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# Divine Names of Arunachala

This new series of *slokas* on the 96 names of Arunachala Siva comes from the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*, Chapter Nine, in which Lord Siva relates His holy names to the Rishi Gautama.

1. ओं शोणाद्रीशाय नमः

om śoṇādrīśāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Lord of the Fiery Hill.

Sona-adri-Isa: Sona means crimson red, blood or fire. Adri means a mountain and Isa means the Lord. There is a sacred tank on the girivalam path known as Sona tirtham. In geographical terms, it is possible there was a river which ran down Arunachala to this *tirtham* in ancient times. Sona is the name of a river mentioned in the *Mahabharata* (Bk.3 *Vana Parva*, Ch.222, v.25), which is said to be the source of Agni, the Vedic god of fire, oblations and purification.

The sloka means the Lord of the mountain from which the Sona river flows. In poetic terms it can also mean the Lord of the mountain from which fire flows.

2. ओं अरुणाद्रीशाय नमः

om aruṇādrīśāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Lord of the Red Hill.

Arun-adri-Isa: Arun means the radiance of the rising sun or the colour vermilion red. Adri mean a mountain and Isa means the Lord. In the Puranas, Aruna is the charioteer of Surya, the sun god.

In the *Necklet of Nine Gems*, Bhagavan says the word 'Aruna' means *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* (Existence, Consciousness and Bliss), the identity of the individual self and the Supreme Self. Arunadrisa is lustrous like a red, gold mountain which bestows Liberation. Bhagavan identifies Arunachala as the visible manifestation of the inner Self.

In Vedic mythology Aruna is the goddess of the first light of dawn. It is that particular instant of red, translucent light just as the sun rises when consciousness is crystal clear.

# Gratitude

There is a story attributed to Chuang Tzu, the legendary Chinese Taoist sage. Although, as is so often the case, there are many variations of the story, in the main it goes something like this:

There was an old man who was well regarded in his village for his wisdom. He had two abiding interests in life: his horses and his son, whom he loved above all else. He and his son shared their passion for horses and together they would ride out far and wide. The happy family and the valuable horses the old man owned were seen as the good fortune that life had lavished on him. When neighbours congratulated the old man on his luck, he replied enigmatically, “Maybe. Maybe not.”

One morning, one of the old man’s cherished stallions escaped. The neighbours heard the news and expressed sympathy over the ill luck of the loss of such a valuable horse, but oddly enough the old man was not distraught. He again said: “May be. Maybe not.” He did not seem to consider that losing the prized horse was necessarily bad luck. It could not be predicted that the horse would escape, and now there was nothing that could be done about it. It just happened. The

neighbours also realised there was nothing to be done and if the old man was not feeling sad why should they?

Soon after, the stallion reappeared and with him was a beautiful mare that came from a rare breed of horse noted for their stamina. When the neighbours heard of this, they quickly came to admire the mare and congratulate the old man on his good fortune. Again, the old man was not thrilled at what happened. He again said, “Maybe. Maybe not.” He explained that it was not necessarily good luck which had brought him this beautiful mare. It just happened, and there was no reason to get over-excited. Puzzled, the neighbours left.

His son was pleased with the new mare and would often ride it for pleasure. One day while cantering out on the pastures she slipped, fell and rolled on the young man’s leg, which was shattered. From then on he walked with a severe limp. Again, the neighbours came to the old man’s house to offer sympathy for the bad luck that had crippled his son. He again said, “Maybe. Maybe not.” It was suggested that the old man sell the mare because it was obviously ill-omened, and others even advised that he should slaughter the animal in revenge. The old man did neither. He told them that they should not feel sorrow for his son, nor anger towards the mare. It was an accident that could not be predicted, and there was nothing he or they could do to change it. The neighbours were convinced the old man was a fool.

Some years later a large enemy force invaded the country, and an order was decreed by the emperor that all young men were to be drafted into the army to defend their country. Because the old man’s son was seriously disabled, and in fact, was a liability, he was not compelled to join in the fighting. The war was savage and many warriors died. Many of the young men of the village were killed, but the crippled son was spared. The neighbours were envious of the old man who was free from the sorrow that infected the village, and told him so. With equanimity undisturbed by either good or bad luck, he replied: “Maybe. Maybe not”.

It has happened to all of us that an event which seems to forbode disastrous consequences, turns out in later years to be beneficial in ways we could not imagine. Conversely, it can also occur that what appears to have been exciting turns out later as too good to be true. We were lured by an inviting dream that became a nightmare because we

forgot there would always be a cost. We meet someone for example whose promises are laced with delusion and alarm bells go off in our mind, but we do not know as yet why. We face it daily for instance on a mundane scale with advertising that promises to fill us with contentment if we only use some product whose very existence we were unaware of until then!

Because of our limited minds we cannot see the bigger picture. How can we evaluate the effect of that which is happening right now when we are ignorant of what may happen in the next moment, let alone next week or year? Like blind mice we grope our way along. Gratitude is the right attitude which affirms our faith that the guru is teaching us though we may not immediately see it. We trust that in everything that happens to us there is the possibility of good. We may not see it now but with *sraddha* (faith) we affirm the possibility and thereby open ourselves up to the action of Grace. A closed heart will never bring us closer to the light of Bhagavan's Grace.

It was once said that in life we are like people in a boat on a river. We cannot see the shoals or rapids; but the guru sitting above and looking down on the boat can see the whole course of the journey from the start to the end.

We have a tendency to compare our lives with others. Yes, some have more money, more friends or better health. This is a recipe for bitterness because we poison our inner selves with wild swings of mood between grasping and self-hatred or recrimination because we think we have failed. Gratitude is the antidote. If we but focus more on the blessings we enjoy but have taken for granted, we would see there is much to be thankful for.

Rarely is anything free in this world. It is true that Bhagavan's Grace is free, but we must work for it to become a permanent reality. If we remember that a blessing is the beginning, we will realise that the responsibility is ours to walk in union with the light guiding us forward. Then how do we know if what appears to be good luck may result in misfortune? Both possibilities are there and we should always be aware of this. Like a precious jewel, we keep it carefully so that it is neither scratched through neglect nor lost through ingratitude.

Again, those lines of Shakespeare quoted in a previous editorial are germane:

## MOUNTAIN PATH

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.<sup>1</sup>

One should never lose the commitment to continue on the path, even if a traumatic incident occurs, nor should one be too jubilant or indulge in smug self-satisfaction because of a fortuitous event, or because something long desired suddenly, smoothly and effortlessly turns out right. We will inevitably experience joys and defeats. In a sense, our bitter setbacks are our best teachers for through them we have no choice but to mature and grow stronger in our inner awareness of what is right and wrong.

How grateful we should be to be given this awareness. This may be the first step towards detachment. For it will save us a great deal of unnecessary suffering and despair.

It is important to remember that once we are on this path guided by Bhagavan the rules and priorities change. Instead of acquisition, we learn to let go; instead of trying to control, we learn to accept and flow with circumstances; instead of complaining if misfortune hits us, we see that it is an opportunity to see our ignorance and learn discrimination and detachment.

When we look back on our lives there are moments when what at the time appeared to be a disaster, with hindsight, we see was the best thing that could have happened to us, however shocking it may have been. There is a Jewish saying ‘*Gam zu l'tovah*’, ‘And that is also for the good’.<sup>2</sup> We bless the apparently bad because who knows what good may come from it. The true fool is one who never learns because of pride, jealousy, envy, hatred and sheer *tamas* (dullness). We avoid such people like a disease because they infect the atmosphere with their negativity.

The wise person is one who accepts every moment as a possibility to be thankful. We all have had ample opportunity to meet both the wise and the foolish, in our lives and we gravitate to the wise person.

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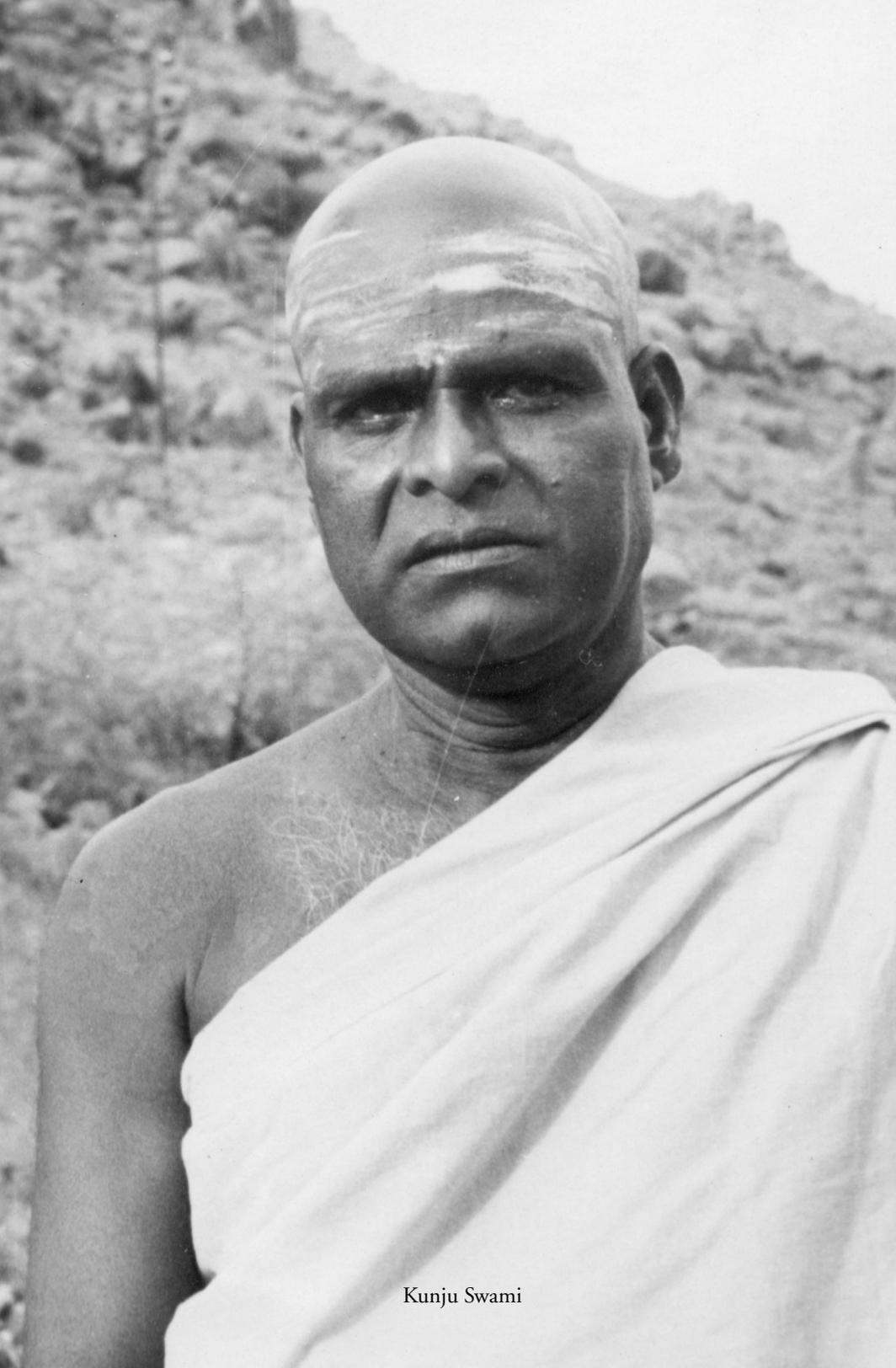
<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, W., *Julius Caesar*, iv, iii.

<sup>2</sup> Morinis, Alan, *Everyday Holiness*, The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar, Trumpler, Boston, 2008. p.71.

How much more so it is with Bhagavan who is pure light. Bhagavan does not see our 'precious' ego or sense of identity, which we cling to like misers out of fear or desire. He sees into our hearts what is real and what is unreal. That is why Bhagavan though it seems he forgives us for our many transgressions and stupidities, goes straight past our mountain of self-righteousness to the untainted centre of who we really are. It was observed in Bhagavan's time that there were so many problematic people and tense situations as personalities jockeyed with each other for attention but it did not matter. Bhagavan saw that it was necessary for all the toxins to come out just as the steam comes out of a pot placed on a fire. Bhagavan did not believe the *vasanas* were important. They were clothes and like clothes could be dispensed with once the person realised they were harmful to their well-being.

Kanakammal, a devotee who was with Bhagavan for many years and who when she was old and frail in later years, was asked what she had learnt. She replied that Bhagavan had taught her not to place too much importance on the body. She was then asked why, when her body was old and wracked with pain, she still came to the ashram every day to sit quietly for an hour or two in the hall where Bhagavan had sat for so long. She replied it was just for gratitude.

May we too recognise and express our gratitude. ▲



Kunju Swami

# Living With The Master

## Reminiscences

### Part Two

KUNJU SWAMI

TRANSLATED BY P. RAMASAMY

*For those who love reading stories about Bhagavan we have decided to extend the extracts from a new, more complete translation of Living With The Master (Enadu Ninaivugal) by Kunju Swami, a close devotee of Bhagavan. The ashram intends to publish the complete translation once it is finalised.*

#### **I Pray for Grace and Receive Upadesa**

Bhagavan was resting seated. An opportune moment for conversing with him in private, I narrated to him everything — my childhood, my stint of delivering discourses and *japa* (ceaseless, repetitious utterance of a holy name), listening to Vedanta discourses as desired by my father, the period of my mental turmoil trying to discover spiritual peace, and relief from the turmoil and experiencing *shanti* the moment I heard about Bhagavan, my Vedanta master's *jeeva-samadhi*

Dr. P. Ramasamy is serving in the Ashram archives upon retirement as professor of English in 2011. He taught English language and literature at graduate, postgraduate and research levels at the Kanchi Maamunivar Centre for Postgraduate Studies, Pondicherry. He was first brought to Ramansramam in the mid 1950s by his father, who had met and conversed with Bhagavan. Four generations of his family are devotees of Bhagavan.

misadventure — I blurted it out all in my native tongue, Malayalam. Bhagavan listened smiling all through. I then asked him for a way out of the muddle in my mind towards mental quietude.

Bhagavan said, “Well, you have read *Kaivalyam*, wherein it is said, ‘If he [the aspirant] comes to see the individual self and its substratum, the Overself, then he becomes the substratum, i.e., Brahman, and escapes rebirths. Should you know yourself, no harm will befall you. Accordingly, once you know yourself, you will come to no harm.’”

I then asked him how to get this Self-knowledge, and he replied, “First find out who you are.”

“How?” I persisted.

“See from where the thoughts arise.”

“How do I go about it?”

“Turn the mind inward and merge it in your heart,” he concluded, and fell back to his natural, silent poise. I too sat, silent. Bhagavan’s compassion-filled gaze was fixed on me. That moment, the muddle cleared and I experienced a mental calm and contentment that I had never before felt.

### **Reproached for Insensitivity**

A devotee by name Ramanatha Brahmachari, stricken with plague, lay bedridden in the other wing of Skandasramam. He was in pain as the eruptions on his skin had burst open. I shall now recount what took place a week before my coming to Bhagavan, when the infection started.

Asking Ramanatha to rest, Bhagavan started from Skandasramam on *giri pradakshina* (going round the hill), accompanied by Perumal Swami, Rangaswamy Iyengar and others. They rested awhile at Pacchai Amman temple en route when the two put forward a proposal to Bhagavan. They said, “Ramanatha’s disease being contagious, we can all remain stationed here, carrying food to him at meal time and tending to him during those visits.” Bhagavan shot back, “Ah! What a splendid idea! He came to me when he was a mere boy and is solely dependent on us. Is it fair to stay here leaving him all alone in his present condition? If you are afraid of catching an infection you all remain here. I will go and be with him. Enough if you bring me food while bringing his.” Stung with remorse at this retort they hung their heads.

### **Celebrating My (re)Birth Day**

Annamalai Swami,<sup>1</sup> who was buried on the day of my arrival, had composed a hundred verses on Bhagavan. Each year, on the anniversary of his demise, his brother and friends would arrive from Arani and perform puja at his samadhi. They would then come to the ashram and chant those hundred verses of his, and join the special *bhiksha* (offering of food for visiting guests) organized that day in his remembrance. This practice continued for several years. It was a particularly special occasion to me because it was on the day of Annamalai Swami's demise that I had my first darshan of Bhagavan, and that indeed was the day I was born anew. I used to look upon those death anniversary meal offerings as my birthday feast.

### **The Glory of the Presence**

I remained inundated in the bliss of Bhagavan's presence. Eighteen days went by in this bliss. Bhagavan's potent presence kept me in abidance in the very core of my heart. An idea then struck me. "Well! I am now stabilized in this state. Here in Tiruvannamalai, my mental composure is disrupted by the chores of daily routine. Whereas if I return home, I could sit uninterrupted in meditative stillness for days on end," I told myself. There was one more reason for this thought of mine. I was nagged by a feeling of guilt at being a guru's guest, regularly eating here without doing any work in return. I discussed the matter with Ramakrishna Swami and he agreed with me. So both of us saluted Bhagavan by way of leave taking and he gave a silent nod. We resolved to remain at home in isolation, absorbed in samadhi, talk to no one even when talked to, and never attempt to meet each other. With these resolutions we reached our respective homes.

My people, who had been worried of my whereabouts, were very happy to see me back. As decided earlier, my friend and I stayed in our homes, keeping silence. My folks did not mind my silence, delighted as they were to have me back home. Some days went by thus. The meditative poise which I had experienced in Bhagavan's proximity steadily declined and then was totally gone. I then realised my foolhardiness. I could neither come to terms with my disenchantment

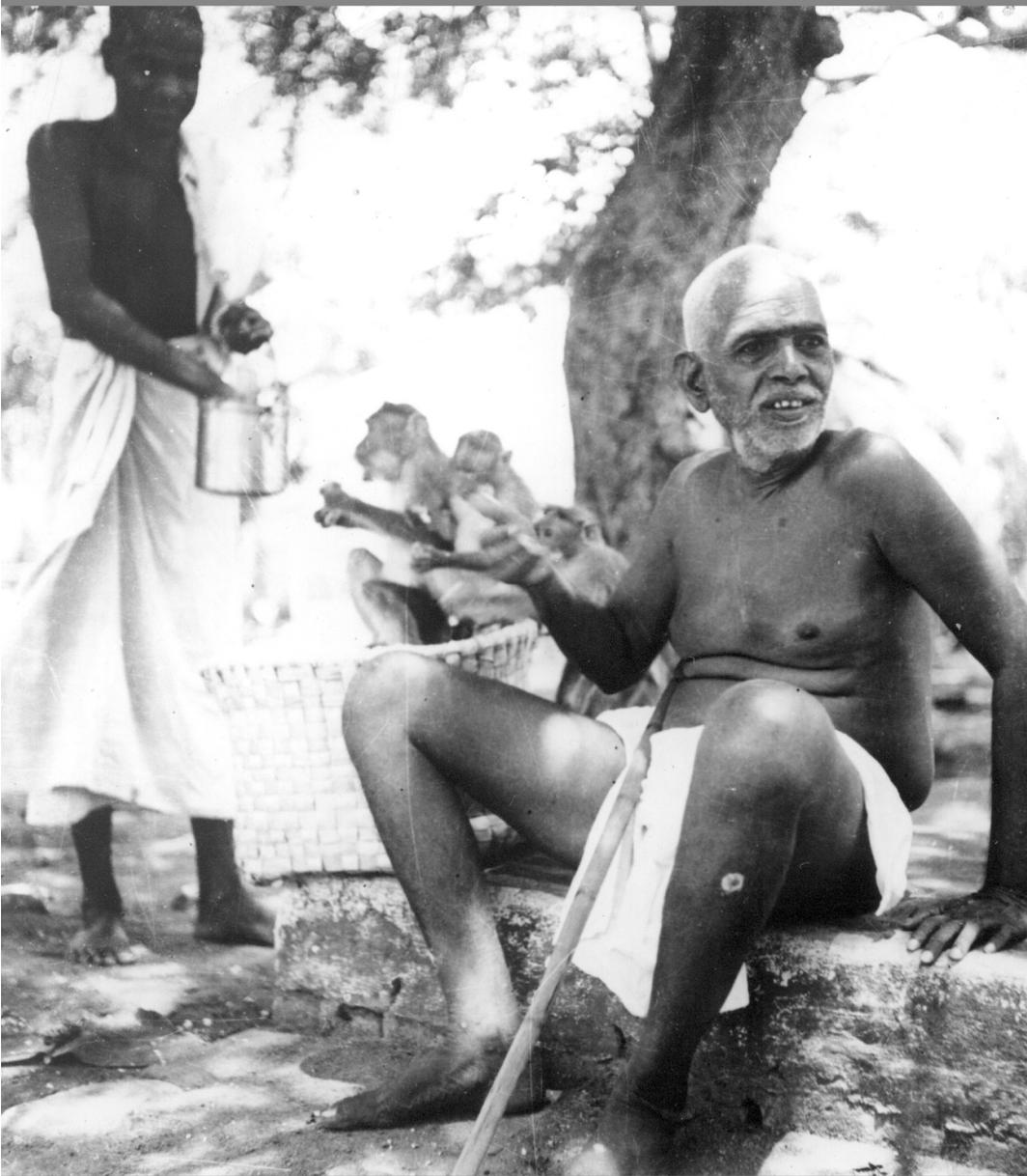
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<sup>1</sup> This Annamalai Swami is not to be confused with the well-known Annamalai Swami who came to Bhagavan in 1932 and lived in Palakothu until his *mahasamadhi* in 1994.

nor give vent to it by telling someone. During this period of dilemma Ramakrishna Swami called on me one night. What a coincidence! He too was sailing in the same boat, he said. We held counsel between ourselves. We felt ashamed at our haughtiness of assuming to have attained that exalted state, which, in days of yore, people could attain only after dwelling in jungle hermitages for many years, living close to spiritual masters and through intense efforts on their own part. In retrospect, I regretted my conceit in dragging out with me Ramakrishna Swami too who had found tranquillity in Bhagavan's proximity. We now understood the power of our Bhagavan's physical presence. We realised that to remain anymore at home would be of no avail, and that the only thing to be done was to seek refuge again at Bhagavan's feet. Fixing a date of departure thence, my friend returned home. I conveyed my decision to my parents. Shocked and least prepared for it, they did all they could to persuade me to remain home, but I was firm in my resolve. I tried to placate them saying that out of the four or five children of theirs, it would be a matter of pride for them if one of their offsprings takes to spirituality and that they in fact would lose nothing by my going away. This time I did not want to run away unannounced. I would go only with the blessings of my elders. Besides, I assured them that I would ever be in Tiruvannamalai with Bhagavan, and that they were welcome at any time to visit me and likewise, I too shall visit them. After such reasoning, I put their minds at rest and took leave of them.

### **Serving the Guru**

We set out in a couple of days as planned and reached Tiruvannamalai. We felt delighted when Bhagavan gave us a smile of welcome. During my earlier visit, I had felt uneasy dining as a guest of my guru without being of any service to him, which I thought was not proper. This time however, I felt at ease on this count because Bhagavan gave me an opportunity rare to have. Readyng hot water for Bhagavan's bath, laundering his daily wear, massaging his feet with medicinal oil before bedtime — such daily chores were done by Perumal Swami, who had to leave station two days after my arrival. He, in some way, deemed me fit to take his place. He must have reckoned that trained in pious ways from childhood, I would not breach observances of



Bhagavan and Kunju Swami feeding the monkeys

tradition and hence entrusted me with these jobs. Had I returned to Tiruvannamalai a couple of days later, I would have missed this opportunity. I now recalled Bhagavan's words of consolation to his grieving mother when Annamalai Swami, whose duty all these had then been, passed away. At that time Bhagavan had said, "Here is this boy [referring to me] now come to serve in Annamalai's place." Within just a few days after he uttered them, Bhagavan had taken me slave. Thrilled at this prophesy coming true, I remained holding the holy feet of Bhagavan firmly at heart. I could not cease wondering how Bhagavan, out of his grace, thus took me captive. The sense of wonder it then evoked has not lost its freshness even today in 1992, seventy two years after. Incidentally, Ramakrishna Swami was asked to look after the outer affairs of the ashram and to serve Bhagavan on the occasions of my absence.

One day I ventured to ask Bhagavan why those exalted states which I had first experienced in Bhagavan's proximity began to wane and then were altogether gone when I left him and reached Kerala. By way of answer to my query, Bhagavan asked me to read verses 83 to 93 in the *Tattuva Vilakka Padalam* ['The Exposition of the Truth' Section] of *Kaivalya Navaneetham*, wherein lay the answer to my query:

83. On hearing this, the disciple, loyal to the instructions of the Master, discarded the five sheaths and went beyond the blank, realised the Self as 'I am Brahman,' and remained as the Perfect Being.
84. At the glance of the Master who was Grace incarnate, the worthy disciple sank into the Ocean of Bliss and merged as the undivided Whole, as pure Consciousness free from body, organs and all else, with mind made perfect, and he became the true Self, experiencing the deep sleep state in the waking state.
85. After the blessed disciple had remained in that state for a long time, his mind gently turned outward. Then he saw his glorious Master before him. His eyes were filled with tears of joy. He was full of love and fell at the feet of the Master. He rose up, came round the Master, and with folded hands spoke to him:
86. "Lord, you are the Reality remaining as my inmost Self, ruling me during all my countless incarnations! Glory to you who assumed an external form in order to instruct me! I do not see how I can

- repay your grace for having liberated me. Glory! Glory to your holy feet!”
87. The Master beamed on him as he spoke, drew him near and said lovingly: “To stay fixed in the Self, without the three kinds of obstacles obstructing your experience, is the highest return you can render me.”
88. “My Lord! Can such realisation that has transcended the dual perception of ‘You’ and ‘I’ and found the Self to be entire and all-pervading, fail me at any time?”  
The Master replied: “The truth that ‘I am Brahman’ is realised from the scriptures or by the grace of the Master, but it cannot be firm in the face of obstructions.”
89. Ignorance, uncertainty and wrong knowledge are obstacles resulting from long-standing habits in the innumerable incarnations of the past which cause trouble, and then the fruits of realisation slip away. Therefore, root them out by listening to the Truth, reasoning and meditation. (*sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*)
90. Checked by incantations, (*sthambhana*), fire will not scorch. Likewise, defective realisation will not put an end to bondage. Therefore devote yourself to hearing the Truth, reasoning and meditation, and root out ignorance, uncertainty and wrong knowledge.
91. Ignorance veils the Truth that the Self is Brahman and shows forth multiplicity instead. Uncertainty is the confusion resulting from lack of firm faith in the words of the Master; the illusion that the evanescent world is a reality and that the body is the Self, is wrong knowledge. So say the sages.
92. Listening to the Truth is to revert the mind repeatedly to the teaching: ‘That thou art’. Reasoning is the rational investigation of the meaning of the text, as already heard. Meditation is one-pointedness of mind. If every day you do these, you will surely gain liberation.
93. The practice must be kept up so long as the sense of knower and knowledge persists. No effort is necessary thereafter. Remaining as the pure, eternal Consciousness, untainted like the ether, and thus liberated while alive, one will live forever as That — after being disembodied also.

## Doubts Dispelled

As I was hardly ever away from Bhagavan's proximity, listening to his answers to questions raised by devotees would clear my doubts as well. In addition, they taught me many new things. Well, I would encounter difficulty in understanding some statement or idea found in the *Sastras* (scriptural canon). While waiting for the right moment to raise the query, it would so happen that another devotee would raise the same doubt to Bhagavan for explanation and, Bhagavan's reply to him would put both our minds at rest. This, indeed, is *daiva gathi* (divine dispensation). A classic example is the case of King Janaka mentioned in *Yoga Vasishtam*. There it is said that this king acquired spiritual wisdom just by listening to the discussions between *siddhas* (sages). All his doubts thus cleared, Janaka is said to have had Experience of the Self.

Vedantic texts such as *Vedanta Chudamani* speak of *viveka gathi*, *viraktha gathi*, and *daiva gathi*. Of these, the first one is the path [*gathi*] of attaining jnana by becoming a disciple of a *sadguru*, and through studying and assimilating what is said in the various sacred texts. Jnana that comes like a flash of lightning, without any effort or favourable circumstances, is the second one. Gautama Buddha, the Tamil saint Pattinathar, and our Bhagavan belong to the second kind. A solemn declaration made in *Yoga Vasishtam* is "True knowledge will come to you as easily as a fruit dropping right into your palm from the sky above." The third type — someone goes to visit a sage without any volition or a specific desire to get enlightenment. At that moment, the guru happens to be instructing his disciples through answers to their serious queries. The visitor, on hearing the guru's words, though not addressed to him, gets enlightened and becomes a *jnani*. This happens only as a result of merits earned through virtuous deeds in his earlier births. It is like a bulb lighting up instantly when a current of electricity flows into it when a switch is turned on. This mode of attaining jnana is *daiva gathi*. Any one of the three dispensations will chance upon one only by virtue of one's righteous deeds in several earlier births. This is affirmed in several scriptural texts.

*The following selected chapters deal with the early life of Bhagavan in Tiruvannamalai, long before Kunju Swami's arrival.*

### **Neighbours' Animosity**

During Bhagavan's initial days of moving into Virupaksha, pilgrims to Tiruvannamalai who used to customarily visit those sadhus already living on the hill, now began coming to Bhagavan instead. So these sadhus began harassing the 'newcomer' lest their popularity might be eroded. To rid them of their anxiety, Bhagavan decided to move out of the hill and take to the woods nearby.

### ***Pranava Deham***

At times, Bhagavan used to experience a dissolution of his physical body. Unexpectedly like a flash of lightning, his physical frame would disintegrate into tiny atom-like particles and disappear, leaving only a smoke-like, nebulous haze. Then, like tiny particles of dew, they would reappear and again coalesce. In this way the physical body would re-concretize. It seems that this used to occur during periods of prolonged sitting without movement or when his physical frame was emaciated due to lack of food. This phenomenon is known as '*pranava deham*', where the body disintegrates into disparate, minute particles and disappears, becoming one with the elements in a bodiless state.

Deciding to undertake a fast and dissolve as *pranava* body, one morning Bhagavan started walking towards Pacchai Amman temple to reach the woods. At that time, Vasudeva Sastri, then a small boy attending *Vedapatasala* (Vedic school), ran into Bhagavan. "Why are you out here all alone? Let's get back to Virupaksha," he said. Bhagavan replied that he wanted to spend a couple of days in the woods and asked him to return. The little boy began weeping, afraid to leave Bhagavan all alone. Bhagavan consoled him saying he would be back soon, sent him on his way and proceeded.

### **Loving Concern of the Chief of the Isanya Mutt**

While walking, a cart happened to pass by on the road which was a little afar. Its occupant was Swami Sathappa, the head of the Isanya *Mutt* (and predecessor to Swami Mahadeva, the present head). He was returning from a visit to his *mutt's* farm property. Seeing Bhagavan from afar and identifying him as 'Brahmana Swami', he asked the cart driver to stop, alighted from the cart and came rushing near. Bubbling with delight, he said, "Swami! I never expected to see you here. It is my good fortune that I could get your darshan. It has been a long

cherished wish of mine to welcome you to my *mutt*. But I did not ask knowing you don't go visiting anywhere. Now I got my chance. Pray do visit our *mutt* now.”

Bhagavan, who was wont to go nowhere, tried to turn down the request, but his remonstrances were of no avail before the robust *mutt* head. Lifting the young Brahmana Swami aloft, lean and emaciated by ascetic starvation, Sathappa Swami simply deposited him inside his cart. Helpless against this overwhelming love, Bhagavan could no longer resist.

### **Visions of the Past Witnessed by Bhagavan**

It happened during Bhagavan's Virupaksha days. In a state that can be described neither as wakefulness nor dream, Bhagavan entered one of the caves on the hill. Sauntering inside, he could see hermitages, lovely ponds, trees in full bloom, plants and trailing climbers — an entire scenic landscape. What was even more interesting, it had an oft-visited, familiar ambience, with no air of strangeness about it. At that time he reported to none about this 'vision'. Years later, in 1915, when renovation jobs were under way in the Adi Annamalai temple, the men at work discovered an underground tunnel, starting from the eastern side of the temple and leading in the direction of the hill. A member of the renovation committee reported the finding to Bhagavan at Virupaksha. Next day, en route his *giri pradakshina*, Bhagavan stopped by and had a look at the tunnel. It came as a surprise to him that the entry portion of the tunnel was similar to what he had seen in his 'vision'. Even then he told no one about it. Those in charge sought his advice on what was to be done. Bhagavan cautioned them that it would be unwise to explore it further. He advised them to cover it over as before, and not tamper with something concerning the divine. The tunnel mouth was then sealed. On completion of the renovation job the temple *kumbhabhishekam* (consecration ceremony) was held on 27-1-1918.

Bhagavan later chanced to find in a verse of *Arunachala Mahatmyam* a description matching what he had 'seen' years ago. This was yet another surprise. He copied this Sanskrit verse and also rendered a Tamil translation of it. His translation was later included in the *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*:

Siva said:

“Though in fact fiery, my lacklustre appearance as a hill on this spot is an act of grace and loving solicitude for the maintenance of the world. Here I always abide as the Great One (*Siddha*). Remember that in the interior of my Heart is transcendental glory with all the enjoyments of the world also.”

### **Bhagavan Attempts a Disguise**

Once Navaratri festivities (‘Nine Nights’ of worship dedicated to the nine forms of Goddess Durga) in the Tamil month of *Purattasi* (mid-September to mid-October) were underway inside the Arunachaleswara temple premises, in its newly built ‘wedding hall’ [where the celestial wedding of the presiding deity and his consort is conducted every year]. Palani Swami, returning after seeing the splendrous festive decorations, particularly the ornamentations of Goddess Apeetha Kuchamba, wanted his beloved Sage to enjoy the divine spectacle. Bhagavan agreed, if only to satisfy a devotee’s wish. At that time Bhagavan and Palani Swami were the only residents of Virupaksha. Bhagavan thought that if he is accompanied by Palani Swami or by some other devotee, he would be identified by their presence. He did not want the consequent fuss and distraction. So he decided to go alone, under disguise! Asking Palani Swami to remain in Virupaksha, he wrapped the washed and dried towel of Palani Swami around his waist and painted the Vaishnavite symbol, vertical stripes of red and white, on his forehead [in contradistinction to his loincloth and the horizontal Saivite white stripes of sacred ash]. He set out at ten in the night. Though he had started out with optimism, he now had a nagging feeling that he would be recognised and mobbed. He kept looking around furtively every now and then. He could not turn his attention towards the Goddess bedecked in fine raiment nor revel in Her splendour. It was a harmless, minor act of deception, but he was ill at ease. Somehow, having had darshan of the deity, he was about to return when one of the temple priests saw through his disguise and called out excitedly, “Hey, everyone! Come over here! Come and see! Our Brahmana Swami! Giving darshan as Lord Vishnu Himself!” He then removed a garland adorning the Goddess and placed it around Bhagavan’s shoulders. Other priests gathered there, to the discomfiture

of Bhagavan. He tried to dash off but the priest now offered Bhagavan items of eatables, the holy *prasad* (offerings to the deity). With all possible haste Bhagavan made it back to Virupaksha, thinking enough was enough. Bhagavan is indeed a rare example of a scrupulously conscientious being who would not resort to the least of peccadillos, even in innocent sport.

### **Bhagavan's Reading of Books on Vedanta**

S.N. Sathappa Chettiar of Karaikudi and his wife established in Tiruvannamalai a *choultry* [a charity home that provides free food and stay to mendicant ascetics] in which they personally supervised the cooking and serving of food to sadhus. It was a labour of love for them. They were devotees of Bhagavan and during one of his customary visits, Chettiar implored Bhagavan to accept some quantity of food from them every day. They would deem it to be their singular good fortune, he said. In response to his request, Palani Swami would go to the choultry and fetch a quantity of cooked rice daily. Keeping it aside, he would begin reading out a chapter from the Malayalam *Adhyatma Ramayana*, stumbling and faltering over the text. Only after the reading was over would he serve food to Bhagavan and thereafter serve himself. In addition, on certain days he would have to serve food to visitors from outstation. Palani Swami's halting reading would take an unduly long while and Bhagavan used to feel sorry for the hungrily waiting visitors. With a view to avoiding this delay Bhagavan one day enquired him, "What Palani Swami? Are you particular that you should yourself do the reading or will it do to listen while someone reads out aloud?" Palani Swami replied that just listening was enough. Next day, Bhagavan took the book and browsed. He found that the Malayalam alphabets consisted of a good number of Tamil and grantha letters which he already knew. He now learnt the remaining unknown Malayalam characters from Palani Swami himself. Thus equipping himself with the knowledge of Malayalam script, Bhagavan began reading aloud from *Adhyatma Ramayana* daily, and Palani Swami would listen. It was this practice that made Bhagavan learn and master the Malayalam tongue. Also, from the home of a local resident by name Nagalinga Swami, Palani Swami would fetch *Kaivalyam*, *Vedanta Chudamani*, *Yoga Vasishtam*

and other texts on Vedanta. Bhagavan would leisurely pore over them during those Virupaksha days when visitors were few. It came as a surprise to him that he himself had experienced the various spiritual states expounded therein. Reading them was akin to recollecting his own past life!

Six years went by in this manner, with Palani Swami attending to Bhagavan in a unique bond of loyal affinity. Now more people joined in as resident devotees at Virupaksha. The food that was being daily fetched from the aforesaid alms-house was not sufficient for all. Therefore it was decided to go begging for food in the town streets. But they would not do it in the usual manner of standing in wait in front of houses after calling out for food. Instead they would saunter at a slow pace chanting the devotional hymns of Adi Sankara. Those who wished to offer them food would fetch it and fill their bowls. Soon, other mendicants began to imitate this mode of begging, going early singing the same hymns and receiving the food earmarked by donors for Bhagavan's devotees. When the 'early birds' thus deprived them of their ration of food, Perumal Swami and Palani Swami thought of a way out. They requested Bhagavan to compose a poem which would be their 'signature' song, and so Bhagavan composed *Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai*. Later, Mother Azhagammal too came and joined Bhagavan as a 'resident devotee', and devotees began coming in increasing numbers.

### **An Attempt at Initiation**

Once, a pundit, a scholar of the Sastras from Sankara *Mutt* at Sringeri came to Bhagavan at Virupaksha, having known that Bhagavan did not have a guru, and was not formally initiated into *sannyasa* [adoption of asceticism]. Palani Swami had at that time gone down to the choultry to fetch food. So, the visitor had the opportunity to speak privately with Bhagavan. The pundit launched an hour-long harangue on the indispensability of a guru for every spiritual aspirant and the imperative of receiving *diksha* (initiation) from that guru and the need to comply with the norms of tradition. He recounted the lives of *avatars* (divine incarnations) like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, and Adi Sankara, who had all reached the pinnacle of spiritual heights [and did have gurus who formally initiated them into spiritual discipline],

adding that Bhagavan himself was the rarest of rare among realised souls. Then, with palms joined in salutation and with utmost deference he petitioned, “Swami! You, who are a Brahmin, need to take *sannyasa* as enjoined by tradition. You know all and I need not remind you of it. I shall enrol you into our *guru-parampara* (succession of a monastic order). Permit me to make the necessary arrangements for a formal initiation. If you are disinclined to wear ochre robes, do wear an ochre *kaupina* (loincloth) at least.” Bhagavan listened but kept silent. The pundit left, saying that he was going to the town and would return at three in the afternoon.

Within a quarter hour of his departure an elderly man came up huffing and puffing. “My train, due to arrive at 8 a.m., came only at ten. I haven’t had my bath yet nor could I perform *sandhya vandanam* [the mandatory, daily worship ritual to be performed by Brahmins at dawn and dusk]. Let me keep this bundle of mine here. Keep an eye on it till I return from my bath.” So saying, he went out hurriedly. Bhagavan said to himself, “This person seems to be a first time visitor. Yet his face is familiar. People who know me would not ask me to look after their luggage.” Puzzled thus, he glanced at the bundle. It contained a couple of *dhotis* [the South Indian male’s lower garment made usually of white cloth], and a few books on top of them, tied up into a bundle by means of a towel. Bhagavan felt an impulse to pick up the books and browse through. Normally disinclined to touch or handle what belonged to others, he could not resist a compulsive feeling now to go through their contents.

He undid the bundle and glanced at the volume kept topmost. It happened to be the Sanskrit work, *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Bhagavan had till now seen only *Arunachala Puranam*, its Tamil translation. With interest quickened, he opened the book at random. After copying two verses from the open page on a bit of paper, he replaced the volume and retied the bundle. By now Palani Swami too, who had gone down to fetch food, returned. Bhagavan had his meal but now he found the bundle missing. He enquired Palani Swami of its whereabouts, who replied that he had not seen any bundle. Nor did the old man seem to have come again after going out. The disappearance of the bundle from within the confines of the small cell was a mystery.

When the pundit returned at three, Bhagavan showed him the slip on which he had copied the two verses. Reading them, the pundit realised that Bhagavan, in his exalted state, transcended all ritualistic traditions and orthodox demands. Ruing his misconceived intentions, he saluted Bhagavan and departed. On returning to his *mutt* at Sringeri, he reported to Sri Narasimha Bharathi, [the then Sankaracharya of the *mutt*] what had transpired. The latter expressed his disapproval and cautioned the pundit not to venture into such attempts in future. The two Sanskrit verses that Bhagavan had copied were later rendered in Tamil by him, and included in *Sri Ramana Nootrirattu (The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi)*.

Siva said:

“What cannot be acquired without endless pains — the true import of Vedanta — is easily attained by all who can directly sight this hill or even mentally think of it from afar.

“I ordain that residence within a radius of three *yojanas* [30 miles] of this hill shall by itself suffice to burn off all defects and effect union with the Supreme even in the absence of initiation.” ▲

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Premarupa*, love’s  
every engendering form,  
inflamed seditions;  
the virgin’s erupting seal,  
and the hermit’s antique flame.

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.



S. Gopalakrishnan

# A Practical Approach to Self-Enquiry

N.S. RAMAMOCHAN

The enquiry ‘Who am I’, which is also called *atma vichara*, is in essence “Seeking the source of thoughts [which arise from the ‘I-thought’], ‘the Self’, and merging in it.” However, ‘Seek the source’ is the greatest pointer that can be applied not just to Self-enquiry, but to all paths, whether it is *vichara*, *japa*, mantra, or breath-control.

The Self is the source of all manifestation. Bhagavan teaches that ego or ‘I-thought’ (*chit shakti*), and breath (*kriya shakti*), arise from and sink into the same source, the Self. In this broad sense, Self-enquiry is not limited to the enquiry ‘Who am I’ alone.

The following Talk from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* lays the ground for a wider framework.

“That which is, is the One Reality. It may be represented by a form, a japa, mantra, vichara or any kind of attempt. All of them finally resolve themselves into that One Single Reality. Bhakti, vichara, japa are only different forms of our efforts to keep out the unreality.” (Talk§401)

Nanduri Sri Ramamohan is a mechanical engineer who has worked for 31 years in Bombay, Holland, Saudi Arabia and the USA. The biography *Self Realisation* originally inspired him. His book on Bhagavan’s teachings *Pointers To Self Realisation*, and its translation into Telugu, *Atma Sakshatkara Sutralu*, were published by the Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.

Bhagavan says that all paths except Self-enquiry employ mind. But, in Self-enquiry the very existence of mind is questioned. The traditional understanding given is that japa, mantra etc., aid in one-pointedness of the mind. Bhagavan's teachings make a leap from this limited perspective to a much wider horizon of seeking the Self while engaging in these practices.

The *upadesa* (spiritual instruction) given to Sri Ganapati Muni makes it clear. That is, "If one watches whence the notion of 'I' springs, the mind will be absorbed into that. That is tapas. If a mantra is repeated, and attention is directed to the source whence the mantrasound is produced, the mind will be absorbed in that. That is tapas." In the above upadesa Bhagavan means that seeking the source is tapas and the path is not to seek or gain something outside oneself but within.

### **Breath Control**

In another Talk Bhagavan says, "Mechanical breath-control will not lead one to the goal. It is only an aid. While doing it mechanically take care to be alert in the mind and remember the 'I' thought and seek its source. Then you will find that where the breath sinks, there the 'I-thought' arises. They sink and rise together. The 'I-thought' also will sink along with the breath. Simultaneously, another luminous and infinite 'I-I' will become manifest, which will be continuous and unbroken. That is the goal. It goes by different names — God, Self, Kundalini Sakti, Consciousness, Yoga, Bhakti, Jnana, etc." (Talk§195)

*"Pay attention to the source from whence 'I thought' or japa or breath arises," is the most astonishing and wonderful teaching that at once opens up great possibilities to the devotees. When one watches the source what happens is a miracle. A devotee while persisting with what he is already doing in spiritual practice can slip into the mode of Self-enquiry. Bhagavan says that Self-enquiry is the 'direct path'.*

One may ask, 'how to pay attention to the source'? Hence, it is apt to deal with the location of the source. Bhagavan says that, Self, the source, is ever constant and not subject to variations. The head nods off in sleep but becomes erect in the waking state. So, it is not the location of the source. Likewise, when the limbs are severed the person continues to live.

Even though Bhagavan says that ‘*hridayam*’ (which means ‘this is the centre’) is the location, it is conceptual till it is experienced and it is not a physical location or attribute. The source is said to be neither inside nor outside, as inside and outside refer to the body. However, for our initial purpose its location may be taken as somewhere inside the body. Everyone has to find its location by themselves. It is important *not* to fix attention on a preconceived location for this amounts to bringing the mind into the picture, as there then arises an observer, and simultaneously, the observed.

### **The Source of ‘I’**

In Self-enquiry each time a thought arises, the enquiry results in its dissolution, proving its transient and insubstantial nature, and thus negating its existence. What then is the location of the source? Here, Bhagavan offers the most valuable clue. He says that ‘I-thought’ or ego and breath rise from and sink into the same source, the Self. This is the one significant clue necessary for us. In Self-enquiry, we are required to watch the source of ‘I-thought’, and merge in it. In the process, perception of breath, which is part of our natural experience when we become quiet, happens. Thus, the method has a practical and familiar aspect. As we watch the source we notice that the breath gradually sinks.

Engaging in Self-enquiry is by far the most wonderful adventure that one can set out on. We are seeking what is very intimate, yet we need clues, and what looks obvious is yet very obscure. Such is the paradox of seeking the Self. So, we do not enter Self-enquiry with any concepts. A state of thought-free, still mind, may be a rare experience for a person, but the path suggested by Bhagavan makes it quite possible and natural.

### **Watching the Source**

At times when the mind is hard to quieten, the repeating of, say, ‘I-I’ mentally, or any chant, while watching the source with alertness will lead to the same goal as Self-enquiry says Bhagavan. After some time when the mind has quietened, one may stop the recital and just watch for the next thought to arise, intently keeping a watch on the source of thoughts, the I-thought.

Here is another example: At the beginning of satsang in the Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, we recite ‘Arunachala Siva, Arunachala

Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala,’ for about five minutes. This recital is a good way to start ‘Self-enquiry’. It needs to be done softly and peacefully, so as to be able to watch the source from where these words arise, as Bhagavan advises.

Bhagavan explains the sequence of arising of words as:

Self/Para→Ego/Pasyanthi→Thoughts/Madhyama→Words/Vaikhari

When one recites Arunachala Siva, the vocal sound ‘Arunachala Siva’ is preceded by the thought ‘Arunachala Siva’. Bhagavan says that all thoughts arise after the rise of the ‘I-thought’. The ‘I-thought’ itself arises from the Self. The attention has to be on the source of thoughts and not on the words which emanate from the vocal organs. At the beginning of the practice we may not (and perhaps need not) know from where the thoughts arise. But the very act of intently watching the source dramatically paves the way to the silence of the mind. This silence (a state free of thoughts), is the pure ‘I-thought’ or ‘I-feeling’, whose source we are seeking. The ‘I-thought’ has one peculiar characteristic. And that is, it either catches hold of a thought or, if it cannot do so, it automatically sinks into its source, the Self.

Bhagavan says that when the source of thoughts, the ‘I-thought’, is watched, the thoughts recoil, meaning that they retreat into their source. He says, “The mind is accustomed to stray outward by the force of the latent *vasanas* (patterns) manifesting as thoughts. So long as there are *vasanas* contained within they must come out and exhaust themselves. The thoughts comprise the mind. Searching what the mind is, the thoughts will recoil and the *seeker will know* that they arise from the Self. It is the aggregate of these thoughts that we call ‘mind’. If one realizes that the thoughts arise from the Self and abide in their source, the mind will disappear. After the mind ceases to exist and bliss of peace has been realized, one will find it then as difficult to bring out a thought, as he now finds it difficult to keep out all thoughts.” (Talk§326)

The recital of ‘Arunachala Siva’, if done watching the source intently even just for five minutes, will assist the mind to slip into silence after the recital and not a single thought may arise for quite some time. From this point one can enter into the mode of Self-enquiry. If then a thought arises, one may continue to be alert and watch the source of the thought or put the question ‘for whom is this thought?’

It must be noted that the word ‘watching’ means ‘paying attention to’ the source. Paying attention to the source becomes really possible only in stillness. Attention is the key. Attention is consciousness. Source, the Self, is Absolute Consciousness. That is, consciousness is applied to its own source. This is what Bhagavan calls turning the mind within. Besides, without attention we may slip into sleep. The stillness should not be disturbed by any mental activity, and watching does not imply any mental activity. It implies ‘becoming aware of’ the source. The Biblical saying ‘Be still and know that I am God’ points to the path and the goal. Bhagavan says that when the source of thoughts is watched, the seeker will know that they arise from the Self.

### **The Enquiry ‘Who am I’**

Bhagavan says that thoughts arise from the Self. The existence of thoughts, their clear conception and operation become evident to the individual. (Talk§25) When a thought arises, the activity of attention to the thought and becoming aware of it, takes place in the mind. Awareness is the nature of consciousness and holding on to the thought is an act of ego, which operates as the individual. By its very nature the ego pounces on the thought and holds on to it. It leaves that thought only when it catches hold of another thought. Thus, in fact, there is the source of thoughts from which they arise, and their recognition in the mind, and there is no thinker as such. The ego is continuously busy with some thought or the other. As the continuous drift from one thought to another takes place in the mind, the mind is said to be a bundle of thoughts. When our attention is on the Self we become aware of our being, but when it is on the thought we lose the awareness of our being. Thoughts veil our real nature.

Bhagavan says that when a thought arises, with alertness, one should raise the query ‘for whom is this thought?’ However, we do not have to hurry to answer this query. Let the answer arise. *This question promptly withdraws attention from the thought.* We have said earlier that attention is consciousness. When consciousness is withdrawn from the thought, it dies leaving the mind still, till again the next thought arises and compels the attention of the ego. It is in fact wonderful to raise the question ‘for whom is this thought?’, and

watch the thought dissolve. The watching of the dissolution of the thought enhances the faith in the process of enquiry. Bhagavan says that if a thought begins to arise, the query should be raised at once so the thought should not be allowed to complete itself. Thus in this practice we will notice that the query ‘for whom is this thought?’ has the important role in stilling the mind. If one is attentive one notices that, sometimes, after the query ‘for whom is this thought’, the mind does not quieten and a lingering sense of distraction remains. The perfect stillness of mind is not attained. Our aim then is to again pay attention to the source from which the thoughts emerge. The answer ‘to me’ promptly directs the attention within, to the source. This answer completes the process of stilling the mind and directing the attention to the source.

Then, the query ‘Who am I?’ is raised. With repeated practice and the development of one-pointed strength of attention so as to remain as the ‘I’, the abidance in the ‘I’ continues spontaneously. This ‘I’ is the pure ‘I’, not associated with anything.

Bhagavan says, “As a matter of fact, in the quest method — which is more correctly ‘Whence am I?’ and not merely ‘Who am I?’ — we are not simply trying to eliminate saying ‘we are not the body, not the senses and so on,’ to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the ‘I’ thought for the ego arises within us. The method contains within it, though implicitly and not expressly, the watching of the breath. When we watch wherefrom the ‘I-thought’, the root of all thoughts, springs, we are necessarily watching the source of breath also, as the ‘I-thought’ and the breath arise from the same source.” (*Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, 1st December, 1945)

He says that even vaguely becoming aware of the source helps the extinction of the ego. (Talk§80)

Further he states, “You know that you are. You cannot deny your existence at any moment of time. For you must be there in order to deny it. This (Pure Existence) is understood by stilling your mind. The mind is the outgoing faculty of the individual. If that is turned within, it becomes still in course of time and that ‘I-AM’ alone prevails.” (Talk§503)

### **Paying Attention to the Source**

When the mind is still, we are ready to pay attention to the source. As mentioned by Bhagavan in Talk§503, 'we know that we are'. We raised the query 'for whom is this thought?' so as not to be distracted by the thought. When the Self-attention continues, even if a thought arises, it drops off and the answer 'for me' may not be warranted. As we progress, if we feel the urge/need to answer 'to me', it may be done, followed by the query 'Who am I'? Any query is made when a distraction is felt. But, in the stillness of mind, abiding at the source continues.

We see that Talk§503 and Talk§618 in essence mean the same thing, 'stilling the mind and seeking the source of ego'. The same end may be reached even with the recital of a mantra. When we are reciting a prayer for example, and watching the source, it means that the intellect is now turned within and is watching the source. It is our common experience that while reciting a prayer our mind may be wandering. But, as we have seen earlier, if we intently watch the source while reciting the prayer, the mind is stilled. While watching the source we become aware of our own being. The intellect is merged in the ego which then merges into the source. Then, when a thought arises and the ego (intellect function of the ego) catches hold of the thought, we will notice a sudden shift in our attention from the source, our being, to the brain, the physical seat of the intellect. The ego then becomes busy with catching the next thought right after leaving the present thought, and with this identification with the new thought we suddenly lose the awareness of our sense of beingness.

On the other hand, the moment we become aware that our attention has shifted to a thought we should be able to shift our attention back to the source and become aware of our being again. Object awareness can result in loss of Self-awareness. We repeatedly shift between losing the awareness of our being and regaining it in the process of enquiry.

Self-attention may be lost in many other ways. Such instances may be that when our attention is drawn or distracted to an object or a scene, or when we happen to hear someone speak. All these distractions too, are thought forms. So, the enquiry such as 'Who is the seer? Who is the hearer?' must be focused on the query 'Who is the seer?' which removes the separation between the seer and the seen.

But one needs to consciously experience the state of inseparableness to know what it is like.

*Once the mind is stilled, the paths of recital and enquiry have the common course of enquiry.* The next question is how to remain steady in enquiry.

### **Remaining Established in the Sense of 'I'**

As the thoughts, which are vasanās, arise, depending on our *vairagya* (detachment), our attention remains with the source or shifts to the thoughts. *Vairagya* itself is a firm intellectual conviction that our real happiness lies in the source, the Self, and nowhere else. This conviction is rooted in what is known as '*nitya-anitya vivekam*'. In practical terms it is the discrimination between temporary, fleeting happiness versus permanent and eternal happiness in whatever we are engaged in. Only an eternal, unchanging source can give eternal happiness.

Bhagavan says, "Each one seeks happiness but is misled into thinking pain associated pleasures as happiness. Such happiness is transient. His mistaken activity gives him short-lived pleasure. Pain and pleasure alternate with one another in the world. To discriminate between the pain-producing and pleasure-producing matters and to confine oneself to the happiness-producing pursuit only is *vairagya*. What is it that will not be followed by pain? He seeks it and engages in it. Otherwise, the man has one foot in the world and another foot in the spiritual pursuit (without progressing satisfactorily in either field)". (Talk§302)

"The scriptures speak of 'in-turned look', 'one pointed look' and so on. The Self being always the Self, why should only a *dhira* be illumined? Does it mean a man of courage? No; *dhih* = intellect; *rah* = watch; protection. So, *dhira* is the one who always keeps the mind inward bent without letting it loose." (Talk§352)

Here a reference to the words of Paul Brunton from his book *The Maharshi and His Message*, will be of great use.

He says, "The mental questionings which have marked most of my earlier meditations have lately begun to cease. I have repeatedly interrogated my consciousness of physical, emotional and mental sensations in turn, but, dissatisfied in the quest of Self, have eventually

left them all. I have then applied the attention of consciousness to its own centre, striving to become aware of its place of origin.”

This is the discrimination process (as indicated by his word ‘sensations’) which he has gone through that leads him to focus on the source, the Self. Those who have succeeded in Self-enquiry or who are firmly entrenched in it have done this discrimination at some time or other.

In the process of enquiry when we become aware of thoughts/vasanas and manage to stay with the source, the thoughts/vasanas which thus far were hidden, come out and die in the light of enquiry. Darkness when exposed to light becomes light. This is perhaps the most effective way that vasanas can be annihilated so as to establish ourselves in the source.

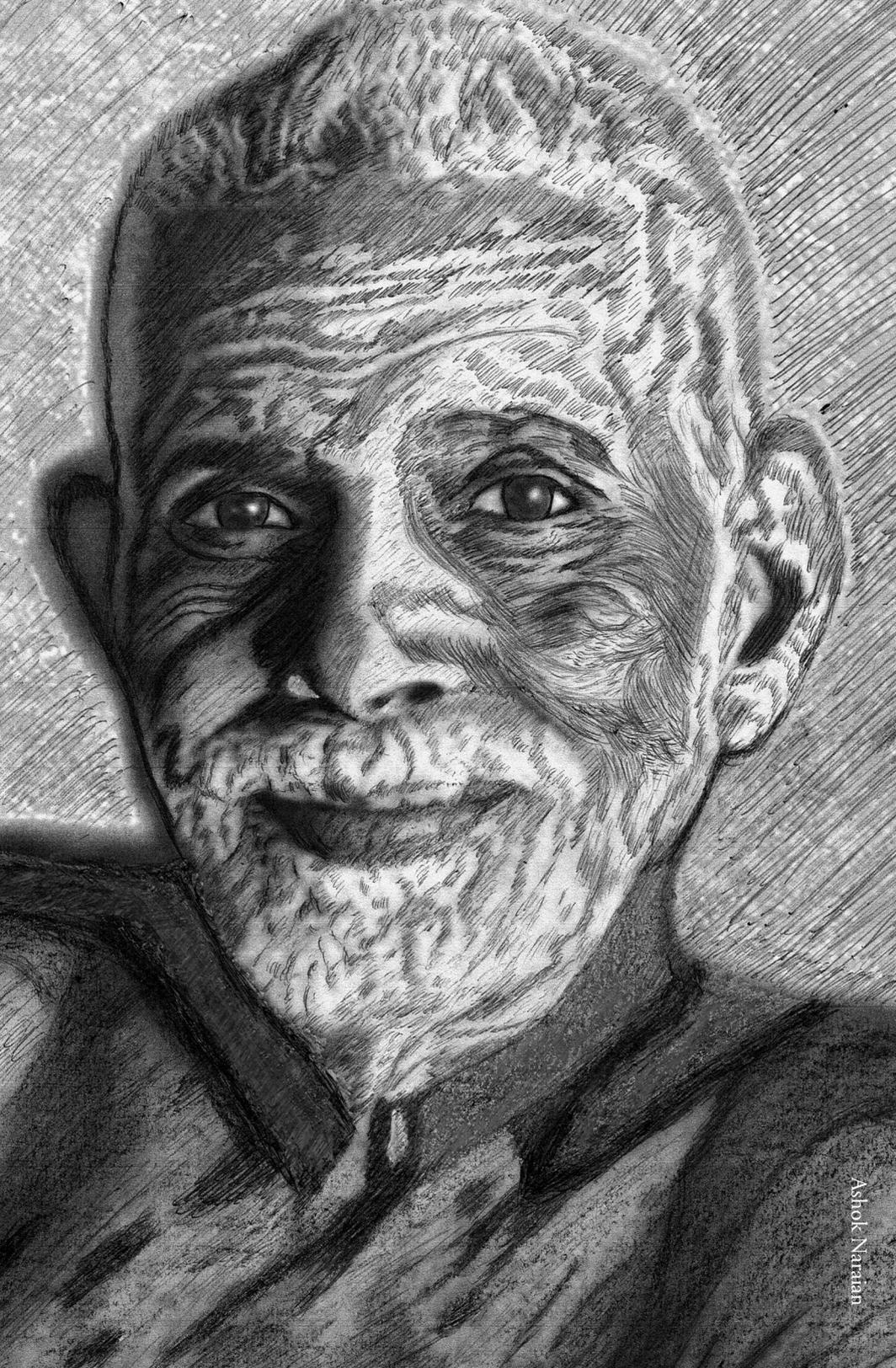
One needs to guard against the back door entry of ego into the process of enquiry. One should be cautious against any urge to indulge in self-talk or recalling something, even the teachings of Sri Bhagavan. When such a thing occurs we know that we have to be alert. Any mental/egoic activity interferes with the enquiry. Similarly, if the mind wanders during the recital of mantra, it is of no real value and we should pull our attention back to that still point of awareness. If it is some kind of urge to comment, then holding breath for one or two seconds stops that urge.

Thus, the key to success in Self-enquiry is to remain focused in the source irrespective of whatever one may be engaged in. Bhagavan tells us how the village girls bring water in pots located on their heads from a distant pond to their home. While bringing water they playfully talk and joke but their attention is always on the pot on their head. Attention to the source itself helps annihilating the vasanas. But *viveka* (discrimination) helps one to remain focused without distraction and hastens the pace of maturity. The intellect has to be free from its tendency to jump on to a thought and hold it. Such a well-trained intellect helps focus on the source and aids the experience of the Self. Such an intellect turned to the source reflects the pure ‘I’.

My thanks to Sri V. Krithivasan for his valuable suggestions.

Sri Ramanarpanam





# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Nineteen

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**8th August 1978**

Sadhu Om: In the first verse of *Sri Arunacala Navamanimalai* Bhagavan sings:

Though actually *acalan* [the motionless one], in that assembly hall [in Chidambaram] he [Lord Siva] dances in front of the mother, who is *acalai* [the consort of *acalan*]. When that Sakti [the divine mother] becomes tranquil in [his] *acala* form, know that he shines exalted as *Arunacalam*.

Lord Siva is our own real self, which is immutable and hence eternally motionless (*acala*), yet it is said that in Chidambaram he assumed the form of Nataraja to dance in front of Kali in order to

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pacify her frenzied dance. Here Kali, who is Sakti, the divine mother of the entire universe, represents our ceaselessly active mind, which is the progenitor of all things. Kali is called *acalai*, the feminine form of *acalan*, the motionless Lord Siva, because in essence she is nothing other than him, just as our mind is in essence nothing other than our real self.

Just as the frenzied dance of Kali needed to be pacified in order for her to regain her original state of motionlessness, the ceaseless rising and activity of our mind needs to subside in order for us to regain our original state as perfectly calm and motionless self-awareness.

In other spiritual paths, which are represented in this verse by other holy places such as Chidambaram, our mind is given a single activity in order to subdue its other activities, so in order to cling to that single activity it needs to make strenuous effort, which is arduous *tapas* (austerities) and which is therefore represented here by the dancing of Nataraja.

In the path of atma-vicara, which is the path of complete self-surrender and which is represented here by Tiruvannamalai, no arduous activity or *tapas* is necessary, because simply by calmly clinging with love to ourself, our mind will merge motionlessly back into ourself, just as Sakti became calm in Tiruvannamalai simply because of her overwhelming love for Lord Siva in his motionless form as Arunachala.

Therefore this verse signifies the fact that in order for us to regain our original state of motionless self-abidance, no activity (dancing) of our mind is necessary, because ultimately we can remain as we really are only by completely giving up all activity, which we can do only by clinging firmly, steadily and peacefully to self-attention.

Jnanasambandar praised Arunachala as ‘ஞானத் திரளாய் நின்று பெருமான்’ (*jñānat-tiralāy niṇḍra perumān*), ‘the great Lord who stands as a dense mass of jnana’, and Bhagavan used to explain this saying that Arunachala is *jnanagni*, the fire of self-knowledge that will destroy the false awareness ‘I am this body’.<sup>1</sup> When Sundaramurti was in Tiruvanaikkaval, he sang a verse saying that Annamalai can be known only by those who have lost their ego, thereby illustrating

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§529, 2006. p.528.

that by merely thinking of Arunachala from afar great saints can understand its secret. And when Adi Sankara was travelling in these parts he approached Arunachala from the eastern side but did not enter the town, because he saw every grain of sand here as a *Siva-linga*, so he did *namaskara* (paid obeisance) from a distance. Referring to this, Bhagavan used to say that the very ground here is *jnana-bhumi*, the soil of jnana.

People generally take *sat-sanga* to mean the company of good people, but Bhagavan clarified its true meaning, explaining that real *sat-sanga* is only association with *sat*, and since *sat* is nothing other than *atma-svarupa*, our own real self, abiding in ourself as ourself is the correct and most perfect form of *sat-sanga*.<sup>2</sup> However, until we are able to abide in *sat* as *sat*, the next best form of *sat-sanga* is to associate with those like Bhagavan who abide as *sat*.

However, so long as we experience ourself as a body, anyone who abides as *sat* will seem to us to be a body, so when their body dies we will seem to lose their *sat-sanga*. Therefore Bhagavan taught us that Arunachala is the very embodiment of ‘*sat*’, so since Arunachala is always present here, *sat-sanga* with it is always available to us. Moreover, since we can associate with Arunachala merely by thinking of it, *sat-sanga* with it is not restricted by either time or place.

However, when we are able to be here, a special way to have *sat-sanga* with it is to do *pradakshina* (circumambulation) around it. Just as a moth is attracted to a candle flame and will fly around it until it eventually comes too close and is consumed by it, if we are attracted to Arunachala and walk around it, we will eventually be consumed by it. Therefore *sat-sanga* is a suicide policy.

When a needle is stroked by a magnet, its previously unaligned molecules are aligned, and thereby the magnetic property of each molecule becomes manifest in the needle as a whole. Therefore the magnetism induced in a needle by such stroking is not a property that it newly acquires, but one that was already inherent in it, albeit in a hitherto concealed manner. Though magnetism is the true nature of a needle, it is revealed only by its association with a magnet.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Talk§283, 2006. p.252, and *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 16-7-46, 2002. p.273.

Likewise by sat-sanga we do not acquire anything that we did not already possess, but our real nature is revealed to us. Just as the natural magnetism of a needle is revealed by repeated contact with a magnet, by repeatedly doing pradakshina around Arunachala or by frequent association with a jnani — whether by being in his physical presence or better still by studying, reflecting on and practising his teachings — we are enabled to see that our real nature is sat.

### 9th August 1978

Sadhu Om: The best way to celebrate Bhagavan's birth centenary would be to prevent the rising of the 'I' who rises to celebrate it in so many other ways. If we make this 'I' subside, then we will be truly celebrating his centenary in the way he would want us to do so.

### 10th August 1978

Sadhu Om: Reading, reflecting on and trying to practise Bhagavan's teachings is essential, because this is the means by which he prepares us and ignites the flame of his *sphurana* (fresh clarity of self-awareness) in our heart. If we do not constantly study, reflect on and practise his teachings, we would thereby be raising an inner barrier between him and ourself, obstructing the flow of his grace and preventing it from entering our heart.

### 16th August 1978

Sadhu Om: In verse 31 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says:

To the *mey-jnani* [the knower of reality], who is asleep within the fleshy body, which is like a cart, activity [of mind or body], *nistha* [steadiness, inactivity or *samadhi*] and sleep are just like, to a person sleeping in a cart, that cart moving, standing or the cart remaining alone [with the bullocks unyoked].

Just as a person who is sleeping in a cart is not aware of the cart or whether it is moving, standing or remaining unyoked, the jnani is not aware of the body and mind or whether they are active, in *nistha* (a state of steadiness or inactivity) or asleep.

In one of his answers recorded in the first chapter of *Maharshi's Gospel*, Bhagavan uses this analogy but describes it in a more detailed

manner. However when reading what is recorded there we should bear in mind that the purpose of this analogy is only to make it clear to us that the jnani, who is nothing other than our own real self, is not at all aware of the body or mind or of any of their alternating states, because as he often explained, these exist only in the view of *ajnanis* (those who are ignorant and therefore mistake themselves to be a body and mind). Therefore we should not read more into this analogy than it is intended to convey. For example, when it is recorded in Maharshi's Gospel that he said that the traveller sleeping in the cart 'does not know these events but finds himself in a different place after he wakes up', we should not take this to mean that the jnani will eventually wake up from the 'wakeful sleep' of jnana and become aware of the body once again.

Regarding the portion, '*samadhi* is their standing still (because *samadhi* means *jagrat-sushupti*, that is to say, the person is aware but not concerned in the action; the bulls are yoked but do not move)', the explanation given in brackets is not what Bhagavan actually said but was added by whoever recorded it, because it confuses the sense in which he used the term *samadhi* in this context. That is, the jnani is always in *jagrat-sushupti*, the state of 'wakeful sleep', because he is what Bhagavan refers to here as the 'ever-wakeful Self', which is awake in the sense that it is always aware of itself and asleep in the sense it is never aware of anything else — any mind, body or world — so when he compares *samadhi* to the cart standing still, what he means by *samadhi* is not the permanent state of *jagrat-sushupti* but only the temporary state of self-absorption in which the body and mind of the jnani sometimes seem to be. In the view of an *ajnani*, the body and mind of a jnani like Bhagavan may sometimes be active and may at other times go into and later come out of a motionless state of inactivity, which is what he calls *nistha* or *samadhi* in this context, but as he explains by means of this analogy, the jnani is completely unaware of the coming and going of all such states, because in his view the only state is *jagrat-sushupti*, which is eternal and immutable.

However, what is particularly significant about this answer of Bhagavan recorded in *Maharshi's Gospel* is the context in which he used this analogy, because he usually used it to illustrate the fact that the jnani is not aware of any mind or body and hence of any of their

activities or states, whereas on this occasion he used it to explain that if we attend only to ourself and not to anything else, our body and mind will nevertheless do whatever actions they are destined to do, but we will not be aware of them. Since atma-jnana or jagrat-sushupti is a state in which we are aware of nothing other than ourself, in order to attain it here and now we should attend only to ourself and thereby refrain from being aware of anything else.

This is what he meant when he said that we should practise *sahaja samadhi* even in the midst of other activities, and in his introduction to *Drig-Drisyā-Vivekam* he explained that practising *sahaja samadhi* means ‘தன்னையே பாஹ்யாந்தர திருஷ்டிபேதமின்றி எப்போதும் நாடுதல்’ (tanṇaiyē bāhyāntara dhiruṣṭi-bhēdamindri eppōdum nādudal), ‘always investigating [or attending to] oneself without the distinction of seeing outside or inside’. Being eternally aware of nothing other than oneself is *sahaja samadhi* (which is another name for *manonasa*, *atma-jnana* or *jagrat-sushupti*), and trying to be always aware of nothing than oneself is practising *sahaja samadhi*. *Sahaja samadhi* is our goal, and the only way to attain it is to practise it here and now. ▲

(To be continued)

## **Arunachala Animal Sanctuary and Rescue Shelter**

The Animal Shelter was established in 2006 after a successfully intervention to stop the wanton killing of the dogs in the Tiruvannamalai municipality. With an initial seed fund given by a Satya Sai Baba devotee the shelter and the assistance of the then local member of the Tamil Nadu State Assembly who arranged for a donation of land, the Shelter has grown into a hospital that cares for the stray dogs, cows and other animals who are suffering on the streets of Tiruvannamalai. As of June 2016 there have been 3,652 emergency rescues; 6,296 dogs sterilised; 11,953 rabies injections; 36,108 clinic visits; 102,548 in patient treatments; 3,259 non-dog treatments and 844 animal adoptions. For those who are interested in aiding this worthwhile cause please check the website:

<http://www.arunachalasanctuary.com/index.php>

## KEYWORD

# Avastha Traya Vichara

JOHN GRIMES

**B**hagavan Ramana said, “The sleep, dream, and waking states are mere phenomena appearing on the Self which is itself unmoving.”<sup>1</sup>

Avastha traya vichara (*avasthātrayavicāra*) is an ‘enquiry into the three states of human existence.’ This enquiry is an ancient technique employed to reveal the real nature of the Self. By analysing human life as a whole, and not merely the waking state as many philosophers are prone to, this analysis reveals a comprehensive approach. The empirical individual human being experiences three types of experience: the waking state, the dream state, and the deep sleep state. A full account of this technique is found in the *Mandukya Upanisad* along with Gaudapada’s brilliant elucidation in his *Mandukya-karika*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 18th January, 1939. Talk§609.

<sup>2</sup> The *Mandukya Upanisad* equates the Om (a-u-m) with the avasthas but we will leave that for a future date.

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According to Bhagavan Ramana the Self is seemingly involved in these three states through the adjunct of the body-mind complex with which it is seemingly associated. This enquiry is meant to reveal that the Self is not really affected by this triple stream of experience. The relationship is adventitious and not natural to it. To realise this is to realise the fourth (*turiya*) state, or the Absolute (Atman/Brahman).

As a matter of fact, our real state is what is sometimes called *turiya* or the fourth state that is always as it is and knows nothing of the three avasthas. Because we call these three avasthas, we call the fourth state *turiya avastha*. But it is not an avastha, but the real and natural state of the Self. When this is realised, we know it is not a *turiya* or fourth state, for a fourth state is only relative, *turiyatita*, the transcendent state called the fourth state.”<sup>3</sup>

Adi Shankara’s *Manisha Panchaka* says, “In the three states, waking, dreaming, deep sleep, the *Paramatma* or pure Consciousness shines accompanying them all.”<sup>4</sup>

A person’s awareness of objects in the waking state is due to the connection of external objects with consciousness through the modifications of the mind. In dreams there is an awareness of internal objects created by the mind out of the *vasanas* (tendencies) derived from the waking state in this or prior births. During deep sleep, consciousness is awake but the mind that connects objects with consciousness is dissolved in *avidya* (ignorance) and therefore there is no cognition of objects (neither external, internal, nor the ego).

There is one, identical Consciousness underlying the three states. It is this witnessing Consciousness (*saksi-caitanya*) that is the Self. Were it not for this witness Consciousness, the entire universe of objects and events would cease to be objects of perception. Why? The mind-body complex and objects are themselves inert (*jada*) and cannot perceive by themselves without the aid of Consciousness.

What do we learn from this analysis? The waking state reveals: ‘I’ am there; objects are external, illumined by an external light; ‘I’ exists in the external universe; the concept of a reality arises (even if that concept is mistaken); the external world is accepted as real. The

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<sup>3</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 5-1-46 Afternoon.

<sup>4</sup> *Manisha Panchaka*, v.1.

dream state reveals: ‘I’ am there; objects are internal, observed by an internal light; the universe (of dreams) exists within me as I am the creator of this dream universe; the possibility arises that the external universe just may be a dream; whatever happens or has happened in the dream really didn’t happen; the dream world is accepted as real so long as one is dreaming.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is only when one is in the waking state that one declares whatever happens in a dream isn’t really real. But what is the reality of the external world from the dream perspective? Appearances happen but that doesn’t imply they are real. Finally, the deep sleep state reveals: ‘I’ am there; I can exist without either external or internal objects; in deep sleep there are no thoughts, no emotions, no sensations. All that is there is a state of total peace (that is only acknowledged by the mind in the waking state).

Bhagavan: “Turiya is the jnani’s state. In sleep our ego is submerged and the sense organs are not active. The jnani’s ego has been killed and he does not indulge in any sense activities of his own accord or with the notion that he is the doer. So he is in sleep. At the same time he is not unconscious as in sleep, but fully awake in the Self; so his state is sleepless. This sleepless sleep, wakeful sleep, or whatever it may be called, is the turiya state of the Self, on which as the screen, all the three avasthas, the waking, dream and sleep, pass, leaving the screen unaffected.”<sup>6</sup>

In deep sleep one is oblivious to everything, both physical and mental. In turiya, one is awake to the Self. Here there is no subject-object awareness, no world awareness; one lives in the One, eternal Self, one is the eternal Self. Again, in deep sleep one is engulfed by maya/avidya that invests the mind with the power to conceal the Self and project experiential objects. In turiya, one transcends maya, has killed ignorance. Thus, the turiya avastha is neither externally cognitive, inwardly cognitive, nor both.

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<sup>5</sup> “While you are dreaming, the dream is a perfectly integrated whole. That is to say, if you felt thirsty in a dream, the illusory drinking of illusory water quenched your illusory thirst. But all this was real and not illusory to you so long as you did not know that the dream itself was illusory. Similarly with the waking world. The sensations you now have get co-ordinated to give you the impression that the world is real.” *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book 2, Chapter III, ‘The Jnani and the World’.

<sup>6</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-45 Evening.

Bhagavan Ramana said,

“The jnani has neither the waking, dreaming, or sleeping avasthas, but only the turiya state. It is the jnani that sleeps. But he sleeps without sleeping or is awake while sleeping.”<sup>7</sup>

A peculiar feature of these four states of consciousness, waking, sleeping, deep sleep, and turiya is that the first three are mutually exclusive of one another. When a person is awake, he is neither dreaming, nor sleeping, etc. However, turiya, like the fourth quarter of a coin that gives fullness and value to the entire coin, is that which underlies the other three states. People say, “I am awake; I had a dream last night; I slept well yesterday night.” It is this sense of ‘I’ that is continuous throughout the three states. The ‘I’ refers to the same individual. It is not one of the states like the other three but runs through them all.

Sri Ramana said, “What makes you say that jnanis do not have the three states? In saying, ‘I had a dream; I was in deep sleep; I am awake’, you must admit that you were there in all the three states. That makes it clear that you were there all the time. If you remain as you are now, you are in the wakeful state; this becomes hidden in the dream state; and the dream state disappears when you are in deep sleep. You were there then, you are there now, and you are there at all times. The three states come and go, but you are always there. It is like a cinema. The screen is always there but several types of pictures appear on the screen and then disappear. Nothing sticks to the screen, it remains a screen. Similarly, you remain your own Self in all the three states.”<sup>8</sup>

We may note that in the deep sleep state, one is neither associated with, nor claims, to be the body or the mind. In the waking and dreaming states this is not the case. If a person believes that they have a body and a mind and are totally identified with it, then how is it possible to exist with a mind-body complex in deep sleep when there is no awareness of it?

Bhagavan Ramana said, “We exist in *sushupti* (sleep) without being associated with the body and mind. But in the other two states we are

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<sup>7</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 28-11-46.

<sup>8</sup> Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Chapter 40, ‘The Screen’.

associated with them. If we are one with the body, how can we exist without the body in sushupti? We can separate ourselves from that which is external to us and not from that which is one with us. Hence the ego is not one with the body. This must be realized in the waking state. *Avasthatraya* (the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep) should be studied only for gaining this outlook.<sup>9</sup>

The avastha traya vichara technique reveals that there is only one Real state, that of Consciousness. The three states cannot be really Real, they are mere appearances that come and go. The Real always exists. Consciousness is the only Reality. Consciousness plus waking, we call waking. Consciousness plus dream, we call dream. Consciousness plus sleep, we call sleep.<sup>10</sup> ▲

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<sup>9</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 18-11-1936. Talk§286.

<sup>10</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11-1-1946 Afternoon.

## Namam

Upahar

No, you are never distant, never, near,  
nor subject to remembrance or forgetting.  
You are what everything already is,  
and all approaches mere imagination,  
no gateway opening  
into the infinite palace of the being.

And yet our song of love forever rises,  
futile as laughter, tuned to the wandering moon,  
flowering here where you abide and shine.

For where shall the radiant bird of praise take flight,  
in every heart set free,  
but in the endless skyway of your name?



Sri Dakshinamurthy

# Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's  
Commentary

Verses 28 to 33

S. RAM MOHAN

**F**rom Verse 28 onwards, Bhagavan presents us with the *jivanmukta lakshanam*, that is, the delineation of the Realised One, who, while ever-abiding in the Self, is perceived as in a corporeal frame. Bhagavan portrays here the glories of such a *jivanmukta*.

## Verse 28

He, who by the knowledge of the Truth, is established in the Self, has destroyed the sensory impressions. He, indeed, is Agni, the fire of Awareness; he is Indra with Self-knowledge as his weapon, the thunder-bolt (*vajra*). He is the conqueror of time. He is the hero who has annihilated death.

## Commentary

Bhagavan here extols the glory of such a *jivanmukta*. He who has attained supreme knowledge and realised the self, has transcended

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the body-mind-intellect complex. His Self-knowledge is the blazing fire which burns away all the gross attributes. He is not conditioned by time and goes beyond time-space axis. He is truly Lord Siva, who has destroyed Kala (death or time). We can connect this idea which is expressed in a similar way by Bhagavan in verse 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu*.

We can recall the exposition of Sri Sankara who says in *Manisha Panchakam*, that the joy experienced by Indra himself is not equal to even a very tiny speck of bliss experienced by the jnani. (*yat saukhyāmbudhi leśa leśata ime śakrādayo nirvṛtā*)

In the next verse 29, Bhagavan presents the translation of verse 5.76.20 of *Yoga Vasishtam*. The state of Self-Realisation spontaneously confers all excellences to the jnani. This statement of Bhagavan effectively dismisses the Buddhist idea of Shunya-Nirvana, where one experiences only a void (*shunya*) after he is released from mundane life. Bhagavan says that the jivanmukta shines in fullness in all splendour, not merely in void.

### Verse 29

With the onset of spring, spontaneously the trees of the earth are adorned with fresh blooms and beauty. In the same way, for a Self-realised person, resplendence, intelligence and strength and other endowments will come on their own accord.

### Introduction

The sadhaka may doubt whether the jnani, living in the world in corporeal frame, performing work like any other person will get ensnared in fresh karmic bonds. Bhagavan removes such an apprehension in this verse.

### Verse 30

Like the one whose mind has wandered away while listening to a tale, the mind of one, whose *vasanas* (memory-traces or impressions) have been totally destroyed, does not really function, even though it may appear to function. On the contrary, the mind of one steeped in the worldly attractions, which is filled with *vasanas*, continues to function even while apparently

doing nothing. Just as it may not appear to function, like the one who sleeps motionless in bed, but in sleep climbs a cliff and falls down into a pit.

### Commentary

Here Bhagavan clarifies that the cause for the bondage of *karma* (actions) is not the body or mind but the *vasanas* resident in the mind. The bondage arises when there is *kartrutva* (doership), i.e. when the ego identifies itself as the ‘doer’. Bhagavan says here that it is difficult to determine from an ‘outside’ point of view what is action and what is non-action. The body may be functioning, while the mind is totally at rest and *vice-versa*. The root cause of ‘action’ is the notion ‘I act’ which springs from the ego. When the ego-sense is not there, there is no real activity, even though there may be apparent activity. On the contrary, when there is ego, even if there is no apparent activity, there is activity of the mind. Bhagavan explains this with the analogy of a person in the audience whose mind has wandered far-away even while watching a performance. The sage, whose mind or ego has been destroyed, is like this.

Bhagavan, in his conversations, had referred to *Yoga Vasishtam* verses 5.56 -13,14 (to be found in *Vichara Sangraham* Chapter 11) and said that for a renunciate who has burnt away his ego, there is no real activity, even though he may be involved in his daily chores. Later Muruganar included these *Yoga Vasishtam* verses rendered in Tamil as verses 1133 and 1134 in *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. Here Bhagavan has combined both these verses in this verse 30 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*.

The same idea is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “He who recognises inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a yogi and a true performer of all action.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 4.18)

A person who is sitting in a *katha-kalakshepam*, whose mind has wandered elsewhere, may look apparently as if he is absorbed in the tale. Actually he has not heard any tale at all. Likewise one who has no sense of ‘doership’, even though he is engaged in apparent activity, has not done any activity.

The same idea of the state of *jivanmukta* is further explained by Bhagavan in his analogy of the cart in the next verse.

### Verse 31

Just as the three states of a cart — the cart moving, it standing still and it being left with the bullocks unyoked — are all the same for the one who is asleep in the cart, even so are the three states of physical activity, samadhi and sleep for the Self-realised sage.

### Commentary

Like the renowned simile of the horse-drawn chariot in *Kathopanishad*, Bhagavan gives here the analogy of the cart. The corporeal body is the cart. The sensory instruments of perceptions are the bullocks yoked to the cart (like the horses in the *Kathopanishad* simile). The sense objects are the road. For the Self-realised yogi, there are three states — the state when he is externally active; the state of *samadhi* (when the sensory instruments are restrained from functioning); and sleep (when the senses are switched off). They are compared respectively to the cart in motion, the cart being stationary with the bullocks still yoked and the cart from which the bullocks have been unyoked.

To the *jivanmukta* (liberated while in the physical body), the three states are the same, just as for a man who is deep asleep in the cart, its three conditions are the same.

The *jivanmukta* forever freed from the false identity of body-mind as ‘I’, the change of the states — wakeful activity, samadhi and sleep — does not belong to him. He is in the uninterrupted state of abidance in the Self. He is ever anchored in perpetual *ananda* (bliss).

In Verse 31 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan, while referring to the *jivanmukta*, rhetorically states, “How can his state ever be comprehended?”

Though the *jivanmukta* has been compared to the sleeper in the cart in the foregoing verse, Bhagavan clarifies in the succeeding verse, that his state is not that of sleep. The true state of *jivanmukta* transcends the three states of wakefulness, dream and deep sleep.

### Verse 32

Beyond the cycle of the three states of sleep, wakefulness and dream experienced by the *jiva*, there is the state called *turiya* (the fourth state), which is known as ‘wakeful sleep’. That fourth

state alone is real; the other three apparent states are merely false appearances. Know that this state of turiya is hailed as ‘*turiyatita*’ (the transcendent turiya) of pure awareness.

### Commentary

The state of the jivanmukta is total awareness, it is therefore akin to total wakefulness. Since that state is normally marked by the subsidence of the ego or the world, it also resembles sleep state. Hence it is referred to as the wakeful-sleep. Saint Thayumanavar, refers to this as ‘*thoongamal thoonguvadu*’. The jivanmukta even while in the wakeful state, sinks into the Heart and abides in the Self there. This is the ultimate state. In worldly parlance, the three states of existence — sleep, wakefulness and dream are considered as real by ordinary people. As a concession to common man, the ultimate state is called ‘*turiyam*’ (the fourth state). The first three states come into being due to the rise of the ego. They are false states. With the extinction of ego, which is their basis, they disappear. It is inaccurate to call the only Real and Natural state as the ‘Fourth State’ since really there are no other three states preceding it. Hence Bhagavan says that it should be hailed as ‘*turiyateetam*’ — the transcendental state of Awareness — beyond the fourth. For the sage who has attained *jivanmukti* (release from samsara while embodied) all the three types of karmas — *sanchita*, *agami* and *prarabdha* — will come to an end. Bhagavan emphatically asserts this in the next verse, with an appropriate analogy.

### Verse 33

The statements made in scriptures that *sanchita* (accumulated fruits of actions) and the *agami* (karmas done in this birth) do not belong to the jivanmukta but the *prarabdha* (the karmas or actions that have begun to fructify in the current life), however, remains, is only in reply to the query put by others (that is, ignorant ones). Realise that just as after the husband is dead, none of the wives married to him can escape widowhood, even so, when the ego (*kartrutva* or doership) is gone in the state of Self-realisation, none of the three types of karmas will survive.

### Commentary

Many of the traditional philosophies posit that for a Self-realised person, sanchita and agami will be wiped out; the sanchita is destroyed in the fire of knowledge at the time of realisation, and agami is not there as the sense of doership has been destroyed. However, prarabdha has to be gone through as long as the current body lasts. The prarabdha is compared to the arrow that has left the archer's bow and it will continue to travel till it hits its target. Agami is like the quiver of arrows which is thrown away once the archer decides to renounce identification. The continuance of the prarabdha in the jivanmukta's body is also compared to the residual rotation of the potter's wheel even after the propelling rod is stopped. The wheel continues to rotate till the momentum is exhausted.

Bhagavan refutes this with a powerful simile. Can any of the several wives of a dead man escape widowhood? Likewise all the three karmas — sanchita, agami and prarabdha cannot survive once the sense of doership or ego is destroyed.

The same idea with the same analogy is expressed by Bhagavan in *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 1145, "When the performer of action dies following the loss of his sense of doership, the three karmas (agami, sanchita and prarabdha) who are the wives of this husband, all become widowed at the same time. Will two of them (agami and sanchita) become widowed and one wife alone (prarabdha) remain un-widowed? Answer me." ▲

### Sri Arunachaleswara Temple Maha Kumbhabhishekam

Renovation is underway at Sri Arunachaleswarar Temple where the thousand-pillar hall, temple gopurams, stonework, deities, paintings and ceremonial utensils are being renovated and will culminate in *Mahakumbhabhishekam* (reconsecration ceremony). The rededication is scheduled for February 2017, (though exact dates have not yet been determined). The last *Mahakumbhabhishekam* at the Big Temple took place in June 2002, when hundreds of Sivacharyas and purohits performed *homas* at dozens of *agni kundams* in the *yagasala*. Prior to 2002, *Kumbhabhishekams* of Arunachaleswara Temple took place in 1976, 1944 and 1918.

# Some Personal Notes on Prayer

## Their Relation to Bhagavan's Teachings

ALASDAIR BLACK

This question falls into two parts: firstly, the relevance of prayer before arriving at Bhagavan's Teaching, and secondly its relevance, if any, to a devotee in this Teaching.

I can't remember who first taught me to pray, whether it was my mother or my ayah. All I do remember is that from an early age I could not go to sleep before I prayed: "God bless Mother and Father. Thank you (God) for everything today and I am truly sorry for my sins. And I pray for (various friends and pet animals)." Then, when I was in a convent school for a year at the age of six or seven, I was taught various Catholic prayers, and since I was happy at that school, those prayers and all that went with them became a warm if buried memory during the ensuing years in a cheerless protestant boarding school in

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England. Which was mainly why I became a Roman Catholic in my mid-twenties. It was not, however, until I became aware of Bhagavan and his Teaching, at around the age of 30, that I also became aware that I had a mind and an ego which needed to be purified and dissolved.

The simple fact is that for so long as we do have an ego, those of us who have been brought up to pray need this channel of communication with God or the Self, especially when we feel ourselves to be separate or cut off from God as well as from others. It is a safety valve. Putting it at its lowest, praying is an admission of our dependence on God, which arises out of at least some degree of humility, an acceptance that there is a Higher Power. Bhagavan so often stressed the importance of humility, which is part and parcel of surrender, that is prerequisite for prayer as it is in all other areas of our spiritual practice. There can be no real spiritual development without surrender.

He also taught that Self-realisation can be attained through love and devotion alone, provided this is genuine and persistent enough. Many indeed hold that our egos can *only* be subsumed into God or the Self through love. The more sincerely we pray, the more we love, and love itself is the purest and most powerful form of prayer. And prayer as an expression of love plays a crucial part in the process of dissolving the ego. But although Bhagavan taught that Self-realisation can be attained through love alone, he also taught that the process is greatly aided, *quicken*ed, when it is combined with Self-enquiry.

Prayer is about relationship, communion and compassion. Until we are on the path to realisation, and even then, we *need* God's guidance in so many aspects of our lives, in so many of the situations we find ourselves in. It is especially helpful in enabling us to love and accept ourselves as we are, which is supremely important. Life can be a dark place indeed without love, particularly love of ourselves. Lack of love is at the root of a great deal of antisocial behaviour. When anyone told me, as they occasionally did in the past, that I needed to love myself, they meant my *little self*, my *personality* or *ego*, in which I was so obviously stuck (through depression or anxiety or whatever). But although they were good at saying: 'Your trouble is you don't love yourself', they could never tell me *how* to love myself — whereas to simply pray for this proved to be the surest way to open myself to this most beneficent power of love.

Friends sometimes say to me “I felt your prayers for me,” when all I’d done was that when they’d come into my mind I’d felt love or sympathy for them. Many of us have had this experience. Love is indeed the purest and most powerful form of prayer. Many of us pray to Bhagavan himself — “Ask Bhagavan, he’ll give you the answer!” You so often hear that in the Ashram. There is, in the Ashram, a palpably powerful vibration of prayerful energy resulting from so much prayer from so many sincere seekers. As well as from Bhagavan’s continuing presence. And which is so helpful to struggling devotees. As it is in many other places where there is a similarly prayerful energy, a comparable sense of holiness, places which have become hallowed through generations of prayer. Doctors, moreover, have noticed that patients are helped by prayer whether or not they themselves are ‘believers’. It is a good idea to pray for God’s guidance when we are facing a difficult situation or have a difficult decision to make. Better to face these situations in God’s company as it were. The plain fact is that prayer is as natural as breathing and just as necessary for many of us.

It is also often through prayer that we arrive at Bhagavan’s Teachings, whether or not this was what we had been praying for. So then there’s the question: What part, if any, can prayer play in our spiritual practice when we come into the orbit of these teachings, when we become a devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi? Bhagavan’s best known statement on prayer was given in answer to a question in 1938:

“Question: If the individual Self merges into the universal Self, how can one pray to God for the uplift of humanity? This question seems to be common among the thinkers of the West.

“Bhagavan: “They pray to God and finish with ‘Thy Will be done!’” If His Will is done why do they pray at all? It is true that the Divine Will prevails at all times and under all circumstances. Individuals cannot act of their own accord. Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet. Each one of us is looked after by God. He has created all. You are one among 2,000 millions [many more now]. When He looks after so many will He omit you? Even common sense dictates that one should abide by His Will.

“Again, there is no need to let Him know your needs. He knows them Himself and will look after them.

“Still more, why do you pray? Because you are helpless yourself and you want the Higher Power to help you. Well, does not your Creator and Protector know your weakness? Should you parade your weakness in order to make Him know it.

“Q: But God helps those who help themselves.

“Bhagavan: Certainly. Help yourself and that is itself according to God’s Will. Every action is prompted by Him only. As for prayer for the sake of others, it looks so unselfish on the surface of it. But analyse the feeling and you will detect selfishness there also. You desire others’ happiness so that you may be happy. Or you want the credit for having interceded on others’ behalf. God does not require an intermediary. Mind your [own] business and all will be well...

“Again, as for prayer, a realised man does not see others as different from oneself ... So long as you think that there are others different from you, you pray for them. But the sense of separateness is ignorance. This ignorance is again the cause of the feeling for helplessness. You know that you are weak and helpless. How then can you help others? If you say, ‘By prayer to God’, God knows His business and does not require your intercession for others.

“Help yourself so that you may become strong. That is done by complete surrender. That means you offer yourself to Him. So you cannot retain your individuality after surrender. You then abide by His Will. Thus Silence is the Highest of all achievements.

“Silence is the ocean into which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

Which seems on the face of it to be fairly dismissive of some types of prayer, at least of ‘asking-for’ prayer or prayer for personal gain or salvation, although it should be noted that his words were addressed to *individuals who have not yet merged into the universal Self* and that the whole question is one which mainly exercises *thinkers in the West*. Bhagavan was pointing out that there is no difference between God and ourselves from the highest standpoint and that prayer based on a sense of separation is misguided.

Indeed, he said elsewhere:

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<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§594. 15th December, 1938.

“How is a Guru gained? If a devotee prays to God unselfishly, God who is immanent, in his Grace takes pity on the loving devotee and manifests Himself as a being according to the devotee’s standard. The devotee thinks that he is a man and expects relationship as between bodies, but the Guru, who is God of Self incarnate, works from within, helps man to see the error of his ways and guides him in the right path until he realises the Self within.”<sup>2</sup>

And again: “God’s grace, and *worship for it*, are intermediate steps *which are necessary to be adopted*, as long as the goal is not reached. When it is reached, God is the Self. ....So long as you think you are the body there is no harm in idol worship”. The distinction between worship and prayer in this context is not clear, although I personally take to *worship for* to mean *to pray for*.<sup>3</sup>

He also said elsewhere that,

“One can regard this whole universe as a manifestation of God and whatever worship is performed in it is excellent as the worship of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Bhagavan in any case prayed himself, in one case at least for a specific purpose. When his mother was very ill he made this prayer to Arunachala, his Guru:

“ ... O Lord! It is for Thee to cure my mother’s fever.

O God that smitest Death itself! My sole refuge!

Vouchsafe Thy grace to my mother and shield her

From Death... Thou blazing light of Jnana! Deign

To wrap my mother in Thy light and make her

One with Thee...Why delayest Thou

to dispel my mother’s delirium?

Besides Thee, is there anyone who with maternal solicitude can

Protect the suppliant soul and ward off the strokes of destiny?”<sup>5</sup>

Some parts of the *Eleven Verses on Arunachala* as well as other compositions by Bhagavan amount to worshipful prayer. The *Aksharamanamalai* (Marital Garland of Letters) is a tumultuous outpouring of worshipful prayer which is regularly chanted in the

<sup>2</sup> Brunton, P., *Conscious Immortality*. 2013. pp.137-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> *Upadesa Saram*. v.5.

<sup>5</sup> *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001. p.141.

Ashram. Indeed, the daily routine in the Ashram is largely taken up with worshipful prayer in one form or another, not least for the benefit of devotees who find it hard to focus their hearts and minds in other ways. Prayer can often be an expression of overflowing joy and thankfulness. Who has not felt the joy of communion with Bhagavan in the Samadhi Hall, particularly during the evening Parayana?

Some of his explicit teachings on prayer are in verses 4–7 of *Upadesa Saram* (The Thirty Verses) which deal with different types of prayer in the order of their efficacy, beginning with pujas, pilgrimages and pradakshina — progressing through the repetition of mantras to the worship of everything in the universe as God — to the highest form of prayer *which is unbroken meditation in silence*.

These are the only statements made by Bhagavan on the subject of prayer that I know of, although he must have said many other things about it which are not recorded. It is however known that he encouraged some individuals who could not grasp the subtleties of non-duality to pray by giving them mantras such as ‘Siva, Siva’ or ‘Om nama Sivaya’. He was always careful to give such advice to suit the needs and stage of spiritual development of the persons concerned.

However, the question of praying for others, or of praying for particular outcomes — *petitional* prayer — is a tricky one. What is God’s business and what is ours? If a friend is in trouble, is there any point in asking God to do anything specific for her or him? “*Please God, stop her pain.*” Which is more or less what Bhagavan himself did in relation to his mother. We don’t know why any particular person is suffering. It may be necessary for her to go through some form of suffering either because of something done in her past or to help her to come nearer to Self-realisation. Or for some other reason. It can indeed be baffling and painful to see someone suffering for no apparent reason — when there is nothing one can do other than to pray for that person’s recovery — for a baby in pain for example.

It could, however, be helpful *to pray for oneself* in relation to the person suffering, for some understanding of what is happening to *me* in relation to that person. It is always in any case helpful to pray as a transmission of love to that person.

Petitional prayer is made out of our limited understanding of what is needed, whereas our minds can never know what is truly needed.

Only God or the Self knows that. In any case we should be careful about what we ask for lest it turns out not to be what we really wanted at all. This sort of prayer can also have the effect of strengthening the ego rather than helping it to dissolve. On the other hand, Bhagavan was clear that no thought, no wish or emotion, is ever without its effect at some level. My own view is that even petitional or intercessory prayer can be beneficial depending on the motivation of the person who prays. It is the motivation and the love behind the prayer that surely matters. Any prayer offered for a good motive cannot go amiss. It must at least go some way towards purifying the mind, that crucial factor in the process of Self-realisation. *“Please God, stop her pain”* could be an attempt to help that person in what could be the only way possible in that particular situation — a tiny act of kindness and of love, from the heart, unseen by others — which can heal. Prayers asking for God’s grace, or to come closer to God, or even to become one with God, are surely also allowable.

It is interesting to contrast Bhagavan’s teaching on prayer with that of Jesus. After telling his disciples that they should pray in private rather than trying to impress others by praying in public, he said that we should “not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by their many words they shall make themselves heard by God. Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him. You should pray like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
 May your name be held holy,  
 Your kingdom come,  
 Your will be done,  
 On earth as in heaven.  
 Give us this day what we truly need,  
 And forgive us our wrongdoing,  
 As we forgive others who have wronged us.  
 Do not put us to the test (judge us)  
 And keep us safe from evil.” *(Matthew 6. v.5-13)*

Which, since God already knows what is needed, was designed to remind us of what our needs really are and of what we need to focus on.

The way in which the Teachings of both Bhagavan and Jesus coincide on this subject is striking if hardly surprising.

Different religions and traditions have different approaches. Catholics are given to petitioning saints such as St. Anthony or St. Blaise if they have lost something or have a sore throat! And there are all kinds of other activities which could loosely be described as petitional prayer. Many people pray to household Gods in the form of idols which they worship e.g. by bathing and dressing them, thereby cleansing their hearts and minds as well as increasing their love and devotion. And there is the placing of petitions, e.g. for fertility, on trees or wayside shrines. There's no end to these things. All of which are helpful and harmless to a point. But which do, in truth, begin to fly in the face of what Bhagavan said on this subject.

What I personally feel Bhagavan objected to was the way in which such prayer can reinforce the ego and be harmful to our spiritual development. If one is a serious aspirant on this path such forms of prayer do need to be given up sooner or later in favour of silence — listening rather than asking for things — but above all, *silence for its own sake*. Bhagavan was very clear about this. Silence is indeed 'the ocean into which the rivers of all religions eventually discharge themselves'.

Perhaps the position of strictly traditional Advaitins, insofar as their Teaching differs from that of Bhagavan, should also be mentioned. For such Advaitins there is an insurmountable problem in relation to any form of prayer since praying presupposes a duality between the one who prays and the one who is prayed to, a subject and an object, whereas traditional Advaita admits of no such duality. *God, the Self, Brahman* is all that there is.

Which was also Bhagavan's view, although he put it more gently, in a more sympathetic and palatable way for those of us who find this teaching difficult to accept. There is no getting away from the fact, however, that prayer can in truth only ever be for our own benefit rather than for that of anyone or anything else given (a) that there is only one Self and no others and (b) that the divine will does indeed prevail at all times and in all circumstances. Nothing else does exist apart from God or the Self, who is, whether we like it or not, orchestrating all of our self-projected reality, all of this seeming diversity of creation, in the best possible way for all of us. But this does not invalidate the necessity for prayer. Whether we understand

God to be outside or inside ourselves, the need to be in touch with our Real Self is just as great.

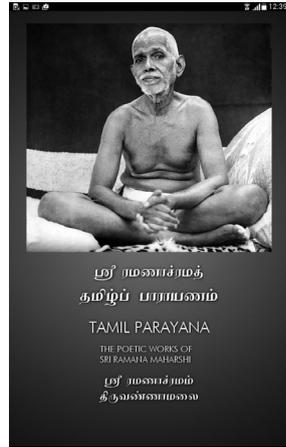
The fact is that nearly all of us on this path have prayed to God at some time or other and that many of us still do. And that apart from surrendering ourselves, practising Self-enquiry and meditating in the way that Bhagavan taught us to, it is possibly the most important thing we can do. Prayer does indeed play a vital part in our sadhana all the way through to Self-realisation — and beyond — as Bhagavan himself demonstrated. ▲

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Devotees gather in front of Bhagavan’s sacred shrine every evening from Monday to Saturday to sing the devotional compositions of Ramana Maharshi also known as Tamil Parayanam. The recitation of sacred texts at Sri Ramanasramam goes back to the early days of Ramana Maharshi’s stay at Virupaksha cave. It is said that the words of a jnani like Ramana Maharshi are equal in power, stature and authority to the cherished Vedas themselves. Like mantras, these skillfully crafted arrows of light work on the mind of the reader in a mysterious and powerfully transformative way, bestowing spiritual clarity and understanding.

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# Bhagavan and the Sankaracharya of Puri

ATREYA

It was an evening in July 1953. I was 20 and had arrived at Calcutta (now Kolkata) a few weeks earlier in search of a job. An acquaintance of mine in Calcutta advised me to attend a talk at the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture at Russa Road, Ballygunge by the Sankaracharya of Govardhan Mutt, Puri; an affiliate of the Sringeri Sarada Peeth. I was told that the revered Pontiff, Swami Bharati Krishna Teertha, was a man of extraordinary intellectual and spiritual gifts, a superb speaker and a saintly person.

The subject of the talk in English was ‘Bhagavan Buddha’ and Professor Bhattacharyya, a very handsome man who taught Philosophy in a college at Calcutta, was in the chair. Swamiji, who was 69, stood with his pontifical staff in his right hand and spoke for an hour. I listened spellbound. His ideas were profound, his presentation original, his diction perfect and his words flowed like a river. The Chairman’s face glowed with admiration throughout the Pontiff’s talk.

Atreya has spent more than 46 years in a few ashrams and occasional social work. In 1988 he found his Sadguru in Bhagavan Ramana and is now a resident of Sri Ramanasramam.

At the end of the talk, my acquaintance introduced me to the Pontiff saying, “This young man had a nervous breakdown last year and he seeks your blessing.” I folded my palms with a look of reverence in my eyes. Swamiji placed his right hand on my head. There was no exchange of words between us. There was a powerful aura of inwardness and silence around the Acharya.

If I had chanced to read *The Times of India* dated 7th June, 1953, which had come out a few weeks earlier, I would have read the following tribute paid to the Acharya.

“Well versed in scriptures of major world religions, the greatest living authority of those of his own, with a mastery of the Vedas unrivalled in centuries, speaking a dozen modern languages with the fluency of a native, filled with the learning of the past as well as that of the present, Sri Jagadguru is amply qualified to be what that title means, namely world-teacher.”

Very impressive indeed. But there were many more facets to his amazing personality. In his youth, in the same year he had earned post-graduate degrees in six subjects as disparate as English and Sanskrit and Mathematics and Science from the Rochester University of the U.S.A. taking the examinations from its Bombay centre. He was so exceptionally proficient in Sanskrit that in 1900 the Madras Sanskrit Association honoured him with the title ‘Saraswati’, after the Goddess of Learning, when he was just a lad of 16, reminiscent of the conferment in the same year of the title ‘*Kavyakanta*’ (one who has poetry in his throat) by the learned Sanskrit scholars of Navadweep (Nadia) in Bengal on Ganapati Muni when he was only 22 years of age.

Of the three thousand and odd hymns that Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha composed in Sanskrit, two are on Arunachala and Ramana jointly.

It was Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha, who had taught Mathematics in colleges, who discovered after years of deep meditation that a portion of the *Atharva Veda* dealt with Mathematics. Based on his findings, he wrote the book *Vedic Mathematics*, a subject on which he became an international authority. Swamiji was also an expert astrologer, a healer by the Ayurvedic system and had a very keen ear for music.

Like all true Hindus, Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha was a lover of all the religions of the world but unlike many people of different religions, he thought that they all taught the same Truth and there is no reason for inter-religious or intra-religious conflict at all if their teachings are correctly understood. Like Mahatma Gandhi he could have said, "I am proud of being a Hindu for my religion teaches me to see good in all religions."

Swamiji was the only Sankaracharya to have actively participated in the national Freedom Movement. He courted arrest and was put in prison for a whole year in Bihar for participating in Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience. Like Gandhiji, he also took a leading part in the Khilafat Movement in protest against the move by Turkey's Mustafa Kamal Pasha (Ata Turk) to abolish the Caliphate.

Later Swamiji said that he did so because he wanted all the mosques in India to be protected. Swami Tirtha was arrested in the Karachi Conspiracy Case Trial at Dakor, Gujarat, in September 1921 and charged with conspiracy to incite soldiers of the British Indian Army against the Government and also charged for abetting with the Ali Brothers, Maulanas Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali, in publishing a statement likely to cause defection of soldiers. He was taken to Karachi to stand his trial. Swamiji's address to the Jury stunned everyone in the court by its eloquence, scholarship, logic and his masterly defence of the rightness of his action.

Writing in the Chennai fortnightly *Frontline* dated April 15, 2016, the well-known lawyer-writer Mr. A.G. Noorani said that it was a great moment in the history of India's struggle for freedom when Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Shaukat Ali and the Sankaracharya of Puri were tried jointly in 1921 at Karachi for sedition along with other charges at the height of the Khilafat movement.

Besides being a formidable scholar of Hindu scriptures and Indian Philosophy, Swamiji also had a very impressive knowledge of world history, western philosophy and the scriptures of the Semitic religions for which he had great respect. If he was very knowledgeable when he spoke of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Valmiki, Vasishta, Vyasa, Ashtavakra, Adi Sankara and others of India, he was equally so when he spoke of Moses, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jesus, Mohammed, Immanuel Kant, Thornton, Emerson and others. He had a thorough knowledge of the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an.

When the Acharya of Puri was asked, when he landed on the U.S. soil in 1958, if he had brought samples of the waters of the holy river Ganga, he said that every drop of water on Mother Earth was holy.

The motto '*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*' (The whole Earth is one family) was for the noble Acharya a fact of deep, constant experience. He said that he did not deem himself to be the guru of the Hindus alone but of all people as the title *Jagadguru* (World Teacher) indicated.

It was a great period, the years 1833 to 1896, which saw the births of Sri Ramakrishna, Mother Sarada, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Bhagavan Ramana, the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, the births of our Acharya of Puri, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at the World Congress of Religions, Chicago, Gandhiji's voyage to South Africa where he created history, Sri Aurobindo's return to India after concluding his studies in England, the births of the charismatic Sankaracharyas Swami Chandrasekhara Bharati of Sringeri and Swami Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of Kanchi, Ma Anandamoyee and J. Krishnamurti, as well as the Advent of Ramana at Arunachala.

The Acharya was born on the 14th of March, 1884 at Tirunelveli District (now bifurcated into Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi Districts), about 150 kms to the south of Madurai. It was also the native district of the greatest Tamil poet of modern times Mahakavi Subramania Bharati; the renowned, revered Swami Sivananda Saraswati of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh; the unrivalled Tamil short stories writer Pudumaipithan; the mystic-composer of Advaitic songs Avudai Akka, (many of which were sung by Bhagavan Ramana's mother Alagammal and other women of those days of the southern districts of the then Madras Presidency as they worked in the kitchen and at other times); and the Freedom-Fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and others.

The Acharya was named Venkataraman. His father Narasimha Sastri retired as Deputy Collector and his great grandfather Justice C. Ranganatha Sastri was a Judge of the Madras High Court. As we have already seen, Venkataraman was an amazingly brilliant student, a star throughout. Even when he was a college student, he started contributing learned articles on a variety of subjects to the prestigious *Review of Reviews* of W.T. Stead.



Venkataraman began his public life in 1905 under the guidance of the great educationist-statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale whom Gandhiji referred to as his political Guru. Gandhiji was then in South Africa doing his historic work in alleviating the conditions of subjugated Indians there which made Leo Tolstoy declare: The most important thing going on in the world today is what that young Hindu Gandhi is doing in South Africa. Venkataraman was deeply interested in that development. In the same year, Venkataraman attended the Banaras session of the Indian National Congress and its next session at Calcutta.

In May 1907, he moved the principal resolution at a mammoth public meeting held at Salem in the Madras Presidency protesting against the deportation without trial of Lala Lajpat Rai, the 'Lion of Punjab'. In December 1908 he was appointed Warden of 'Sons of India' by Mrs. Annie Besant, the great Theosophist and Founder of the Home Rule Movement. When Sri Aurobindo (then Aurobindo Ghosh) was teaching English in a college at Baroda, Venkataraman was a visiting lecturer in Philosophy and they got to know each other. It is said that Venkataraman played a role in Sri Aurobindo leaving the French Colony Chandernagore, which he found out was unsafe for him and settling in another French possession, viz. Pondichery.

In 1909, at the age of 25, Venkataraman became the Principal of the nascent National College of Rajamahendri, a position which he gave up in 1911 and went to Sringeri in the Mysore State (now Karnataka) to devote himself to the service of His Holiness Satchidananda Shivabhinava Narasimha Bharati, the then Sankaracharya of the Sarada Peetha, and to pursue his spiritual sadhana under his guidance.

There were three marked traits in Venkataraman's personality: an insatiable thirst for knowledge in all branches of learning and he kept himself abreast of the latest trends in science till his last days; a burning urge to serve humanity and to contribute to the happiness and peace of humanity; and, above all, to master the supreme science of Self-Knowledge for he knew that the true knowledge is that which serves to liberate the knower (*Saa Vidyaa yaa vimuktaye*). It was this third trait which drew him to the highly revered Swami Satchidananda Shivabhinava Narasimha Bharati of Sringeri at that young age.

For eight years Venkataraman was engaged in a very deep study of Vedanta, the science of Self-Knowledge under the guidance of Swami Narasimha Bharati and in meditation in the nearby forests. During that period he also taught Sanskrit and Philosophy in nearby schools and delivered a series of lectures on the teachings of Adi Sankaracharya in several places including Poona (now Pune) and Bombay (now Mumbai).

Venkataraman was initiated into sannyasa at Varanasi by His Holiness Jagadguru Sankaracharya Swami Trivikram Tirtha Maharaj of the Sarada Peetha on 14th July 1919 and was given the sannyasa name Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha. As he was seen by everyone as supremely qualified in every way for the position, Swamiji was installed on the pontifical throne of Sarada Peetha in March 1921.

In that year, he was nominated to the All India Congress Committee and its Subjects Committee by the then Congress President, Salem Vijayaraghavacharya. His Holiness Bharati Krishna Tirtha took part in the Khilafat Movement and was arrested for his speech on 'Rajdharm and Prajadharm' (Duties of the Ruler and of the Ruled) for six weeks. His Holiness declared, "There is nothing inherent in Hinduism and Islam which tends to militate against Hindu-Muslim unity of a permanent nature."

In 1925, at the persistent request of His Holiness Swami Madhusudan Tirtha Maharaj, Sankaracharya of the Govardhana Peetha at Puri, whose health was seriously declining, Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha consented to be his successor and was installed by His Holiness Swami Trivikram Tirtha Maharaj.

In this capacity, Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha Maharaj continued to travel all over the country and disseminate the universal teachings of the timeless Sanatana Dharma and in 1958 at the invitation of the Self-Realization Fellowship of Los Angeles, USA, he gave more than fifty stirring speeches on Vedic metaphysics, Vedic mathematics, Unity of religions, World peace, Science and Religion and so on, taking America by storm as Swami Vivekananda had done sixty-five years earlier. He was to have made 150 speeches at various universities, etc. but had to return to India due to ill health. On the way, however, he gave some talks in the U.K.

The Acharya was a marvellous exponent of Sanatana Dharma, which term he preferred to Hinduism, the latter term not indigenous but owing its origin to the Persians. One wonders if anyone else has ever spoken so exhaustively and lucidly on Sanatana Dharma as the Acharya of Puri. He told his listeners that the very word sanatana [*Sadaa bhava* (ever present) is sanatana] indicated that it is ever there without a beginning and hence without an end. Truth is timeless. Whereas other religions had a founder, Sanatana Dharma had none but God Himself Who is Truth. Unlike other religions, Sanatana Dharma is eternal.

The Acharya laid emphasis on the fact that the Sanatana Dharma did not exclude other Dharmas. He quoted from the scriptures which said, “That religion which comes into conflict with another religion is not real religion but false religion...” He also pointed out that in Sanatana Dharma different gods are not worshipped; only different forms of God are worshipped. Different forms of one God who is both Formless and is in all forms are worshipped by men according to their characteristics. The Acharya quotes Bhishma of *Mahabharata*:

“Before that Almighty Lord whose nature is Dharma and whom different Adhikaris with different tastes and desiring different fruits of action and belonging to different Dharmas worship and propitiate with their different Dharmas, before Him I prostrate myself.”

The Acharya rejected the Aryan invasion theory. He also showed how flawed is the Western Orientalists’ proclivity to systematically post-date all the literature and historical incidents of India. For instance, to them the Rgveda came into existence a few thousand years ago and Yajurveda came later, “the Mantra Samhita portion of the Vedas being of an earlier time when the ‘Aryan race was still babbling in its infancy’, the Upanishads being the product of a later age when the same Aryan intellect could wrestle with and, to some extent, tackle great problems of Psychology and Metaphysics of the Universe and so forth.”

The Acharya traced this post-dating propensity of the Western Orientalists to the Christian belief, based on the Holy Bible, that the Universe was created 6000 years ago.

The Acharya tirelessly appealed to people of different religions to work for world peace and human unity. Being as much a man



of science as of religion and philosophy, he showed how Sanatana Dharma was far from being opposed to reason and how, on the contrary, it encouraged its adherents to accept everything after testing it on the touchstone of reason.

Inspired by Sri Aurobindo, whose Mahasamadhi had taken place in 1950 — the same year as that of Bhagavan Ramana — and other great men of his time, the Acharya founded the *Viswa Punarnirman Sangha* (World Reconstruction Organization) with the objective of bringing about human transformation, reconstruction of society on moral basis involving complete transformation — cultural, personal, institutional dimensions of society, and the renaissance of true humanitarian Dharma.

The Acharya spent the last few years of his sacred life in Nagpur. His Mahasamadhi took place on 2nd February, 1960.

It is surprising that none of the Acharya's devotees who wrote excellent, though brief, biographical sketches of their great Mentor, chose to make any reference to such an important event in his life as his two visits to Bhagavan Ramana, first towards the end of 1948 and the other early in 1949.

He was the only Sankaracharya of the Six Mutts established by Adi Sankaracharya who visited Bhagavan Ramana. It is said that his Guru, the great, dynamic Swami Satchidananda Shivabhinava Narasimha Bharati of the Sringeri Sarada Peetha had tried a few times unsuccessfully to make a visit. However, the great man's wish was fulfilled vicariously, albeit posthumously, in his beloved disciple's visits to Arunachala.

The Acharya sent a letter to the Ashram expressing his desire to pay a visit to Bhagavan and to get certain doubts cleared. However, he wanted a few doubts cleared in a reply letter, the chief of them referring to the following Agamic text: "Hara Gauri Samyogaat..... avacchaayaa yogaha." The Acharya wanted to know from Bhagavan what *avachhaayaa yogaha* was. When the Acharya's letter was placed before Bhagavan waiting for his instructions regarding a reply, he smiled and said that the questioner knew it all himself and needed no fresh light. However, he would know it better when he came in person. A reply was sent on those lines.

Bhagavan's devotee T.K. Sundaresha Iyer writes in his book *At the Feet of Bhagavan*: "After some days the Acharya visited the Ashram.

Bhagavan gave instruction for him to be received and attended to with all care and respect for his exalted position....

“Sri Bhagavan was seated in the Golden Jubilee Hall on the granite sofa; and eager spectators had gathered in their hundreds. Quite near to Bhagavan’s sofa a small dais was arranged, with a deer’s skin for the Pontiff to sit on, and then he was escorted to the presence of Bhagavan. On coming before the Maharshi, the Teacher [Acharya] greeted Him with his staff, as is the custom of sannyasis, and was shown the seat arranged for him. He was surprised that so prominent a seat had been allotted; he asked the dais to be removed, spread the deer’s skin on the ground, and sat on that.

“After a little preliminary talk, the Teacher [Acharya] repeated the main question of his letter and asked Bhagavan to enlighten him on the meaning of this phrase. Bhagavan gave him His look of Grace and was silent, and the Acharya was all receptive. No words were exchanged between them. Thus over half an hour passed.

“Then Bhagavan smiled and remarked: ‘What is there to explain? You know it already. This text represents only the very essence of Divine Knowledge — when Nature unites with the Person, then the visible becomes all shadows. It is as meaningful as pictures on the cinema screen, and then will be experienced the state of All-Self as seen...The one Being-Consciousness which projects all this out of Itself, sustains and then withdraws it again into Itself. Having swallowed all the shadows of this world, Itself dances as the Ocean of Bliss, the Reality or Substratum of all that is, was and shall be. And then It is ‘I-I’.’

“The Teacher [Acharya] seemed to have received new Light and Life; he was all joy. He said that in all his wandering through the country he had tried to be enlightened upon this mystery; but it was only here that he got the secret and the truth of Light as explained in the texts of the Vedanta.

“So overwhelmed with joy was he that he repeated his visit to Bhagavan when the Matrubhuteswara Shrine was consecrated, and he personally supervised all the rituals in the *Yagasalas* (sacrifice halls) and saw to it that everything went off all right.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sundaresa Iyer, T.K., *At The Feet of Bhagavan*, 1996. pp.38-40.

Once Bhagavan told the devotees in the Old Hall after a visitor had left, “Won’t he know all that? He only wanted to test us.” But not so in this case. Bhagavan knew that the Acharya, great in *vidya* (knowledge) and in *vinaya* (humility) wanted confirmation not instruction. Many men of great intellect, learning and penance had come to Bhagavan, stayed with him and been devoted to him, not the least of them being Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni himself. But here was one who, besides his awesome academic achievements and encyclopaedic knowledge, penance and renunciation, was also the Head of a prestigious Advaitic Mutt, the only such Head, visiting Bhagavan, the pure Advaitic (Non-dual) Essence.

It was indeed a great moment in Timeless Time when the Acharya and Bhagavan met. The Acharya was a World Teacher, Bhagavan was *nishprancho* (worldless) and who disavowed being a teacher, for he was beyond the duality of the teacher and taught and all dualities. The Acharya had a vast, deep, noble mind; Bhagavan was mind-free. The visitor was a great sannyasi; Bhagavan was an *atyasrami*, beyond all asramas. The Acharya represented a religion (Dharma) though he showed equal reverence to all religions. Bhagavan's Dharma was *svadharma* in the highest sense, the dharma of Being the Self. The Acharya, though inwardly still, travelled often to fulfil his pontifical duties. Bhagavan was achala, like his Arunachala, like the Atman. The Acharya was a master of speech, Bhagavan of silence. ▲

The author is grateful to Sri Ganesh Balasubramanian, Bangalore, for helping us write this article by lending invaluable books of the Acharya and for the photos.

# Sufism and Jnana Yoga

## Part One

### Advaita Vedanta and Tasawwuf; Jnana and Ma'rifa

CHARLES UPTON

Jnana (*jñāna*) or true knowledge is universal. Jnana-Yoga as a marga within the context of Vedanta tradition is one manifestation of it, but signs of it can be found in every world religion — if you know how to look. Meister Eckhart, who succeeded St. Thomas Aquinas in his chair at the University of Paris, and whom Perennialist writer Wolfgang Smith sees as the one who revealed the esoteric dimension of Aquinas' Scholastic Philosophy, expressed the essence of Christian jnana when he said, "The eye through which I see God and the eye through which God sees me are the same eye", and, "my truest 'I' is God." Likewise the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was undoubtedly alluding to jnana within the context of Islam when he said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

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The inner exegesis of this *hadith* (saying of the Prophet) belongs almost exclusively to the mystics of Islam, the Sufis. In rather gross but nonetheless useful terms, Sufism or *Tasawwuf* can be described as a marga (*tariqa*) whose effective force is bhakti (*mahabbah*), whose goal is jnana (*ma'rifa*), and whose principal though not exclusive method is japam (*dhikr*). On one level, "He who knows himself knows his Lord" means: He who knows his *Nafs* (literally 'soul') — his passions, his ego, his habit of obsessive self-definition and world-definition — knows what controls him, until he becomes free of it. On a deeper level, it means: He who recognises his dependency upon God, his need for God, his insufficiency in the absence of God, thereby recognises the reality of God. On the deepest level it means: He who recognises his own intrinsic nothingness realises God as his Essence.

Sri Ramana Maharshi's teaching based on jnana yoga, his well-known direct method of *atma-vichara* or Self-inquiry, by which we progressively realise that "I am not the body; I am not the feelings; I am not the thoughts; I am not the thought of 'I', but that, ultimately speaking, 'I am the Self, the Atman.'" According to Sri Sankaracharya, the ego or I-sense arises when the Atman is identified with the various sheaths of the Atman, the koshas: the physical sheath or *annamayakosha*, the energy sheath or *pranamayakosha*, the mental sheath or *manomayakosha*, the wisdom sheath or *vijñanamayakosha*, and the bliss sheath or *anandamayakosha*. Self-enquiry progressively breaks these identifications.

To say 'I am the Self', however, has certain dangers; it either removes the final veil, or sets up the subtlest and most impenetrable veil of all. 'I am the Self' is properly a realisation, not an identification. It can become an identification, however, if the jnana yogi falls into the trap of identifying with a subtle mental concept of the Atman rather than realising the Atman itself. 'I am the Self' is not an identification because it is not based on a union of two terms, one of which (the ego) identifies itself with the other (the Self). Rather, it is the end of all identification; it is the very Reality.

To say 'I Am the Self' is not to identify oneself with God, but to assert that 'The Self (God) is the only I Am'; thus it is strictly equivalent to the first part of the Muslim *shahada* or testimony of faith, *La Ilaha illa'Allah*, 'There is no god but God', which the

Sufis interpret as: ‘There is no reality but The Reality.’ Likewise, the Vedantic *tat tvam asi*, often translated into English as ‘That art Thou’, does not mean: my self-concept is God, but rather: God is the actual Reality of what I mistakenly consider myself.

On one occasion the famous Sufi Mansur al-Hallaj cried out in an ecstatic state, *Ana l’Haqq!*, “I am the Truth!”— Al-Haqq being one of the 99 Names of God in Islam — an indiscretion for which he was tried and executed. Jesus Christ blasphemed according to the orthodox Jews of the time and suffered the similar fate. He confirmed his ‘blasphemy’ by declaring, “Before Abraham was, I am” [John 8:58].

‘I Am’ is the English translation of what was likely the first syllable of the Hebrew name for God, a name which is often translated as ‘I AM That I Am’. This Holy and Unspeakable Name of God, known as the *shem ha-mephorash*, was never to be pronounced except by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. The exoteric Muslims who heard the ‘blasphemy’ of al-Hallaj believed that he had deified his self-concept, which is a sin in any religion. There are some Sufis however, who take the opposite view and believe that al-Hallaj was annihilated at the moment he spoke, and consequently that the one who said *Ana l’Haqq!* was really Allah, who of course had the complete right to say it.

*The Upanisads, the Brahma Sutra*, etc. are directed primarily to the mystics, and are consequently explicit about the doctrines of the Advaita Vedanta — though we must not ignore the fact that the entire collective traditional Hinduism is more open to the mystical perspective than the collective traditional Islam. The Qur’an, on the other hand, is directed to the entire Muslim *ummah*, which is why the mystical doctrines can only be isolated through a *batini tafsir*, an inner exegesis, of the Holy Book — and of the hadith as well, especially the *hadith qudsi* (those in which Allah Himself speaks through the Prophet) — which are largely understood, and put into practice, by the Sufis alone, whether or not they go by that name. Likewise, it is customary for most Sufis to be ‘householders’, involved in the common day-to-day pursuits of the Muslim community; as the Prophet stated, “There is no monasticism in Islam.”

The upshot is that the Sufi spiritual ‘states’ and ‘stations’ are virtually innumerable; they are rarely reducible to a handful of

definable and recognisable types of samadhi. Every aspect of daily life, every human encounter, can be the occasion for a particular spiritual insight, based on the operation of a particular Name of God. Consequently, the whole realm of personal and collective morality and social interaction, as well as ritual obligation, is not taken as simply preparatory to the mystical Path; instead, it is seen as providing a set of practical supports and symbolic insights for the actual traversing of that Path.

As well, the purely inner states experienced in contemplation are also virtually innumerable, though certain states or stations, such as Expansion and Contraction or Annihilation and Subsistence, are recognised by nearly all Sufis. And yet, given that God is One, the essence of self-transcendence is also One, in Islam as in Hinduism, and throughout all the sacred traditions.

Nor are the spiritual methodologies of Islam and Hinduism as dissimilar as they might appear at first glance. It is often said that Islam comprises three levels of understanding and practice: *islam* proper, which is satisfied by obedience to the *shari'ah*; *iman*, which has to do with the development of real faith; and *ihsan*, which means 'excellence' or 'perfection'. According to the esoteric meaning of these terms, *islam* could correspond to karma-yoga, *iman* to bhakti yoga, and *ihsan* to jnana yoga. ▲

(to be continued)

### **Pavalakunru**

The Pavalakunru temple is on top of a small spur on the eastern face of Arunachala. It was at the foot of this hillock that the Goddess Parvati is said to have performed penance under the guidance of Rishi Gautama. Lord Siva appeared to her, pleased by her *tapas* and prayer. Lord Siva and Parvati then merged into one and became *Ardhanareeswara*.

Bhagavan stayed at Pavalakunru from September 1898 for about six months and it was during this time that his mother saw him for the first time since his departure from Madurai in 1896.

This ancient temple has been thoroughly renovated and restored under Ashram supervision and support. Devotees are invited to attend *Mahakumabhishekam* ceremonies in the month of October (exact dates to be announced soon).

# Moments of Bliss Revisited

## Part Two

### Padma makes an Offering of Palm Fruits to Bhagavan

PADMA VENKATARAMAN  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*It is a commonly recognised phenomenon that, in the presence of a jnani like Bhagavan, events have a way of orchestrating themselves in such a way that some previously unforeseen goal is achieved, often for the good of the devotee or devotees who are involved in those events. Since the jnani has no ego, no personal self, such events are brought about by his mere presence, just as the sun brings a lotus blossom into flower with no conscious intent. Numerous such events have been documented in the life of Bhagavan and the incident with Padma and the palm fruit offering is another such one. Padma's offering of palm fruits, Bhagavan's actions and words, the sudden sounds of puja in the Mother's temple breaking out and the intervention of Niranjanananda Swami appear to be all perfectly orchestrated to bring about a desired goal, that of bringing to an end Padma's rejection of solid food, something that would have clearly been injurious to her well-being if allowed to continue.*

*As far as Bhagavan's predilection for palm fruits is concerned, 'nungu' in Tamil, this has been documented by Annamalai Swami in a diary entry which is reproduced in English in the book Living by the Words of Bhagavan, edited by David Godman:*

*"Two days before this incident I had tried to give Bhagavan some nungus [palmyra fruits]. I had stored them on Mr Cohen's veranda in Palakottu because it was a convenient place to intercept Bhagavan on his daily walk. When Bhagavan came past he looked at me suspiciously and asked me several times, "Why have you come here?"*

*After some hesitation I told Bhagavan, "I came here to cut and give these nungus to Bhagavan." Bhagavan accepted the fruits, but as he was receiving them he laughingly said, "You should have eaten them yourself and while you were eating them you should have had the thought, 'I am also Bhagavan.'"*

*Bhagavan's reluctance to eat soon disappeared. He dug out many of the fruits with his fingers and sucked the juice. Finally, after exclaiming "Appadi! [an expression of contentment] I cannot carry the stomach," he walked away.*

**T**o what extent grace can be gained, to what extent it must save (meaning and context not clear), he (my husband) came once a month to see me. He provided me with what I needed. As for Bhagavan, he, Bhagavan, noticed his visits. He knew about it. When I was within sight of him [Bhagavan], when I fell under his gaze, he would fix that gaze upon [me] for a short while. All that was a great experience, to be removing all the mind's impurities from day to day.

Speaking of food, on one occasion, during the time I wasn't taking food...very.....one day [I thought], "Till now I have not brought anything, anything at all for Bhagavan; I haven't obtained anything for him." What to give to Bhagavan? What is there that, if I give it to him, he will eat? If Bhagavan ate, he would only eat if the food was served to all. Such was his egalitarian nature. I thought about how I could ask Bhagavan and what I might give him. I asked everyone; all who were in the kitchen, I asked them."

They replied, "What could you do, young lady? You yourself are not taking food. What are you going to prepare to give to him? It's not important. What would it achieve? Your devotion is enough." I

could not accept that answer. What I did later was that I asked what he would eat at one, or half past one, in the afternoon.

They said that in the hot season, summer time, he would eat Palmyra fruits...But to manage to get 100 of them somewhere or other...I had no knowledge of the place, nothing to help me. I was determined to offer some kind of food to Bhagavan, so I spoke to someone, somewhere, somehow, made the arrangements and bought a 100 [fruits], at which point, what they all said was, “If you bring them and hand them over at two o’clock, we’ll get them peeled and give them to Bhagavan.” I don’t recall how I got them for Bhagavan to eat, nor do I remember who brought them. I don’t recall how I managed to get that many palm fruits. Nor did I get help from anyone else.

They arrived somehow. (Padma uses her tone of voice here to indicate the idea of “somehow or other”). The sun was really hot. I took them to the kitchen, to the rear entrance at the back, handed them over and came away, having asked them to give them to Bhagavan. Afterwards, at half past two, we went for darshan, at half past two, as was the usual practice. Later on, after 6.30 p.m., ladies were not allowed to remain [in the hall], they used to say. So what he [Bhagavan] did — Satyananda Swami was there — he said to him, whilst I was performing namaskaram, “Bring the dish from inside.” By “the dish from inside” I thought he probably meant ‘that (Padma points with her finger) dish from inside.’ I thought, ‘Presumably he means the one in the kitchen.’

He takes the dish with the palm fruits and comes and places it at the foot of the sofa. Accepting it, he says to Satyananda Swami, “Tell [her what] I said.” He (Bhagavan) is very near [to Satyananda Swami] and speaks in a very low voice. What he [Satyananda Swami] did then was, [he said], “You should not have delivered the fruits and then come away in this manner, without eating.” ... [unclear]... It seems that, just after I had given the palm fruits in the kitchen, Bhagavan went in and asked, “Who has brought the nungu?” ... [unclear] ... When Bhagavan asked, [they said], “The not-eating Padma.”

There were two people called Padma. One was an elderly lady and I [was the other]. Bhagavan apparently asked, “Who is the one who came just now?” “She is called “the Padma who does not eat”.” “She just drinks milk,” [they said]. Then he took that vessel and placed

it, brought it and placed it, beneath this sofa. At six thirty, when I performed namaskaram and stood up, Bhagavan looked [at me].

“Bring it out,” he said. Satyananda took the dish and came next to me. Bhagavan was there, seated. What he did was, [he said], “Just as Bhagavan does not wish devotees to eat when he, the guru, is not eating, equally, if the devotees do not eat, then Bhagavan will not consent [to eat]. From now on you must eat.”

“Furthermore, there is a sloka in the [Bhagavad] Gita: “hunger, starvation... is not appropriate for the spiritual aspirant, the practitioners of both yoga and meditation. Neither is it acceptable for them to eat till the stomach is full. There should be neither overindulgence in sleep, nor deprivation of it”

Having spoken thus, having said those words and said that they came from that sloka, he gave me that *yanai mandai* [earthen] vessel, the big yanai mandai as it was always called at that time, which he held in his hands. Giving it to me, he told me to eat.

“Tell her that Bhagavan will be pleased if she eats.” That’s what he [Bhagavan] told him [Satyananda Swami] to say. After that, that fast was automatically brought to an end, by his very presence, when I looked at him, by the very words from his mouth.

At the same time, the puja [was going on] in the Mathrubhuteshwarar temple. It was as if I were receiving *anna prashana*, when swami suddenly said — I don’t know why but Niranjanananda Swami was very fond of me — “Tomorrow you really must start eating. This is Bhagavan’s will. It was Bhagavan’s intention [*uddeśam*],” he said. “Very well, Swami,” I said. That day I sat down and ate a little boiled rice. As soon as I put it in my mouth — because over many days it (Padma points to her throat) had shrunk — I got a bad attack of the hiccups.

Niranjanananda Swami was very worried. “Just a little, enough, whatever you eat is enough. Let’s see tomorrow,” he said asking for water to be given to me (and a lady who was there gave me some). “Never mind. You can start eating from tomorrow.” He then said, “Afterwards, from then on, little by little you will automatically begin to eat more, as Bhagavan requests.” ▲

(to be continued)

**Editor:** If there are any relatives or friends of Padma Venkataraman who may provide further information about her, we would be glad to hear from them.

# Enlightenment: A Thing of Beauty and a Joy Forever

*Pratyabhijna: Direct Recognition of  
Satyam Sivam Sundaram*

SWAMI TANMAYANANDA SARASVATI

## **Preamble**

In the last two issues we dwelt at length on how Bhagavan Ramana's teachings are so profound and yet deceptively simple, for they contain revolutionary insights into spiritual illumination. The principal strains of Bhagavan's central message pertain to what exactly constitutes the nature of Enlightenment and what is the most direct and practical approach to manifest it in our everyday lives. If we are to do justice to Bhagavan's counsel, we are expected not to stash it away as a sacred relic or an Utopian ideal to be celebrated on festive occasions and feel smug in mutual appreciation groups, but to sincerely follow through by reorienting our priorities in everyday life to facilitate its manifestation in our personal lives, with joy and freedom.

It cannot be over-emphasized that Mahaṛṣi Ramana wanted every sincere seeker not to remain complacent with mere intellectual

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati received *Vedānta sikṣā* from Swami Tejomayananda, and *sannyāsa dīkṣā* from Swami Virajeśwara Sarasvati. In his *pūrvāśrama*, he was a faculty member in IIT Madras, where he guided several M.Tech. research projects and one Ph.D. thesis. He lives in Arunachala since 2002.

appreciation of His teachings but to persevere till its eventual culmination as realisation (*pratyabhijñā*) of the highest Truth. It demands an uncompromising commitment to practise the teachings with an unflagging zeal as an integral way of life in this world and to achieve the final felicitous beatitude in this life before the inevitable fall of the physical body.

### **The Premium is on Practice**

A true seeker (*mumukṣu*) who realises the urgency of the task on hand will not fritter away his precious resources of time and energy in trivial but infinitely varied temptations and distractions of the world at large but use every occasion as an opportunity to get back to the core purpose and work silently but relentlessly. Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that an ounce of practice is better than tons of theory while Lord Krishna assured Arjuna that even a little practice of this supreme *adhyātma vidyā* never goes in vain but releases the seeker from great fear!<sup>1</sup>

Bhagavan said Truth is beyond the theologies of Dvaita, Advaita and the like, all of which lie within the confines of relative knowledge. He asserted that all relative knowledge is but glorified ignorance that deludes the learned pundits.<sup>2</sup> Far blessed is a simple but sincere seeker unschooled in such intellectual gymnastics as he is better positioned to practise the teachings straightaway without being saddled with tomes of accumulated academic information.<sup>3</sup>

### **Beauty is Synonymous with Self and Ever Bestows Joy**

John Keats wrote the immortal line “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” in his celebrated poem *Endymion*. Again in another poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, he sums up the acme of human knowledge as: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” How sublime and Advaitic it is! Along with Keats, the other great English poets like Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Alexander

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, v.2.40, *nehābhikramaṇāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate, svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt.*

<sup>2</sup> *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, v.13, *jñānamān tāṇemey nāṇāvā jñāṇamañ jñāṇamām...*

<sup>3</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§392, “Fortunate is the man who does not involve himself in this maze! I was indeed fortunate that I never took to it.”

Pope and Shakespeare poured forth such lyrics of ethereal charm, that hold great lessons from the Advaitic perspective even if it might appear to come from an improbable source.

At the other end of the spectrum lies modern physics. Here we may consider science and fine arts to be dissimilar like head vs. heart (as reason vs. aesthetics), but still they are complementary to the pursuit of truth. Heisenberg, one of the founding fathers of quantum physics, enjoyed quoting Latin proverbs: ‘The simple is the seal of the true’ and ‘Beauty is the splendour of the truth.’<sup>4</sup> His mentor Niels Bohr loved to quote Schillers’ poem, *The Sentences of Confucius* containing the memorable lines: “The full mind is alone the clear, and Truth dwells in the deeps.”

What is astonishing is that Bhagavan, the mystic non-pareil of modern times was known to have expressed great empathy and relished the finest expressions of truth from these apparently unrelated fields of human endeavour, namely the sciences and the arts.<sup>5</sup> This was evidenced in the dialogues reported in *Talks* and the light He threw on Einstein’s Relativity Theory when Madavathirta Swami broached the subject with him. All this proves that whenever in any specific field of human endeavour, the practitioner probes deep enough to reach the bedrock of truth, he recognises the Advaitic vision of unity for it is the substratum of all knowledge the human mind is capable of receiving.

### **Enlightenment: A Land of Beauty Where Joy Flows Forever — *Satyam Śivam Sundaram***

In Advaita Vedanta, the accomplishment of Self-knowledge is celebrated as the manifestation of Truth shining forth in glory as *Satyam Śivam Sundaram*. *Satyam* is defined as that which endures in all periods of time — past, present and future — because it transcends the very concept of time and hence cannot be negated within the domain of time (*trikāle api abāditatvāt satyam*). Thus, Truth is eternal and stands forever. *Śivam* stands for the *summum bonum* of all auspiciousness and beatitude of human life. All joy flows from this fountainhead of auspiciousness, *Śivam*.

<sup>4</sup> ‘*Simplex sigillum veri*’ and ‘*Pulchritudo splendor veritatis*’.

<sup>5</sup> Talk§146. “Those who have discovered great Truths have done so in the still depths of the Self.”

In the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, we have a section on the analysis of happiness. Starting from the highest level of human joy and proceeding through various gradations of happiness for those who have evolved higher, like *gandharvas* and *devas* in the celestial domains, it culminates in the highest level of bliss gained in the abiding experience of Self-knowledge. Truth is then synonymous with the purest form of limitless joy. Thus *anantam*, ‘limitlessness’ leads to *Anandam*, ‘happiness’. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Sage Sanatsujata instructs Narada Maharshi ‘there is no joy in the finite; absolute happiness inheres only in the infinite Self.’<sup>6</sup> Thus the spiritual parallel is strikingly remarkable — between *Satyam Śivam Sundaram* and what Keats wrote — in reverse order. Thus in the immortal line, ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever,’ beauty (*sundaram*) brings joy (*śivam*) to the being forever (*satyam*), and the correspondence cannot be more exact!

### **Dwelling upon Beauty that is the Self — Atma is *Sundaram***

In our everyday life of humdrum existence what sustains us through the drudgery necessary for our existential survival is the frequent glimpses of joy that we experience whenever we encounter sights of captivating beauty — a beautiful sunrise by the beach or sunset over the distant cliffs, the fresh dew drops on morning grass, a rainbow of colours, a full moon night, or say a calf suckled by the mother cow. Man-made things also bring great joy like soul-stirring music, evocative paintings, a graceful dance, magnificent sculptures — the list is endless.

Scientific discoveries are no exception. Kepler and Newton, Heisenberg and Einstein, the modern counterparts of the ancient Vedic seers (*r̥ṣis*), to name a few, have expressed such religious stirrings at discovering the beauties of the hidden cosmic order. For instance, when Kepler discovered the laws of planetary motion that revealed the grand harmony of the universe, he broke out into this cry of joy: “I thank thee, Lord God our Creator, that thou allowed me to see the beauty in thy work of creation.”<sup>7</sup> He was profoundly moved by the fact he had been allowed a glimpse of the central connection not

<sup>6</sup> *Chāndogya Up.*, v. 7-23-1, na alpe sukham asti, bhūmā eva sukham...

<sup>7</sup> Wilber, Ken, (ed), *Quantum Questions*, Shambala, 2001, p.62.

ENLIGHTENMENT: A THING OF BEAUTY AND A JOY FOREVER conceived by man — a connection of the highest beauty — in the grand symphony that is the universe.

Newton felt humbled by the discoveries of gravitational force which acts like the unseen hand of the puppeteer in the eternal cosmic puppet show. He disclaimed all greatness and personal glory lavished upon him when he said he was just like a small boy playing by the sea shore with a few pebbles of knowledge he had gathered in a life-time's work while the vast infinite sandy shores would remain unexplored forever. Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, echoed the same regarding the elusive quest for truth: "The trillionth part has been said; whatever has been said only multiplies what remains to be said."

An early definition of beauty given in antiquity goes: "Beauty is the proper conformity of the parts to one another and to the whole."<sup>8</sup> The universe is then no more seen as a disjointed conglomerate of unrelated parts i.e., not as a 'multi-verse' with each unit on its own without any connection to the rest of the whole but as a 'universe' where everything falls into place with nothing redundant and everything related in a seamless manner to everything else. All that is manifest is but one unified Whole. The ancient Upanishads extolled that it is the Lord that pervades and sustains the entire manifest Creation.

The modern physicist would say therefore that when a stone is thrown into a lake creating ripples, a distant star shakes! He likened the entire universe to one single gigantic vibrating jelly. Plotinus saw that where there is no division of parts the whole reveals a profound perception of beauty: "Beauty is the translucence, through the material phenomenon, of the eternal splendour of the 'One'."<sup>9</sup> Can it be matched any better with the classical Advaitic vision of unity behind the infinite diversity of creation? The Indian *rishis* said it is but One ceaseless cosmic dance of Lord Siva — Nataraja's Dance of Creation in its macroscopic aspect! Maharshi Ramana said the dance of the Lord constantly takes place in the hearts of every *jīva* as *aham sphuranam*, in its microcosmic aspect.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.69.

### **Dissolution of Creation in Advaitic Experience**

Creation itself is the palpable form of the Lord and does not exist independently apart from the Lord. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy wrote in his classic treatise, *Dance of Shiva*,<sup>10</sup> regarding the spiritual import of Lord Nataraja's *Ananda Tandavam* that the dance is inseparable from the dancer. For when the dance of creation ceases, the dancer (as Creator) also vanishes into Unmanifest Brahman in *mahāpralayam*! Even in the empirical plane, whenever a dance stops the artist ceases to exist as a dancer because the performer instantly sheds the role of the dancer! The 'role of a dancer' is only a garb which is worn only when the dance is on! This is far more so in the spiritual realm, where Lord Nataraja's dance of Grace transforms the seeker into a sage, who then abides unceasingly (*Ozhivil Oḍukkam*) in the motionless principle (*Arunachala Tattvam*), where the worlds cease to exist for the illumined *jnani*.

In the macroscopic dimension, the five functions of the Lord (*pañakṛtyam*, that is, *sṛṣṭi*, *sthiti*, *samhāram*, *tirodhānam* and *anugraham*) constitute the very dance of Lord Nataraja. When a ripe seeker attains Enlightenment by the descent of Lord Nataraja's Grace (*anugraham*), the world-show stops for him while the dance continues for the rest of humanity. The enlightened person bereft of his *jiva bodha* lands in the lap of Arunachala, the ultimate stillness filled with *siva bodham*. Bhagavan's verse on *Chidambara tattvam* in His *Navamaṇi Mālai* (*achalaṅṅē āyiṇum...*) amply bears this out.

It is the direct irrefutable experience of countless sages that Self-knowledge alone is that supreme elixir where the *jiva* is resolved forever in eternal bliss, never to return to *samsāra* again. *Pratyabhijñā* is the first recognition of the Self in its true nature as a direct and immediate personal experience and holds the key to the Elysian bliss that was always ours but waiting to be owned up. It is but fitting to conclude with the words of Keats once more from his poem *Endymion*, which perfectly (even if unwittingly) describes this Advaitic wisdom as, "An endless fountain of immortal drink, Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink". Siva, Siva...! ▲

<sup>10</sup> Coomaraswamy, A.K., *Dance of Shiva*, Sagar Pub., New Delhi, 1976, pp.66-67, 72,77& 79.

## Hridaya Guha

Janet Rubinson

Curling tendrils of Grace,  
Pull me to your Heart cave, O Ramana!

Let the Power of this Hill in all Its forms  
Reveal the Self shining within.

May the banyan tree of Wisdom  
Strangle and starve the habits of my mind.

Flesh-eating birds of Bliss,  
Tear away the memory of desire.

Lightning of Inquiry, blazing fire,  
Burn the knotted ropes,  
Loosening, falling,  
Falling away.

Iron-rich boulders of Sadhana,  
Crush the bones of grief then burn them in your furnace,  
Blue-black as night.

Cleansing rain of Surrender,  
Wash away the ash, the cloaking haze of regret.

Healing Nectar of Devotion,  
Dissolve the leaf bed on which I dream.  
Unwrap my shrouded thoughts,  
Let the vibrations of Your Name  
Drench my mind with the Medicine of You.

Aruna Path, with your tender stones of Grace, mercifully  
Lead me to my sweet demise,  
O Ramana, in the cave of your dominion.

Such is Your Love, O Arunachala,  
that I will not survive your mercy.

No greater Bliss is there than this;  
To become the Space in which  
the soaring Arunagiri birds wing home.



TRIBUTE

# A True Karma Yogi

Sri T.V. Venkataraman  
The Ashram Printer

THE ASHRAM

Of the four principal types of yoga, jnana, bhakti, karma and raja yoga, karma yoga is generally regarded as a necessary but lower discipline. We could not be more mistaken, not just that Mahatma Gandhi showed its validity and efficacy but that those who had the privilege of knowing and working with Sri T.V. Venkataraman, the ashram printer, knew that here was a person of great depth of integrity and intelligence who had dedicated his life to a higher aspiration while he lived inconspicuously as a family man. He hid his knowledge and wisdom well and it was only after being in his company fairly often that one began to realise how unusual a person he was and how special. His reliability and dedication in respect to ashram publications was exceptional. There were years especially after Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi* when the ashram office could not afford to pay for printing but the books came off the press regardless.

It was therefore a cause of great sorrow for those who knew the true value of this humble man that he left this world at Chennai on

Friday, the 15th July 2016 at the age of 87. We mourn his passing and honour the man.

He was born on 13th July 1929 in Ananthapur District, Andhra Pradesh to Sri T.K. Venkatesan and Smt. Rajalakshmi. He had his early schooling at The Hindu Theological High School, Sowcarpet, Chennai and at the Ramakrishna Mission Schools, when the family moved over to T.Nagar, Chennai. He was a meritorious student throughout his schooling.

Later in 1945, he joined the prestigious Loyola College, Chennai and graduated in 1949 with a first class in B.Sc. Physics. He was also a dramatist and played some key roles in V. S. Raghavan's drama troop, including female roles.

He cultivated a passion in printing technology and after his college education, joined his father's printing press business, Jupiter Press Pvt Ltd. He developed the business from a small firm into the great and distinguished enterprise, a well-respected name in the printing business in the city of Chennai; and he did it all by virtue of his sincere, honest and disciplined approach to work. What was unusual for those of us who knew him in later life was how calm and collected he was in his approach to any work. It seemed as though through his dedication it had permeated every aspect of his character. You knew what he said was never for effect but because it was true.

In his commercial life he was successful but paradoxically he did not look into any commercial venture solely with a profit motive. It seemed that his profit-making work gave him the opportunity to do what he really felt was worthwhile. Jupiter Press was recognised and rewarded with the printing of publications not only from Ramanasramam but also from Sri Ramakrishna Math and thereafter from Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Max Muller Bhavan.

Venkataraman was attracted to Bhagavan and became an ardent devotee from a young age. When it was known Bhagavan was seriously ill, his father, Sri Venkatesan and the family and staff of the press went to Tiruvannamalai and received Bhagavan's darshan shortly before the end. Later Venkataraman often spoke of this visit with great emotion. He was a regular visitor to the Ashram till recently, when because of poor health he could not do so to his great regret.

His family was very close to him and he earned their respect and love by his methodical care for them. He was a very simple,

disciplined, principled person. A man of few words, he was humble with everyone he met and spoke with a soft affectionate voice. His serious demeanour contradicted the gentle humour resting just below the surface in his conversations. Venkataraman enjoyed attending music concerts but his first passion was tennis, which he regularly played at Thygarajanagar Social Club into his seventies!

Venkataraman was married in 1955 to Smt. Lalitha and blessed with a daughter Nirmala and a son, Gurumoorthy. It is definitely true in his case that behind a successful man there is always a woman. His wife was testimony for that and they enjoyed fifty years of happy married life. He lost his beloved wife in 2012 and from then on he started withdrawing from social life apart from attending to his own essential duties up to the last days of his life. His daughter Nirmala, a chartered accountant, looked after him with great care and devotion, ever since his wife Lalitha passed away.

He fell down in his pooja room on Friday, 7th July and broke his leg. He underwent surgery which by all accounts had been successful, but a week later on Friday the 15th, a complication arose and he slipped into a coma where he lay peacefully for three hours until, at 6.30pm, he left this world. This particular Friday was a day of *Ekadasi* in the *Uttarayana Punyakala* and he was cremated on the 16th July, a day of *Dvadasi*, and *Dakshinayana Punyakala* had started on that day. This is said to be a sacred and rare conjunction for departure. A few days before his death he told one person that Bhagavan was calling him.

For some who may ask why a simple mention in the ashram bulletin is not sufficient tribute for this man, all one can say is that *The Mountain Path* would never have survived the vicissitudes of 52 years without his untiring vigilance and help. He was the ultimate proof-reader upon whom the editors of the magazine relied ever since its inception in 1964. Even when he found a mistake (he always found mistakes!) he would in humility, suggest the correction so as not to hurt the person involved. His kindness was so normal and unflinching we took it as a given.

He was always ready to assist the ashram in whatever way possible. That in addition to his unflinching co-operation in respect to ashram book publications was invaluable. One could not have asked for a more sympathetic and professional printer.

We miss him and salute this great man. ▲



# Maria de Guadalupe, Image of the Divine

ROLAND OLSON

“Who is She that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, irresistible as an army set in battle array?”  
— Solomon 6:10

**O**n the other side of the world, just a few degrees latitude north of Arunachala, lies a barren rocky hill that was the ancient home of an Aztec shrine to the Goddess Tonantzin. Here the indigenous people of Mexico and Central America came from time immemorial to seek the help and protection of their Divine Mother. Following Columbus’s discovery of the route to the Americas in 1492 and the subsequent arrival of the Spanish with their weapons and diseases, all of that began to change. The Aztec temple of the Divine Mother on Tepeyac Hill was destroyed and with the swift collapse of the traditional Aztec world and the destruction of a way of life, the native peoples were stranded at a crossroads between their old ways and a completely foreign culture.

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The outlines of this story have replayed themselves over and over in world history: the beliefs and culture of an ancient civilization overwhelmed and temporarily submerged by a foreign culture, only to revive in a new form with renewed vigour. In this case, however, the revival centered not on the appearance of a charismatic figure, but on an Image that originated because of an occurrence on Tepeyac Hill. This unique Image, now popularly called Maria de Guadalupe, was destined to illuminate a pathway for the indigenous peoples that incorporated the old Aztec ways with those of the Spanish conquistadors in a completely unpredictable manner.

The story begins simply enough. Almost five hundred years ago, on the morning of December 9th, 1531, a poor Indian named Juan Diego, a convert to the Catholic Faith, was walking past the hill when he heard beautiful music resembling bird song. He stopped to listen and heard someone call his name. Climbing the hill he was greeted by a radiant young Indian woman who told him that She was the Holy Virgin Mary and wanted the Spanish bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, to build a shrine for Her on the hill where She could comfort those who came to Her for help.

Unfortunately, when Juan delivered Her message the bishop was not receptive, and Juan hurried back to tell the Holy Virgin that it would be better if She found someone more reputable to deliver it. He said that he was, after all, only a poor ignorant Indian farmer. She demurred, insisting that he, Juan Diego, was exactly the person who should carry Her message, and She asked him to return to the bishop's palace with Her request.

The next day it was only with great reluctance that the bishop's servants allowed Juan to see Bishop Zumárraga again. The bishop said he would reconsider building a church on the hill, but only if the Virgin sent him an unmistakable sign that it was really Her wish. When Juan reported back to Her, She assured him She would give the bishop such a sign the very next morning.

That night Juan's uncle became very ill, and the next morning, in his haste to seek help, Juan went around the other side of the hill hoping to avoid the Holy Virgin. She was not to be put off, however, and came down to meet him on the other side assuring him that his uncle would recover; She then asked him to go to the top of the hill

and cut the flowers he found there as a sign for the bishop. At the top of the hill Juan was astonished to find beautiful Castilian roses with their petals fully open, blossoming on the frosty ground amidst the thorns, thistles and agave. He gathered them up in his *tilma*, a long apron-like garment woven of rough hemp-like fibre, and brought them to Her; She arranged them and admonished him to show them only to the bishop.

Holding up the *tilma* with the roses inside, Juan made his way to the palace where he was again reluctantly admitted to the bishop's presence. Humbly he told the bishop he had brought the required sign and as he unfurled the *tilma* the roses tumbled out before everyone's astonished eyes and the Divine Image of the Virgin Mary was imprinted on the fabric of the cloak.

The Image that appeared on the coarse cloth of the cloak is of a young Indian woman with Her head bent slightly to the right; Her eyes are half closed and Her hands are joined in prayer. She is clad in a pink robe, and a blue-green mantle covers Her head and falls around Her body. Rays of gold resembling the leaves of maguey agave emanate like sunlight from behind Her form. The tenderness of Her face and the inward aspect of Her eyes are impossible to describe. The aura of subtle beauty imprinted on the coarse *tilma* convey to millions of people around the world unmeasured depths of motherly compassion and kindness. A Hindu friend of mine on seeing the picture for the first time remarked, "Look at those eyes! She's in samadhi!"

Over the centuries this Image has become a symbol of hope and comfort for hundreds of millions of people who flock from all over the world to seek Her intercession and help. It is especially a sign of succour for the poor and helpless, those who have no one to listen and extend a hand to relieve their suffering. Because of this Image, the indigenous people of Mexico and Central America converted to the Catholic Faith en masse. They undoubtedly saw and still see the Divine Mother as one of their own, a Mother who has always cared for them and cares for them still — a Being whose acceptance does not depend on hierarchical rules and conditions. Had She not told Juan Diego, "Here I will give people all my love, compassion, help, and comfort. Am I not the Mother of all who seek and place their trust in Me? Here I will hear their cries and listen to their complaints.

Here I will console them in their suffering and relieve their pain. Here I will heal them in their anguish, their affliction and distress.”

Ironically enough, the same Image that was to be such a source of comfort to the defeated indigenous peoples became a source of confusion and controversy for the Franciscan Friars at the mission. They could not reconcile the Image of an Indian woman clothed in garb replete with the Aztec symbols of Her Divinity with the more traditional Catholic idea of the Virgin Mary. Could this be, they asked themselves, not the Holy Virgin Mary, but the Aztec Goddess, Tonantzin?

In fact, the ambiguity of the Image was so troubling that it was not until the Franciscan Bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, was succeeded by the Dominican Archbishop, Alonso de Montúfar, that a chapel was constructed on the site and devotion to it sanctioned.

The uncertainty of the Church’s position on the Image has been underscored by recent scientific studies that have shown that in the years following its appearance, Church authorities altered the Image significantly to conform more closely to Catholic iconography. A silver leaf crescent moon supported by an angel was added under the Virgin’s feet. Gold leaf stars were added to her cloak and gold was added to reinforce the golden maguey-like sun rays emanating from behind Her form.<sup>1</sup> A gold crown that is no longer seen was added atop Her head. Ironically, in an unexpected turn, all these subsequent additions have begun to peel off, flake and fade away while the stunningly beautiful original Image so venerated by the indigenous people remains completely intact radiating compassion and protection to all Her devotees.

There is still debate about the true origin of this wonderful Image. Could an Indian artist have painted it? Infrared photographic studies have shown no sign of a preliminary sketch beneath the original painting so this seems unlikely; then too experts maintain that the rough fabric upon which the Image is painted should have disintegrated hundreds of years ago. Perhaps most controversial of all are the photographic studies of the pupils of the Virgin’s eyes;

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<sup>1</sup> A maguey is an agave plant much like the American aloe with its thick pointed, water retentive leaves.

magnified 2500 times, they purportedly reveal images of Bishop de Zumárraga and those standing beside him when the tilma was unfurled and the painting appeared.

Fifty years ago, as a very young man, I travelled to Mexico City to see for myself the mysterious Image that I had revered as a boy. I arrived the evening before Easter just before midnight when the purple shroud covering it was removed for the Easter celebration. The old Basilica where it resided was huge, shadowy and lit by the thousands of candles held by the Divine Mother's devotees. Children sprawled asleep in the aisles. The hum of low excited voices filled the nave. All the seats were taken. Unexpectedly, a young Mestizo family hugged me, made room for me and welcomed me into their midst. I was exhausted and grubby from the 48 hour bus ride, my clothing was rumpled, my hair too long; I spoke no Spanish but instantly felt at home and was enthralled to be in the presence of the sacred Image of Guadalupe with so many of Her devotees. From where I stood, I could clearly see Her tender face and feel the love and compassion, the sense of protection, radiating from Her divine eyes. Here rich and poor crowded together shoulder to shoulder before the Divine Mother of the Universe. Here we were all equal. Here was a place for all of us, even the poor, the abandoned, the disinherited, perhaps especially, the so-called sinners. Here it was impossible not to feel the waves of Her unconditional love.

"Am I not here who am your Mother?" She had said to Juan Diego, "Are you not under the shadow of my protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?" We could not but understand in the core of our beings that our lives, however chaotic, miserable and uncertain, are always reflected in the eyes of the Divine. It no longer mattered where the Image had originated or why the fabric had not disintegrated or whether the images in the pupils of her eyes were real or not. The real miracle of the Image of Guadalupe is the unquestionable tenderness, compassion and sense of protection that it conveys.

Many things have changed since my visit more than fifty years ago. A new Basilica has been built to accommodate the millions of pilgrims who come each year. The shrine of Maria de Guadalupe is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage site in the world and it is by no

## MOUNTAIN PATH

means only Catholics who journey there to ask for Her help. I have not returned but I do attend the celebration of Her appearance at Tepeyac Hill in the midwestern town in the United States where I live. There are usually two celebrations, one that begins about 10 o'clock on the eve of the appearance and one the next day. The Mass on the day of the feast itself is usually a quiet affair in our town; the regular daily Mass attenders are present but frequently I have noticed no special celebration or excitement.

The evening celebration on the eve of the feast is different; it breathes all the excitement and devotion of the Mass I attended at the Basilica itself. Hundreds of Hispanic people of all generations and income levels crowd the church hall. There are performances and music, and the excitement level is high as we proceed to the church just before midnight. There, children bring bouquets of roses and lay them before the Image; a small band including a guitar, a violin and some horns serenades us from the balcony. The church is lit by candles. Young families crowd the pews. Spanish hymns to the Virgin throb with emotion. Babies cry. Grandmas pat their hands. Many of the people who attend this celebration are poor and unappreciated; many are descendants of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America. Some people look down on them for having so many children. They have come into the United States, some illegally, to harvest our crops, work in our restaurants, take care of our lawns. As Mass begins I look around with a sense of wonder, in front and behind, at the young families, the old people and the children I have worked with in the school system. As the priest begins to make his way down the aisle amidst clouds of incense and clumps of little children carrying bouquets of roses, the music swells and we all stand. The Image of Maria de Guadalupe with Her tender face and inward turned eyes fills our hearts. We know we have come home. ▲

# The Battle of Bukkur

GERD LEDERMANN

*On the 5th May this year in Wales, an extraordinary man, Gerd Ledermann, left this world. He was 88 years old. Gerd had a long connection with Sri Ramanasramam which began in the mid-1960s when he and his family visited the ashram while traveling overland from Europe by jeep to Australia via Singapore. He and his first wife, established a small ashram in Queensland. Later in life after he built a home for himself in the hills of Nepal, and though a convinced Buddhist, Gerd made frequent and extended trips to Tiruvannamalai.*

*Gerd was exceptional most notably for his humility, compassion and practical concern for others as well as his astute ability to implement solutions. At first he would appear unprepossessing but one was soon drawn to his quiet aura full of gentleness and self-effacing intelligence. One would never hear him speak an unkind word.*

*Gerd was born in Germany as an only child in 1928. At the age of 11 he was put on the last of the Kindertransport trains in 1939 that took Jewish children to England. He never saw his parents again. His mother died at Auschwitz and of his father nothing conclusive was ever heard. He stayed in a Scottish orphanage, and after he left school at 15 he had to fend for himself. He worked on the docks of Glasgow as a stevedore while studying electrical engineering. After graduating in 1949 he bicycled to Israel. There he lived eight years, three of which were spent in the army. Disillusioned by what he saw in his 'promised*

*land' he travelled again by bicycle, this time to Scandinavia where he did odd jobs tending reindeer and working on the docks of Helsinki. Eventually he returned to Scotland but soon moved to Canada and worked in the Arctic region before going on to California, where he met his first wife, who was also a Kindertransportee. After two years in Mexico, they decided to live in Australia and bought a jeep for the purpose. While on route they were offered work in Pakistan and it is from this period that the following story comes written by Gerd.*

*After the ten years in Australia, Gerd set out alone with his bicycle and lived in Iran during the Shah's time working as a translator in German. He left on the last flight to England before the fall of the Shah in 1979, and then devoted himself to the 'Ockenden Venture' for the next six years as a volunteer helping Vietnamese boat people.*

*After further adventures in Hong Kong, China, Tibet, he came to Nepal where he built a home in the hills behind Kathmandu and established a small school to help the local farmers' children. He met his second wife Kamala who was a Sherpa. They had one daughter Lea. Due to the exigencies of the Marxist insurgency they were forced to leave Nepal and move to Wales. It was here he spent his final years.*

*Without any equivocation one can say: "Here was a good man."*

**A** voice announced out of the hot night air, "Your Majesty has not been present when I called thrice before."

A full moon silhouetted the minarets and mosque domes on the opposite bank of the Indus. The splash of barge poles revealed the passing of a square-bowed sailing vessel upstream; the clash of tambourines accompanying rhythmic Urdu chanting drifted across the water, the tinkling of bells on donkeys' legs rose from the river's edge and the fragrance of spices hung in the still evening air.

My wife and I, with our six years old son Jeffrey, had come to Sukkur, 300 miles inland from Karachi and close to the second hottest inhabited place in the world, on an electrification scheme. Seven months had passed since then.

"My Majesty has been extremely busy all day," I offered in return.

He saluted. "We require all foreigners' particulars by 6 a.m. tomorrow. In triplicate."

Objections were of no avail. The precious document had to be composed, no matter how late it was.

We have lived on Bukkur Island, high up on ancient layers of ruins from previous civilisations. Crumbling battlements dropped to the sluggish, brown river below us. We shared this dusty idyll with eleven servants, a guardian of a holy tomb, a row of pitiful beggars, our son's dog 'Tikhe' and an assortment of cobras and unidentified snake-life.

It was an historic island, strategically commanding the Indus, an important inland waterway. Alexander the Great, returning to Greece after conquering northern India, had passed this way. He had had to fight several tribal armies, which tried to obstruct his river passage.

Around 700 A.D. conquering Arab armies from Mecca, under the young General Muhammad bin Quasim, came up the Indus. The muezzin's melodious call to prayer, the minaretted skyline and even one of the many hairs of the beard of Mohammed — scattered throughout the Moslem world — have been there ever since.

For 150 years the rebellious Samma Princes ruled Bukkur. In 1594 Bukkur fell into the hands of Emperor Akbar and 160 years later the Kalhoras captured it, only to lose it again to the Afghans. Finally it became a stronghold of Mir Rustam of Khairpur, until in 1838 — during the Afghan war, the British took possession and used it as an arsenal and a prison for Baluchi robbers.

When we arrived, it belonged to West Pakistan, but the British were really occupying it. The representatives of Her Majesty's Government were a team of Dorman-Long civil engineers of Sydney Harbour Bridge fame, who had just completed a new railway bridge from Bukkur to Rohri. We were just in time to take over their bungalow, which was under threat of demolition by the Railway Department. But the battles on and for Bukkur were by no means over.

One day my wife's terrified scream, "cook, quick, come here, a snake," broke the silence of a scorching noon. The offending reptile had dropped at her feet, as she opened the refrigerator.

"Yes, Memsahib", came the reply from the kitchen, but no cook appeared. Instead his voice rang loud and clear. "Bearer," who in turn, aware of the trouble, gave vent to a resounding "Sweeper," who had to come. There was just nobody else to call, except perhaps the watchman, and he was asleep as usual in a shady nook out of earshot.

As soon as Yussuf, the sweeper went into action with a broom handle, faces appeared at doors and windows. There were calls of encouragement and advice that came from all sides. Yussuf turned back and forth, acknowledging and arguing, with the broom handle above his hand most of the time. The snake needed no prodding to make her escape under such favourable conditions.

Another battle, a few days later, with the odds over-whelmingly in favour of the establishment, ended in victory. When a rat ventured into the inner sanctum of our bedroom, neither cook nor turbaned bearer could resist taking a hand in the chase. Drawers were pulled out, curtains were beaten and a pile of water landed on our bed. When I joined in with a decorative boomerang, the end was inevitable. As the sweeper carried the corpse out by its tail, my wife was just coming to investigate the commotion. Her scream once again carried far across Bukkur's broken battlements.

Many a scream must have echoed from those fortifications, as mortally wounded bodies tumbled from the bastion's heights into the murky waters of the Indus and attackers were crushed by rocks and gored by spears. Battering rams tried to smash a breach, roar of fires at the gates put fear of death into the defenders and bloodcurdling cries of "Death to the enemies of Allah", which carried across the Indus for centuries.

But none of these sounds of violence were ever as consistent and lasting as the steady staccato 'swish-slap', which assailed our ears from the moment we arrived in Sukkur. Hundreds of years it must have gone on already, hour after hour in rhythmic monotony. It was the *dobis*' (washermen's) strength pitted against the material to be cleaned. The shirts and trousers, sheets and towels beaten mercilessly on the smooth rocks of the river's banks. The outcome was always preordained.

The stones were unmoving, but the laundry changed perceptibly with each defeat, becoming increasingly frayed and buttons more fragmentary. The progress of the 20th century, foreign aid or even an indignant Memshib could do nothing to change the situation.

"But madam, he has six smalls and his wife is serious with children in stomach," was the bearer's plea, when we threatened repeatedly to fire our dobi.

And so like generations of colonials before us, and United Nations experts after us, we accepted the tears and the broken buttons as part of the price for being on foreign soil.

Evening often brought a slight breeze rippling across the moonlit Indus. The comparative cool was a relief and stretched all eleven servants in a row on their charpoys, awaiting sleep; their problems and their wants in abeyance until morning. Then we too forgot the day's crisis, the humour, and the continuous decisions, baked, as it were, into a constant pattern by the sheering heat.

The last call of the muezzin carried clear across the water, barge poles splashed gently below us and the chant of the boatmen drifted across the island. We talked quietly, savouring the romance in the air, spinning philosophies of life and existence, dreaming of a farm in Australia.

“What made us go halfway around the world to live in this strange environment?” we asked each other. “Why didn't we just carry on with our normal routine in surroundings where customs, language and mentalities were familiar?”

The urge to travel, to see other countries and peoples, especially the mysterious East, the incentive of a high salary and allowances were all part of it, but not quite enough to make us come to this alien, torrid desert. Do we not all feel at some time in our lives that we want to help others less fortunate than ourselves? There are many ways of doing this, each one being at least as beneficial to the helper as the helped. We were presented with this opportunity. An under-developed country, lack of technical know-how, soil made useless by rising salt, undernourished children; there was much scope.

To the question “Are we doing any good?” there was no clear-cut answer. A powerhouse and transmission lines came into being, despite the obstacles. Who derived the benefit from this, was beyond our control. We tried our best to give of our knowledge and of our experience. Even if we lost our temper when the generator and the air-conditioner stopped at midnight, because someone had sold the fuel, or when the railway department ordered the water supply cut off to make us leave the bungalow they wanted to demolish.

‘The Ugly American’ provides quite a few answers, but there is just no perfection in human form, no ideal solution much as we long for it. Each one has to work out his destiny as well as possible. Part of ours was to battle it out on Bukkur Island.

But not everything was difficult. When the tailor turned up one morning to take measurements for my wife's 'Burkah', the white shroud with a little eye-grid for vision, worn by the local Moslem women in public, the first question he asked was "Do you want her feet showing?"

That was a simple decision. Next day the office clerk provided further enlightenment on the subject, when he complained "You know, Master, those rascals in the Bazaar are looking at the soles of my wife's feet."

When I asked how these rather cumbersome customs, which did not seem to improve the morals, came about, his answer was "only Allah knows."

Another simple matter was to have a bookstand made to order by a carpenter, at least so we thought. When the cook brought the best tradesman he could find in the bazaar, all we had to do was to explain what was needed and tell him the measurements of the required piece of furniture. There was much waving of hands, horizontally and vertically, showing of numbers on rule, as well as a great deal of head wagging. This usually meant full understanding of the subject under discussion. But repeated consultations in Urdu between cook and carpenter were a sure indication, that all was not well with the project. I decided to make certain and drew front and side views of the shelves on a piece of paper, marking all dimension clearly. This was greeted with broad smiles and so much nodding, that I felt very pleased with myself for having finally settled any possible doubts.

Three days later a cart drawn by a majestic looking camel drew up behind our bungalow. The carpenter jumped down with a proud smile and had a peon unload his handiwork. But there were two pieces, one definitely having the appearance of bookshelves, the other somewhat flatter and less useful looking. When the carpenter saw my puzzled look, he produced the sketch I had made and pointed to the justification for his products. He had actually built a front as well as a side view and I had no choice but to pay for my superior knowledge of technical drawing.

The months passed and Bukkur Island became more and more our home. The water supply was almost continuous, the generator rarely failed us and we even fathomed the functioning intricacies of

a particularly obstinate kerosene refrigerator. For a day or two at a time we were actually lulled into a sense of peace and order.

Then Mephistopheles joined our household. He was young, light grey and possessed of a stubbornness far beyond that normally attributed to his race. He was a donkey, saved by our 30 Rupees from the drudgery of endless trips across the island and the bridges under loads of sand and gravel. We thought Jeffrey's afternoon entertainment had been easily provided for, but Mephistopheles had other ideas.

He had developed passive resistance to a degree of perfection. With Jeffrey astride gleefully, colourful saddle, bridle and tassels in place and Hussain, the afternoon watchman, delegated to lead the innocent looking procession, who could have foreseen some of the island's most epic battles.

Hussain was replaced by Chowdry, the morning watchman, who in turn gave up in favour of Yussuf, the sweeper. Even the bearer, who claimed donkey experience, could make no mark on the immobility of Mephistopheles. At last I had to take a hand.

Armed with the already famous boomerang and uttering war cries in the strange language of a distant land, I charged from behind. It was against all the tactical principles I had learned and I felt like a coward. But the result was unmistakable. There was a distinct movement of at least one foot.

As the afternoons progressed and my machinations became more subtle, Mephistopheles' forward motions became increasingly apparent, so that not only Jeffrey enjoyed the situation, but an ever-growing crowd of onlookers. Until our last day on the old fort, the, by then familiar, spectacle was enacted every afternoon without fail.

Jeffrey was astride the trotting Mephistopheles and laughing happily, followed by his ferocious, freely perspiring father, waving a boomerang and uttering outlandish yells. Up and down we went, across historic mounds of rubble, crumbling mosque walls in ankle deep dust through which generations of warriors had battled before me.

After centuries of fighting and killing, all that has remained of Alexander the Great, Muhammad bin Quasim and the Samma Princes is a huge heap of ruins and few lines in some history books. We left behind a powerhouse, some transmission lines and a neurotic donkey as signs of our victories and defeats.

What battles await Bukkur now? ▲



Sant Kabir and a disciple

# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter Three

### The Lord Comes to Kabir in the Form of a Brahmin

#### Part Two

NABAJI SIDDHA

Again, the Lord in disguise carried on His appeal, “What is the point in standing mute? O dear Kabir, there is no other refuge for jivas than observance of dharma. Aren’t you given to noble impulses of charity and generosity? Oh! Won’t you look at my face with compassion? Making a brahmin happy will add to your merit, your sins will be reduced to ashes. If you give even a side look in my direction, your miserly nature will take to flight.

“O embodiment of dharma! Radiant being! Haven’t you heard of the saying, ‘miserliness is a great sin’? If you understand this, you will realize the value of charity. In ancient times, Lord Shiva drank poison to uphold dharma. He readily granted a boon to Bhasmasura at his own expense. Didn’t He happily give away His trishul to demon Kumbhakarna? He gifted away even His wife to Ravana. Did He not grant immortality to a sixteen-year-old Markandeya? Listen to this amazing charity! The sage Dadichi gifted his own spine for the

welfare of the world! The king Shibi readily cut up his own body for the sake of a bird.

“Did not Arjuna start a battle with Krishna on behalf of a Gandharva? Goddess Lakshmi took over the sin of killing a brahmin on Herself on behalf of Lord Shiva! The almighty Lord Krishna humbled himself to act as a messenger on behalf of the Pandavas. He even became their charioteer and washed their horses. He was ready to bestow the eight-fold wealth on Kuchela and become his servant! While noble souls have gone to such great lengths of self-giving to uphold dharma and protect the welfare of the world, you are dragging your feet over a trifle. Why such petty-mindedness?”

Bewildered by the turn of events, Kabir pondered, “How sweet and nectar-like is the brahmin’s voice! How many examples he has quoted to support the exalted status of charity! How many divine names of illustrious souls he uttered! Ah, King Mahabali! What an immortal fame he earned, by not only giving the three measures of earth, but by offering his very head at the lotus feet of the Lord! Alas! how his preceptor Sukracharya tried to obstruct the king’s magnanimous act and in the process lost one of his eyes! Oh, will I also turn out to be such a lowly creature given to avarice and miserliness? Will my life be a wasted one?”

“It is said that charity for the householder, austerity for the renunciant, chastity for women, and discrimination for men are enduring virtues. I, who set out to sell the merchandise, am truly a householder. Can I fail in charity, the infallible companion of a householder on the path of dharma? Can I hereafter bring myself to loathe another person? Can I bear to see a person go hungry?”

With the long train of thoughts assailing him, Kabir offered the cloth to the brahmin while uttering the word, ‘Bismillah’ as was the tradition in Islam.

The deceitful brahmin was startled at this and recoiling from the utterance, screamed at Kabir, “O vile creature! Is this word from our scriptures? Reciting a name from a Faith that shuns compassion and reverence for life — which is the guiding light of all meritorious practices like japa, tapa in this life and next — and permits killing lives for one’s nourishment, you are performing charity! What a cruel fate has befallen me? Taking you for a brahmin boy, I applauded your conduct and virtues. I lavished my affection on you.”

Looking closely at Kabir's forehead and neck, he wailed further, "You are indeed cursed not to have put on the auspicious signs of bhasma or sandal paste. You are ignorant indeed! To remind oneself constantly of the fact that this body made of earth is ultimately reduced to dust, one wears these signs. Start wearing these symbols, which constantly remind one of the passing panorama of worldly existence. Always hold on to the ideal of dharma, which is one's soulmate. Be firm and don't let your mind, the insidious enemy, run in a wayward manner. Look upon the insignia as the very holy feet of the Lord. Realize that the Lord dwells within you and bliss of the Absolute is the supreme goal of life. Take to unceasingly chanting the name, 'Sri Ram'. This world is but a mirage. Whenever you give charity, take the name of Sitaram and give it."

Kabir was frightened, like a serpent encountering the eagle, to listen to these words, which dwelt predominantly on *saguna*. Resolving to get to the root of the issue of *saguna-nirguna*, he spoke to the brahmin, "O revered brahmin! The scriptures assign a pre-eminent place to the nirguna aspect. As it is beyond words of description, they indicate it by drawing parallels between the two states — as Impersonal which is eternal as against the transitory nature of Personal; pure Unity against diversity; attributeless as opposed to Personal aspect with attributes; and egoless as different from ego-centricity.

"In order to express it verbally, the scriptures have described the indescribable by different names, but all along they have assigned the nirguna a premier place. While so, why are you forbidding me from expressing the Impersonal 'Bismillah' and urge me to utter the holy name of 'Sitaram', which is suggestive of Personal aspect? Why this importance to Personal aspect, will you kindly enlighten me on this?"

Though the String-puller's intention was to completely purify Kabir's mind through saguna worship and thus qualify him to attain the nirguna state, he purposely set out on a course of perverted and offensive arguments, instead of logically explaining it to Kabir.

"O Siddhas, now follow the ensuing dialogue between them."

"Listen, young upstart!" said the brahmin, "While you take up the cause of the formless void, i.e. nirguna which is beyond description and beyond mind, it is incongruous that you make no attempts to still your mind and tongue. On the contrary, deluding yourself to be

the body, you allow free play of the senses and indulge your fickle mind in sense pleasures. Your mind wallows in the dualistic mire of 'I and you' and 'subject and object'. The tall talk of Impersonal is vainglorious without an ounce of practice.

"Enmeshed in the sensory world, can your puny intellect comprehend the state of the Impersonal or of Brahma-jnana, established like rock in that state? Realizing his own nature, he ever abides in the Self. Your uttering 'Bismillah' is a mere play of words while flaunting this flimsy rag around the market place! Is there any action left for a Brahma-jnani to perform, who is freed from the ego? Words cannot launch you into Silence just as a boat cannot sail on sand. A woman who cherishes chastity of her own accord without any compulsion, alone is a noble woman. He who engages in charitable acts for his uplift rather than for name and fame is indeed a noble man. Reverence shown to a person for his innate greatness and not sycophancy is true honour. Similarly, to be absorbed silently in the all-pervading Perfection is real nirguna and not your pompous debate on It. It is not a state of remaining separate and offering homage to It!"

Kabir spoke with reverence, "O venerable brahmin! Dispeller of all doubts! The way to the Supreme state, unquestionably, lies in curing the ego of its identification with the body-mind-intellect and merging with actionless Brahman. This is achieved by emptying the mind of its tendencies and subduing its passions. Considering that all creatures from the lowest worm onwards are filled with Brahman and individual is part of that Whole, there is no place for a separate existence of the individual entity 'I' in the Brahman-filled existence. Therefore, one should abstain from initiatives based on personal doership of 'I', but discharge only those actions which come to him of their own accord.

"Your lucid exposition has removed the cobwebs of doubts. The Brahma-nishta, now I understand clearly, abides in the superconscious state internally and while dwelling in the world takes repeated dips in the great Silence which is akin to deep sleep. You have also enlightened me on the distance to be bridged between precept and such an exalted experience. Yet, you have not set my mind at rest as to why you advocate the utterance of the name 'Sitaram'?"

## THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A BRAHMIN

“O ignoramus! You have launched again on definitions of nirguna state without understanding the esoteric meaning of what I am driving at. You are like a raw fruit, which looks ripe from outside, without the corresponding maturity and taste that go with the colour. Suppose an eggplant has some protrusions, which appear like its legs and hands. Can it start walking or waving those limbs? Similarly, your exhibition of mere words without direct perception of Truth is facile. Of what avail is this verbosity without Self-knowledge, which is inseparable from you and which contains vast universes in itself and is itself contained within the atom?

“Can a drop of water be different from ocean? Can a spark be different from fire? Can a particle of dust be different from earth? Can you, an individual entity, be different from Brahman? It is ignorance to think of the all-perfect, omnipresent Brahman, which inheres in everything as separate from you and contemplate on it. You are a full-fledged fool to imagine yourself to be quite knowledgeable.

“Was the world created by the actionless Brahman or the Lord of illusory power? Come out with your answer.” Saying this, the brahmin knocked on Kabir’s head with his closed fist.

Kabir replied, “O blemishless brahmin! Brahman was the primal Cause from whose power arose the creation. Then what is the use of contemplating on the saguna aspect? It is true that a Brahma-jnani should abide in inner Silence. However, many scriptures say that those who are not free of ‘I’ also can contemplate on the Nirguna aspect. Then why do you forbid it?

“If you want to dwell only in the realm of the Absolute, disregarding the relative”, continuing his irksome harangue, the brahmin demanded, “then who is the meditator and who is meditated upon? Who is the benefactor and who is the beneficiary? Then who is liberated and who is in bondage? What is bliss and who experiences bliss? Who is the teacher and who is the disciple? What about this life and next life? What are the pleasures of this world and the other and who bestows them? What about birth and death? Who experiences the pleasures and sufferings? Who is the creator and who is the created? Who is the protector and who is the destroyer? What is sustained or what is destroyed? What is the wakeful state or the dream state? Who informs you of these states? What is deep sleep state and who distinguishes

this state from others? Who is father or mother? Who is born or who dies? Who is this 'I' or 'you'? What is illusion? Who has experienced his own Self?

“Am I to assume that you are a Brahma-jnani, yet you have brought this rag here which you can neither sell nor give away for fear of punishment at home? Your knowledge arises merely from your lips. Are you perceptive enough to get at the root of my words? As long as a person cannot experience deep sleep and in his wakeful state, this distinction of 'I' or 'you' will continue. Can a dumb person be eloquent? Will a chaste woman flirt with another man? Will a man of character fail to keep his words? Can one think of anything in deep sleep?

“Once a person realises the Undivided Essence, he cannot separate himself from the Unitiveness, he is incapable of a narrower vision of duality. It is equally true that one who experiences only the relative existence cannot comprehend the Absolute. Just as a noble woman can never become a prostitute and vice versa, a dualist cannot take up the position of a monist nor can a monist act like a dualist.”

Working himself into frenzy, the brahmin gave a fierce look and launched into another attack, “You are too obtuse and too young to understand these higher truths. All your infantile talk has no substance in it. Can you view this world from my level of wisdom? Being bound by the duality of 'I' and 'you', can you gauge the mystery behind the word 'Bismillah'?

“Initially, one should engage in the worship and contemplation of the Personal aspect, then gradually becoming aware of the transitoriness of this world, raise oneself from the body-oriented sensory life, and in the ultimate stage take to contemplation of the Nirguna. If you try to jump straight into the formless, it will be like falling flat to the ground from the standing position, which will inevitably break your neck. Immature youngster that you are, your life will be spent in vain resulting in no good either in this life or next life, if you attempt to scale the steep ascent without preparation. Just as children build castles in the sand, similarly you attempt to climb the heights with verbal wisdom. Your words should reflect your inner attainments.

“Aha..! How you try to impress with empty words and exhaust yourself! Listen, give up this attitude and take to the repetition of

## THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A BRAHMIN

the Divine Name which our ancient rishis like Narada have extolled and by which they attained the Highest. Get yourself initiated into the sacred Name, attain perfect purity by chanting it for a prolonged period and then enter the realm of nirguna. Don't fall into disgrace like the Rishis of Dharukavanam who defied the Trinity." Thus enslaving Kabir by His grace and planting the conviction firmly in his mind on the saguna aspect as a ladder to the summit of Brahman, the illusory brahmin disappeared from his sight.

Kabir pondered over the brahmin's words, "I asked him about contemplation of the Personal, he has imparted truths of the Impersonal. Whatever it is, I am saved from ruin; or else my fate would have been like trying to reach the top floor without the staircase and injuring myself. How stupidly I persisted in my arguments of the nirguna without the requisite training for such a state. How I was deluded by my desire for this trifle of a cloth and came to grief? Alas, I have not walked my talk of the Absolute! The theoretical wisdom is useful only for fooling innocent people. One who cannot practice what he preaches is a coward of the worst kind. I realise now, how difficult it is to attain the nirguna state, which lies beyond name and form. Considering the ongoing battle with the sense cravings, one should tether the wobbly mind initially to saguna, the Divine name, and equip it for the flight into the Unknown. I am indeed ignorant of the path that leads to liberation. Until I find a suitable teacher to guide me to the goal, let me stick to the words of the brahmin."

Concluding thus, Kabir started to fix his mind with great devotion on the Lord. ▲



Lord Nataraja and Sivakama Sundari at Sri Ramanasramam

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

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

The scriptures declare that the all-embracing supreme reality is everywhere. When you say that it is to be found, not in one holy place, but in this or that other place, are you saying that it does not exist where you are? Witless fool, know that supreme bliss will only arise when you reach the firmament of true knowledge, upon the destruction of your defective, discriminating awareness. (147)

As long as there is identification with the body, the objects of sense will not subside. If they do subside [through control of the mind and senses], unconsciousness will result. [Therefore you should cultivate the awareness that the world does not exist

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>.

apart from the Self]. Is the space of the heavens disturbed when a bird flies through it? When one realises the true nature of the worldly bond, [it will lose its hold on you], just as the heat of fire is annulled by the power of the *mantra*. (148)

Certain *mantras* are supposed to possess the power of annulling the heat of fire. See also v. 30, where the same simile is employed in the opposite sense, the power of *mantras* being compared to the veiling power of *anava malam*. Just as the *mantra* supposedly protects us from the heat of fire, the firm realisation that the world does not exist apart from the Self will enable us to remain unaffected by it. If we know ourselves as the underlying ‘screen’ of the Self, we will not be affected by anything that appears to occur on it, just as the sky is not affected by the bird that flies across it.

What does it matter if the body remains or if it goes? Endless are the workings of those [divine beings] who dwell with form, without form and both with and without form. Is it necessary to break up a clay pot to prove that it is made of earth? Your course now is to abide in that state of pure *maya*, fully aware [of your nature as the Self]. (149)

The Self, Sivam, is traditionally conceived in three aspects, that of *formlessness*, the undifferentiated supreme reality, that of *form*, the manifestation of that reality in the form of a living guru, and that which is *both with and without form*, which is the reality manifesting in the form of the Siva lingam. The general idea seems to be that it is futile for disciples to try to second-guess the working out of their spiritual destiny, regarding the body to be an obstacle to enlightenment and so on.

It is not necessary to crumble a clay pot into dust to prove that it is made of clay. We are not so confused by its pot-like form that we cease to realise that its basic essence is just common earth. In the same way, in order to realise that the body is but an empty form whose only true essence is the Self, we do not need to attempt to destroy and disaggregate that body. Indeed, any attempt to do so would be futile.

The words pure *maya* in the final sentence are a translation of the Tamil *maya vayinthavam*, Sanskrit *maya bairava*. *bairava* is

derived from the word *bindu*, which is synonymous with *shakti tattva*. It is shakti which, as *maya*, veils consciousness and creates the world experience. What seems to be meant here is a state in which, though still embodied, and therefore subject to some extent to *suddha (pure) maya*, the aspirant has perceived the world experience to be other than his true self and is therefore no longer subject to the ego illusion, the effect of *anava malam*, the world illusion of *asuddha (impure) maya* and the consequent cycle of deeds which lead to continued rebirth, *kanma malam*. Such being the case, it is of no interest to him whatsoever whether or for how long his bodily existence is prolonged.

The aim of Vedanta is to be free of the delusion of *maya*, [in which the world appears real], like the snake seen in the rope, and the thief seen in the wooden post, whilst the aim of Siddhanta is to dwell effortlessly in the state of transcendent bliss, just as those bound by the ego [dwell in the state of bondage]. To those who are free of the individual consciousness these two are one and the same. (150)

Just as *a coil of rope* or *a wooden post* can be perceived momentarily as a snake or a thief, due to light conditions or the mental and physical state of the observer, the world, which is just a momentary appearance in the substratum of the Self, is taken to be real by those under the sway of *maya*.

In the supreme state there is no longer a personal self which struggles to make sense of a world which it sees as alien to itself. Therefore the life of the *jnani* is literally *muyarci ketta* — *effort-less*, which we might also translate as *free of the sense of doership*.

The idea in comparing the state of transcendent bliss to the state of bondage appears to be that, just as those who are subject to the full force of the ego, *anava malam*, never for a moment question it, believing it to be their natural state, so do those who have transcended the ego dwell in the transcendent state beyond even bliss as their natural state, equally without questioning it. Hence their state is called *muyarci ketta anandatitam* — *the effortless state of transcendental bliss*.

*Those who are free of the individual consciousness* is a translation of the Tamil *taan nandinaarkku*. This is glossed by Tirupporur

Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) as *those who are free of the defective knowledge, which arises objectively as 'Oneself'*.

The teaching of Vedanta, whose key texts are the Upanishads, emphasises the eradication of illusion, the negative aspect of realisation, whilst Siddhanta, whose key texts are the Agamas, emphasises the positive aspect of realisation, that of uniting with Sivam, the true substratum of the illusory world appearance. For those who have attained the final state of realisation, when the individual consciousness merges inseparably with the Self and that individual consciousness is annihilated, there is no difference between the two.

Tirujnanasambandhar, he of the land of Sikazhi, he who rules us through his grace, he whose divine sport is *jnana*, spoke saying, 'Not speaking of One or Two, just be. Thrice do I swear [that this is the truth]!' (151)

## Chapter 6 An explanation of non-attachment

*The word virattti, Sanskrit virakti, which is translated as non-attachment in the title of this verse means freedom from attachment. TCS explains that it refers to inner renunciation, not outer renunciation, which is the subject of the next chapter, entitled turavu, which is the native Tamil word for renunciation. The two words are not essentially different in meaning, although the latter, being derived from the verb tura — to leave, relinquish, reject, discard has a more active sense, and is therefore probably more suited to express outward renunciation.*

The sage who drank the ambrosial milk of non-dual bliss from the breast of Parvati [in a cup of gold], said, 'In the state of true knowledge there is neither suffering nor happiness, and in the state in which that true knowledge is lost, suffering and happiness manifest, causing delusion. You are the knowledge which embraces both of these.' (152)

That the milk from Parvati's breast was served to the young Jnanasambandhar in a golden cup is attested by the saint himself in *Tevaram* 3.24.2: *My father grew angry saying that the food (milk) [served to me] in a flower-like golden cup was bad.*

*You are the knowledge which embraces both of these* — The Tamil text says *ali arivu nee*, which means literally *You are the androgynous knowledge*. The word *ali* can be used in the sense of neither male nor female, neuter, or possessing both male and female characteristics, hermaphrodite, androgyne. The Tamil Lexicon says, ‘Hermaphrodite, being which is neither man nor woman wholly.’ TCS glosses as follows: ‘He (the author) calls *jiva* (*pacu*) knowledge ‘androgynous knowledge’ because, unlike the knowledge of *god* (*pati*) — *male knowledge*, and knowledge of the *bond* (*paacam*) — *female knowledge*, it exists as *god-knowledge* when it unites with god-knowledge, and as *bond-knowledge* when it unites with bond-knowledge, in the same way that the hermaphrodite embraces both the male and female forms.’

Thus the *jiva*, the individual soul, possesses no inherent consciousness, and therefore no reality, in its own right. It comes into existence simply through its identification with the world, and since it has no existence in itself, it ceases to exist once that identification is ended. Thus the realised sage, in whom that identification has ended, is not other than Sivam itself.

It should be pointed out here that the ‘bond-knowledge’ spoken of above should not be taken to mean an entity existing in its own right, but only an appearance within the Self, Sivam, projected by the *jiva* out of its false understanding.

All six religions agree that the final goal is the pure state which results from renunciation and the cutting away of desire. Know that this is the state of liberation, free of the thirty-six *tattvas*, in which there is no more birth. It is the final state in which all effort comes to an end upon the annihilation of *karma*. (153)

The six religious systems which are considered to be Vedic, each being based on a deity of the Hindu pantheon, are: *Saivism* (*Siva*), *Vainavam* (*Vishnu*), *Shaktam* (*Shakti*), *Sauram* (*Sun*), *Kanapattiyam* (*Ganesha*), and *Kaumaram* (*Murugan*).

TCS says that the author is again (see v.143) quoting the names of two chapters from the *Tiru-k-kural* of Tiruvalluvar, Ch.35, *turavu* — *Renunciation*, and Ch.37, *avaa aruttal* — *The Extirpation of Desire*. He further states that, given the above, Ch. 36, *mey unartal* — *Knowledge of the True* is also included by implication. The word *kuudal* —

*agreement* can also mean *Madurai*, the home of the legendary Tamil Sangams. His commentary therefore indicates that the author is inviting us to imagine that these three chapters are being read out in Madurai from *the sanga palakai*, which according to the Tamil Lexicon is a ‘Miraculous seat capable of accommodating only deserving scholars, believed to have been granted by Siva at Madura to the Sangam poets.’

This book is for those who are free of desire, [and could not even bear to be accused of it], just as a warrior who is willing to die for a cause cannot bear to be accused of cowardice. It is for those who are like the camel, which will eat anything with relish as if it were well-cooked food. To those who are full of desires, and are accustomed to good food which bloats the body, it will seem flawed and unacceptable. (154)

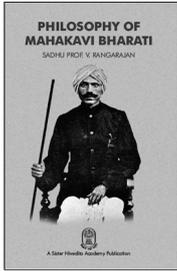
If the worldly bond falls away, the *jiva* will automatically come to rest in the Lord, just as someone swinging on a swing will come to rest on the ground if the rope breaks. Verse [349 of the *Tiru-k-kural*], speaks of the ending of births upon the cutting-off of the attachments created by desire. Is this just your own understanding? Is it not also the understanding of all other religions everywhere? (155)

In this comparison the individual self, *jiva*, *pacu*, is compared to someone swinging on a swing; the ropes supporting it are the worldly bonds, *paacam*, consisting of the mind and senses, and the solid earth is *pati*, Sivam, the Self. As long as these ropes are in place, the *jiva* will swing endlessly forwards and backwards, oscillating between desire and fear, attraction and revulsion. However, if the ropes are cut away, it will come to rest on the solid ground of the Self.

The words *pattru atra kanne pirappu arukkum – births will end upon the ending of attachments* are a direct quotation from v. 349 of the *Tiru-k-kural*: ‘When attachments are ended, rebirth will be cut off. Otherwise the impermanent state [of birth and death] will manifest [over and over again].’ ▲

(To be continued)

# BOOK REVIEWS



PHILOSOPHY OF MAHAKAVI BHARATI by Sadhu Prof. V. Rangarajan, Sister Nivedita Academy, 'Sri Bharati Mandir', Srinivasanagar, Kithaganur Main Road, Krishnarajapuram, Bangalore 560 036. [www.sribharatamatamandir.org](http://www.sribharatamatamandir.org)

A literary critic wrote that none knew more French than Victor Hugo. It can similarly be said of Tagore, Pushkin, Lorca, Hafiz, Mirza Ghalib and Subramanian Bharati in regard to Bengali, Russian, Spanish, Persian, Urdu and Tamil. Bharati wrote: "Of all the languages I know (he was at home in at least eight), none is as sweet as Tamil." One has to read Bharati in Tamil to realise that, by the time he passed away at the age of 39 in 1921, he had made Tamil much sweeter than it ever was. And far more powerful.

Bharati was a genius if there was one. His Tamil oeuvre is among the finest in world literature and a perennial obsession with the Tamil-speaking people of every walk of life. In this highly readable, well-researched book written in a simple, unpretentious, natural, free-flowing, limpid prose, the author gives a detailed, objective picture of Bharati the poet, philosopher, mystic, patriot, social reformer and revolutionary, though he seems to have left the analysis of Bharati's poetic art to experts.

Bharati was a deeply religious man, in the higher sense of the term. His pantheon had many gods but Kali takes a central place. He was a *Shakta* (Kali worshipper) and also an Advaitin. Like Sri Ramakrishna, he could have claimed, quoting Ramprasad Sen, "Having known Kali Brahman, I have transcended duality."

Swami Vivekananda's speeches had a deep impact on Bharati. On his way from Varanasi after attending a Congress Committee meeting, he met Swamiji's disciple Sister Nivedita and from then on Bharati started referring to her as his Guru and wrote a poem on her, his *Jnana Guru*. To her he owed his passion for women's emancipation, while to her Master his belief in service to mankind as a pre-requisite for Self-realisation. Bharati rightly believed that Swamiji sowed the seeds of India's national movement.

Rangarajan quotes profusely from Bharati's poetic works to the delight of the Tamil reader but the translations are just adequate, failing to convey the magic, thrill and power of the original. However, neither he nor the

other translators can be faulted for Bharati is not a translator's delight and he is yet to find his A.K. Ramanujan. What Romain Rolland said of Swami Vivekananda, "I cannot read a single sentence of his writings without getting electrified," would equally apply Bharati's poems.

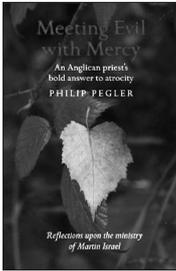
In the excellent chapter on Bharati's Religious Philosophy, the author throws light on the various aspects of Bharati's spirituality. Bharati sees clearly that there is no individual 'I' and he laments, "O God, when will I stop saying 'I'?" He wants to be totally free of fear, anger, fear, lust, greed and hypocrisy. He sings that all these will be destroyed in love and that love is indestructible. Echoing the timeless words of the Sermon on the Mount and Hindu Scriptures, he sings "Oh good heart, bless the enemy." He deemed all that is done by men is God's deed. He believed that immortality was his birth right. Thanks to his close association with Sri Aurobindo, he gained deeper insights into the Vedas and his Tamil translations of some Vedic hymns are deemed by some to have the quality of mantras. He did not believe that the world is an illusion but is a manifestation of God. He believed that "Mother worship will save humanity for the supreme energy renders immortal all that reflects her beauty and fire."

Rangarajan, an Hindutva enthusiast, has happily not passed over Bharati's great admiration for Gandhiji and his hailing him as an incarnation. Bharati in his song on Gandhi calls him the first and foremost among men on earth. However, while concurring with his gospel of Ahimsa, he made it clear that he would rather reward a hit with a hit. When Bharati left after meeting Gandhiji briefly at Madras in 1919, Gandhiji told Rajaji and others present that Bharati was a national asset and should be taken care of.

Rangarajan gives adequate space in his excellent book to Bharati's political philosophy and his role as a social reformer and revolutionary, his egalitarianism, his firm disapproval of superstition and dogmatism, narrowness of vision, his understanding of the *varna* (caste) but strongest disapproval of the present-day casteism, his deep concern for women's education and freedom, his respect for all that is good in tradition.

Fittingly, Rangarajan concludes his impressive book, with the eloquent tribute to the Mahakavi by Sarojini Naidu who wrote: "He is entitled, by his genius and his work, to rank among those who have transcended all limitations of race, language and continent and have become the universal possession of mankind."

— Mumukshu



MEETING EVIL WITH MERCY. An Anglican Priest's Bold Answer to Atrocity by Philip Pegler. Christian Alternative. UK. 2015. £11.95, US\$19.95 pp.172. ISBN 978-1-78535-306-2 [www.christian-alternative.com](http://www.christian-alternative.com)

It would be impossible to give justice to the book under review in the space of one page. This is a book that would interest lapsed Christians for its subject: the life of a Jew born in South Africa in 1927, is revealing as to how a Christian life can be lived and what it means to be a

Christian in an age where religion is openly disparaged in the West. Martin Israel was a brilliant student; he studied medicine in London and became a lecturer in pathology. A jointly authored book of his became a standard text in the science. He later became an Anglican priest, popular lecturer and spiritual counsellor, holding many retreats. He was also a healer, exorcist and writer of a number of spiritual books. He never married.

The bare bones of his life are unusual and he was an unusual man. He was that rare creature: a person of his convictions. He was intellectually acute and not at all naive about the world and its challenges. His integrity was unquestioned and his ability to reach out in compassionate understanding were superlative. He was a doctor of the soul.

The book is ostensibly about Israel's life and his spiritual evolution. One of the principal themes of this book is about evil, what it is and how one faces it in all its unalloyed virulence. In this modern age we ridicule the idea of evil as an independent force but recent events with the rise and imminent fall of ISIS reveal our so-called enlightened view is negligent to say the least. There is evil in the world and before we can overcome it we are obliged to recognise its potency to harm and destroy.

Martin Israel does not dismiss evil but embraces it knowing that truth will prevail. "In the end the darkness has to inform the light no less than the light to illuminate the darkness. Each has valuable teaching to bestow so that a life beyond the dualities may emerge. This is the life of integrity. It is the life of God beyond the dualities of darkness and light, in which the uncreated light embraces and transfigures both earthly light and subterranean darkness." For those of us who cannot quite comprehend why there is evil in the world, this book is a finely written account of one who was fearless in the face of darkness and understood its power.

—Christopher Quilkey



# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## **Cow Lakshmi Samadhi Day**

The Cow Lakshmi holds a unique place in the annals of devotees who came to Bhagavan. Her remarkable behaviour in the Old Hall and Bhagavan's unfailing love and concern marked her as 'someone' special. On the 18th June, 1948, she attained liberation in Bhagavan's hands. The Ashram has remembered her on her samadhi day each year with special puja. This year's observance fell on the 17th June, 2016 before a large gathering of devotees who sang the praises of this great devotee. After the first arati, the ladies sang Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer's Life of Lakshmi, and this was followed by KVS's Gomata Lakshamma.

## **Guru Purnima**

Guru Purnima is an important celebration in the calendar year. It is the tradition along with Mahasivaratri that many devotees stay awake the whole night in prayer and remembrance. It is on this day that sannyasins begin *chaturmasya*, the annual four-month respite from itinerant life. Guru Purnima at Sri Ramanasramam was celebrated the 19th July with mahanyasa puja at Mother's Shrine and guru pada puja at Bhagavan's shrine. Sannyasins were presented with ochre robes. Devotees joined the thousands in circumambulating the Hill on this auspicious occasion.

## **Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Day**

The 25th July is the Anniversary Day of Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni (Nayana) and it was observed in the New Hall. Devotees chanted Ganapati Muni's *Sat Darshanam* and some chapters from *Sri Ramana Gita*.

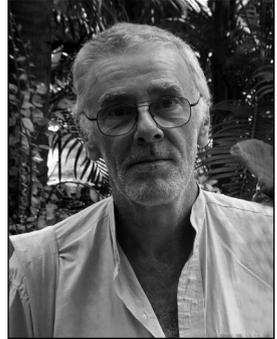
## **Advent**

It was on the 1st September 1896 that the young Venkataraman first arrived in Tiruvannamalai from Madurai. He was never to leave the sight of Holy Arunachala from that date. Ramana devotees from the Madurai Mandhiram make the pilgrimage each year in a group to celebrate Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala. There was a *parayana* by

this group at the Ashram. It was a happy time for all Ramana devotees who participated in this great day. This Advent day was also special because Sri Muruganar's Aradhana day was celebrated on this day.

## Obituaries

Among the many devotees who have made a substantial difference to the ashram as an institution, **Graham Boyd** stands out as an outstanding contributor. He was born in Leeds on 13th July 1949 and came to the Ashram in the mid-1990s. In his youth while working odd jobs, Graham struggled to find inner peace amidst the entanglements of modern life. But in the early 1980s when he came across Mouni Sadhu's *In Days of Great Peace*, his life 'changed overnight' and he began to call himself a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.



Graham was a doer and spent the latter half of his life assisting in the modernisation of the ashram. He was self-trained in sound and electrical engineering and was instrumental in introducing computers to Ashram where he designed the Ashram's first two websites in the days when website-designing was still quite new.

Graham was untiring in his service to the Ashram and among his many projects were recording the Ashram *Tamil Parayanam*, digitising English publications, filming and editing the biography on Bhagavan's life in the documentary entitled *Eternal Light* and other video project on *Arunachala Giripradakshina*. His contribution in establishing the Archives was invaluable. It was Graham who initiated the restoration of archival photographs of Sri Bhagavan that devotees the world over enjoy today. Ever a friend of the poor, he quietly helped the needy.

He was diagnosed with osteosarcoma in November 2015 and underwent extensive treatment in Chennai which proved unsuccessful. Though he suffered greatly, his faith in Bhagavan remained undiminished and was an inspiring example for all who met him in his last days showing how to face death with devotion and courage. Graham was blessed to be able to live out his final days in Tiruvannamalai where he merged at the feet of Arunachala on



16th June 2016. His daughter, Candice Faqir of Scarborough UK and friends attended him in his last days.

**Gomathi Ammal** was the grand-daughter of Kizhapasalai Ramachandra Iyer who was the brother of Bhagavan's Mother, Azhagammal. Born in 1929, Gomathi Ammal was the only child of Erukkur Lakshmi Ammal (daughter of Ramachandra Iyer and sister of Nagalakshmi Ammal, mother of Ashram President, V.S.

Ramanan). In 1935, when just six years old, Gomathi had the good fortune to have Bhagavan's darsan and has been a devotee ever since. Gomathi was blessed to spend her final years in Tiruvannamalai where she rendered service to the Ashram during Navaratri, Sri Vidya Homam and other functions. Gomathi was absorbed in Bhagavan on 29th June 2016. Devotees recall with affection her kind gentle disposition.

**Sulochana Natarajan** was absorbed in Bhagavan Ramana around 8.15 p.m. on Tuesday, 23rd August 2016 at Bangalore. She was 79 years old. She had darshan of Bhagavan as a young school girl. Caught young in his Net of Grace, she flowered into an ardent, dedicated devotee and her whole life has been an uninterrupted saga of service to her Sadguru. Equipped with excellent musical acumen and training, she was encouraged by her husband A.R. Natarajan, the dynamic Founder-President of Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore, and passionate devotee of Bhagavan. She was also ably assisted by her very talented and dedicated daughters. She contributed substantially to the growth of the Centre as a hub of Ramana music and dance and devotion, bringing out countless cassettes, CDs, videos and books and training boys and girls in Ramana music and ballets. Sulochana Amma has notated well over thousand songs on Bhagavan, mostly composed by Muruganar. She was one of those devotees who lived, moved and had their being in Bhagavan Ramana. ▲

