derived from a study of *prasthAna trayam* (the triple Vedantic scriptural canons viz. *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Brahma Sutras*) and allied *prakaraNa granthas* written by later-day Acharyas like Adi Sankara. This does not mean that everyone must necessarily plod through all these and master them before commencing the practice of Self-abidance. If you understand Bhagavan's teachings clearly (in line with scriptural reasoning) with full faith in His words, even one book will be enough viz., *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* for actual practice! This is akin to the traditional saying that the *MANDUkyā Upanishad* (the shortest Upanishad containing only 12 mantras) alone is enough to achieve liberation.⁵

Among the principal works of Bhagavan, *Upadesa Saram*, *ULLadu NArpadu*, *Guru VAchaka Kovai* were hailed as the *Ramana PrasthAnatrayam* by His direct disciples like Muruganar and Sadhu Om. Each of these texts and other works like *NAn YA?* and *Self-enquiry* are complete in themselves and bestow invaluable insights on every other work of Bhagavan, just as the phenomenon of holography is described by the remarkable observation that 'Each is in All and All is in Each'.⁶

Role of *ShAstra jnAnam* in *VichAra MArga*

Enlightenment depends mainly on fitness with regard to clarity and ripeness with regard to one's natural inclination – and not on how much one requires to read – in order to plunge headlong into the inescapable practice of *AtmaVichAra*. As Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said metaphorically in the context of scriptural erudition, to kill oneself one does not need any more than a blade or a needle but to conquer others in battles one needs to wield a mighty sword!

Put simply: To teach serious students and to preach at large, it is helpful and even mandatory to acquire a great proficiency in scriptural knowledge for expounding this esoteric wisdom in a lucid manner; however, for one's own salvation, such erudition is hardly essential and

⁵ *Muktikopanishad*, 'MANDUkyam eva alam mumukshUNAm vimuktaye'.

⁶ The amazing characteristic of a small hologram is that even if it is shattered, the whole information is stored in each piece and can be retrieved.

oftentimes it can become counterproductive,⁷ by generating new and unnecessary arguments. Too much reading makes the mind restless while our aim is to quieten and sink it in the Source! One could say that Self-knowledge means committing *hara-kiri* (suicide) by the ego. Too much bookish knowledge often can nourish the ego, the seed of *samsAra*, through pride of learning.

Ashtavakra roars similarly that a wise seeker attains Self-knowledge through a few incisive instructions from a *satguru*⁸ whereas an aspirant with a restless intellect remains deluded all his life chasing endless bookish knowledge! Nisargadatta Maharaj was one such rare seeker; he read very little but hung onto his guru's dying words and was illumined within three years. Bhagavan gave tremendous confidence to many of his close disciples to pursue *vichAra sAdhana* when they were faced with the major task of grasping *shAstra vichAra*,⁹ as illustrated in the cases of Desur Akhilandammal and Natanananda. He told Kunju Swami that the supreme good would accrue if one pursues the former, accomplishing which whatever one utters subsequently would be in consonance with scriptural sayings. Bhagavan has quoted *Ozhivil ODukkam* (v.1.5) which says, "*Tannizhappai Enna KaTRu SAdhippan?*" (By learning which scripture, can one achieve loss of individuality?).

Bhagavan was nuanced in his reply when someone asked him if he condemns outright all scholastic pursuit in the realm of spiritual *sAdhana*. He said his view is not to condemn *shAstra vichAra per se* but only the *vidyAbhimAna*¹⁰ that usually creeps in a subtle manner. This

⁷ ULLadu NArpadu Anubandham v.34, '*pannool kutumbam ULLadu yogatthaDaiyAi Or*'.

⁸ Ashtavakra Gita, v.15.1, '*yathA tathopadesena krutArthah sattva buddhimAn, Ajeevamapi jignAsuh parastatra vimuhyati*'. Also Talk§275, "When the man is ripe for receiving the instruction and his mind is about to sink into the Heart, the instruction imparted works in a flash and he realizes the Self all right."

⁹ Talk§230, 'Q. Can one realize the Truth by learning the scriptures and study of books? A. No. *Sastra* learning itself is a *vasana*. Realisation is only in *Samadhi*.' Talk§513, 'It is enough that a person becomes *antarmukhi*. The *sastras* are not needed for an inward turned mind. They are meant for the rest.'

¹⁰ Talk§253, "Pride of learning and desire for appreciation are condemned and not learning itself. Learning leading to search for Truth and humility is good." Talk§565, "...the Self is not in the books; but it is in you."

tempts the seeker and propels him outward to win recognition, fame and all attendant blandishments¹¹ that make external life addictively enjoyable. One could then lose focus on what really matters.

The Upanishads¹² liken this path to walking on razor's edge because nothing outside is an impediment by itself but our own lack of alertness and vigilance to avoid falling for temptations, gross as well as subtle. Jesus said words to the effect that one should be ready to lose everything including oneself if he/she aims to win the Peace that passes all understanding. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Sage Ashtavakra exclaims with sarcasm that people who are very intelligent, eloquent and industrious in spiritual lore shun the deeper pursuit of Self-knowledge,¹³ as they fear it would make them 'dumb, inert and lazy' thus foiling worldly enjoyments like name, fame and prosperity which hold them in fascination. All jnAnis have their own unique way of revealing the enlightened state but achieve consensus in Silence,¹⁴ beyond all doctrinal disputations.

Role of Semantics in Vedanta: A Boon or a Bane?

Words are indispensable at one level but need to be set aside at advanced stages of practice once they have served their purpose. However, they are a double-edged knife which can cut both ways in the context of Vedantic dissemination because the same set of words can be interpreted in different ways. For instance, consider the statement: 'There is no one like an enlightened person – only Enlightenment remains'. This can be insightful in only one correct sense but can also be understood incorrectly or argued wrongly in other ways which are banal. So, does the fault lie with words themselves *per se* or does

¹¹ *VivekachUDAmāNi*, v. 60, 'vAk vaikhari sabdajhari sAstra vyAkhyAna kausalam, vaidushyam vidushAm tadvat bhuktaye na tu muktaye'.

¹² *Katha Upanishad*, v.1.3.14, 'uttishThata jAgrata... kshurasya dhArA nisitA duratyayA durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti.'

¹³ *Ashtavakra Gita*, v.15.3, 'vAgmi prAjna mahodyogam janam mookam jaDAlasam karoti tattvabodhoyam atastyaktah bubbhukshubhih'.

¹⁴ *PrauDAnubhUtih*, v.5, 'dvaitAdvaita vivarjite samarase mounam param sammatam.'

it lie in the unprepared mind that receives it or worse still, does it lie with the teacher who handles the words clumsily in explicating paradoxical and dicey assertions?

One needs to be dispassionate in objective analysis in order to avoid hasty conclusions. Swami Vivekananda said true religion takes you to the limits of reason and then transcends it but never violates the canons of reason. It is worthwhile to keep in mind a popular *subhAshitam*¹⁵ (often cited by Bhagavan), saying that ‘one should accept what is uttered by even a callow youth if it appeals to reason but reject as a trivial blade of grass anything which violates rational logic even if uttered by Lotus-born Brahma, the Creator.’ Hard core Advaitic understanding demands this fundamental tenet to be adhered to scrupulously, lest one gets carried away by sentimental attachments or emotional loyalties to personalities however famous they may be.

We can safely say that words can reveal knowledge when well-used¹⁶ in line with scriptural reasoning but obfuscate when handled flippantly and divert the quest off the mark. Perverse dialectics can turn out to be baneful if we are not vigilant. If words themselves can reveal knowledge, then does it not amount to Enlightenment being purely a matter of intellectual understanding which negates all intuitive experience, mystical or supra-mental that transcend the mind?

No, we say – words can ‘reveal’ (when taught by a *satguru*,¹⁷ charged as they are with his ineffable Grace) through implication (*lakshyArtha*) and right guidance by the so-called ‘leading error principle’ (*samvAdi bhrama*) and not directly by their literal meaning (*vAchyArtha*).

Sage VidyAraNyA’s Principle of ‘Leading Error’ (*samvAdi bhrama*)

In the celebrated Vedantic text *Panchadasi*,¹⁸ the renowned sage VidyAraNya of Sringeri Peetham postulates a brilliant concept and

¹⁵ ‘yuktyuktam upAdeyam vachanam bAlakAdapi, anyat truNam iva tyAjyam abhyuktam padmajanmanA’.

¹⁶ *SadAchArah*, v.18, ‘sabda shakter acintyatvAt sabdAdeva aparokshadheeh, sushupto purusho yadvat sabdenaiva anubudhyate.’ And *Katha Up.*1.2.8, ‘na nareNAvareNa prokte suvijneyah...ananyaprokte gativratra nAsti.’.

¹⁷ *SadAchArah*, v.19, ‘.. guruNA bodhitah sishyah sabdabrahma ativartate’.

¹⁸ *Panchadasi*, Ch.9, ‘Dhyana Deepam’. v.1-25, 30 -35, 38-47, 122-130, 139, 155.

expatiates upon it with several examples to elucidate the issue raised above concerning the role of *sAstra jnAnam* and meditation (*nirguNa upAsana*) in triggering *PratyabhijnAnam*, the immediate Knowledge. Consider a thick forest where two modest temples stand far apart. Two travellers are journeying separately through this wood by nightfall. Each one glimpses a bright gleam of light emanating from a distance through the keyhole of the door from each of the two temples. They think mistakenly that the bright light corresponds to a precious gem fallen somewhere in the forest and desiring to possess it, each one follows the gleaming rays and respectively reach the spot where each temple stood.

The first traveller opens the door and indeed finds the gem that was throwing out the light and he is happy that what he 'knew' as a gem was indeed right, though in fact it was merely his hunch. The second traveller also reaches the door of the other temple from where he saw the light coming out. However, he is disappointed to find that the light was actually originating from an oil lamp and came out of the key-hole in the door. He does not get the gem which he too was sure was lying there. Sri VidyAraNya comments that both the travellers believed they saw a gem at a distance lying unclaimed in the forest and undertook the same pursuit which however, ended with opposite results. For the first person, 'his so-called knowledge' fortunately proved to be right while the 'same knowledge' proved fruitless for the other.

In both cases, the 'knowledge of gem' was erroneous to begin with, as neither of them saw the actual gem itself but merely mistook the emanating light as the gem.¹⁹ It was not a case of firm knowledge but only an optimistic suspicion, which was believed to be true initially. But for the first one, pursuit of the 'erroneous perception' (*bhrama pratyaksha*) ended happily with a precious possession. This then is a typical instance of 'a leading error' (*samvAdi bhrama*) because it did indeed 'lead' to the desired goal by a fortuitous coincidence.

¹⁹ This is a typical case of 'erroneous superimposition' discussed by Sri Sankara in *AdhyAsa BhAshya*, his celebrated introduction to the *Brahma Sutras*: '*smrtirupah paratra purvadrshtha avabhAsah iti adhyAsah*'. Snake-rope, silver-nacre and ghost on post are popular examples of *adhyAsa*.

It is this positive result that converts the ‘initial premise’ or ‘erroneous knowledge’ into ‘true knowledge’ (*pramA*). For the other one, the ‘initial wrong knowledge’ ended as ‘final wrong knowledge’ and so it was a case of ‘misleading error’ (*visamvAdi bhrama*). The result, whether success or failure, then turns out to be ultimate arbiter of the ‘soundness of the knowledge’ while on the path.²⁰ The former is also called a ‘beneficial’ or ‘productive’ error and the latter a ‘deluding’ or ‘unfructifying’ error.

Paroksha jnAnam and Aparoksha jnAnam in Advaita Vedanta

Applying the cue from this example (*drshtAntham*) to the ‘main theme’ (*dArshTAntham*) on hand, VidyAraNya boldly asserts that the *paroksha jnAnam* gained from the *sAstrAs* through *sravaNam* and *mananam* — that the *jiva* is in reality *Brahman* only, as revealed by the *Tat Tvam Asi mahavakya* — comes under the category of *samvAdi bhrama* only because the seeker does not have direct or immediate knowledge of the Self at once! But he has made the right investment in both the *sruti pramANa* and the *Apta vAkya* (teachings of the *satguru*) which pays off in the end, as he attains direct knowledge (*aparoksha jnAnam*) in due course through unremitting *nididhyAsanam*. Therefore faith (*sraddhA*) in the revelation of the *sAstrAs* and *Guru-upadesa* and commitment to the pursuit (*mumukshutvam*) and perseverance are indispensable ingredients for Enlightenment to manifest.

The mediated knowledge of the Self through the vision of the Advaita Vedanta *sAstrA* corresponds to the ‘erroneous knowledge’ of the first traveller who eventually succeeds in his pursuit of the gem in the above example. But it is ‘a leading error’ because it ‘leads us successfully’ towards realisation (*PratyabhijnAnam*) of the ‘ever-attained’ goal (*prAptasya prAptih*, v.155). But any other teaching not Advaitic in content or essence, from whichever source it has arisen, can only be a ‘fruitless error’ (*visamvAdi bhrama*) for it can never liberate the seeker from the primal ignorance of the Self and consequently from the beginningless *samsAra*. *SraddhA* is then a case of provisional acceptance of the Vedantic revelation giving it a benefit of doubt as it were, pending

²⁰ Ibid., ‘*prateeyamAnatvAt sat, bAdhyamAnatvAt asat*’ (an empirical thing being perceived, it is real; upon falsification by subsequent perception, it becomes unreal).

verification. It becomes superfluous upon eventual vindication in one's experience because direct vision then supersedes the article of faith.

Thus all non-Advaitic 'differential vision' (*bheda drshti*) corresponds to the 'erroneous knowledge' of the second traveller which remains error-ridden till the end and must inevitably disappoint the seeker. Its only use is to disillusion him or her so that he or she seeks new pastures and inevitably gravitates towards the higher knowledge of Advaita *siddhanta*. This is not to condemn *dvaitic* teachings found in every religion because they have their own use inasmuch as they ripen the mind to surrender to the Lord thus promoting *chitta suddhi*. But eventually it must yield way to the Advaitic vision in the last lap of the *jiva yatra*.

It is thus a matter of perspectives from different levels, not absolute pronouncements or judgments. The Vedic vision accommodates a spectrum of divergent perspectives and allows the seekers full freedom to choose that vision which best appeals to their conviction. Every variant is given an honoured place (including atheism) in the grand scheme of evolution and encouraged as a legitimate step in that ladder.

Nature of Enlightenment – Intellectual Understanding *vis-a-vis* Experiential Knowledge²¹

VidyAraNya Swami makes a nuanced refinement subsequently in *Panchadasi* (v.139, 153 – 156) saying that *sAstra jnAnam* is indeed true knowledge (*pramA*) from its own perspective but only from the point of view of the seeker it is called as a 'leading error' (*samvAdi bhrama*). This nails the fallacious but fashionable thesis that Enlightenment is nothing but 'assimilation of the *sAstra jnAnam*' and there can never be an 'experiential illumination' other than the former. According to VidyAraNya, meditation on the Vedantic revelation of *jiva-brahma aikyam* can be called *nirguNa upAsana* and this shall surely lead to *pratyabhijnA*, even if the seeker is not competent enough to practise the highest level of *nididhyAsana*, which is Self-abidance (bereft of all *bhAvanAs* or concepts) espoused life-long by Bhagavan Ramana.

²¹ This theme will be discussed exhaustively in the next sequel to this series of articles on *PratyabhijnAna-prakaraNam* which commenced from July 2013 issue of Mountain Path and followed up in October 2013, July 2014, April 2015 issues.

Thus *sAstra jnAnam* is indeed a blessing for those seekers who are temperamentally *jnAna mArgis* because it eventually culminates in Enlightenment in the form of *PratyabhijnAnam*, an experiential Awakening.²² Until this happens, *sAstra jnAnam* would necessarily remain as ‘a leading error’ but only as far as the seeker is concerned because he is yet to be delivered from *samsAra* by *aparoksha jnAnam*.

‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating’ in this context means that ‘absolute release from the endless sorrows of *samsAra*’ is known to one’s own conscience (which cannot be muffled or evaded for all time) and this intimate personal experience alone is the final proof of the validity of the *sruti pramANa* for oneself. The celebrity status that grows around eloquent exponents cannot confer *jivanmukti*²³ nor vouch for its attainment. Societal praise and lavish recognitions of such skills constitute external validation (*paratah pramANa*) while *jivanmukti* is *svatah pramANa*. Swami Chinmayananda exhorted, ‘Take a close and honest look at yourself. It pays to see where you stand’.

Adi Sankaracharya declares: “For an enlightened person, his identification with the limitless Self is as effortless and intimate as *dehAtma buddhi* is for the ignorant, with the result that it has completely negated his former *dehAtma buddhi*; such a person is spontaneously liberated while living, even if he does not desire *moksha*.”²⁴ By pondering deeply over this verse, one can easily recognise the fallacy in the thesis that ‘enlightenment is purely a matter of intellectual understanding’ and has nothing to do with experiencing oneself as pure limitless Consciousness. VAchaspatis Mishra states in *BhAmati*, his commentary on *BrahmaSutra BhAshya* that since our ignorance is experiential (and keeps us in bondage), enlightenment must perforce be experiential too, for it confers the liberating knowledge!

²² Sankara *BhAshya*, *Brahma Sutra* No.2, ‘*anubhava avasAnatvAt, bhutavastu vishayatvAt ca brahma jnAnasya*’.

²³ *AparokshAnubhuti*, v.133, ‘*kusalA brahmavArtAyAm vrttiheenAh surAgiNah, tepi ajnAnataya nunam punarAyAnti yAnti ca*’.

²⁴ *Upadesa Sahasri*, v.4.5, also quoted in *Panchadasi*, v.7.20, ‘*dehAtma jnAnavat jnAnam dehAtma jnAna bAdhakam, Atmanyeva bhavet yasya saha na icchinnapi muchyate*’.

Beatitude of *Aparoksha JnAnam*

It does not benefit us personally if countless jnAnis have vindicated the veracity of the scriptures before, because their experience cannot release us from *samsAra*, just as others enjoying a sumptuous feast cannot appease our gnawing hunger. At best their experience reinforces our faith and conviction in the revealed knowledge of the Vedas and propels us forward with renewed vigour. The ultimate vision has to be our own, for converting *our samvAdi bhrama* into *pramA*, the true Knowledge.

Self-Knowledge, as the very term suggests, is truly self-referential (*svatah pramANa*)²⁵ and needs no validation from any external authority. This is the unique catholicity and humility of Upanishadic teachings,²⁶ for they step aside after leading the seeker to the very portals of Advaita *anubhuti* without binding him or her to the Revealed Word or the One Book forever. To sum up the present context, it can be safely said, “Truth is That which sets you free”²⁷ and can never be a matter of unverifiable beliefs.

Assimilation of the Vedantic vision surely transforms a genuine seeker into a great saint who can inspire and guide countless seekers in the same path that he himself has travelled. But only upon awakening through ‘direct experience’ (*pratyabhijnA*) and staying firmly anchored in it, does he become a full-fledged Sage. Such an enlightened *mahAtma* becomes a living embodiment of the Truth (like a Buddha, Sankara or Ramana) in whose abiding vision of unity, all differential notions (*bheda drshti*) vanish without a trace, the true hallmark of the highest wisdom (*samyak darsanam*). ▲

(To be continued)

²⁵Talk§189, “The Maharshi’s teaching is only an expression of his own experience and realisation. Others find it tallies with Sankara’s. A realised person will use his own language.” When *VivekachUDAmNi* was first read out to Him at Gurumurtham, He exclaimed in wonder that the text described his own story and experience.

²⁶See Swami Ranganathananda’s sublime discourses on *BrhadAraNyaka Upanishad*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata. 2005. v.4.3.22, “*atra pitA apitA bhavati...lokAh alokAh, devAh adevAh, vedAh avedAh (bhavanti)*.” (worlds are no more worlds, gods are no more gods, Vedas cease to be Vedas etc. in that state of ultimate perfection.)

²⁷Jesus said, “Know the Truth and It shall set you free.” (John 8:32).

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Eighteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th July 1978

Sadhu Om: King Vajrangada Pandya, who first discovered the greatness of *Arunachala-pradaksina*, went round the hill three times a day for three years. What gave him a taste for it at first was his expectation that he would thereby once again become Indra [the ruler of *svarga* or heaven], but after three years *viveka* (discrimination) dawned in him, so he prayed to Arunachaleswara only for *sayujya* (union) with him. Thus as a result of his doing *Arunachala-pradaksina* his *kamyā bhakti* matured into *niskamyā bhakti*, and the discrimination he gained thereby made him ripe enough to attain *Siva-sayujya*. Such maturity of discrimination is the benefit we can expect to derive from walking round Arunachala.

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.

10th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Many people believe that their progress in sadhana can be measured by the amount of time they are able to remain without thoughts, but remaining without thoughts for some time is not the true aim of sadhana. Its aim is only knowledge, which means clear awareness of oneself. What is the use of remaining for five hours without thoughts if all one's desires, anger and other such defects return during the sixth hour? One may remain for three hundred years without knowing the body, but if one does not know oneself, what benefit can one derive from it?

Therefore when we practise sadhana our aim should not be to remain without thoughts for as long as possible, but should only be to know oneself. We investigate 'who am I?' in order to gain knowledge of oneself. Having understood that all our problems are due to our incorrect knowledge 'I am the body', we must strive only to obtain correct knowledge of oneself.

15th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Merely withdrawing our mind from second and third persons is not *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry], but just a secondary effect of it. Attending to oneself alone is *atma-vicara*, and when we attend only to oneself our mind is thereby withdrawn from other things. In verse 16 of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says:

"Leaving aside external phenomena, the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real knowledge."

'Leaving aside external phenomena' means withdrawing our attention from second and third persons, but that by itself is not real knowledge, because we leave all external phenomena whenever we fall asleep. In order to know what is real, we must know our own 'form of light', which is the fundamental awareness that illumines our mind. Therefore in this verse the main clause is 'the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real knowledge', whereas 'leaving aside external phenomena' is just a subsidiary clause, because when our mind attends to its own self-awareness, 'I am', its attention is thereby automatically withdrawn from external phenomena.

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Remaining for a while without thoughts is no doubt a peaceful and pleasant experience, but it is not the ultimate solution to our problems. What needs to be rectified is our illusory awareness 'I am this body', and since it is a mistaken knowledge of ourself, it can be rectified only by correct knowledge of ourself.

People generally assume that only the time they spend sitting in meditation is sadhana, whereas in fact sadhana is going on throughout the waking and dream states, and has been for countless births. Everything that we experience in our life, which is all given by the grace of guru, and our repeated reflections on the miseries of life, together with our repeated attempts to find the root of these miseries within ourself, are sadhana, because by all these means we gradually gain the power of correct discrimination, and thereby the maturity of our mind is increased, making us ripe for self-knowledge.

Self-abidance and self-attention are one and the same thing. Abidance is being (*sat*), whereas attention is knowing (*cit*), and as Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar*, being oneself is knowing oneself, because oneself is not two, and because as he says in verse 23, there is no awareness other than what is to know what is, so what is (*sat*) is itself awareness (*cit*). A worldly-minded person abides in the world because he attends to the world, whereas a spiritual person abides in himself because he attends to himself.

18th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Guru alone knows all the vasanas that are lying hidden within us. He knows which ones he can allow to sprout as thoughts in order for us to destroy them with the power of discrimination that he has given us, that is, by investigating to whom they have appeared. He also knows which ones he must not yet allow to sprout, because they would be too powerful for us to destroy.

If allowed to marry, some aspirants would become immersed in worldly pleasures and desires, whereas others would develop detachment (*vairagya*), reflecting inwardly, 'What are these carnal pleasures? Just two bodies of flesh and bones trying to find pleasure in each other'. However, those in whom such *vairagya* quickly blazes

forth in married life may not be able to gain it if they were not given a taste of such a life, because they would then be hankering for such pleasures, thinking how wonderful it may be to experience them.

Providing circumstances that prompt our vasanas to sprout as desires or thoughts is like watering the seeds in a garden. By watering our less powerful and dangerous vasanas in this way, and by enabling us to conquer them by means of *viveka* and *vairagya*, the guru enables us to gradually gain the strength to face and conquer more powerful and dangerous ones. However, there are some vasanas that are so dangerous that he will never allow them to emerge, but will instead allow them to dry up by not being attended to so that they become like dry firewood, which will be consumed along with their root, our ego, when the fire of jnana eventually blazes forth.

Only guru can do all this for us. He knows not only all our present thoughts but also all that we could possibly think, do or experience. It is necessary for us to reflect and convince ourselves of this, lest our ego proudly raises its head thinking 'I can conquer maya'. Humility is essential. By the strength of our own ego we can do nothing. We cannot even think without his grace. As Bhagavan says in verse 170 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*:

“If even the gods Vayu and Agni [the gods of wind and fire] were unable either to move or to burn a trivial small straw, alas, who can or how to do [anything] egotistically by their own strength?”

It is always better to be humble and lie low. Let anything trample over us, because we cannot fall any further. In one of my verses I give the following illustrations: an eagle with its strong claws and beak can be chased away by crows; a mighty elephant will stand up and move aside for a line of black ants lest they enter its trunk; the sun can dry the ocean, but we can be protected from it by a small umbrella; a train can pull huge loads, but it cannot resist being stopped by a break operated by one finger of its driver; the Ganga can sweep away elephants in its current, but it cannot stop small fish swimming against its current. Likewise, even great yogis cannot conquer this maya, but we can simply by surrendering ourselves to the grace of Bhagavan.

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

When we think more and more along these lines, our discrimination and longing to cling to his feet will increase, and we will therefore not be inclined to rise thinking 'I can do'. This battle between the *viveka* and *vairagya* given by Bhagavan and our tendency to rise as this ego must go on throughout this waking state. In this battle we often feel like a ship tossed about in a violent storm, but he is our helmsman, so we should pray to him as he taught us in verse 79 of *Sri Arunachala Aksaramanamalai*: 'Arunachala, protect me so that I may not be like a ship tossing in a great storm without a helmsman'.

28th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Strength lies in our being, not in our thinking. Therefore real strength comes only from self-abidance. Time is not an important factor in self-abidance, because we gain no spiritual benefit by remaining without thought for eight hours in sleep. Attention (which is a focusing of our awareness, *cit*) is the only important factor in self-abidance (which is a state of just being, *sat*), because the intensity of our self-attention is what determines the firmness and depth of our self-abidance. Knowing oneself alone is being oneself, and that alone is true strength (*sakti*).

If someone, after doing some tapas and thereby gaining a little power over others, takes people as his disciples, then as Sri Ramakrishna said he is like a small water-snake catching a big frog. He will not be able to swallow them, but he will not let go of them, so both will have to suffer. Having taken responsibility for the disciple's vasanas, such a 'guru' will himself be overpowered by the disciple's desires.

The real guru is not a person, but is only our own unlimited and hence non-personal self, because our infinite self alone can manipulate and destroy all our vasanas without itself being affected by them at all.



(To be continued)

KEYWORD

Upadesa

JOHN GRIMES

The foundation for the injunction ‘*sruti, yukti, anubhava*’ (hear the sacred wisdom, digest it, put it into practice) necessarily begins with humility, an attitude of ‘I don’t know’, for anyone desiring to be a genuine, dedicated spiritual aspirant. The prostration, with great reverence, is first and foremost to Wisdom, the Self, the Divine, the inner Guru, and not to something physical. A seeker should approach the Guru, the repository of Sacred Wisdom, and say, “I request, revered one, that you teach me”.¹ Then, after hearing the teachings and digesting them, one must put them into practice. Without putting them into practice, they remain just words, mere movements of the intellect, information that hasn’t transformed one in any way.

The Sanskrit ‘*upa*’ means ‘near’ as in *upa-desa* (near the place), *upa-ni-sad* (sitting steadfastly/intensely near the Guru/Self); *upa-nayana* (the act of leading near). What a wonderful word! Being near the Divine, being the Divine.

¹ *Chandogya Upanishad* 4.9.2 Satyakama to Gautama and *Chandogya Up.* 7.1.1 Narada to Sanatkumara.

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When a devotee asked Bhagavan Ramana for two *upadesas* (instructions) regarding liberation, Sri Ramana replied, “What do I know? Everything is an *upadesa*. Worship of the Divine is the only *upadesa*.”² Between these two seemingly simple statements, one may recount numerous *upadesas* that he gave during his lifetime. Bhagavan, who was established in the state of unceasing Self-abidance (*sahaja-samadhi*) compassionately taught spiritual seekers in various ways ranging from Silence, to ‘Who am I?’ to ‘Nothing has ever happened’, to ‘You are the creator of the universe’, to ‘Totally surrender to the Lord who is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient’.

Firstly, Sri Ramana said, “Silence is the true *upadesa*. It is the perfect *upadesa*. It is suited only for the most advanced seeker. Others are unable to draw full inspiration from it. Therefore they require words to explain the Truth. But Truth is beyond words. It does not admit of explanation.”³ He often praised Silence as the clearest *upadesa*, the primary, the highest form of Grace. He said that all other *upadesas* are derived from Silence and therefore are secondary.

Then there is Sri Ramana’s path of Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*), asking the question, “Who am I?”. He replied, when asked which is the best method of spiritual practice (*sadhana*), “That depends on the temperament of the individual. Every person is born with latent tendencies (*samskara*) from their past lives. One method will prove easy to one person and another to another. There can be no general rule.”⁴

If Bhagavan had to employ words, he usually advocated Self-enquiry. “Self-enquiry is the direct method. All other methods are practised while retaining the ego and therefore many doubts arise and the ultimate question still remains to be tackled in the end. But in this method the final question is the only one and is raised from the very beginning.”⁵

The theory of non-origination, that states that nothing has ever truly been born or has died (*ajata-vada*) was expounded by the *paramaguru*

² Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§59.

³ Ibid., Talk§569; also see Talk§445 & Talk§518.

⁴ Ibid., Talk§580.

⁵ Ibid., Talk§146.

of Adi Sankara, Gaudapada.⁶ However, even this perspective admits that it is but an approximation to the Truth, a statement with which Sri Ramana is in complete agreement. Thus Gaudapada said, “Ajati is meaningful only so long as *jati* (birth) carries meaning. The absolute Truth is that no word can designate or describe the Self.”⁷ From this perspective there is no creation, no birth, no death, no dissolution, no bondage, no liberation, and no one striving for liberation. Bhagavan remarked, “The Truth was revealed even at the start. For the very first *sloka* of Sri Krishna’s *upadesa* to Arjuna starts: ‘No birth and no death, no change, etc.’”⁸

It is a Sage’s experience that nothing has ever happened, because the Self alone exists as the sole unchanging Reality. From this perspective, the relative reality of the world is not denied. A Sage perceives appearances like anyone else. However, the Sage does not perceive the world as comprised of separate objects. An appearance is not unreal merely because it is an appearance. The *real* nature of an appearance is *inseparable* from the Self and partakes of its reality. What is *not* real is to mentally construct an illusory world of *separate*, interacting objects. Bhagavan said, “The Vedantins do not say the world is unreal. That is a misunderstanding. If they did, what would be the meaning of the Vedantic text: ‘All this is Brahman’? They only mean that the world is unreal as world, but it is real as Self. If you regard the world as not Self it is not real. Everything, whether you call it world or *maya* or *lila* or *sakti*, must be within the Self and not apart from it. There can be no *sakti* apart from the *sakta*.”⁹

Another perspective, which is a verbal concession for seekers who find the *ajata-vada* impossible to digest, posits that creation is simultaneous with perception. According to this perspective the world arises like a dream on account of a person’s own thoughts, induced by

⁶ See *Mandukya Karika*; also *Katha Up.* 1.2.18. ‘The knowing Self is never born; nor does it die at any time’; *Bhagavad Gita* 2.20. ‘The Self is neither born nor does it die.’

⁷ *Mandukya Karika* 4, 74

⁸ Talk§611.

⁹ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002. 3-7-46. p.266.

the ignorance of not knowing oneself to be the non-dual Self. With the arising of the 'I'-thought, the world simultaneously comes into existence and ceases to exist when the 'I'-thought ceases. The world only exists when it is perceived. Upon awakening from sleep, the first thought a person has is the 'I'-thought and upon its emergence, the entire universe consisting of objects separate from oneself springs into existence. Once the 'I' thought (or ego), which is mistakenly taken to mean 'me' (female/male, mother/father, thin/healthy, etc.) arises as the subject, then everything other than this 'me' becomes an object. In deep sleep, when the 'I'-thought is absent, so is the universe. This is everyone's personal experience, though they refuse to admit it. Sri Ramana encouraged his followers to accept this theory as a working hypothesis because, by constantly regarding the world as the unreal creation of one's own mind, it loses its attraction and it becomes easier for the person to maintain an undistracted awareness of the 'I'-thought. This theory is 'true' in so far as the mind of an unenlightened person does create an imaginary world for itself. At the same time, from the standpoint of the Self or Absolute Reality, an imaginary 'I' creating an imaginary world is no creation at all.

Apart from Self-enquiry, Sri Ramana also taught the path of Surrender, a path open to everyone. The only prerequisite needed is a complete change of heart, an absolute confidence in the saving grace of the Lord. This path has no rules. It is said to be a direct and easy path for, once taken, all is left in the hands of God. It is known as 'the way of the kitten'. A kitten puts forth no effort when the mother cat carries it by the neck from place to place. It just goes limp. If it were to struggle, this would make its mother's efforts much more difficult.

The path of complete surrender implies abiding by the will of God in all things. There should be no grievances about what does or does not take place. Even when things turn out differently from the way one wishes, everything is left up to God. Surrender means abiding by God's will. One awaits His pleasure, at all times. To ask God to do as one pleases is not to surrender, but to command God. One cannot demand that God obey one and still think one has surrendered. God knows what is best and when and how to do everything. Surrender

means leaving everything to God. God carries such a person's burdens like a lawyer, to whom one has signed over a 'power of attorney'. In the truly surrendered devotee, the ego or 'I'-thought is also surrendered.

It has been said that Bhagavan recommended two distinct paths: 1)investigating the 'I'-thought through self-enquiry/vichara; and 2)completely surrendering all responsibility for one's life to God or the Self. But for such self-surrender to be effective, one must have no will or desire of one's own and must be completely free of the idea that one is an individual person who is capable of acting independently of God.¹⁰

Sri Ramana said:

"There are two ways to surrender; one is looking into the source of the 'I' and merging into that source; the other is feeling 'I am helpless by myself, God alone is all-powerful and except for throwing myself completely on Him there is no other means of safety for me,' and thus gradually developing the conviction that God alone exists and the ego does not count. Both methods lead to the same goal. Complete surrender is another name for jnana or liberation."¹¹ ▲

¹⁰ See *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 'Surrender', p.78

¹¹ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day, with Bhagavan*, 2002. 1-3-46 Morning, pp.162-3.

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.

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.



19



38

श्रीअरुणाचलम्

श्रीरमणाश्रमम्

श्रीरमणाश्रमम्

Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verses 23 to 27

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 23

That Heart, which is Pure Consciousness, is that in which the entire creation exists. The entire Universe is seen as a reflection in it. It is the abode of all wealth. Hence, the One Awareness is termed as the Heart. It is not an organ of the perishable corporeal body, which is insentient like a stone.

Commentary

This verse takes the practioner deeper into understanding the mystery of the Heart. The previous verse mentions that the heart is of two kinds. The first is the physical heart, which is limited and is positioned in a particular spot in the body and is to be rejected. The Spiritual Heart which is consciousness, which is illimitable and all-pervading is to be contemplated. Here, Bhagavan refines the Heart as Pure Awareness, the abiding place for all being and the mirror in which all

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creation is reflected. He further emphasizes that it is not to be confused with the physical heart, which is an organ of the insentient body.

Bhagavan thus sets at rest the conflicting question whether the *sahasrara*, the thousand petalled lotus in the head, is the seat of Awareness, or the spiritual Heart is the centre of pure Awareness. He declares that Heart is the seat of the Self which is declared by the *Purusha Suktam* and the *Upanishads*.

Verse 24

When the mind is merged in the Pure Heart by proper sadhana, the latent tendencies (*vasanas*) are destroyed along with the spontaneous cessation of the breath.

Commentary

Whenever an action is performed, with *kartrutva* or 'doer-ship' it has a two-fold effect. One is accumulation to your balance of *papa* (demerit) or *punya* (merit). The doer has to undergo the effect of this in the current or subsequent births. But more insidious is the accumulation of *vasanas* or latencies which propel the man to repeatedly indulge in the performance of the act thus becoming inextricably caught in the cycle of *samsara*. The only way to root-out the *vasanas*, Bhagavan says, is the process of Self-enquiry and abidance of the mind in the heart. Then all the *vasanas* will be annihilated. The breathing also simultaneously stops. What remains thereafter is the Infinite Bliss of Self-Experience.

The same idea is conveyed by the next verse taken from the work *Devikalottaram* translated into Tamil by Bhagavan.

Verse 25

By constant meditation in the Heart of that Awareness, 'I am that Blissful-Consciousness-Siva' which is not troubled by limiting adjuncts, it extinguishes all attachments of the mind.

Commentary

Bhagavan has repeatedly emphasised that 'Pure Consciousness' or 'Awareness' is the Heart, which is the same as the Self. It is the place of origin of the ego-sense. The true Heart is not in the body, which

is the product of ego. Therefore when through vichara (enquiry), the mind reaches the Heart or the Source, the movement of both the mind and breath stop simultaneously. The Self alone shines as the sole surviving entity, beyond Time and Space.

The sadhana of spiritual enquiry is mentioned in the previous verse as the practice of merging the mind in the Real Heart that is Pure-Awareness. The same idea is mentioned earlier in Verse 9. That, which remains as the pure and still awareness in the form of ‘I Consciousness in the lotus of the Heart’, which bestows liberation on the sadhaka.

The following two verses, adopted from *Yoga Vasishtam*, show how the sadhaka should live in the world. Keeping his mind firmly on the Self, at the same time engaged in the world existence and its play.

Verse 26

With the mind holding on firmly to that True State which is the substratum of all states of varying nature, perform your role in the stage of the world, like acting your part in a play, Oh hero! know the Immortal Truth behind all appearances. Firmly holding on to that Truth, act playfully in the world as if you are swayed by desires, but with the mind truly tranquil.

Verse 27

Assuming the false façade of joy, excitement, disapproval and eagerness for results, act on the world in a spirit of play. Oh hero! Inwardly free from the myriad binding forces, display equanimity to all creatures, engage playfully in actions, according to the role you have assumed.

Commentary

Guru Vachaka Kovai also presents similar ideas in verses 81 & 82.

“Reach the Heart by clearly knowing your true nature and abide there permanently as that unattached Supreme Self, without slipping from the state of knowledge. Then act according to the human role you have assumed, outwardly behaving as if like all others in the world, you are experiencing joy and misery.” And, “Embracing conduct that

is not in accordance with social norms is not appropriate for jnanis, even if they know all that is to be known and have attained all the siddhis. Hence if at any time you happen to be among any kind of company, at those times let your outward behaviour appear to be in harmony with your company.” ▲

Quarrelling with the Lord

Neera Kashyap

The rubber tree glimmers in fragrant rain,
dust sliding back to earth in pouring notes.
Grim greyness leaves to green limp veins, ribs, blades;
wet breathing pores, refreshed with clemency.

Arrive so I forget when you depart.
Arrive so I forget when you hit out
with your unkind departures, exits free.
Arrive so I forgive, forget, abide.

This dance is not just mine but yours, my foe.
This dance is not just ours but Time's to move,
unspooling clouds of film to fill the hours
so Time dissolves, instilling hearts with peace.

To crowd today with thoughts of your goodbyes.
To crowd today with thoughts of endless Time
is greyness; the dance of rain unheeding
the stealing back of grey, of grime, of thirst.

The spool unfolds the hues of dusty breath.
The spool unfolds the hues of endless thought.
For brown a scarred hill, raging red for prey;
the clean of green departs, the screen remains.

Then why do I romance with you, my foe?
Then why do I romance with you in dreams?
Enfolding sleep where thoughts no longer flow.
Then stilling colours all, the Screen remains.

Thayumanavar

The Silent Sage

V.S. KRISHNAN

A mong various human relations, the most intimate, sacred and deep-rooted is the one with the mother. While all other relations are characterised by an element of mutual expectation, the relationship with mother is based on pure love and devoid of any expectation. There is no parallel anywhere to the profundities of mother's love. Mother's love is limitless, sublime, unconditional, magnanimous and ever-enduring. No words can give adequate expression to the overwhelming flow of love that springs from the heart of a mother. Her son or daughter would have risen high as a towering spiritual leader or as a universal Guru but that makes no difference for the free flow of love between the mother and daughter or son. It is a divine relation that cuts through all barriers. It is unique and no other love can equal it, not even that of God. Perhaps, that was why God Siva himself manifested as a mother to a daughter. It is said that Lord Siva cannot physically be present in a perceivable form 'as Himself'

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whenever and wherever His devotees look for Him and that is the reason He manifested as a human mother to bestow His love and care to all His devotees at all times. Because Lord Siva manifested as a mother, to take care of a pregnant daughter, He came to be known as Thayumanavar or Matrubuteshwar [the Lord who became the Mother]. The legend of Thayumanava Swamy is a moving illustration of the motherly love and compassion bestowed by Lord Siva on His devotees.¹

Kediliappa and Gajavalli were an ideal couple residing in Vedaranyam, a town in the Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu. They were united not only by love towards each other but also by their devotion towards Lord Thayumanavar. They both aimed at a single goal in life; to embrace the Lotus Feet of Lord Siva. Entrusted with the responsibility of managing the local temple, Kediliappa did his duties sincerely, without expecting any reward and found happiness in his work. Having heard about his good qualities, King Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha offered him the position of a Minister.

Though his new work at Trisirapuram, the seat of royal power, changed Kediliappa's routine, it did not make any difference to his devotion to Lord Thayumanavar, the presiding deity of Rock Fort temple at Tiruchirappalli. Days passed by. Sometime in the year 1705, a boy child of exuberant charm was born to them. Being the ardent

¹ According to legend Ratnavati, a great female devotee of Lord Siva, was pregnant and as was customary, she returned to her mother's house, situated north of the Kaveri River for delivery. One day, while her mother had gone to Tiruchirappalli, across the river, Ratnavati felt her labour pains. Alone at home she cried for help. Soon, her mother came and attended to her delivery. Actually, her real mother was stuck across the river due to the flood. When the flood receded, she returned home and saw the happy face of Ratnavati with her baby. Pleasantly surprised, she asked her daughter who had helped her in the delivery, "You yourself came and helped!", said the daughter. But her mother said, "I have only just returned!". It then dawned on them that Lord Siva Himself had incarnated as her mother (*Thayum Anavar*). For Lord Siva, who has manifested in different forms at different times, perhaps this incarnation as mother truly reflects His divine qualities of love and compassion. Lord Thayumanavar, continues to bless His devotees from the Rock Fort Matrubuteshwar temple complex constructed in the 6th century at Tiruchirappalli.



Thayumanavar

devotees of Lord Thayumanavar, the parents believed that the boy was born as a result of the blessings of Lord Thayumanavar and they gave him the Lord's name.

Thayumanavar grew up a handsome youth, intellectually brilliant and devout in heart. He acquired knowledge from whichever direction it came and in whatever form it came. It came from the scriptures, saints, pundits, experience, and from inspiration and introspection. He absorbed it all. However, he was his usual self; calm, serene, composed and always finding happiness in sitting before Lord Thayumanavar, meditating and contemplating. Many pundits, and the king himself, came to know of his brilliant powers of observation and comprehension.

Then the inevitable happened. Kediliappa, the father, bid farewell to this world to rest in peace at the Lotus feet of the Lord. The king requested Thayumanavar to occupy the office vacated by his father. Though power and position did not interest him, Thayumanavar accepted the offer as a true Karma Yogi, and started performing his duties diligently. Even while doing his duties, he was driven by the urge to know the eternal truth and looked for a master who could fulfill his spiritual quest. One day, on his way to the Rock Temple at Tiruchirappalli, he saw the sage, Mouna Guru Desikar, who came from the lineage of Thirumular.²

Mouna Guru radiated a unique spiritual power. Thayumanavar realised that at last he had discovered what he was looking for. He sought the blessings of this saint and requested to be accepted as his disciple. The saint said that the time for his initiation had not come yet and that he should wait for an opportune moment. Thereafter, Thayumanavar spent most of his time in the company of this saint. When his guru was about to depart on a long pilgrimage, Thayumanavar was heartbroken, as he could not bear this separation.

² Thirumular who lived in the 8th century, was a saint, a realised Yoga Guru, a Siddhar, a great Siva devotee and a mystical poet. He articulated the concept of Siva as the cosmic power, the source, origin and cause of all the activities of the universe and his composition *Thirumantiram* is a treasure house of mystical knowledge. *Thirumantiram* consists of 3000 verses that deal with almost all aspects of *jiva* (individual), *jagat* (universe) and *Iswara* (God).

His guru then advised him that the essence of all spiritual pursuit (*sadhana*) is to ‘remain quiet’ (*summa iru*). “Remain quiet in silence, without any thought,” the Guru exhorted his disciple. Thayumanavar followed this advice very sincerely and he consequently experienced a state of peace and happiness: “As I remained quiet, without thoughts, I was uplifted to a state where, without the difference of ‘you’ and ‘me’, the pure and supreme ‘I’ (Self) alone remained,” he wrote later.

King Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha, himself a Siva devotee, observed Thayumanavar closely and found him extraordinarily brilliant and always in pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

The king said: “You are an enlightened person who has a higher goal and it would not be right on my part to restrict you to material affairs. However, I request you to continue to guide me in carrying out my duties as a king in the right manner.” Thayumanavar then served as a Philosopher Guide to the king. After the demise of the king, the queen, Rani Meenakshi, ascended the throne, but she turned out to be a pleasure-seeking woman who made it difficult for Thayumanavar to continue in the court. It pained him to see rival forces manoeuvring to take over power. Disgusted by these events, Thayumanavar resigned from his office and moved away from Trisirapuram.³ He remembered the words of advice given by his guru and remained in silence most of the time. Gradually, this state of silence transformed him into a realised being, ever in a state of Self-awareness. He started composing hymns expressing his experience of Self-realisation.

At the invitation of his brother, Siva Chidambaram, Thayumanavar visited his ancestral home at Vedaranyam. Here his relatives requested Thayumanavar to marry Mattuvar Kuzhali, a virtuous young girl whom they had selected for him. Thayumanavar then consulted his mentor and philosopher guide, Mouna Guru who said that marriage was never an impediment to those who pursued their spiritual goal with seriousness. The guru therefore advised Thayumanavar to go ahead with his marriage. Accordingly, the marriage of Thayumanavar

³ A few years later Rani Meenakshi lost the kingdom due to her incompetence and committed suicide.

with Mattuvar Kuzhali was solemnised. He was blessed with a son whom he named Kanaka Sabapathi. Unfortunately, soon after the child's birth his wife passed away.

Thayumanavar thereafter lived in seclusion, practising self-enquiry. Once again he met his guru, Mouna Guru Desikar, who reiterated his advice to observe silence. His guru who had earlier declined Thayumanavar's request for initiation, now initiated him into the order of renunciants (*sannyasa*). Perhaps the guru, in his wisdom, had wanted Thayumanavar to pass through the stage of family life (*grihasth asrama*) to fulfill some of his latent tendencies (*vasanas*), before he could progress in spiritual life. Thayumanavar then embarked on a pilgrimage. At Chidambaram, standing before Lord Nataraja, he immersed himself in thoughts of God, marvelling at His grace, splendour and beauty. He composed beautiful hymns in praise of Lord Nataraja: "There is no greater treasure than Thy grace, no greater power than Thou, no greater delight than Your vision. Overwhelmed with devotion, I become one with You."

Thayumanavar composed many hymns that are unparalleled in their poetic beauty and devotion. He returned to live in Tiruchirapalli and served his master, Mouna Guru. After the guru shed his body, Thayumanavar became the head of the Mutt (monastery) and spent most of the time in silence. Thayumanavar aimed at reaching the pure state of mind-lessness (*manathatra parisuddha nilai*). He said: "For those enlightened devotees, who ever remain in a state of bliss, words and their meanings will be a burden." (*allum pakalum arivaki ninravarkke sollum porulum sumai kaan paraparam*).⁴ He added that his aspiration was to overcome the obstacle of words and their meaning and remain, day and night, in silence (*sollum porulum atru summa iruppatharke allum pakalum enakku asai paraparam*).⁵

⁴ 'Thayumanavar' by Munaivar Sri E. Sundaramurthy from the collection, *Jnana Parambarai* presented by Arut Selvar Dr. N. Mahalingam and published by Ramananda Adigalar Foundation, Coimbatore 641006 in 2006, p.364.

⁵ Ibid., p.364.

According to him this is possible only by refraining from any thoughts, actions or words. He said that remaining in a state of silence is the highest state; the state equal to yoga. He composed immortal verses about his divine experiences. He had now become a realised soul. The purpose for which he had taken birth was fulfilled. This body is a mere means or instrument to seek the higher truth and once this end is achieved the medium loses its relevance. In his last years he went on a pilgrimage to several sacred places including Tiruvotriyur, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai, Tiruvarur, Madurai and finally Rameswaram. Having served the cause of Saiva Sidhantham and having attained the state of realisation, he was free from the delusions of body and mind. Around 1783, Thayumanavar entered *mahasamadhi*, union with the eternal reality at Ramanathapuram.⁶

Bhagavan Ramana was a *jivanmukta*, liberated while still living in the body. He was dispassionate and ever conscious of his Self. Yet, when reading the verses of Thayumanavar, he became so choked with emotion that tears rolled down his cheeks. He found it difficult to continue, put aside the book and remained in a contemplative state. This shows what profound impact Thayumanavar's verses had created on him. What made Thayumanavar's works appeal to Bhagavan so much? Why was Bhagavan, who was always steady and still, so moved by the verses of Thayumanavar? Why did Bhagavan want Thayumanavar's songs also to be included in the Tamil parayana at the Ashram?

In the presence of Bhagavan devotees never felt the need for words. The spell of silence was overwhelmingly present around Bhagavan. Before him one felt the power of silence as if it was a solid substance. Bhagavan said, "Silence is never-ending speech. Vocal speech obstructs the other speech of silence. In silence one is in intimate contact with the surroundings. The silence of Dakshinamurti removed the doubts of the four sages. He expressed the truth by means of silence (*mouna vyakhya prakatita tatvam*). Silence is said to be exposition. Silence is so potent."⁷ "Language is only a medium for communicating one's

⁶ Ibid., p.356.

⁷ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk\$68.

thoughts to another. It is called in only after thoughts arise; other thoughts arise after the 'I-thought' rises; the 'I-thought' is the root of all speech. When one remains without thinking one understands another by means of the universal language of silence."⁸ "Silence is unceasing eloquence."⁹

Bhagavan often remained in silence for long stretches of the day and often communicated in silence. The time he spent in silence was much more than the time he used for words. He was well known for the brevity of his speech. He must have been moved, when he found his own experience being expressed in the songs of Thayumanavar. What Bhagavan had not spoken about, but experienced within, Thayumanavar had spoken of, through his songs. While replying to the questions raised by devotees, Bhagavan often referred to Thayumanavar's works and selected some of his verses for recital (*parayana*) at the Ashram. Bhagavan said: "Silence is the most potent form of work. However vast and emphatic the sastras [scripture] may be, they fail in their effect. The Guru is quiet and peace prevails in all. His silence is more vast and more emphatic than all the sastras put together."¹⁰

"On one occasion, Bhagavan quoted the words of Thayumanavar and underlined the importance of *mouna* (silence). He defined *mouna* as "the state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of ego". In the whole of Thayumanavar's literature, what Bhagavan preferred is the following line: "With the disappearance of ego, another I-I spontaneously manifests in full glory".¹¹

"What is that power that is not located 'here' or 'there' but is present all over the universe? Which is that power that showers grace? Which is that power which gives life to all lives? What is the power that is infinite and eternal?" Thayumanavar posed such questions and answered that God alone is this supreme power.¹² He further said

⁸ Ibid., Talk§246.

⁹ Ibid., Talk§20.

¹⁰ Ibid., Talk§398.

¹⁰ Ibid., Talk§122.

¹² Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.357. *Angu, Ingu*.

that the eternal reality, which we call God, is beyond words, beyond expression and beyond the mind. It is Silence.

There is divinity in every human being but this divinity is lost when the mind comes into play. It is the mind that makes a person someone other than what he naturally is. Thayumanavar has therefore prayed to be blessed with the pure and perfect state that is free from the mind. He emphasises in his songs the need to reach this state of purity and perfection, free from the mind.¹³

The mind is always seeking something. Even when it gets what it wants, it is never contented but pursues some other object. Like the waves of the ocean, thoughts go on and on, generating multiple desires. According to Thayumanavar the only way to attain the state of contentment and fulfillment is to remain quiet (*summa iru*). In most of his songs, he highlighted the advice his Guru had given him in two simple words: *Summa Iru*.

In one song, Thayumanavar sings: “You made me sit quietly. Can there be a greater happiness than this?”¹⁴ Though the advice ‘Be quiet and still’ appears to be simple, it is not as easy as it appears to be, because the mind never rests, even for a while. It keeps generating thoughts. Even for a moment, one cannot free oneself from thoughts. The mind loves to indulge in thoughts right from the moment when the individual wakes up from deep sleep (*sushupti*). When it leaves one thought, it catches hold of another thought and this goes on and on. Thayumanavar says that the mind is like a monkey that has been bitten by a scorpion, its movements wild and agitated.¹⁵

He says: “O God, why have you put me in a situation where my mind swings, changes and jumps like a monkey?”¹⁶ In another song, Thayumanavar said: “Oh mind, having associated with you for so

¹³ *Manathatra Parisudha Nilai*.

¹⁴ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.365. *Soothu Onrum Inri Ennai Summa Irukkavaithai, Ithu Onrum Pothatho Inbam Paraparame*.

¹⁵ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.365. *Kolli Thel Kotti Kudhikindra Pei Kurangai Kalla ManamThulluthen Kando Paraparame*.

¹⁶ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.365. *Gunamilla Manamenum Pei Kurangin Pinne Maratha Kayudan Suzhala Ennai Vaithanaye*.

long, I will now give a good farewell to you. With the blessings of my venerable Guru, I will then reach a state beyond illusions like ‘I’ or ‘mine’ and will attain my natural state of being one with the Lord.”¹⁷

Though the world is a myth, a mere dream and transitory in nature, the mind always tends to turn towards this unreal world. The *vasanas* (inherent latent tendencies) which have been carried forward for ages also prompt our minds to turn towards the outside world. Thayumanavar says: “The worldly life is just a dream. I want to distance myself from this world and wish to live where there is no imagination or thoughts. O Mind, leave me alone and go to an imaginary world and live there.”¹⁸

To be in a state of stillness, without any thoughts, is indeed the highest state a *sadhaka* can aspire to, but it is not an easy task to keep the mind still. In a song titled *Tejomayanandam*, Thayumanavar says: “It may be possible to control and manage an elephant, a lion or a tiger. It may be possible to put five different metals into fire and perform the miracle of converting them into gold. It may even be possible to walk on water, to enter into fire and come out unharmed, and to gain all the sidhic powers, but it is very difficult to control the mind and remain quiet.”¹⁹ Mouna Guru who recognised the difficulties faced by Thayumanavar, in controlling his mind, told him that the act of ‘*summa iru*’ required great conscious effort, and then gave him detailed instructions on how this *sadhana* should be pursued with concentration and conscious effort. Thayumanavar followed these instructions scrupulously.

What constitutes one’s true nature is the Self which gives the individual the consciousness of his existence. The mind and body are just instruments that one possesses. It is the mind which creates the wrong notion of ‘I am the body’. The body grows, decays and perishes. What is real, supreme and eternal is the Self. Self-knowledge

¹⁷ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.371. *Vendiya Naal Ennodu Pazhagiya Nee...*

¹⁸ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy, Munaivar E., p.369. *Arpa Maname Akila Vazhvu Athanaiyum Soppanam Kandai...Karppanai Illa Idathe Ennai Summa Vaithirukka.*

¹⁹ Op.cit., Sundaramurthy Munaivar E., p.365. *Yanai, Singham, Karadi, Puli...*

alone is the absolute knowledge. In his songs titled *Akarabuvanam Chidambara Rahasya*, verses 18-23, Thayumanavar explains the advice he received from Mouna Guru:

He came and claimed my body, my belongings, my very life
 And taught me the path of rejection:
 You are not the five senses, nor the five elements,
 Nor the organs of action,
 You are none of these,
 You are not the body,
 Nor are you knowledge and ignorance,
 You are the Chit, the real, which is like a crystal,
 Reflecting the qualities of whatever is placed before it,
 And yet having no connection with it.²⁰

It is only when one identifies with the mind that one becomes somebody other than one's real Self. According to Bhagavan the ego, which is the creation of the mind, is the single obstacle to Self realisation. Remaining quiet (*summa iru*) is the best way to drive out the ego. In his *Akshara Mana Malai*, Bhagavan asks Arunachala: "[Arunachala!] You did not say the words, 'Do not speak. Just be still,' but, communicating through the posture of divine silence, you remained still, speech and breath both in abeyance, (exemplifying that state)."²¹

Bhagavan highlights the value of silence again in another passage: "[Arunachala!] May you bestow your grace by simply remaining enthroned in peaceful repose within my heart, so that it sweetly surges, becoming an ocean of bliss, and in consequence both word and thought subside within."²² While talking to a devotee from Colombo, Bhagavan agreed that it is difficult to remain quiet and that some effort like meditation is necessary.

He said: "Concentration is not thinking of one thing. On the other hand, it is keeping away all the thoughts which obstruct the vision of

²⁰ *Bhagavan and Thayumanavar* by Robert Butler, T.V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman, p.6. See davidgodman.org/rteach/Thayumanavar.pdf

²¹ *Akshara Mana Malai*, v.36. *Sollathu soli nee sollara nil enru...*

²² *Akshara Mana Malai*, v.31. *Sugakkadal ponga sollunarvu adanga...*

our true nature.”²³ Maharshi then quoted the song of Thayumanavar: “O Mind, I advised you to remain quiet but ignoring that advice, you went on debating abstract things and what have you gained? When remaining in quiet is bliss, why do you pursue this world of Maya? Though great saints keep on reiterating the importance of remaining quiet, you keep on wandering in the forest of ignorance.”²⁴

Who is a true devotee? The true devotee is one whose heart is overwhelmed with love and whose mind entertains no other thoughts except that of God. Where the heart is full of love, Lord Siva comes and resides there because, as Thirumular said, Lord Siva and Love are not separate. Siva is love and Love is Siva. When the loving mind is centered on God, it totally surrenders and individuality ceases. When devotion becomes so perfect, mature and complete, the devotee attains the state of non-duality (Advaita) with God. According to *Thirumantiram*, in the beginning one visualises God, later one sheds tears in front of His idol and finally one realises God within. Thayumanavar was a fine example of such a devotee. He symbolises the true love of a mother, the enlightened wisdom of a sage and the dedication of a true devotee. Thayumanavar, the Silent Sage and the true devotee, remains as a beacon in the galaxy of saints who reveal the way to spiritual fulfillment to us. ▲

²³Talk§398.

²⁴‘Udal Poyyuravu’ vv.5 &52; and ‘Payappuli’, v.6.

The Shining of My Lord

Verses from *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*
composed by Muruganar

TRANSLATED BY T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN
AND DAVID GODMAN

When Muruganar passed away in 1973, a huge portion of his poetic output, estimated to be about 18,000 verses, still remained unpublished. A few months before his death he made it clear that he wanted Sadhu Om, his long-time literary collaborator, to take charge of his manuscripts because he knew he was the only person who had the capacity, the knowledge and the enthusiasm to organise this vast collection and bring it out in a coherent form. Sadhu Om took on the challenge and spent much of the remainder of his own life copying out the verses and arranging them in a thematic way.

His efforts were supported by Prof. K. Swaminathan who, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, was the chief editor of Mahatma Gandhi's *Collected Works* and vice-president of the Ramana Kendra in New Delhi. Using his influence and government connections, Professor Swaminathan secured financial support for Sadhu Om's project. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s nine new volumes of Muruganar's previously

unpublished Tamil verses were brought out in a series entitled *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*,¹ all published by the Delhi Ramana Kendra. The government subsidy paid for the printing, allowing each volume to go on sale for the bargain price of Rs 10 per copy. These books have recently gone out of print, but all the volumes have been scanned and can nowadays be read on the Sri Ramanasramam site.²

Very few of these verses have so far appeared in English. In 2004 about 1,800 verses from a long poem entitled *Padamalai*, which originally appeared in volume nine of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, were translated and appeared in a book of that title,³ but other than this, only a few stray translated verses have appeared in the writings of Prof. K. Swaminathan,⁴ Sadhu Om and Michael James.

T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman have recently translated a selection of verses from the first eight volumes of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* and arranged them thematically under the title *The Shining of My Lord*.⁵ The book will be published later this year. Here is one of its sections entitled 'The Guru':

The Guru

1 Only the Self, the real Lord who exists and shines in the heart as 'I, I', is the Guru.

2 The appropriate Guru for you is the one whom you feel your mind has been effortlessly and totally captivated by. He is indeed the *jnana*-Guru who bestows being-consciousness and who shines as the form of God himself in this world.

¹ *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* can be translated as *The Experience of Jnana Bestowed by Sri Ramana*, or *Experiencing the Jnana that is Sri Ramana*.

² http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/resource_centre/publications/ramana-jnana-bodham/

³ *Padamalai*, translated by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and David Godman.

⁴ A few verses from *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* can be found in *Homage to the Presence of Sri Ramana*, translated by K. Swaminathan and published by Sri Ramanasramam.

⁵ There will be a few extra verses from other works by Muruganar, but the vast majority will be from *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*.

3 Only when the devotee is fully mature does Lord Parameswara, through his grace, bestow true *jnana* in abundance. The Guru, on the other hand, brings the devotee's mind to complete maturity through his power, and then bestows true *jnana* by charging it with *sakti-pada*.⁶

4 Only those Gurus who, like the sun, radiate penetrating rays of grace are *jnana* Gurus. Lord Siva manifested as Guru Ramana. He is consciousness-the-supreme, who with his glance puts an end to the delusion of fear-inducing concepts.

5 Lord Arunachaleswara, who stands as the grace-bestowing supreme, assumed the form of the *Brahman*-knowing Guru. His only wish is to transform the life of devotees into a life of nothing but bliss that possesses the surging light of *jnana* devoid of ignorance.

6 The *jiva* has taken on the form of the body, forgetting its real nature, the Self, which is the light of consciousness, the limitless sky-like expanse. The pre-eminent function of the *Sadguru* who is the Self, one's true nature, is to clearly convince the *jiva* of its real nature by dispelling the delusion of 'I' and 'mine' in the body, the possessions, and so on.

7 The peerless light of true *jnana* will well up and surge forth in a heart that has taken as its exclusive target the grace of the Guru. In the Self-experience in which nothing but consciousness exists, the fear-inducing mental anxieties that cause distress will leave for good, and the bliss associated with an intense serenity of mind will arise, filling up the heart.

8 The trustworthy Guru Ramana, the fire of *jnana*, possesses a perfect and ripe wisdom that is full of the light of *mauna*. He steals

⁶ Lord Parameswara is Lord Siva. *Sakti-pada* is both the power and the process by which the Guru liberates the devotee. Muruganar is saying here that God (Lord Parameswara) has the capacity to do this only if the devotee is in a mature state, whereas the Guru has the additional power and capacity to bring devotees to that state of maturity. The title Muruganar gave this verse was 'The Superiority of Guru over God'.

as his tribute only the ego-mind, the delusion, which is the 'I am this body of flesh' stain.

9 Other than the grace-bestowing Guru, who is both father and mother, who else on this earth exists as the close and permanent relative who is capable of bestowing the eminent being-consciousness that confers true benefit on the *jiva*, not only in this birth, but in all births?

My Guru

10 I remained befuddled, imagining I had compulsory duties to perform. My Guru then freed me completely from this sense of obligation through the experience of firm *jnana*, the state of oneness that is free from the bewilderment of the ego which brings into being the idea of mandatory duties. He transformed me into the supreme which, by its very nature, soars as the empyrean of grace.

11 My Guru who lives forever, abiding gloriously in the heart as consciousness, devoid of overpowering sleep, gently smiled within himself, thinking of my foolish ignorance that makes me sing the waking up song for him.⁷

12 My Guru shines as the embodiment of *mauna*, the infinite expanse of grace. To make me see myself as himself in the time it takes to blink an eye, he demonstrated clearly in my heart, in the form of the pure expanse, the *jnana swarupa* that exists as the treasure trove of grace.

13 My Guru who possesses the virtue of generosity effectively exercised his dominion over me by bestowing on me the blessed state of living in perpetual bliss. I now live as an inebriated, lazy man, my mind swelling with bliss, just like a bee that has drunk the honey of

⁷There is a song in *Tiruvachakam* entitled 'Tirupalliezhucci' that is generally sung to wake Siva up in the early morning. Muruganar made his own version of this song and included it in *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. As Muruganar points out in this verse, since Bhagavan is never in the unconscious state of deep sleep, there is no need to attempt to wake him up.

grace at his feet. I merely eat and play, with absolutely no anxieties in my heart.

14 How wonderful it is that the very mind which was accustomed to moving in the way of bondage has now been made to shine with liberation as its own nature. What other evidence is needed that Ramana, the king of Gurus, is a magician?

15 Guru Ramana, the Lord, wells up and surges as the rapturous supreme bliss in the hearts of those true devotees in whom love abounds. He, the supreme reality who sustains this world, remaining as its unmoving prop, will not allow those who have placed their trust in him to suffer and wither away.

16 At first he appeared separate from me as my mother and father, as the God who bestows grace and eventually as the utterly impartial teacher of true *jnana*. Enabling me to experience bliss, he has now become one with me as my own non-dual Self-nature, that which is entitled to one's love, which confers only goodness.

17 My God Ramana reigned over me, shining clearly within me as the Self, the formless truth of consciousness, and externally as the Guru who bestows grace-consciousness. As I am firmly established in his feet, there is no delusion for me.

18 He is the brahmin [*Brahman*-knower], the embodiment of immaculate grace that is the intrinsic nature of the transcendental *swarupa*. As a consequence of him abiding in my heart without ever leaving it, the sense of 'I' and 'mine' that are the ego-delusion, has been destroyed. In his state of being the Guru, none can equal or better him.

19 It is not possible for me to describe even slightly the greatness of the Guru who totally destroyed my mental bewilderment. If I attempt to have thoughts, my mind will ecstatically glorify his nature in the abode of *mauna*, that which is the source of the thought that attempted to praise him.

20 Because *Sivam*, ever untouched by name and form, itself took me as its target by becoming the form of the Guru, I have flourishing in my heart a life of resting in the divine feet of silence, that state of distinction in which there is nothing to dwell upon.

My Guru Lord

21 Except for the god who is my Guru Lord, the master of *mauna*, what did all the other gods do for me? All the other gods in their heavens exist only for everyone else. For me, my Guru alone is my god.

22 Our Lord, shining forth resplendently as *swarupa*, exists as the repository of grace. When he is waiting for an opportune moment to steal your ego and save you from the misery-filled and delusive samsara, do not go after and join the spurious gurus who wander in the streets with the sole aim of stealing your wealth.

23 To destroy the false first person that rises as I, our Lord incarnated himself in an appropriate way upon this earth as the *jnana*-Guru to promulgate the enquiry method, 'Who am I?'. The way to attain his divine feet of silence that are the state of liberation is to come to him and remain fully under the dominion of our Lord who is the supreme light of grace, *jnana*.

24 Remaining as the sun of *jnana*, my Lord, the *Sadguru*, radiated the light of grace and dispelled completely the dense darkness, the intense delusion in my heart. Consequently, the distress arising through bewilderment, which in turn is caused by the obsession with concepts, ended. This is how my Lord came to exercise his rule over me, I who was such an insignificant one.

25 Our Guru, our Lord Ramana, *Sadasivan* who is free from the ego, is the excellent one who speaks only about *jnana*, and never utters a single useless word. He is a sea of serenity, free of anger. He is the wish-fulfilling jewel in the hearts of human beings.

26 Because the light of my Guru whose form is consciousness now flourishes in my heart spontaneously as the Self, I see it continuously,

without ever blinking. Will the light that has embraced me and enabled me to attain *mauna* through a dead ego ever allow me to blink?

27 While remaining as the expanse of consciousness that exists as the true eye, my Lord sported before me as the Guru who bestows being-consciousness, pouring down the rain of grace that became a great flood, and enabling the realisation of the one deathless reality in the heart.

28 Our peerless Lord, the Guru who has the true *jnana* that is divine grace, is a prosperous person who grants to those who resort to him the ultimate refuge, the state of *Sivam* itself, making it become their possession. But those whose minds are deluded by desire, and so on,⁸ will go to him and beg only for garbage, dry leaves and twigs.

29 Ramana is the embodiment of reality in whom flourishes abundantly the godly Lordship that is extolled by all the people of the world. He is the grace-bestowing Guru for the science of the supreme [*paravidya*]. His power of *jnana*, the knowledge of reality that is the state of *mauna* and which is the perfection of liberation, is extremely difficult for anyone to attain.

The Guru-jewel

30 Having had *darshan* of the Guru-jewel, from now on I will not wander and suffer in this world, desiring a different jewel. The Guru-jewel merged in my heart as a ruby and rendered unto me the supreme benefit, enabling a life of divine exultation to prosper.

31 When I come to think of it, there is absolutely no greatness in this world for me, a dog, other than through the Guru-jewel. Ever since the Guru-jewel that is the divine light merged in my heart, my life has become imbued with the radiance of the diamond that is consciousness, my own real nature.

⁸ 'Desire, and so on' is an abbreviation of the following list: *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *loba* (miserliness), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride), *mathsarya* (jealousy).

32 I, who have joined and moved intimately with the Guru-jewel, will not wander around and suffer, begging for another jewel. In the omnipresent fullness of grace bestowed by my Guru-jewel via his look of grace, I am not aware of even a single need.

33 The Guru, the magnificent jewel, abides in my heart as the light of consciousness, bringing to an end the ignoble obsessions of 'I' and 'mine'. He is the merciful one who has as his very nature the unchanging quality of grace, the beginningless [benevolent] disposition towards his devotees.

34 Remaining within my heart, my king, the jewel lamp that needs no kindling, expelled the ego-delusion, leaving no trace of it. I now spend my time extolling the glory of my Lord experiencing real bliss in my mind.

The one, unique word of my Guru

Sometimes the 'one, unique word' refers to summa iru, ('Be still') Bhagavan's often repeated order to the mind to be still. At other times it alludes to the silent emanations that came from Bhagavan that he claimed were the highest and primary form of his teachings.

35 I was subjected to mental bewilderment, imagining myself to be taking births and wallowing in *samsara*. Then he uttered the one word that made me never-born, clearly convincing me that I was being-consciousness, the supreme that merely exists and shines as the eye of grace. Through this eye I saw birth and death as mere imagination.

36 To engage in vain disputation about the reality, the effulgent light that is beyond words and their interpretations, is stupidity. The wise course is to shine, abiding as the perfect primal entity, the reality, having lost the rising ego. This happens as a consequence of the one word bestowed by the Guru – the *mauna* consciousness that cannot be described in words.

I will serve no other Lord

37 I will cherish exclusively the divine being who is my Guru. Other than him I will not approach another human being. Responding to this [attitude] in an appropriate way, my Lord invested me, his slave, with the crown of *jnana*, and I attained *mauna*.

38 I have become a slave to the feet of my Guru-Lord, the granter of clear knowledge of reality, who dispelled my delusion of bondage and reigned over me. My mind and speech will think of and sing about only the glory of my Lord, the liberal bestower of divine grace. They will not, even in a state of forgetfulness, utter the names of others.

39 I do not have the power to offer to others even an iota of the immense desire that arises in my heart for my Lord. The perfect light of the grace of my Lord, the vast expanse of supreme bliss that is the fountainhead of love, has taken total possession of my desire.

40 By establishing me in his state of truth, the holy land of mauna whose nature is the consciousness that neither rises nor sets, my Lord terminated the chaotic activity of ego-consciousness. My mind will not revere anyone other than this *Brahman*-knower who is the embodiment of grace.

41 On account of the great wealth, the fortune of grace in my heart, I will now proclaim with divine arrogance: 'I will be a slave only of the one who ruled over me, and not to anyone else in this world.'

42 I am not ignorant of the fact that that all the gods who appear to be many are only one, but although I know this, out of all those gods my mind will only desire and flow towards Siva-Ramana.

43 Irrespective of what I may gain through other people in any of the worlds, from now on I will not consent in my mind, even slightly, to enter into the state of slavery to anyone else except my Lord.

MOUNTAIN PATH

44 Without getting sidetracked, my mind remains firmly established in the Self, the supreme of supremes, as nothing but the Self. As a result my love flows abundantly only towards the feet of my Lord that shine as supreme bliss. I will not entertain any [love] towards anything else.

45 My Guru, Siva-Ramana, dispelled the twin attachments of 'I' and 'mine', and by doing so abolished the affliction of birth, becoming my own *swarupa* that shines as the light of consciousness. Now that I have taken up personal service to my Lord's feet of grace, there is no possibility that I will ever become slave to another.

46 My Lord, who manifested in this world and ruled over me, established in my heart the kingdom of infinitely spacious grace, enabling me to experience *swarupa*, the divine silence whose very nature is happiness. For what purpose should I now resort to others, uttering words of flattery?

47 The excellent grace that my Lord granted me, the lowest dog, was the supreme expanse of consciousness in which I could see no separate object to desire. I will only take refuge in my Lord, my own Self, he who bestowed this lofty state on this dog. I will not run after anyone else, seeking anything else. ▲

A Pilgrim's Log

RAVI IYER

My wife Anu, dropped me off at Dulles International Airport, Washington DC. Four weeks earlier we had been sitting in our Puja Room in our house in Vienna, Virginia discussing the plans for our India trip in July 2010 in connection with the *upanayanam* of my brother's son as well as the *sathabhishekam* celebrations of my father.

I mentioned that it would be unlikely that I would be able to visit Arunachala until 2011. As a self employed physician I could never afford to take more than ten days off from work at a single time. Each trip to India represented an enormous expense since I had to continue paying the practice expenses and payroll while effectively earning no money and at the same time incurring additional expenses while in India. Thus I have to earn and save money for each trip. I had already made a trip to Pune in May 2009 to care for my father and since the July 2010 trip was again to Pune, I had resigned myself to mental contemplation of the only place that I truly call my home.

As I spoke these words my gaze moved to the picture of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The gentle countenance smiled back at me as if relishing a secret joke.

Next day my office manager brought me the December schedule. She wanted to know which days we would be closing the practice for Christmas and New Year. I looked at the calendar. December 23rd was a Wednesday and Christmas fell on a Friday this year. My heart jumped at the realisation that between December 23rd and January 4th we would be open only for 4 days. This meant that if I made a trip to Tiruvannamalai I would lose no more than four days of revenue and we could easily offset that loss by working extra 1/2 days on weekends before and after this period!

I called Anu with my suggestion. She quickly found me a flight itinerary that fitted the dates and was affordable. I would depart at 5:30 pm on Wednesday December 23rd and reach Chennai, India at 11:50 pm on Thursday December 24th. After resting at my brother-in-law's place in East Tambaram I could reach Ramanasramam on Friday December 25th afternoon and I could stay there till January 1st, 2010.

My return would be on January 2nd, 2010.

What was more, December 31st was full moon and January 1st was Bhagavan's Jayanti. I had never before been able to experience either event at Arunachala. It is at moments like these that I relearn the lesson of the beauty of His play. He plays with the hearts of His bhaktas like Krishna with His gopis. One day He makes me feel the ache and despondency of separation and then in the next instant He fills me with the longing and excitement of impending union. Such is His Blessed Leela and I thrilled to play my part in it. On a separate note, I had made a vow in December 2006 that I would visit Arunachala every year henceforth and by arranging this trip He had in one stroke ensured that this vow would be fulfilled for both 2009 and 2010. Who is it that dares to claim that it is they who are performing the actions.... Indeed it is only He who takes such vows and it is He who fulfills them too, yet all the while letting us be the beneficiaries of His actions. Such is His Grace.

I walked past the Security gates and boarded the flight at Dulles. The 20 hour trip passed in a strange dream like movement. Every trip of mine to Arunachala has had a completely unique flavour. Never

has the visit been the same. This time the pull of Arunachala was inexorable. Bhagavan has frequently claimed that indeed no one ever goes anywhere or comes anywhere, that the Self remains motionless while what moves is the scenery of the vehicle, body, plane, clouds until finally the scenery of the destination is displayed in full detail before the Eternal Witness. And indeed this time it was exactly so. Sitting in my seat with the thrumming vibration of the engines beneath my feet, I distinctly felt that there was indeed no going to Arunachala that could ever be done. There was profound stillness within and without me, a sense of conscious awareness of infinite depth stretching beyond the limits of space and time. A profound stillness of unconcerned and unaffected awareness that was me but so much greater than anything that I had ever associated as me before. Thoughts would occasionally rise but their movement had slowed to the point that they were like torpid lazy bubbles rising through the molasses like density of my awareness. So distinct was this separation between the few thoughts that rose and the intensity of awareness that there was no effort needed to control these random bubbles of thought. The awareness had begun resonating with a powerful fascination and there was no room for anything outside of itself.

Right there at 35,000 feet over the North Atlantic I realised once and forever that I was always at Arunachala and that there was never anything outside of that state.

Friday, December 25th, 2009:

I am woken up from my jet-lagged slumber by my driver, who informs me that we have reached Tiruvannamalai. I glance at my watch. It is 5:30 pm. Then the car passed beneath the wrought iron arches and I found myself embraced by the shadow of the 400 year old iluppai tree of my spiritual home driving away the demons of such fears and declaring the eternal constancy of the silent welcome of my master. I walk into the great hall to greet and acknowledge the smile of recognition and welcome beaming from Bhagavan's picture before making my way to my assigned room in the Pallakothu section of the ashram. It was with a sense of glad relief that I sank into my ashram bed at 10 pm.

Saturday, December 26th, 2009:

I woke up without the benefit of an alarm at 3:00 am thanks to my body still remembering the circadian rhythms of the western hemisphere. I walked towards the old Meditation Hall which curiously was radiant with flood lights, a very unusual finding at this hour. On entering I was surprised to see that three workers were busy painting the walls and Bhagavan's couch had been moved to the middle of the room and the wooden barriers that served as a cordon had been moved aside. I realised that they were preparing the room for Bhagavan's *Jayanti* barely six days away.

As I stood before Him, He smiled His welcome at this new accessibility. I moved forward and sat very close to His couch delighted at this rare opportunity to have the '*sparsham*' of the couch, which my Master occupied for nearly three decades showering His Grace on prince and pauper alike.

The large picture frame of Him reclining with feet stretched down the length of the couch was lifelike above me as I sat at His Feet. Time stood still as my heart relived this experience that it once had before the Master in a different body, in a different lifetime. Bhagavan has often said that the Guru's Glance (*guru kataksham*) is like the grip of a tiger on the throat of its prey. Once so held, no matter what the disciple may do, however much he may struggle, despite all his failings he is never forsaken, and is eventually consumed into the eternal state that is *kaivalyam*. Sitting there at the feet of Bhagavan I felt with sureness that verily I had no cause for fear having become the captive of this Tiger.

The workers continued their work around me while I sat in rapture at Bhagavan's feet. Strangely no one chose to enter for the next three hours. Periodically the door would open and someone would step in and bow hastily and leave after seeing the workers working around me. There was no sign saying that they could not stay. Yet no one dared intrude. It was as if Bhagavan had purposely orchestrated the events to give me this private time with Him and I unabashedly drank with abandon from the cup that was offered.

I met Swami Shantananda Puri. His body has slowed somewhat after his recent heart attack but his mind has lost none of its

perspicacity or wisdom. Satsang with such people and watching the quiet unobtrusive teaching by practice of the many ashram inmates is far more efficacious in enabling my transformation than the most brilliant oratory of the learned pundits.

At the ashram I begin to see the true meaning of *ahimsa*. I am beginning to see that the customary understanding of the principle of non-violence or *ahimsa* as non-injury to animals and fellow beings and extending to ideas of vegetarian notions of diet and a monastic form of existence could not be more infantile. Here at Arunachala I am brought face to face with the truth that *ahimsa* first and foremost means non-differentiation from self.

I am shown here that the essence of differential identification of oneself is violence. This is the primordial violence committed by me within my consciousness long before it manifests as external behaviour.

Sitting here at Arunachala, Bhagavan makes me confront the truth about how I commit this violence in myriad ways and the hours I spend watching the behaviour of ashram inmates and elevated souls like Swami Shantananda Puri reaffirm the truth that something higher is not incompatible with normal existence.

Sunday, December 27th, 2009:

The ashram president, Sri VS Ramanan graciously sits down with me after breakfast. He enquires about my family and parents. Through him I learnt that December 31st is Full Moon + Lunar eclipse + *Arudra Darshanam* day and January 1st is Bhagavan's *Jayanti*. He tells me that this kind of synchrony of events is extremely rare. I am thrilled at this blessing. It is always a joy to converse with him and Smt. Susila Mami.

I climbed to Skandasramam today. The weather is cool even in the afternoon and there is always a refreshing breeze that is very pleasant indeed. The physical exercise is quite beneficial and I always return to the US in better health after visiting Ramanasramam.

There is a very nice sannyasi from either Kerala or Palakad who lives at Skandasramam and frequently gives walking sticks to struggling climbers. Every morning at 8 am he performs puja to Bhagavan at

MOUNTAIN PATH

Skandasramam to the tune of the most melodious and vibrationally powerful chant one can hear. It is an intense experience to lose oneself in the waves of sound as he performs his worship.

Walking back to the ashram, I cannot help wondering how anyone could possibly conceive any other way to spend their vacation time than coming to Arunachala, then I smile as I realise that most of my relatives would probably think the reverse about me. Such is the wonder of His Leela.

I run into a new acquaintance, one Mr. C.S. Bedi from Chandigarh. He too shares the same inexplicable connection to Arunachala as me. “Most of my friends cannot comprehend what I do at this place for 15 days, or why I would come here,” he says laughing a bit self consciously.

“What can I tell them, when I do not understand how this place holds me captive. Who can understand the joy of this place without first losing themselves?”

He knows the inner pradakshina path very well having done it many times, and we laugh like children on a secret adventure as we make plans to walk it at night.

Monday, December 28th 2009:

I climbed to Skandasramam around 3 am. The rear gate of the ashram is kept closed until 6 am; however I use the detour available by walking past the Ganapati temple just beyond Annamalai Swami ashram and swinging right along Pallakothu tank along the outer aspect of the ashram's rear boundary wall until I reach the rear gate from the other side. From there it is up the regular path to Skandasramam. The early morning darkness is well relieved by the bright illumination of an LED headlamp that I brought specifically for this purpose.

The climb to Skandasramam strikes me as a very apt metaphor for the course of spiritual sadhana. The initial 1/3 is a steep heart pounding climb that very often bests the faint of heart, just as when one initially starts a new sadhana, one is faced with seemingly daunting obstacles. But then just when you think that you would never succeed

in the face of such rigour, the path levels off and you enter a shaded plateau between two hill outcrops.

Sitting securely on that rock in the predawn darkness, I felt suspended in space with the lights of the Arunachaleshwar temple and the town shining like jewels beneath my feet. Above was the December sky and the waxing moon. Behind was the towering massive presence of Arunachala. In my ears were the magnetic sounds of Vedic chants. I rapidly sink into this experience. There are no further words that can be said.

Tuesday, December 29th, 2009:

I spent the day relatively quietly at the Ashram. Everywhere the preparations for the coming *Jayanti* on January 1st are in full swing. The open ground right outside the dining hall where the majority of the water taps are located, has been covered by a huge pandal and the ground has been washed and coated with copious amounts of diluted cowdung that act as a bonding agent upon the loose dirt. Once dried the resulting effect is as if the entire area has been cemented into a firm dry surface that does not stain clothes nor release any dust. This will be the main dining area for the estimated 10,000 visitors on *Jayanti* day.

Yet through it all nothing changes in the underlying rhythms of the Ashram. In a manner directly comparable to the unmoving and unchanging Arunachala peak that towers above, the daily *parayana* and meditations continue unruffled regardless of all the movement. This is my Rock of Gibraltar. This constancy, this certainty of permanence amidst the impermanence that pervades even this place. This is the silent declaration of my Guru and My Father of the One *Sat* that vibrates in stillness at the centre of an entire cosmos of whirlwind change.

What words are to be spoken when I am reduced to a state of silence by the Bliss of simple being, when there are very few thoughts at all that trouble the ease of ones existence, and there is a natural silence that is indescribable to anyone outside the pale of that state and yet its radiance is unmistakable to recognise when confronted by someone who is in its grip.

Wednesday, December 30th, 2009:

I climb up and spend the morning at Skandasramam. After lunch, C.S. Bedi informs me that we may do *giri pradakshina* via the inner path. Another North Indian couple also join us and we set off. The inner *pradakshina* path commences as a fork from the path to Skandasramam a couple of 100 feet from the ashram rear gate. However at 1 pm the rear gate was closed, so we took the bypass that I had discovered a few days back from the side of Annamalai ashram along Pallakothu tank.

This was my first time and I did not expect the lush and wild beauty of the inner path that commences right from the start. About five minutes into the path there is a stream of cool refreshing water that forms a natural waterfall into a three foot deep pool of crystal water. From there we crossed a small garden or park that appeared to be managed by the Arunachala reforestation group. The heavily wooded footpath trail of the inner *pradakshina* ends finally at Pachaiamman Koil on the north western side of Arunachala.¹

We walked steadily along the path surrounded by the raw wild beauty of Arunachala. This was a face I had never seen or imagined before. The sounds and activity of the outer world were only distantly apprehensible here. I was transported back to my childhood when I would hide with friends in bushes of the backyard and create a private world in which I would revel in seclusion.

Wednesday, December 30th evening: 8pm:

I returned to my favourite spot on the rock above Skandasramam after dinner. Night had fallen and I sat there, allowing myself to sink into contemplation of the spectacle of the township lights before me....

Sitting on that rock for the first time there was the *experience of the unreality* of the Universe and the simultaneous *experience of the reality of awareness!* An enormous sense of expansive freedom filled my consciousness. I truly had nothing to do in this life or any other

¹ Readers should be aware that the Inner Path has now been closed by the Forestry Department. Anyone who wishes to walk the Inner Path requires permission from the Forestry Office, which is situated near the bus stand in Tiruvannamalai.

life henceforth. These experiences and pictures and impressions were automatic emissions and therefore of no concern of mine, of no greater import than the random bead of sweat that may drip from my forehead or any other automatic bodily function that I may witness. If even death were to come to this body at this moment it would be merely one more automatic experience superimposed upon this *awareness*. This *awareness* that had no name, no beginning, no end, no gender, no form, neither light nor dark, no direction, no place of residence, no location, no movement, no stillness, no attribute apart from itself, no support yet it is radiantly luminous, the one light by which all is manifested, the one alone that ever remains, no means to know it except to be it, no way to manifest except as Silence.

It was 10 pm when I became conscious of my surroundings. I got up and climbed down to the Ashram and lay on my bed.

Thursday, December 31st, 2009:

I got up at 5 am, which was a little later than my usual hour. There was sense that I had never slept. I felt refreshed and there was no experience of fatigue but somehow the distinction between sleep and wakefulness no longer felt clear-cut.

After breakfast I set out on my own to do *giripradakshina* along the inner path. When I reached the flowing stream, I climbed down into the pool and bathed under the waterfall. Climbing out I walked along the footpath while the weather was neither cold nor hot and I felt very comfortable walking in my wet T-shirt and shorts with my canvas Ramanasramam shoulder bag. Along the way there were several other ponds and tanks some of whom had some sannyasis bathing and washing their clothes.

I continued walking until I reached Parvati Mukham. There I noticed a side trail bifurcating away from the Inner Path and on impulse I followed it and within a short distance I was deeper into the forest at the base of Parvati Mukham. Here there was a profusion of red coloured and yellow coloured stones. I picked several stones that attracted my fancy.

Walking alone down the Inner Path was a special experience. Like my private time in front of Bhagavan's couch on December 26th, there was a sense of intimate communion with my Mother. There was at no time any feeling of fatigue. The feet never seemed to touch the ground despite the fact that it was a Full Moon day, there were no other pilgrims on the path and I walked carefree in the courtyard of my Father and Mother revelling in the joy that can only be experienced when in one's own home.

I reached the Ashram at 11:30am just in time to join C.S. Bedi and other friends at the lunch-line outside the dining hall. He took one look at my face and asked, "Did you do *girivalam*?" "Yes!", I smiled back. "I am going again after lunch want to come?" He laughed. "You have become crazy!" I laughed, "It's Arunachala's fault!"

After lunch I set off again alone on the Inner Path. There was no fatigue and I was not really pushing my pace. Each circuit was about nine miles and yet at no point did I feel any strain. All through my circuit I would be doing *japam* but at many times even the *japam* would stop and there would be periods of blankness when I would not be able to recall the sector that I had just crossed, yet the feet walked and the body moved.

Gazing up at Arunachala I suddenly realised that by this time tomorrow I would be on the road to Chennai and onward to Washington, DC. My heart was gripped by a doubt: "Of what use is all Your power to shower Grace upon me, if You are unable to be equally powerful when I am physically removed from this place," I boldly asked, "If You are not bounded by Space and Time then how is it that You pretend that Your Grace is dependent on my proximity to You?"

The answer came immediately to my consciousness, "Stop thinking that you are physically removed and I will stop pretending to limit my Grace." Relief descended upon me at this assurance and I turned and continued to walk with a song in my heart.

I reached the Ashram at 4:30 pm and went and rested in my room for an hour. At 6:30 pm in accordance with my usual habit I sat outside the Samadhi Hall as the *parayana* went on inside before Bhagavan's *samadhi*.

After dinner, I learned that C.S. Bedi and some other people were planning another *girivalam* via the Outer Path. So at 9 pm I joined them and set off once again for the 3rd time that day. Since it was Full Moon, the Outer Path was solid stream of humanity walking around the Hill. This was a unique counterpoint to the experience of the inner path. An experience of remaining centered on Arunachala and internally silent despite the tumultuous throng of humanity and the multitudes of vendors hawking refreshments and wares to the ambulatory population. The Full Moon was huge and luminous and the silvery moonlight bathed the Hill with an ethereal glow.

It was 12:05 am when I reached the Ashram and the Lunar eclipse was just beginning to cast its shadow across the Moon. I lay down in my bed and performed *japam* for 30 minutes and then fell asleep.

Friday, January 1st, 2010: Arudra Darshanam / Bhagavan's Jayanti & New Year

I got up at my usual time. My legs felt no soreness and my body felt strong and refreshed. I had my bath and wore a specially starched and ironed shirt and *veshti* and walked over to Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall where the *parayanams* had already begun. The *lingam* was decorated in a very grand manner with all the flowers and garments. But more than that was a subtle sense of tremendous majesty that radiated from the Samadhi and was reflected in every picture of Bhagavan.

I stood in the breakfast line supremely happy. In my fifty-one years I have never ever attended any family function of any kind where I had felt more at home, more comfortable and more belonged than on that one morning at Ramanasramam.

I was standing thus in line with joyous heart when suddenly I was gripped by a shaking chill. I started shivering violently and I struggled to control it so that people around me may not become alarmed. One moment I was feeling totally healthy and vital and in the next instant I was in the grip of this strange fever. I continued to shiver all through breakfast and when I got up after the meal, my legs felt very weak. I stumbled to my room and curled up on my bed in a fetal position as I continued to shiver. I took some medicine from my

MOUNTAIN PATH

travel pack for the fever and slept very restlessly until 11 am. Getting up I walked over to the ashram. There I met Dr. Anand Ramanan who had arrived for the *Jayanti* a few days earlier. He checked me out and noted that the lymph nodes (glands) in my neck were slightly swollen and felt that I may be coming down with some viral fever. He prescribed some medicines for me.

I was scheduled to leave after lunch and I bid my farewells to Sri V.S. Ramanan and Smt Ramanan and a few other Ashram inmates that I had become familiar with. I circled Bhagavan's Samadhi and Mother Alagammal's shrine. Normally I always feel the pang of regret and a sense of separation whenever it comes time to leave Ramanasramam. But not this time. I felt clearly that for me there was no leaving this place ever and that from this moment onwards I would always be here regardless of my physical state.

Standing before Bhagavan with body steadily becoming consumed by fever and a growing deep pain invading my bones, I felt that whether this body of mine flourished or perished, I had found my eternal sanctuary beyond Space and Time. I turned and got into the car that would take me to Chennai.

By the time I reached Chennai, I was burning with fever and there was no strength in my limbs. I would later learn that I had most probably contracted dengue fever. I collapsed into bed at my brother-in-law's place. My mother-in-law tended to me as best as she could and by 10 pm I was able to struggle to my feet and proceed to the airport. I was feeling so weak that it was hard for me to think clearly and I was definitely in no position to respond to all the over-solicitous inquiries about how I was feeling by the profusion of relatives and well-wishers who were emotionally attached to me. I boarded the aircraft and flopped into my seat. I had no strength, yet a part of me remained unconcerned. Yes the body was failing. Yes there was tremendous pain in every limb but I continued to feel the benevolent protection of Arunachala. The vision of Parvati with Her *abhaya mudra* (fear not gesture) was vivid in my mind and there was no sense of fear. I fell asleep and did not wake even for meals except

to drink some Sprite on the flight to Frankfurt. At Frankfurt I had wheelchair assistance to my connecting flight and again fell asleep until Washington DC.

Anu picked me up and when I reached home and crawled into bed, the fever still had me in its grip. For the next five days I continued to remain bed-ridden with my body crucified by pain and able to drink only liquids. There was strange dichotomy in my awareness. Even at the height of the illness when I felt sure that it was impossible to ever experience more pain, I felt strangely removed from it. On the morning of the 6th day after my return to US I got up well before dawn, still very weak but unable to sleep. I slowly walked into the kitchen. It was 4:30 am and everyone in the house except my dog and I was fast asleep. As a physician I knew that the best thing for me was frequent drinks of fluid with salt and I decided to squeeze some lemons and make some lemonade with some salt. I cut the lemon but when I tried to squeeze it I had no strength in my fingers to apply the necessary pressure.

I collapsed into the chair and a prayer rose in my heart to the Goddess in Pachaianman Koil, "Mother, you have left me with no strength to even squeeze a lemon, what do you want from me?" Immediately a thought rose in me, "I am *Atma-balam* (power of the soul) and I am *Deha-balam* (the power in the body). Get up." Strength flowed into me as I effortlessly got up and made my lemonade drink. I went back to bed. When I woke up at 12:30 pm I was hungry and my head felt clear for the first time. I ate ravenously for the first time in 6 days. The next morning I was strong enough to go to work for 1/2 day and from then on there was no further evidence of any illness whatsoever.

May His Glory remain Ever Transcendent! ▲



Demystifying the Term ‘Sphurana’

Part Three

MICHAEL JAMES

Returning once again to our analysis of the above-quoted passage of *Vichara Sangraham*, the conditional clause in the fourth sentence that I translated as ‘if one just is’ is சும்மா இருந்தால் (*summa irundal*), in which the word சும்மா (*summa*) means just, merely, quietly, silently, peacefully or without any work or activity. When Sri Ramana says, ‘without leaving that’, he means without ceasing to attend to that ஸ்புரிப்பு (*spurippu*), the fresh clarity of self-awareness that is experienced as ‘I am I’ (‘I am just I’ or ‘I am nothing other than I alone’) in place of the former clouded and confused self-awareness that was experienced as ‘I am this body’, and he describes this state of self-attentiveness as ‘just being’ because self-attentiveness is not an action but a state of actionless being. Attending to anything other than ourself is an activity, because it entails a movement of our attention away from ourself towards something else, whereas attending only to ourself, ‘I’, is not an activity, because it entails no movement of our attention away from ourself, its source, and hence it is a state of just being — a state in which all mental activity has ceased.

Sri Ramana says that if we thus remain still without ceasing to attend to it, this fresh clarity of self-awareness will entirely destroy the ego, our false experience ‘I am this body’, and will then subside or be extinguished, just as the flame that catches on a piece of camphor will be extinguished as soon as it has consumed that camphor entirely. What does he mean by saying that this *ஸ்புரிப்பு* (*spurippu*) or fresh clarity of self-awareness will thus be extinguished? He obviously does not mean that self-awareness or clarity of self-awareness will cease when the ego is destroyed, because the ego is the cloud that obscures the perfect clarity of self-awareness that is our real nature. What he means therefore is that its seeming freshness or newness will cease, because when the ego ceases to exist what remains shining is not anything new but is only our natural and eternal clarity of absolute and infinite self-awareness.

Prior to the complete destruction of the ego, whatever kind of *ஸ்புரிப்பு* (*spurippu*) we experience will not be an absolute clarity but only a relative clarity of self-awareness, and in contrast to the relatively unclear self-awareness that we have been confusing till now with this body, it will seem to be new and fresh. But when we eventually experience absolute clarity of self-awareness, it will be clear to us that our present body-confused self-awareness, which is our ego or mind, has never actually existed, and hence that absolute clarity of self-awareness will be experienced as natural, not as anything new or hitherto unknown.

That is, when our mind has been completely destroyed by absolute clarity of self-awareness, all that will remain is what we really are, and for what we really are such clarity of self-awareness is neither new nor special, but is perfectly natural or *sahaja*. This state in which clarity of self-awareness ceases to seem new and is instead experienced as natural and eternal is what Sri Ramana describes here as the state in which *spurippu* has subsided or been extinguished. The natural clarity of self-awareness that then remains is the perfect kind of *spurippu* or *sphurana* that Sri Ramana described in verse 20 of *Upadesa Saram* as *parama purna sat* — supreme whole being or reality.

In section 2 of *Vichara Sangraham* he gives a more technical and abstruse explanation of the relative and imperfect kind of *spurippu*, presumably to satisfy Gambhiram Seshayyar's interest with the concepts expressed in such technical language in the vedantic and yogic texts that he often asked Him to explain. Generally Sri Ramana expressed his teachings in simple terms that could be readily understood by people who have little or no knowledge of the more abstruse concepts expressed in many such texts, but when he was questioned in terms of such concepts he would reply accordingly. What he says in the third sub-section of section 2 is this:

surutti murccai-y-adiya kalangalil e-v-vidha jnanamum adavadu tan jnanam-o anniya jnanam-o atpamum indrenbadu evarakkum anubhavam andro? pinnar tukkattinindrum 'viritten', mayakkattinindrum 'telinden' endra anubhavam mutkuriya nirvisesa nilaiyinindrutittador visesa-jnanattinadu tottram-andro? i-v-visesa jnanam-e vijnanam enppadukiradu. i-v-vijnanamanadu anmavai-y-enum anamavai-y-enum asrayittu vilangum alladu taniyaha-p pirakasikkadu. [...] i-v-vijnanam anmavai y-asrayittu anmakaram-aha vilangum sthiti-y-e aham spurippu ena-c collappadukiradu. inda spurippu vastuvai vittu-t taniyaha iradu. inda spurippe vastuvai aparoksa-p paduttatkana takka-kuri-y-am. endralum idu-v-e vastu-nilai y-ahadu. inda spurippanadu edanai asrayittu vilangukirato anta mulam-e vastu alladu prajnanam enappadum. vedantam prajnanam brahma endradu idu-patri-y-e-y-am.

Is it not the experience of everyone that during times such as sleep or fainting there is not the slightest knowledge of any kind, that is, neither knowledge of oneself nor knowledge of any other thing? Afterwards, the experience 'I woke from sleep' or 'I regained consciousness from fainting' is the appearance of a *visesa-jnana* [distinctive, differentiated or feature-laden knowledge] that rose from the aforesaid *nirvisesa* [non-distinctive, undifferentiated or featureless] state, is it not? This *visesa-jnana* alone is called *vijnana*. This *vijnana* cannot shine separately [or on its own] but

shines only [by] attaching itself to either *atman* [self] or *anatman* [something that is not self]. [...] The state in which this vijnana attaches itself to *atman* and shines as *atmakaram* [the form or nature of self] is alone called aham *spurippu* [the clear shining of 'I']. This *spurippu* does not exist on its own separate from *vastu* [the real substance, namely self]. This *spurippu* itself is a suitable [precursory] indication of the arising of direct cognition (*aparoksa*) of *vastu*. However, this itself is not the state of *vastu*. What this *spurippu* shines attaching itself to [or depending upon], that *mulam* [origin, source or foundation] alone is called *vastu* or *prajnanam* [pure consciousness]. That which vedanta says as '*prajnanam brahma*' [pure consciousness is *brahman*, the absolute reality] is only about this.

An indication of the fact that this technical explanation is not how Sri Ramana would normally explain such ideas can be seen in the first sentence of this passage, where he seems to concede that we have no knowledge of ourself in sleep, as most of us usually imagine, because he generally insisted that though we do not experience anything other than ourself in sleep, we do experience ourself — our being, 'I am'. However, despite this concession, the meaning of the first two sentences of this passage is clear, namely that when we wake from sleep or any other such state of seeming unconsciousness, we experience a type of self-awareness that was absent in sleep and that is distinct or differentiated from whatever we did or did not experience then. He calls this distinctive self-awareness *visesa-jnana*, which means knowledge that is different, special, distinctive, differentiated or having distinguishing features — features that differentiate it from the *nirvisesa* (undifferentiated or featureless) character of sleep.

Though Sri Ramana uses various technical terms and concepts here, he does explain them to some extent, and some of his explanations are particularly revealing, such as his explanation that the term vijnana (as it is used for example in the technical term *vijnanamaya kosa*, which means the discriminating faculty, intellect or 'sheath composed of vijnana') denotes only this *visesa-jnana*.

The verb that I have translated here as ‘attaches itself to’ is ஆசிரயி (*asrayi*), a Tamil form of the Sanskrit verb आश्रि (*asri*), which means to join, adhere, attach oneself to, rest on, depend on or resort to, and in this context it specifically means both to attach oneself to and to depend upon for support. Since *visesa-jnana* (the distinctive self-awareness that we experience in waking and dream) cannot stand on its own without any support, it generally attaches itself to the body, depending upon it for support, but it can instead attach itself only to self. When it attaches itself to the body and mind, it assumes their distinguishing features, and thus it appears to be identical to them, whereas when it attaches itself to self, it shines as *atmakaram*, the ‘form’ or nature of self, and is then called *aham-spurippu*, the clear shining of ‘I’. Thus *aham-spurippu* is the state in which our self-awareness shines clearly, having relinquished its hold on the body and mind by attaching itself firmly to self alone. In other words, when we attend only to self, thereby ceasing to attend to anything else, we experience a fresh clarity of self-awareness, which is called *aham-spurippu* or *aham-sphurana*.

At present our attachment to other things is very strong, but the more we try to attend to ‘I’ alone, the more strongly we will become attached to ‘I’, and the more our attachment to other things will thereby be weakened, until eventually our attachment to ‘I’ will completely destroy all our attachments to anything else. This is why Sri Ramana used to say that we should cling firmly to *aham-spurippu*, the clear shining of ‘I’, and why he said in the earlier passage that I quoted from the first sub-section of section 1 of *Vichara Sangraham*:

[...] *adanai vidadu summa irundal, deham nan-ennum
ahamkara-rupa jiva-bhodattai mutrilum nasam-akki, karppurattil
patriya neruppu-p-pol, tanum santam-ay-vidum.*

[...] Without leaving it [that *spurippu*, the fresh clarity of self-awareness that shines as ‘I am I’], 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 be extinguished.

That is, when the ego is eventually destroyed by the clear shining of 'I' (*aham-spurippu*), the shining of 'I' will cease to be experienced as a *visesa-jnana* (a different, distinctive or special knowledge) and will instead be experienced as it really is, which is *prajnanam*: pure self-awareness (that is, self-awareness that is completely adjunct-free and hence *nirvisesa*: featureless and not distinctive or different). In other words, *aham-spurippu* or *aham-sphurana* (the clear experience 'I am only I') will seem to be *visesa* (different, distinctive or special) only so long as even the slightest trace of the ego (the illusory experience 'I am this body') survives, and it will cease to seem *visesa* as soon as the ego is completely annihilated. This cessation of the seeming *visesatva* (difference, distinctiveness or specialness) of the *aham-spurippu* or *aham-sphurana* is what Sri Ramana sometimes described as its subsidence or extinguishment.

What he describes as the source (*mulam*) and substance (*vastu*) of this *aham-spurippu* is only ourselves, because it originates from ourselves and when scrutinised is found to be nothing other than ourselves, but so long as we experience it as something new and special (*visesa*), it is not itself the reality or self, which is not new but natural (*sahaja* or *nirvisesa*), being what we always actually are. Therefore Sri Ramana once said, '*aham sphuranattin mulattai nadi-y-iruppade margam ahum*, which means, 'remaining investigating [examining or attending to] the source of the *aham-sphurana* is alone the path'.¹ That is, whatever fresh clarity of self-awareness we may experience, our aim should always be to keep our attention focused ever more firmly and sharply on ourselves, the source from which this clarity originates and the essential support on which it always depends. ▲

¹ This is recorded towards the end of a reply that was sent on Sri Ramana's behalf to a question that Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri asked him by a letter in May 1931, which was published in 1980 on pp. 21-2 of a booklet called *Manimozhigalum Tanippakkalum*, and a translation and explanation of which was published on pp. 95-101 of the April 1982 issue of *The Mountain Path* in an article entitled 'Bhagavan's Letter to Ganapati Muni', which was reproduced in February 2010 by David Godman in his blog: <http://sri-ramana-maharshi.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/bhagavans-letter-to-ganapati-muni.html>.

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

First Meeting with Bhagavan

Part One

PADMA VENKATARAMAN
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Padma Venkataraman first came to Bhagavan in 1947. After Bhagavan's passing she remained in Ramana Nagar for a number of years. She was well acquainted with Muruganar, setting the songs of Ramana Sannidhi Murai to music and singing before him, serving him and receiving instruction from him on Bhagavan's works along with Smt. Kanakammal and others. Sadly Padma passed away some two years ago.

The text of the following article is closely based on a video which Padma recorded in the 1990s on a visit to Sri Ramanasramam, and which is preserved in the ashram archives. The video has been uploaded to the Youtube Internet site (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGBjjw1IIFI>) and it is intended to provide subtitles in Tamil and English in the near future.

The video appears to be entirely spontaneous and unrehearsed, as if, and this may be the actual case, Padma were quite unaware that the request to record it was going to be made. Indeed at the very end she makes it clear that she does not feel that she is in any way qualified to convey

the sublime qualities of Bhagavan, for she says with a disarming modesty, 'It is not possible for me to speak about Bhagavan. You asked me, so I am speaking.' There is no doubt, however, that all readers of the text and viewers of the video will agree that her modesty was somewhat misplaced, as she vividly relives and evokes the events of half a century ago as if they were yesterday. The text has been slightly edited to make it suitable for reading as a magazine article. Words in square brackets are added to complete the sense, or are conjectural, based on the context, due to the poor quality of the video. The text of the video will be published in three parts.

The sound quality of the video was such that it required the assistance of three native Tamil speakers to help with the transcription. These three were Lakshmi Nateshkumar, Radha Nagarajan and Cheenu Srinivasan.

I first went to see Bhagavan in the year 1947. On that occasion, after going in the morning, seeing Bhagavan and having his darshan, when everybody, all the devotees, were sitting all together, a desire arose within me to be alone with Bhagavan and tell him what was on my mind. My husband then approached the ashram manager, Niranjanananda Swami, and spoke to him about my indifference to worldly life (*virakti*), and about my desire for the grace of the guru. When my husband, whose name is Ramani, went and enquired with Niranjanananda Swami about these matters, he replied, 'Bhagavan, actually, will return to the hall at a quarter past two. But the devotees will not come in till half past two. At that time, then, if there is anything you want to ask, you can ask it in private.'

What happened then was, when the two of us were sitting together, I said, 'Buy one of Bhagavan's books...' – the time would have been gone half past one – '...go and buy one of Bhagavan's books.' I had not read any of the *shastras*. I had not read any of the works on Vedanta. But in all situations a profound desire for a teacher is required. Through Bhagavan, through his grace, I think

¹ *sadhana chatustaya* are the four means of salvation in Hinduism: discrimination, non-attachment, the six virtues (tranquillity, training, withdrawal, forbearance, faith and focus) and the desire for liberation.

he called me to him. I bowed my head to him, so to speak. He (my husband) bought the book ‘*Nan Yar?*’ (‘Who am I?’) and gave it to me before the bookstore closed, it being the lunch hour. So that was what I was reading. Previously all I knew was that I wanted a good guru. I did not know what I needed to do; how and by what means, to subdue the mind, such as *sadhana chatushraya*¹ (the prerequisites for initiation into Vedanta) and all the rest. What I did then, he and I first sat down, as soon he had returned with the book ‘Who am I?’, and by a quarter past two I had read it ten times over. Through reading it those ten times, by Bhagavan’s grace, through which I was able to understand all the ideas contained in the works of Vedanta, even those that cannot be [easily] understood, some kind of deep certainty arose in me. The time reached a quarter past two and permission was given for us to go inside and speak.

I and he, my husband, entered the hall. As soon as Bhagavan arrived, some people who were there said, “They have come from Madras. It seems they have something serious they want to say.” They were speaking from memory.² Then what I did, I had a very strong sensation ... as soon as I saw Bhagavan ... I had a very strong sensation of my consciousness being overpowered. He too, very strongly, his consciousness... my husband’s consciousness ... was overpowered.

He (my husband) spoke first, saying, “She has no interest in the household; no desire to be involved in worldly affairs. She would like to be alone somewhere. From an early age she has been desperate to find a guru. [I don’t know what to do],” he said. What I...Bhagavan was looking at me. That day under his gaze ... my ... whatever I wanted to ask, Bhagavan was the one who entered within [me]³ ...

² It seems there must have been one or two people there who had overheard and remembered a previous conversation, possibly the one with Niranjanananda Swami, and therefore took it upon themselves to explain the unexpected presence of Padma and her husband to Bhagavan.

³ Padma is overcome with emotion at this point and is unable to finish her sentence. She is unable to describe the experience in which her consciousness has been overpowered in Bhagavan’s presence to such an extent that she feels that she has no conscious will of her own, and that the words she says are those of Bhagavan only.

“What is it?” he asked. As soon as Bhagavan asked, I said that I wanted *atma sakshatkara* (realisation of the Self). Even I have no idea how I came to ask that. ‘Is that so (*appadiya*)?’ he said. Bhagavan’s way of saying the word, *appadiya* would sound so beautiful. Whatever anybody asked, whoever it was, he would say, *appadiya*. It would be very sweet. No sooner had he said that – “Is that so? Take a seat,” – than it was half past two. Consequently, when we went in and sat down at a quarter past two, everything, those words themselves, whatever words I used and how, whatever questions, we had only just read them in the ‘Who am I’ book. Do we have the spiritual maturity to go and ask questions of such a great sage?

Bhagavan, very peacefully, with great compassion, looking at me as if giving initiation through his eyes and granting me freedom from fear (*abhaya*), said, “Is it so? Please sit.” When he said pleasantly, “Please sit down,” I sat down.

I remember nothing after seeing [Bhagavan]. My husband had to leave for Madras that same day. He (my husband) realised that I wouldn’t go and that he needed to put in place arrangements for me somewhere or other, because I said I was determined to stay there with Bhagavan. That afternoon he found a room somewhere, a small room, took me there left me, and went to tell Bhagavan. Saying he had taken me there and that’s where I was, he left, after taking me and settling me in Gothami Lakshmi [house].

All that time I gave up eating, because all that was problem. Staying alone somewhere ... I was just having milk to drink. It went on like that for several weeks, once in the afternoon and once in the morning. After Bhagavan had spoken to me, what happened was, he (my husband) came in the evening and said to Bhagavan, “I am leaving now. I am leaving her and going. Now Bhagavan must take care of her.” [Bhagavan] replied, “Just so!” as if to say, “She must remain here.”

At half past three Bhagavan related an incident from [*Yoga Vasishtha*]. (Padma relates Bhagavan’s account of what Dasaratha said:) “Rama has become very detached from worldly things. He keeps to himself; he is always sitting alone; he does not take part in games; he

has no companions, and no interest in or desire for anything. That's how he is." With these words, Dasaratha burst into tears.

When [The sage] Vasishtha came and straightaway asked where Rama was, [Dasaratha said,] "Rama doesn't get involved with anything. He remains very alone. He no longer associates with anyone," he said. "That's what he has become, the child I was at pains to sire."

So saying, Dasaratha wept. However the newly arrived Vasishtha, was delighted and said, "Is it so? Such is the level of spiritual maturity Rama has attained. I must go and see him at once."

Guru Vasishtha was happy. [Yet as for] Dasaratha, [he] was weeping.

While [Bhagavan] was relating that incident, some lady who was there that day, along with a few other people, asked me what I had asked. But I didn't know what to say to her. When the devotees who were present asked me what I had asked Bhagavan at a quarter past two, [I could not say because] it was something I had never even thought before, never mind spoken. The reason why is that it did not belong to me. It was Bhagavan who inspired me to ask that question. Otherwise I would probably have asked for something different, like 'peace of mind'.

When I decided [what to ask for], what I asked for was *atma sakshatkara*. If I am to say how it was when Bhagavan said these words, he (my husband), was weeping. I was happy, at peace. Then Bhagavan spoke. "Is that so? Please sit...", he said. When I think about it, it was extremely appropriate to that situation, the way Bhagavan told this story. A lady also who was there said, "He told the story for your sake." She [also] said, "He [Bhagavan] willed that you should come and stay here, young as you are, and then, for that same reason, he told that divine tale [to] everyone. After that, day after day..." [video breaks off here in mid-sentence]. ▲

(to be continued)



John Maynard

BOOK EXCERPT

Day and Night on the Sufi Path

The Practice of Remembrance (*Dhikr*)

CHARLES UPTON

The author has published some thirteen books on comparative metaphysics based on the Traditionalist/Perennialist School of Rene Guenon and Fritjof Schuon. This book on Sufism is written within the Islamic revelation, path and terminology. His explanation of what in Hinduism is termed japa is profound and there is much we can learn. The book is published by Angelico Press, 4709 Briar Knoll Dr., Kettering, OH 45429. www.angelicopress.com 242 pages. \$19.95 / £13.00. ISBN: 978-1-62138-135-8

The Nature of *Dhikr*

The Invocation of the Name, the central practice of Sufism, possesses the virtues of simplicity, spiritual depth, and the ability to find a place in many different contexts, including solitary meditation, group practice, and the activities of daily life.

For the Invocation of the Name to become second nature, continuing even in sleep, is the proximate goal of the practice of it; nonetheless, the practice of *Dhikr* must not become merely automatic or mechanical. According to one Sufi authority, the *Dhikr* is not just some kind of internal tape recorder. One must both silently pronounce the Name, and also remember what it means. The word Allah must make present to us the Reality of Allah, otherwise we have turned

the Name itself into an idol. And this encounter with the meaning of the Invocation cannot happen without a willing and conscious engagement of the Heart, which is both the spiritual centre of the human psyche and the centre-of-gravity of our conscious intent. The Heart, as a reality intrinsic to the human form, exists whether or not we are aware of it. And yet if we are not aware of it, it possesses only a virtual reality; in terms of our true spiritual condition, it is as if we had no Heart. If it did not pre-exist as a spiritual potential, we could never realize it: a Heart cannot be 'constructed' by the will and the conscious mind operating in a vacuum. And yet without a conscious and ongoing intent to focus upon it, this spiritual potential can never be actualized, and thus cannot properly be called a 'Heart.' The Heart is the unconscious root of our conscious attention; because God has first remembered us in the act of creating us, He has made it possible for us to remember Him.

The Invocation of the Name of God is an ongoing act of willing and conscious attention, but it is also more than that. If it were not, if it depended upon nothing beyond raw self-will, it could never be constant, and would end by doing more harm than good. It is sometimes said that "God and His Name are One"; in other words, it is possible for me to become conscious of God's Presence through the invocation of His Name only because God's Name is His Presence.

If the Name were not also the Presence, all our attempts to become aware of God's Presence by means of it would be futile; we would remain submerged in our own subjectivity. The Name is an objective factor, beyond our own habitual mental and emotional states; if it were not, it could in no way take our consciousness beyond these states, and place it in the objective Reality of God's Presence. (In Sufism, the sign of the Name's objectivity is the fact that in order to be fully effective the Name must be conferred by a spiritual Master.) And yet, without the conscious and ongoing work of paying attention to both the Name and Its meaning, that objective Reality would remain veiled for us. This is another instance, or application, of the principle of the reciprocity between God's grace and human effort. That God is objectively present, whether we attend to Him or not, is "Grace";

that we can only receive this Grace by having faith in It, and then by attending to It, and finally by reaching Certainty and Stability with regard to It, requires work. Invocation takes effort – and yet the whole of our effort is carried upon the great wave of ease and effortlessness and inevitability which is the sovereign Power of God – because, in the last analysis, God is the only Doer; we ourselves can do nothing. So *Dhikr* is both laborious and effortless, both conscious and totally beyond our consciousness, both something we do and something that is done for us and within us. Because of this dual quality of effort and effortlessness, the practice of Invocation is most naturally carried by the one human physical function in which the voluntary and the involuntary come closest to being perfectly united: the rising and falling of the breath.

If God were not consciously attending to us and thus ‘invoking our name’ in the dimension of Eternity, we would be completely unable to invoke His Name in the dimension of time – if for no Day and Night on the Sufi Path other reason than that we would never have come into existence in the first place. Thus the Invocation of the Name is both our willed and deliberate action, and also God’s action within us. And while our action is always incomplete and imperfect, God’s action within us is forever complete and perfect, eternally and instantaneously.

The central work of invoking the Name of God, therefore, must be for us to remember that He remembers us, to progressively leave behind our imperfect acts of attention to Him, and place ourselves in the presence of His perfect Act of Attention to us – to know ourselves as known. In the words of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him: “Pray to God as if you saw Him, because even if you don’t see Him, He sees you.”

The Name of God makes present to us the Reality of Allah, and one way it may do this is by gathering and synthesizing the knowledge of Him that He has imprinted upon our Heart by means of the spiritual states He has sent us, each of which comes paired with an ‘intrinsic practice’ proper to that state. For example, the recognition that God recreates the whole universe in every instant is naturally paired with the corresponding practice of letting oneself be completely

transformed by Him, instant-by-instant, ‘like a corpse in the hands of a Washer of the Dead.’ The understanding that He is only imperfectly objective to me while I am perfectly objective to Him is paired with the practice of giving up trying to encompass God in knowledge while recognizing that He encompasses me, and always has. And the feeling that God is absent (Absence being one of the modes of His Presence) is paired with a fierce longing to see His Face, ending in a resignation to His Will in either Presence or Absence, including a sacrifice of all one’s willful attempts to command that Presence, in the recognition that they are only human conceptions of Him, and thus nothing but idols – at which point these idols are overturned and God’s Presence unveiled. And these are only three examples of the innumerable modes in which He presents Himself to us in each spiritual moment, no two of which are alike. Some of these intrinsic practices are capable of being partly expressed in words; others are far too subtle for any such expression.

But unless the Invocation takes us beyond these ‘contemplative unveilings’ to the naked Presence of the Unveiled, it will degenerate into a rapid mental review of various bits of acquired philosophical knowledge, or an emotional melodrama of our love affair with God, and the veil will fall again. What we already possess out of what God has given us is nothing; what He has yet in store for us is everything. And Who He Is in Himself is beyond even this everything. Love is beyond gratitude because gratitude veils Intimacy; Love is beyond hope because hope rejects Presence. “When I came to Love,” said Rumi, “I became ashamed of everything I had ever said about Love.” Because God and His Name are One, only God has the power, and the right, to speak that Name. Spiritual states and their intrinsic practices comprise the shadow of lover cast upon the face of the Beloved – but when Love arrives, that shadow is nowhere to be seen. Love (*Mahabbah*) is the door to Knowledge (*Ma’rifah*), and final Knowledge comes only by *Fana’*, Annihilation.

Stages of Dhikr

The hadith “Pray to God as if you saw Him, because even if you don’t see Him, He sees you,” can be taken to refer to three distinct levels

of *Dhikr*. To begin with, ‘I’ am speaking God’s Name, struggling to remain conscious of Him, or asking Him to reveal His Presence – to “me.” The ‘God’ I am dealing with on this level is what Ibn al-‘Arabi called ‘the God created in belief.’ He is inseparable from my self-image; in a way He is a projection of it; contemplating Him on this level is the same thing as contemplating myself: this is the meaning of ‘as if you saw Him.’ Nonetheless, as Ibn al-‘Arabi points out, God still accepts the prayers we make to our image of Him, even if that image is an illusion – because, in another sense, it really is Him. God, as the Essence of all forms, is indeed worshipped – though in a veiled and blameworthy way – through the worship paid to idols, even if the idol is our own self-image. Those who worship God in the form of their own self-images will experience Him as Wrath, but if they were to allow that Wrath to dominate them and hurl them beyond the level of personal and religious idolatry, it would be revealed as a face of Mercy.

At a later stage of the *Dhikr*, the one represented by ‘even if you don’t see Him,’ we realize that our image of God is really only the projected shadow of our ego, and begin to encounter God as He is. At this point the words of Abu Bakr apply: “To know that God cannot be known is to know God.” The limited, egotistical ‘knower’ is bewildered, neutralized; the unknowability of God consumes all our attempts to know God in the fire of Knowledge itself; this is one aspect of or approach to *Fana’*, Annihilation. Here we are no longer invoking God’s Name; rather, God is invoking His own Name within us. The Name at this station no longer refers to a separate Object as perceived by a separate subject; God and His Name are One. This is an aspect of the *Ma’rifah* (Knowledge) of Allah.

At the final stage, the stage of ‘He sees you,’ the only Witness is God, and God witnesses nothing and no-one but Himself. At this station, what was once ‘you’ is now nothing but the Name. You – as witnessed directly by God, not conjecturally by yourself – are God’s Name, or one of His Names. This is the perfection of *Fana’* (Annihilation in God), which is inseparable from *Baqa’* (Subsistence in God), the final stage of realization. ‘He sees you’ is, however, not

only *Baqa'* as the ultimate station; it is also virtual, and effective, from the beginning, and thus functions as the hidden Lodestone of the Path. It is not something that becomes true, it is something that is true. Truths are not established in time; they are realized in Eternity. Once we reach certainty as to the reality of Allah as the eternal Source of our existence, He becomes the sole Object of remembering.

And when this remembrance-of-Allah is perfected, He becomes the sole Rememberer as well; the limited subjective selfhood that veiled the spiritual Heart from remembering God is first forgotten (in *Fana'*), and then transformed into the object of God's remembering (in *Baqa'*), an object which is fundamentally none other than God Himself. To catch a glimpse of the reality of God while forgetting yourself is to realize that you are seen more fully and more penetratingly by Him than you could ever see yourself: Remember Me and I will remember you [Quran. 2:152]. And such Remembering in reality begins not with you, but with Him: It is indeed We who have sent down the Remembrance [Quran. 15:9]. To remember God until God becomes the only Rememberer is to unveil the *Nafs al-mutma'inah* as the mirror of Allah, as seen through the Eye of the Heart. This is the *Ma'rifah* of the *Nafs*. In the words of Ibn al-'Arabi, from his *Futubat al-Makiyya*:

“[T]he recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of the Reality. He does not see the Reality Itself, which is not possible, although he knows that he may see only his form in it. . . . If you have experienced this you have experienced as much as is possible for created being, so do not seek to weary yourself in any attempts to proceed higher than this, for there is nothing higher, nor is there beyond the point you have reached anything except the Pure, the Undetermined, the Unmanifested. In seeing your true self, He is your mirror and you are His mirror in which He sees His Names and their determinations, which are nothing other than Himself.”

Dhikr begins as a search for God. Later it becomes the only way we can withstand the power of God's gifts. Next the rememberer is annihilated; only the Remembered remains. At the end, the Remembered becomes the Rememberer – as He always was. ▲

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Three

The Lord Comes to Kabir in the Form of a Brahmin

Part One

NABAJI SIDDHA

The great sage Nabhaji continued his narration of Kabir's life. He said, "O exalted beings, who having lit the lamp of Knowledge in the temple of this body, remain forever in unbroken union with the Self! Now, listen further.

"Bidding Kabir, ever immersed in the state of *Brahma-jnana*, to engage in the worldly life of a weaver appears like, putting a chaste woman in the company of a prostitute; or an honourable man with a decadent; or a peaceful person with a slaughterer; or the wise with ignorant; or a serpent with Garuda; or a cow in the company of tiger.

The guileless and virtuous Kabir started practising as a weaver. After weaving barely a yard of cloth, he would often drift into God-consciousness for hours and the Lord himself would finish it. When Jijabibi saw him sitting with closed eyes she berated him, "You, good-for-nothing! Instead of plying the loom, you have gone to sound sleep. From morn till evening, you have managed only two yards of

cloth. You, who masquerade like the learned of the land, are playing a fool at the loom! Alright, now you take this piece of cloth to the market and bring me the proceeds home, if you hope to get even a morsel of food here.”

Startled into consciousness by his mother’s angry outburst, Kabir dashed off to the market with the woven cloth. Walking to and fro in the busy market place Kabir called out loudly, “O virtuous men and women! Take a look at this beautiful yellow silk cloth. Come, don’t miss this opportunity.”

Nabhaji said, “O listeners, this scene can be compared only to the fate of King Mandatha who fell into unlucky times of selling firewood in the streets or King Harishchandra who was reduced to pledging his wife and son.”

However, the cloth caused mixed reaction in the bazaar. Some protested angrily pointing to the cloth, “What a flimsy material it is? Whoever wove it must be hopeless at the loom?” Some others deluded by the Lord’s power of maya exclaimed, “What an exquisite piece is it? We cannot afford to buy such an exclusive cloth!” Indeed, who can set a price on the cloth woven by the Lord himself? O Siddhas, as no one came forward to purchase the cloth till sunset, Kabir folded it and holding it under his arm set out towards home.

At this moment, the Lord appearing suddenly before Kabir in the form of a poor brahmin, grabbed the cloth from him and started running. Kabir chased him, shouting words of abuse, “O thief of a brahmin, a crook! You are trying to steal the yellow silk, woven with my sweat.” Catching up with the brahmin, Kabir tried to wrest the precious silk-cloth from his hand.

At this, the deceitful brahmin unfolded the cloth and holding it in front of the gathering said, “Have you ever seen such an awfully woven cloth which he is trying to pass on as a splendid piece?” Before completing his words, the brahmin tore the cloth into two pieces.

Aghast at this, Kabir said, “O brahmin, in spite of belonging to the class of Vedic scholars, you have damaged the priceless cloth which is equal to *pitambar*, the yellow-silk worn by Lord Vishnu. You are doomed by such an act. You are as terrible as the dreaded lord of death,

THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A BRAHMIN

causing anguish to others. Having created the likes of you who strike terror in the hearts of people with greed for others' possessions, the Creator need not have bothered with creating Yama."

The brahmin derided, "Hey, your cloth is not fit to be used even as a loin-cloth. How dare you equate it to *pitambar* of the Lord? Your effrontery at glorifying the cloth is like that of a criminal praising a miser; a hunter adoring a murderer." The brahmin continued taunting Kabir and the crowd also joined him.

Undaunted, Kabir said emphatically, "Though a chaste woman is bereft of beauty, a man of principles without wealth, a serene one without japa, a desireless one without renunciation, a wise one without steadfast mind, a person of strong will without discipline, they are indeed treated with respect and honour; so is my silk cloth though loosely woven, precious and worthy of the Lord."

Kabir tried to end the dispute and leave, but the brahmin blocking his path said, "I would like to buy this cloth. Let me know its price."

Kabir replied guilelessly, "I don't know its price. I will sell it for whatever value is agreed upon by the people here."

The brahmin said in a disparaging tone, "O noble men, please give your opinion on what I should pay for this flimsy piece, which he passes for a cloth."

Each one quoted a different price ranging from one coin to a hundred. When the brahmin heard the word 'hundred', he whirled around and barked, "This fellow has brought a namesake of a cloth which is only a little more than a bundle of tangled yarn. Without fixing a proper price for this cloth, you are indulging in fun and mockery."

Turning his attention to Kabir, the shrewd brahmin said, "O Kabir, I will give you a couple of coins for this cloth which is, in fact, not worth even a single coin. When you set out from home this morning, you must have encountered good omens like a king, a fox, a chaste woman or a devotee of the Lord to earn two coins for this rag which is closer to a hunter's net than to a cloth."

The old man untied a knot in his cloth that had a thousand holes in it and took out two grimy coins. Holding out the same to Kabir, he said, "Even this is too much for the rag."

Looking at the measly amount in his hand, Kabir appealed to the crowd in a plaintive voice, “O folks, look at this sly brahmin. He has indeed struck a smart bargain. See this great wealth he has so reluctantly parted with in exchange for my silk cloth.” In sheer frustration, Kabir flung away the coins.

The brahmin, provoked by this act, went on a tirade, “O evil-doer! Outcaste! Have you come to wipe out the riches of my ancestors? How much more your avarice wants for this rag? Is it for this you addressed me as a noble brahmin? You are spoiling for a fight!”

Picking up the coins from the ground, he continued, “By flinging these coins in the mud, you have displayed contempt for them which are as precious as *salagram* or ruby. They are as holy as the names of the Lord or as dear as one’s welfare.

“Are these coins to be dishonoured and slighted like this? O fool, with these two coins, I can bring the three worlds under my control, I can have Kubera, the lord of wealth paying homage to me, I can support and nourish countless universes and put an end to poverty on earth. You good-for-nothing, what do you know of the worth of these coins? They are as auspicious as the Sri adorning the chest of Lord Vishnu. O evil-man, just as a dog cannot benefit from a full coconut, you have spurned a rare thing.”

Kabir also paid him back in the same vein, “Even if you sell yourself and your ancestors, you cannot raise enough to pay for this precious cloth. Get away from me.”

As the duel of words continued, people poked fun at them saying, “You both deserve each other – one with a namesake of a cloth and the other with his measly coins. This scene is as hilarious as a deaf and blind looking on a street show; a virtuous and an impious man going together to the place of worship; an old man and a child engaged in a fight; a thief and a greedy man doing business together; O crazy brahmin! O pigheaded outcaste! You both are made for each other!”

The brahmin continued, “You are blind to my noble status, unaware of my might to offer even the most cherished things on the earth on a platter. You cannot part from this rag piece and blabber all gibberish.”

THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A BRAHMIN

“If you, a toothless old man, can prattle so much, what would be my fate at the hands of my mother if I return home empty-handed? She would hurl abuses at me and torture me. Get lost, you greedy old man!”

Now, the brahmin changed his tactics and pleaded with Kabir to accept his coins in exchange for the cloth.

Kabir said wearily, “You have no intention of buying my cloth. You talk big, holding out that paltry sum. Your behaviour is like that of a beggar seeking marriage alliance with an aristocratic family! You have picked up those throwaway coins from a gutter and come here to cheat me of my earning. I will have nothing to do with you.”

The shrewd brahmin implored, “I have no other coins with me. Why don’t you take pity on this poor man and give at least half of the piece? By this deed, you will acquire great merit and fame and attain a glorious state, equal to that of Sudama on whom it was bestowed in exchange for a handful of flattened rice.”

Moved by tender emotion, Kabir replied kindly, “This yellow silk is befitting the Lord. If I give it away without earning its value, my parents will thrash me and may even put an end to my earthly existence. Please forgive me.”

The brahmin persisted in his plea, “O embodiment of great merit and realisation! I have heard that you are a boy of noble conduct. Your body language and external signs on your face testify to that. For this small act of generosity, you will soon hoist the flag of righteousness in Varanasi. It is so evident from your appearance. O beneficent boy! Your friends and relatives and the four kinds of armed forces will do you ceremonial honours. It is said that a righteous act remains one’s close companion through several births and protects him. You must be well aware of these truths. Kindly take pity on this old man and donate him a piece of cloth.”

“Oh, if I give away this piece, my mother would persecute me and make my life miserable”, mused the perplexed Kabir.

He could neither sell the cloth nor bring himself to give it away in charity. He lapsed into a long silence. ▲

(To be continued)



TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

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

[To think that the performance of rituals] will pass for the bliss of Sivam is very strange, like a new bride mistaking the wedding rites for sexual intercourse! Just as, unmoving, the oil in a lamp spreads [through the wick and is consumed] by the flame, the true state is to give yourself up to be consumed [by the Self]. (137)

Just as a naive young girl might be imagined to mistake the marriage rites for the act of physical union, the immature disciple mistakes the outward forms of religion, which lead up to union with Sivam, for the union itself.

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>.

Chapter 5
Transcending [the path of] cariyai

According to its title, in this short chapter the author explains how a preoccupation with cariyai, the lower of the four paths, that of service to the deity, is antagonistic to the goal of realisation of Sivam, the Self. However in fact most of the verses are of a general nature, whilst three pillory the bogus jnani, who feigns enlightenment in his conduct and appearance (vv. 141-143).

When will there be happiness for those who do not subside inwardly, but instead, thinking these activities to be the means of liberation, torment their bodies with pilgrimages, bathing in holy tanks and observing fasts on days which they deem auspicious? Their present lot is suffering only. When will their objective consciousness be lost and bliss arise in them? (138)

You lost souls, it seems you never asked if, the personal consciousness having died, you should not go about in the world as if your body were a walking corpse! Where have you heard that the body can be got rid of through the efforts of the body itself? (139)

If you ask us what place we have come from just now, and if we have forgotten what place it is, when you ask us the way to that place, all roads will seem the same, as if the seven worlds had merged into one. (140)

If someone, who does not remember the place from which he has come, gives directions to that place to someone who asks for them, the information given will be entirely useless. Since the person giving the directions does not know them himself, the person following those directions will have no hope of finding the correct path. In a similar way enlightenment cannot be gained by someone who receives instruction from a guru who has not experienced that state himself.

The meaning is not entirely clear but as the next three verses (141-3) lampoon the false teacher, this is probably the correct interpretation. Though the exact meaning is not clear, it seems to be that all roads taken by one following the wrong directions will be the same, in that they are not the right road and will not lead to the correct destination. In the same way all courses of action taken by one acting on the instructions of a false guru will be the same, in that all will be fruitless, and will not lead to union with Sivam.

Displays of ochre robes, long strings of *rudraksha* beads, white ash, and white teeth [from abstaining from chewing betel] constitute the counterfeiting of *jnana*. To those who know the nature of the all-pervading Sivam, the One who is free of all desire (*pathi*), the *jiva*, the one of limited, worldly knowledge (*pacu*), and the worldly bond (*pacam*), which is unreal, will there be such things as word or form? (141)

The Saiva *sannyasi* traditionally wears robes dyed with *kavi* – red ochre, and long strings of *rudraksha* beads, here referred to simply as *tazh vadam* – necklaces which hangs low. The exposed parts of the body are usually liberally smeared with *tiru neeru* – holy ash, which is made from cow dung rendered to a powder in a kiln. The ascetic is forbidden to chew betel, therefore his teeth are white, unlike those of the householder, which are stained a reddish colour from its juices.

The wearing of the insignia of a *jnani* by one who is not qualified by his spiritual attainment to do so is called *jnana kalavu*, literally, *the stealing of jnana*. These insignia belong to *jnana*, true knowledge, only; the wearing of them by anyone else, therefore, constitutes robbing *jnana* of what rightfully belongs to it. In the translation, the idea has been turned around somewhat to say the *counterfeiting of jnana*, the idea of the false *jnani* faking *jnana* being more understandable in English than that of him, as it were, stealing its intellectual property.

The reference in the latter part of the verse is to the Siddhanta triad of *pathi* – god, *pacu* – the soul and *pacam* – the worldly bond. Here God is referred to as *Puranan* as the one who constitutes the

fullness of Reality, other than which nothing is or can be. The *jiva* is referred to as *cirrarivan*, as *possessing imperfect, limited, (ciru)*, i.e. *worldly, knowledge (arivu)*.

They flash their white teeth, which are well suited to the dispensation of limited, worldly knowledge; they display their erudition, flourishing weighty tomes; they wear ochre robes and earrings; they wear a *rudraksha* bead in a golden locket around their necks; they sit in meditation with their eyeballs rolled upwards, as if they have transcended the thirty-six *tattvas*. Yet all this is but the work of great *maya*, that whirls [like a toy windmill]. (142)

The inferior teachers, though they try to impress by their clothing and demeanour, are not capable of conveying the higher truths relating to *jnana*. Therefore their teaching is restricted to matters of ritual, yoga postures, meditation techniques and so on. Because these concern only the limited ego-consciousness, they are called *pacu markkam* – *the path of the jiva*, rendered in the translation as [*the dispensation of*] *worldly knowledge*.

The text does not specifically mention *a golden locket*, but says simply *kattu*, which means a *tie, fastening, knot, ligature*, in this case, *something tied around the neck*, specifically a *kevudu* or *kevudam*, which the Tamil Lexicon glosses as, ‘*rudraksha* bead enclosed in a gold or silver case and tied on the arm or neck, as a badge, amulet or charm.’

The words [*as if*] in the penultimate clause are not in the text, but are added to make it clear that the teachers in question are not actually in the transcendent state they claim to be. This is clear from the context of the verse; it is also clear from many of the preceding verses, which point out that the state of *manolaya* – *total subsidence of the mind induced by meditational practices*, is not the true transcendent state of realisation. The Tamil word employed here, *kancimittu*, which has been translated as *with their eyeballs rolled upwards* usually means *blinking or winking*. The translation here follows Tiruporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) who glosses, adopting yoga postures

with the eyes rolled upwards. The idea is to present a picture of the false teacher as both ludicrous in his deluded self-importance and unscrupulous in his deliberate attempt to deceive his disciples.

For those who merely act the part of the realised sage what enjoyment will there be, other than that of the daily offerings of food they receive? Can they know the bliss which is not known even to those whose consciousness is pure, who have cut away desire, renouncing both inwardly and outwardly? (143)

The text says *nana kiriyai nadippavar*, which means literally *those who act out the conduct of jnana*. Here the word *kiriyai* is used in the general sense of *action, conduct*. TCS glosses it as *nanacaram – the practices related to jnana*, the final stage on the Siddhanta spiritual path.

As described in a number of previous verses, bliss is a state which precedes the final state of liberation, and in which there is still a trace of discriminating consciousness. In the final state itself there is no longer any distinction between the bliss and the knower of it. In that state, the *jnani* is both the Self, and the bliss of the Self; he knows it by being it, since there is no other to know it objectively, hence it is called *ariyaa inbam – the bliss which is not known*. Sri Ramana has spoken of bliss in the following terms:

...*ananda* (bliss), is also called an obstacle, because in that state a feeling of separation from the source of *ananda*, enabling the enjoyer to say 'I am enjoying *ananda*' is present. Even this has to be surmounted. The final stage of *samadhana* or *samadhi* has to be reached in which one becomes *ananda* or one with reality, and the duality of enjoyer and enjoyment ceases in the ocean of *sat-chit-ananda* or the Self. (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 25-4-46, Morning).

At the end of the verse the Tamil text says *avaa aruttu turavu aay* – cutting away desire [and] practising renunciation. TCS glosses, '*turavu* is the ending of outward attachment. '*avaa aruttal*' is the ending of inner attachment. When both these forms of attachment fall away, the states of *cakalam* and *kevalam* fall away. When these fall away, true realisation appears.' The verse is an indirect reference to Tirukkural in

MOUNTAIN PATH

which ch. 36, entitled Mey unarthal – *Knowledge of the True* is located between ch. 35, Turavu – *Renunciation* and ch. 37, Ava aruttal – *The Extirpation of Desire*.

Bliss is indeed the dwelling place of true knowledge. You are like the *acunam* bird, in that an atom of suffering in this world appears as great as a mountain, and through this virtuous quality a longing for supreme bliss has arisen in you. Listen now, and seeking supreme bliss [in the following manner], you shall obtain it. (144)

The word *pul* employed in the verse means a *bird* in general. Here the *acunam* bird is meant; it is described by the Tamil Lexicon as follows, 'A creature believed to be so susceptible to harmony that when it is fascinated by notes of music, a sudden loud beat of the drum causes its instantaneous death.' Similarly the mature disciple, in whom the desire for liberation has grown exceedingly strong, will suffer greatly from the least contact with the things of the world, if he allows himself to become identified with them.

Supreme bliss is not separate from you. It is your true being. That which arises with the sense objects is bliss also, but it is not the pure consciousness in which bliss itself is annihilated. In that state both kinds of bliss are annihilated. (145)

Since our true nature is bliss only, a degree of bliss will be experienced through contact with the objects of sense, but this bliss is not to be mistaken for the bliss which is experienced through transcending the senses entirely, and which precedes its own annihilation in the state of realisation. The meaning is not entirely clear. In this translation it has been taken to mean that the *jnani*, having freed himself from the bliss of the world of the senses, then experiences supreme bliss at the point of merging with the Self. However, for this merger to take place, even this supreme bliss, which still contains a trace of duality, must be lost. It could also mean that the first kind of bliss is lost because it is only

temporary, and when it passes away, the experiencer is returned once more to the sufferings of the phenomenal world, whilst the second kind of bliss, supreme bliss, is lost because the duality of experiencer and thing experienced cease on merging permanently with the Self.

The inferior bliss that arises with the objects of sense, lasts for some time, then disappears is of little worth; the superior bliss is that which is all-consuming and endures without intermission. Can it be gained by the discriminating mind? The bliss which appears and is subsequently lost is synonymous with the alternating states of pleasure and pain. Your true state is that of the bliss which neither appears nor subsides. (146)

The state referred to in the first part of the verse is that of those who try to experience bliss with the discriminating mind, it being understood that no such attempt on the part of the *jnani* would, or could, be made.

The state of being merged in the Self is one of pure bliss, yet it is not perceived as such, since there is no discriminating intelligence to perceive it. Being of the very nature of the Self, it neither appears nor disappears. This is rather like the state of deep sleep, which we recognise to have been blissful only on waking up from it. If we imagine therefore a state which is like deep sleep, but filled with undifferentiated awareness, then we have some idea of the state being alluded to here.

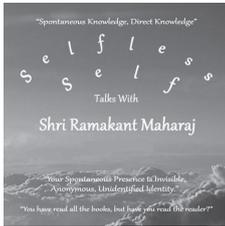
(*To be continued*) ▲

Errata

We regret that the article published in the April 2016 issue titled 'My Guru' was mis-attributed to Jayaraman Rajah Iyer.

The article was written by V. Jayaraman. He is a former bank manager, who took voluntary retirement in 1999. Since then he has worked as a consultant in the software industry. An ardent devotee of Bhagavan, he is a regular visitor to Sri Ramanasramam and a great admirer of Arthur Osborne.

BOOK REVIEWS



SELFLESS SELF Talks with Shri Ramakant Maharaj edited by Ann Shaw. Published by Selfless Self Press, Apt 1, Connolly House, 65 North Road, London SW19 1XA. 2nd ed. 2015. pp. 434. \$22, Rs650. ISBN - 978-0992875619 www.ramakantmaharaj.net and www.selfless-self.com

Ramakant Maharaj (RM) is a direct disciple of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (NM). He was born in 1941; is married with two sons; and qualified as a lawyer and worked in the banking industry. He spent 19 years closely associated with NM from whom he received *Naam Mantra* in 1962. For the past decade he has been guiding students from his ashram in Nasik, Maharashtra. He belongs to the Inchegiri Navnath Sampradaya, which is known for its practicality. Fortunately for those who do not speak Marathi, he speaks English and has evolved the teachings of the Lineage to meet the ever changing circumstances of modern life in India. He cuts through all concepts including the 'I Am' concept and strongly discourages dependency on the master or his form. He points to our 'Invisible Presence' by giving 'Direct Knowledge'. RM says: "It is my duty to share this Knowledge, the same Knowledge that my Master shared with me."

The book format is different both in dimension and presentation. It is meant to encourage reflection. It is not meant to be read cover to cover but rather to be picked up and absorbed in section by section. The layout with its use of bold capital centred statements means that the reader is alerted to important statements which cannot be ignored. The book is long and dense. The book is divided into three parts: Self-Enquiry, Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization. The book is not so much a presentation of concepts as a manual addressed to the 'Invisible Listener' in us.

The teaching of RM is concrete and radical. He hammers the same point over and over again with subtle variations: The body form is a material and all knowledge is material knowledge. He constantly directs our attention to the illusion of our identity with the body-form.

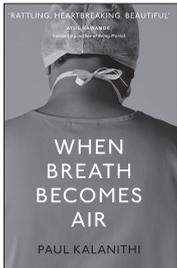
“When You Become One With Selfless Self, Your Identity Is Forgotten, Your Identity Then Poses As Your Master. It Takes The Shape Of Your Master.” “You Are The Cause And Consequence Of Your Entire World.” “Try To Know Your Identity. Try To Know Your Unidentified Identity. The Knower Will Disappear While Trying To Know Ultimate Truth. The Knower Will Disappear. No Knowledge, No Knower.”

This book may appear to be just another recitation of the familiar party line of Advaita but what differentiates it is the obvious sincerity and one pointed focus and power of the teaching. RM does not tire in pointing out the fallacy of our false identification with that which has no existence in its own right. We are reminded of Sri Ramana’s who consistently taught self-enquiry to all who entered his presence. Truth does not grow stale. It is ever fresh. To state it again and again does not show a lack of imagination but indicates a powerful and unceasing conviction that reinforces the essential from whatever angle one takes.

At first one may feel intimidated by the size, scope and seeming repetition of the book but with patience one can see its value. The book’s aim is to bring the reader back again and again to the central point: Who is the knower?

RM reminds one of NM whose fierce uncompromising commitment to the truth quelled the superficial questions and arguments of the curious. This book too is not for the casually inquisitive or faint hearted. One has to breathe this book not think it. There is more happening in the dialogues than words can say. After reading through this book I have come to the conclusion that to be in the presence of RM is to enter another dimension of understanding.

— Christopher Quilkey



WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR by Paul Kalanithi. Bodley Head UK 2016. HB, Rs419, pp.256. ISBN-10: 184792367

I chanced to read a recommended list of new publications and the title *When Breath Becomes Air* caught my eye as it had a ‘Vedantic’ air to it, or at least that is how I felt on seeing it. I ‘googled’ review and ordered the book. The author as a second-generation

Indian-American, a neurosurgeon completing his advanced training at Stanford and a rising star in the firmament of high achievers. Sadly, the relentless spread of a rare form of lung cancer had made deep inroads in his body and he died aged 36 on 9th March 2015, which ended his dreams of being a pioneering neurosurgeon and neuroscientist.

But Dr. Paul Kalanithi in his thirties did leave us a legacy far more valuable than those twice his age and more. A legacy not merely that of a surgeon using a scalpel, but one where his words and writing would become one far more profound. Written over several months while on a cocktail of drugs and chemotherapy, it is a story of his own inner struggle with the dreaded disease of cancer. While confined to a mortal frame, it is a work set in the soaring heights of spiritual inner reflection.

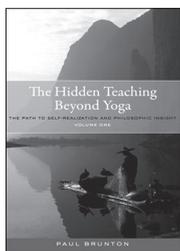
Written in a flowing lucid style with powerful metaphors and vibrant contrasts of life and death, he reflects on the interface of biology, morality, literature and philosophy. He asks what makes life meaningful even in the face of death and decay? What makes a good doctor from an insensitive one? Where lies the boundaries of what a neurosurgeon should do if it is to deprive a human the power of words and language and therefore meaning?

With the march of his cancer, Kalanithi reflects that how from being Death's ambassador to some of his patients beyond cure, Death was now paying him a personal visit. The pages are wrenching when we read that time has no meaning and tense of no consequence to one dying where the past and future are all clearly rolled into the present. That it is the work of one person, a writer, neurosurgeon, pastor and philosopher all rolled into one mortal being should come as no surprise to the reader as one experiences all of them through his pages.

But it is also a book of dedication, perseverance and an enduring love for his wife and daughter. To his daughter of nine months his parting words in the book are his experiencing "a sated joy, a joy unknown to me in all my prior years, a joy that does not hunger for more and more but rests, satisfied."

When Breath Becomes Air is a quest in man's search for meaning, in both the warm glow of life and the cold embrace of inevitable death that we are all bound to face.

— Cheenu Srinivasan



THE HIDDEN TEACHING BEYOND YOGA The Path to Self-Realization and Philosophical Insight Volume One by Paul Brunton. 2015. pp377, \$21.95. ISBN: 978-1-58394-910-8

THE WISDOM OF THE OVERSELF The Path to Self-Realization and Philosophical Insight Volume Two by Paul Brunton. pp435, \$21.95. ISBN: 978-1-58394-914-6 North Atlantic Books, Berkeley,

California, USA. www.northatlanticbooks.com

Paul Brunton (PB) holds a special place in Sri Ramana Maharshi lore. His book *A Search in Secret India* alerted many both in India and in the West that there was a great sage in Tiruvannamalai. PB was a gifted professional writer who had the ability to describe a scene which captured the atmosphere. His description of sitting in Bhagavan's presence is a classic. Though later there were differences with the ashram office, PB's connection and devotion to Bhagavan was unwavering and the influence on PB's life and thinking immense.

Since PB's death in 1981, The Paul Brunton Philosophical Foundation meticulously collated his large store of notes and eventually published in 16 volumes *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*. The same Foundation has now superbly edited and published the two of PB's major philosophical books with final amendments by PB before his passing for these new editions. The Foundation is to be praised for their exemplary work and is an example for any group that wants to collate and publish spiritual writings of their lineage or master.

It is astonishing to note that *A Search in Secret India* (1934) and these books under review were originally published in the 1941 and 1943 respectively. They are as relevant today as then with the added bonus PB is a cogent writer. It is a pleasure to read them from a stylistic view. He has a sense of beauty, a considerable intellect and a logical, explanatory mind. He is very much his own person and refused to affiliate himself with any spiritual or religious group. He always went his own idiosyncratic way and formulated his own vision of reality and yoga based on personal experience and reflection. In the late 1950s when he had achieved a degree of recognition, he disappeared and began as

anonymously as possible, a peripatetic life until his final decade or so when he resurfaced in Switzerland. He deliberately obscured his own personal history as much as he could so that those who read his serious philosophical writings would not confuse the man with the teaching.

When he first arrived in India he was continuing his search that begun in London as a youth. He was seeking for knowledge and genuine exponents of yoga. What he discovered was quite often a corruption of high spiritual principles, which resulted in superstition, incredulity and opportunism. He travelled in the far ends of India until he came at last to the Maharshi in whose presence PB had what he called “the profoundest trance experience”. Having a restless, inquisitive mind PB wanted a philosophical foundation, and not satisfied at the ashram, eventually moved on to Mysore where the respected Maharajah of Mysore gave him refuge during the late 1930s and 40s. Here he met the pundit V. Subrahmanya Iyer who had a crucial influence on him. V.S. Iyer initially introduced and expounded to him three sacred texts: *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Ashtavakra Samhita* and the Gaudapada’s *Karika on The Mandukya Upanishad*. The influence of these texts can be seen in both volumes, as well as several Buddhist texts, especially the *Heart Sutra*.

PB’s two books under review are ambitious. The predominant influence is Vedanta and Buddhism, mixed with active spiritual positivism and the scientific breakthroughs in relativity which were then just becoming known. There is also a hint of PB’s past association with the principles of white occult schools. He was concerned with individualism and had a distinctive view of enlightenment based on his own research and experience. He repudiated the view that the end all of yoga was uninterrupted *samadhi* or what he termed trance. He quotes Sri Aurobindo who wrote: “Trance is a way of escape – the body is made quiet, the physical mind is in a state of torpor, the inner consciousness is left free to go on with its experience. The disadvantage is that trance becomes indispensable and that the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved, it remains imperfect.” PB differentiated between the various types of *samadhi* (at-oneness with the sacred). *Yoga nidra* is unconscious trance and *sahaja samadhi*, the capacity to remain simultaneously aware of pure consciousness and the world.

There are two key terms which PB employs: Mentalism and Overself. “By mentalism we mean ... that all things in human experience without any exception are wholly and entirely mental things and are not merely mental copies of material things; that this entire panorama of universal existence is nothing but a mental experience and not merely a mental representation of a separate material existence; that we can arrive at such conclusions not only by a straight-line sequence of reasoned thinking but also by a re-orientation of consciousness during advanced mystical meditation.”

And, “Overself is used to signify the ultimate reality of both man and the universe.” It cannot be defined in positive conceptual terms and that “the concept of the Overself is thus only an intellectualization of reality and can never be a substitute for the actualized being of the Overself.”

It has vague connotations of Emerson’s Oversoul. PB meant for Overself to equate with *paramatma*. It is here important to understand that PB belongs to that group of spiritual wanderers who seek the Truth outside the conventional religious strictures. PB drew heavily on Sri Ramana’s teachings and I have read in a first edition of one of his philosophical books in the ashram library, (though I cannot recall now exactly which one) an almost verbatim rendering of *Ulladu Narpadu*. I have it from a reliable source that PB said in his latter years he regretted not citing his references but at the time felt that the phobia of the East would block readers from this first ‘taste’ of the great traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, so he transmuted the technical language of his sources into less accurate but more palatable English terms.

This would make sense as he had a mission to bring to the attention of intelligent people who were sincere seekers, the Knowledge freely available in Tradition but obscured by layers of commentary and history to the point where it was rendered incomprehensible or alien. And to do that PB had to integrate it in his own terms and write in his own gifted way that was understandable to the modern person. Certainly PB was a remarkable human being, courageous in his pursuit of the Truth. The veracity of his discoveries can in this case be verified by reading these expansive volumes. They are an elaborate philosophical and practical exposition, which demand time and effort. Those who attempt the task will not be disappointed.

— Christopher Quilkey

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Mahasivaratri was celebrated at the Ashram on the night of 7th March with *jagaran*, a night long vigil of puja, recitation, meditation and *pradakshina*. The Vedapatasala students chanted the Holy Rudram through much of the night, with many devotees in attendance. The fourteenth day of every lunar month or the day before the new moon is known as Sivaratri. Of the twelve Sivaratris that occur each year, the most important occurs in February or March and is called Mahasivaratri. This once a year remembrance of the 'Great Night of Siva' is the day when the Lord saved the world from the darkness of ignorance by revealing his true form as pure light.

Maha Rudram was performed at the Ashram from the 5th to the 7th March and had four main parts: Two days of japa mantra in the library auditorium followed by *homa* and *archana* in the New Hall, and *kalasa abhishekam* at Bhagavan's Shrine. During the three days, 45 students and 15 purohits recited *namakam* 1,331 times and *chamakam* 121 times. Rudram consists of *namakam* (the repetition of *namah* indicating surrender to the Lord) and *chamakam* (repeating *chame*, 'and for me').

In the **Sri Vidya** tradition, Goddess Lalita Tripurasundari is the supreme divine power and the physical universe is her manifestation. This important ceremony is performed each year at the Ashram, and the Sri Chakra and the Meru Chakra of The Mother's Temple are rededicated in *yagna* called Sri Vidya Havan. This year's havan took place on Friday, 18 March commencing at 7 am with *Navavarana Puja* from 8-11am and followed by *homa*. At 2.30 pm *purnahuti* took place followed by *deeparadhana*. The procession back into the Mother's Shrine and *abhishekam* and final *deeparadhana* took place at 2.45pm.

Bhagavan's 66th **Mahanirvana** was observed on Wednesday morning the 4th May with Tamil *parayana* in the Samadhi Hall starting around 5.30am and *abhishekam* starting around 8am with final *arati* at 10.30am. Some 1,500 devotees received Bhagavan's *prasad* at breakfast, 2000 plus devotees at lunch and dinner from various buffet stations.

Music over the three days included Smt. Ambika Kameshwar, who offered a music programme the evening of *Aradhana* and the following day, RMCL who hosted the Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam with verses from Sivaprakasam Pillai set to five *ghana ragas* of Thyagaraja's famous Pancharatna Kritis. The night of the 3rd, Sri Sangeeta Sivakumar and on the 2nd May, Sri Vijay Siva offered concerts of Carnatic music.

Mahapuja in honour of The Mother commenced on the evening of the 29th May and main day celebrations started in the early morning hours of the 30th with flower decorating in the Mother's Shrine and New Hall to the sounds of *Mahanyasa Japa. Abhishekam* began around 9am and was followed by *arati* and songs from Susilamma who led the other lady devotees.

Obituaries

Born in Chennai in November 1941, **Sri M.G. Balu** trained in electrical engineering and started his career in Neyveli Lignite Corporation. He joined Murugappa Group in the 1970s and was posted to Kollaty, Kerala to install an electro-minerals plant there and later, helped set up a hydro-electrical project. He became a devotee of Sri Bhagavan in the 1980s and dreamed of coming to stay in Ramanasramam upon his retirement. He took retirement in 1998 and when his part-time consultancy work was over in 2001, he fulfilled his dream and came to serve in Bhagavan's Ashram. He served three years in the Ashram library and then in 2004, shifted to the new archives building where he served until two years ago. In 2014 he suffered a light cerebral haemorrhage and underwent treatment. His condition appeared to be stable and in recent months he seemed to be improving. As had been his lifelong wish, he lived out his days in Sri Ramanasramam until Sunday, 28th February, when he passed away peacefully in his Ashram room at the Feet of Holy Annamalai



One of our long time, sincere workers in the ashram **Sri Chinnaraj** who had served us for more than 40 years passed away suddenly on 22nd March, 2016. He will always be remembered for his loyal, devoted service in the Ashram and also at President's household. Both his surviving sons Anand and Arun are carrying on the tradition of serving in the Ashram.

Gerd Ledermann, a committed Buddhist and long time devotee of Bhagavan who came to Bhagavan in the 1960s, passed away on 5th May in Wales at the age of 88. Gerd led an extraordinary life. His family were orthodox Jews who lived in Germany. At the age of 11 in 1939 he was put on the last children's train (*Kindertransport*) out of Germany. His parents died at Auschwitz. He lived in an orphanage till the age of 15 at Glasgow after which he supported himself as a stevedore, carrying bags on and off ships while he studied electrical engineering at college. Thereafter he travelled the world gaining friends wherever he went due to his deep humility and respect for human life. We hope to publish a tribute to him in the next issue of the *Mountain Path*.

Ida Pedanda Gede Gunung, the Brahmin High Priest of Bali, passed away on 18th May, after a stroke. He was 63. Although occupying such a high position, 'Ratu' as he was affectionately called, was a simple man with simple tastes. Although being worshiped as a God-King, by the Balinese who walked on their knees in front of him, he considered himself a simple devotee of Bhagavan Ramana and Arunachala. When it came time for him to make his first visit to Arunachala, he wanted from the very beginning to stay at Ramanasramam but was unable to do so. After making his first visit to Ramanasramam, he declared that in the future he would only stay there. Despite his many duties he was able to come to the Ashram again last February. The purification of the body, according to Balinese Hindu customs, will be on June 5th. The cremation will be on July 21st. There will be millions attending, and the President of Indonesia, and members of Parliament are scheduled to attend.

