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Divine Names of Arunachala

2. ओं देवाधीशाय नमः

om devādhīśāya namaḥ

Obeisance to the Lord of the Heavenly Beings.

Devadhisah is grammatically split as Deva + Adhish. Deva means shining heavenly beings; Adhisha means Lord. Arunachala is the Lord of heavenly beings. Different devas are said to have dominion and power over different aspects of creation. Lord Arunachala is the Supreme Being presiding over all such devas. Ramana Maharshi explains “The body is only one. Still, how many functions are performed by it? The source of all the functions is only one. It is in the same way with the gods (devas) also.” [Talk§371]

It is said that siddhas inhabit the subtle realm of sacred Arunachala. Bhagavan once remarked that there is a heavenly city within Arunachala.

4. ओं जनप्रियाय नमः

om janapriyāya namaḥ

Obeisance to the Lord who loves all Living Beings.

Janapriya: jana means living beings; priya means ‘dear or loved’. The name Janapriya means one who loves all the living beings. A devotee asked Ramana Maharshi if love postulates duality how the Self can be an object of love. He replied, “Love is not different from the Self. Love of an object is of an inferior order and cannot endure. Whereas the Self is Love, in other words, God is Love.” [Talk§433]

Restraint

Restraint is not a word one often hears these days. It is more likely that we hear about excess, indulging oneself. Restraint is not restriction, rather it is positive self-control. We restrain ourselves because we reflect that we can act in a better way. For example, we restrain ourselves from spending our hard earned salary on a new enticing mobile phone because we want to save money to visit Arunachala. We evaluate, we discriminate between what is of value and what is not.

Restraint can have the implication of deprivation, that one is deliberately missing out on something. But what are we missing out on? Quite often it is something we don't need. For example, we restrain ourselves from a second helping of food because we are satisfied and any more would just be greed. But how do we know when to be restrained in our behaviour or thoughts, especially when we are surrounded by an endless array of advertisements or social peer pressure to acquire, do, acquiesce or compromise our beliefs and values for the sake of something new or inviting? Temptation is a powerful intoxicant. And lastly, how do we restrain ourselves in the face of long-entrenched habits that we know are not helping us?

There was a great Theravada monk Ajahn Chah (1918-1992), in the Thai Forest Tradition. In one of his talks ‘Understanding *Vinaya*’¹, he related that after he had begun to practise meditation, he went to the most revered master of the time, the Venerable Ajahn Mun. He was perplexed and had reached a dead-end after reading numerous and detailed Buddhist texts on how a monk should act.

He told Ajahn Mun that it was impossible to remember every single rule. Ajahn Mun replied that this was true if one took into account every single rule but, “‘If we train this mind to have a sense of shame and a fear of wrong-doing, we will then be restrained, we will be cautious.’

“‘This will condition us to be content with little, with few wishes, because we can’t possibly look after them all. When this happens our *sati*² becomes stronger. We will be able to maintain *sati* at all times. Wherever we are, we will make the effort to maintain thorough *sati*. Caution will be developed. Whenever you doubt don’t act on it. If there’s anything you don’t understand, ask the teacher. Trying to practise every single training rule would indeed be burdensome, but we should decide whether or not we are prepared to admit our faults. Do we accept them?’

“‘This teaching is very important. It’s not so much that we must know every single training rule, it is more that *we should know how to train our own minds*.

“‘All that stuff that you’ve been reading arises from the mind; rather than doubting all the time...be composed in mind. Whatever arises that you doubt, just give it up. For instance, if you wonder, ‘Is this wrong or not?’ but if you’re not really sure, then don’t say it, don’t act on it, don’t discard your restraint.’”³

Atma vichara is not unlike restraint. We enquire into who is thinking, who is feeling. Who is this ‘I’? The very question gives us pause to consider mindfully what we think or feel. It gives us a space in which to discriminate between what is true and what is false.

¹ The Buddhist monastic code of discipline.

² Mindfulness. *Sati* is Pali for Sanskrit *smṛti* (remembrance).

³ *Food For The Heart. The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah*. Wisdom Publications, Boston. 2002. pp.82-3.

Whenever we are in doubt we pause and wait until the right response arises. In our daily life we constantly experience confusion because we misidentify ourselves with a notion of who we are that is wrong. That space between thoughts, created by self-enquiry, gives us the opportunity to see things as they are, not as we wish them to be. In that moment of stillness there is no projection of a thought, there is no confused doubt and there is no projection of wish fulfilment.

There is a story told by Ramakrishna Paramahansa which illustrates what is essential and what is irrelevant. There was a small boat about to cross a river and in the boat were a pundit and a villager. Because of vanity the pundit made a great show of his erudition while the villager listened quietly. A thunderstorm arose as they made their way across the river. The villager understood from experience that their boat would probably sink. He turned to the pundit and enquired if he could swim. The pundit said no and the villager then commented that though he did not know the *Vedas* like the pundit, he could swim.

What is the most important tool we have if we wish to be free of confusion and ignorance? *It is a mind trained to discriminate between what is eternal and what is transitory.* Like the ability to swim we are saved from drowning in our sea of concepts.

There are many ways to train the mind which involve simple disciplines and the cultivation of virtue. Live as simple a life as possible. Do not unnecessarily argue as it is a waste of energy and creates resentment. Avoid comparisons with others as we are all on the path, each travelling at their own speed and most with needs that are different from ours. Keep the right company and avoid those who are malicious. Do not judge others unless you are prepared to see from their side the challenges they face. Avoid gossip and the craving for public recognition. It comes down to one basic requirement: avoid negativity as much as possible. Be clean in body and mind.

Restraint is a powerful tool that helps us see clearly. Self-control is not a punishment nor a killjoy attitude that dislikes anything pleasurable on principle. It is not avoidance: it is a clear perception of the consequences of what we may be about to do. When we are in doubt we exercise restraint, but this does not mean we remain dense, unfeeling and lifeless. Self-restraint does not mean we shut our eyes,

block our ears, cease talking and stop eating. Quite the contrary, we become more sensitive and do what is appropriate.

Anyone who has driven a car can remember getting behind the wheel for the first time and thinking that the car is driving them! We tend to panic and apply the brakes with abrupt force. With practise we learn control and restraint until we are in charge, and then we become the one who drives, rather than a helpless passenger. We apply the brake smoothly so that the car slows down in a continuous flow.

Have you ever noticed that Bhagavan slowly applies the necessary medicine to us so much so that we rarely notice it until afterwards when the ‘treatment’ is successful and we look back and see how much we have changed for the good and are no longer in the grip of a compulsive desire or the victim of an irrational, obsessive fear?

The Buddha compared meditation to the tuning a musical instrument. When we play it or when we exercise our mind, should we rigidly control our technique or should we indulge and let go? The answer is neither. When we tune a stringed instrument, we neither bind the strings too tightly nor do we allow them to be too loose. It is by precise restraint that we learn to develop our awareness of the consequences.

The nature of the mind is fluid and the art of meditation is to flow with it, but to be mindful of each thought as it arises. Bhagavan wrote: “Better than such broken thought (meditation) is its steady and continuous flow like the flow of oil or of a perennial stream.”⁴ The point of self-enquiry is to develop consciousness so that we do not lose our centre of gravity. It is a question of poise.

Like the young Ajahn Chah we soon become baffled and disheartened if we rigidly follow every rule, instruction, advice, book, admonition, sloka, discussion, command, direction or stipulation. The world is full of do’s and don’t’s. We would be driven mad if we followed them all. We would lose our balance and fall into one of those black holes of depression and despair. One-pointed awareness is like the light we shine on a dark path to keep us safe. The stronger the awareness the clearer our perception of what is the right action. Atma vichara is our infallible tool.

⁴ *Upadesa Saram*, v.7.

The so-called spiritual world and this physical world are not in opposition, just as the physical body of a person and their spirit are not in conflict. If they are at war, then a person is torn apart by contradictory impulses unless they find the panacea of the guru's grace. The body and mind are in fact, complimentary aspects that aid each other. They are instruments which help us understand by revealing to us the results of our impulses and actions. A human birth is the result of great merit. According to scripture it is not easy to obtain.

We train our bodies and minds through discipline and virtue and we eventually see that they are not enemies. How often have we seen people who persecute their bodies, thinking that the world is an illusion, a bondage, and the sooner one gets rid of it the better. This negative type of self-restraint is a death wish. It is an unintelligent denial; it is ignorance. We are issued with bodies at birth, is it not perhaps to be expected that we take a slight bit of trouble to keep those bodies in reasonable condition?

Slow and steady are the operative words. The characteristic of Bhagavan's teaching is that it is generally unhurried, but once a step is taken we never fall back into a particular trap of malign, unconscious vasanas.

We should remember that Bhagavan said that if we take one step towards the guru, the guru will take nine steps towards us. To take that one step requires that simple quality of flexible restraint so that the mind is quiet and open to grace. ▲



Living With The Master

Reminiscences

Part Three

KUNJU SWAMI

TRANSLATED BY P. RAMASAMY

We continue our series of reminiscences with extracts from a new, more complete translation of Living With The Master by Kunju Swami, a close devotee of Bhagavan. The ashram intends to publish the complete translation once it is finalised.

Parayana and Bhagavan's Indrawn Repose

At Skandasramam, we used sit in front of Bhagavan every evening at six thirty, and do *parayana* (chanting of hymns) of *Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai*. Bhagavan would remain seated, reclining against the cushion, motionless, eyes closed. By the time our *parayana* reached its end it would be time for dinner, served at half past seven. Now and then, say once in two or three days, Bhagavan would continue to remain indrawn, deeply absorbed, in *samadhi*. Seeing him not rising after the conclusion of our recital, we would gently call out. It would be of no avail, Bhagavan remaining entirely oblivious to his surroundings. Perumal Swami, Akhandananda, Mastan Swami and I

Dr. P. Ramasamy is serving in the Ashram archives upon retirement as professor of English in 2011. He was first brought to Ramanasramam in the mid 1950s by his father, who had met and conversed with Bhagavan. Four generations of his family are devotees.

would pick up conches each that were kept in the ashram, blowing all four of them in unison. Our ‘siren’ would penetrate into his introverted stillness, gradually bringing him to outward consciousness of the world at large. On such days, dinner time would turn out to be as late as 9 p.m. This was a regular happening. Even after all of us shifted down to Mother’s *samadhi* downhill, Bhagavan used to go into such spells once in a week or ten days. Dandapani Swami would at first hold Bhagavan’s feet and massage them, but his attempts would not succeed. Only the call of the conches could bring him out of his absorption. As days went by, these spells disappeared, as Bhagavan was now established in *sahaja*, that is, an effortless withdrawn state. It brings to my mind the verse in *Yoga Vasishtam*, where it is reported that Lord Krishna had to blow a conch to awaken Prahlada from the inner depths of his spiritual immersion.

Bhagavan’s Sense of Humour

From Skandasramam, Bhagavan used to trek down to his mother’s *samadhi* every day, in the morning or in the evening, ever since her internment. Five or six months passed thus. One day Chinna Swami told me, “Do come down this evening. Batter for *mudakkathan dosai*¹ is being prepared. Tomorrow morning I shall fry those dosais and you can take them up for Bhagavan and others.” Promising to come, I asked Ramakrishna Swami to look after Bhagavan, and arrived down in the evening. Rising before dawn next morning, I began to scrub and cleanse the utensils by the stream running from Palakothu towards Mother’s *samadhi*.

It was hardly daybreak when I heard a voice asking, “Can a guest get some food?” Startled, I turned to see who it was and what I saw made goose bumps rise. For, it was Bhagavan, the Sage Supreme Himself – wrapped in a shawl, a turban of a towel wrapped around his head, and a walking stick in hand. The rarest of rare darshans indeed! Meanwhile, hearing voices, Chinna Swami and Dandapani Swami came out and were thrilled to see Bhagavan. They entreated him to

¹ A dosai preparation in which the leaves of *mudakkathan* have been added and ground along with the batter. These *dosais* are greenish and relished as a speciality in Tamil Nadu, in addition to their medicinal property of curing pain in the joints. This climber is commonly known as the balloon vine on account of its balloon-like, hollow, air-filled fruits. (Botanical name *Cardiospermum Halicabum*, *kanphata* in Hindi.)

stay and enjoy their piping-hot dosais. Bhagavan tried to decline at first, but seeing their loving persistence, had to agree. Brushing his teeth with a neem twig and washing his face from the running water of the stream, he came in and sat down. By then the daily supply of goat milk also arrived and Bhagavan had a breakfast of dosai and coffee. “It is the delicious food served here that draws people here one after the other, I think!” he commented, giving me a meaningful look, and laughed heartily. We too then had our breakfast.

Permanent Stay by Mother’s *Samadhi*

After his breakfast of mudakkathan dosais Bhagavan rested for a while. At that time, Sadayappa Chettiar, a resident of Tiruvannamalai, happened to visit the nearby Kattu Draupati temple (he was the managing trustee of the temple). On coming to know that Bhagavan had come downhill, he at once rushed back home, packed up cooking provisions, and depositing them in a cart, drove back again to Mother’s samadhi. He implored Bhagavan to spend the day there and kindly accept his *bhiksha* (offering of food). It would help his aged sister who could not climb up the hill to have *darshan* of Bhagavan, he said. Bhagavan had to accede to this request.

Meanwhile, Ramakrishna Swami, having waited up at Skandasramam for Bhagavan to return, himself came down carrying Bhagavan’s change of attire, along with other devotees. That day turned out to be the inaugural day of Bhagavan’s move to Mother’s shrine, which later was to expand into the sprawling premises of the present day Ramanasramam! That very first bhiksha at the present ashram site was in fact an elaborate feast.

News spread through the town that Bhagavan was camping downhill and of the day’s bhiksha here. Nayana, instead of his daily visit to Skandashram, also arrived at the new venue. Other devotees congregated there. It was past six in the evening and Bhagavan could do nothing about it. By the time all the visitors from the town left, it was nightfall. Unable to return to Skandasramam at that hour, we spent the night there. Next morning, another devotee turned up with food to offer bhiksha for *that* day, so Bhagavan had to stay back that day too. The next day and the day after that turned out to be repetitions in succession. Bhagavan could not get away from these compulsions of devotion and love.

Someone had to be stationed at Skandasramam to safeguard the things there. No one undertook to go, for fear of staying there alone. Finally I was deputed for the task. Gopal Rao and I retreated uphill to stay at Skandasramam. Food was sent to us from down below. The bhiksha there kept continuing, through wholehearted offerings by devotee after devotee. Gopal Rao and I stayed for a week and then ran out of patience. We made our way down, telling ourselves that our duty was to be in Bhagavan's presence and not keeping watch over an uninhabited building. On seeing us Chinna Swami asked, "Why have you come away?" "We couldn't bear to be away from Bhagavan," we replied. No one could object to our reply, with Bhagavan himself taking up permanent residence downhill – as it eventually turned out. Some days later, some people who happened to go to Skandasramam returned and reported that the doors were all open and the things inside stolen away. We hastened up immediately and found the long plank used by Bhagavan and the clock gone. We brought down whatever still remained. Bhagavan said, "That is good. No more need for a guard up there!"

Bhagavan's taking up of residence at the Mother's samadhi, was primarily an act of grace and compassion. The difficulty of several aged devotees in trekking up to Skandasramam was solved. Easy access to his abode could be had by all now, young and old alike, to discover peace and tranquillity. It was at the end of November in 1922 that Bhagavan shifted to Mother's shrine. Earlier that month, Bhagavan, and us devotees, were still resident at Skandasramam during the *Kartikai Deepam* festival. Coming to settle downhill after that, we celebrated Bhagavan's *jayanti* (birthday) in the month of December as the inauguration ceremony of Sri Ramanasramam.

Bathing in the Pandava Holy Tank

During our early Ramanasramam days we used to rise at four in the morning and, toilet over, proceed with Bhagavan to bathe in the Pandava Holy Tank at the foothill. Knowing of our arrival there, Eeswara Swami and company too would arrive unfailingly, from the Moola Mantapam of Arunachaleswar temple where they were then residing. Bhagavan and Eeswara Swami would remain afloat in the water in *padmasana* posture. Seeing them we too would try practising it.

We used to experience severe cold during the winter months. Comforts like rooms or bedding were minimal during the early days. A



platform with a sheet spread on it and a pillow was all that Bhagavan had to sleep on. The rest of us had to be content with the woven fronds of coconut palm and a brick doing duty as pillow. We would all huddle on the floor to sleep close to Bhagavan's stone platform. A charcoal brazier would keep a fire going. When there was shortage of charcoal, we would peel dry bark off tamarind trees as substitute fuel. Bhagavan was a light sleeper and that too would only be brief. We too would spend sleepless nights thanks to the bitingly cold weather! The brazier would glow with livid fire. We would squat around it in Bhagavan's presence. Pearls of wisdom would drop forth from his lips in the quiet hours. Those were golden days which were never again to recur. When devotees arrived from outstation, offering them our spots, we would stay for the night at the *mantapam* opposite or in the nearby Kattu Draupati Amman temple and return at daybreak. In the summer we slept in the open, under the *peepal* tree.

A Repast of Assorted Greens

To tide over the times of rice shortage, we would go into the forest and forage for all kinds of greens. While stripping them free of veins and stalks, readying them to go into the cooking pot, Bhagavan would explain to us the nutritional and curative properties of each of those herbs. After readying the quantity required to fill a large vessel, we would cook it to his specifications. He would advise us to eat greens as our main meal, and rice as the side dish! It was nectar indeed, which we used to eat to the bellyful.

I wonder from where Bhagavan learnt all about the medicinal values of the various greens. From being a school student, he came straight here and lived as an ascetic. He did nothing except remaining steadfast in the Self. From where he acquired these diverse talents is an enigma. He did all household jobs with expertise – culinary skills, the stitching of leaf plates, the stringing of flowers, the making of pickles. Being *poorna vastu* (Perfect Being), there was nothing that Bhagavan did not know or could not do. We used to pluck leaves from trees and fetch a pile of them for stitching together into leaf plates. Stitching leaves was a woman's job and Echamma, her sister and other women and those who knew this art would sit together along with Bhagavan, as a work team. But Bhagavan's stitching would be

faster and neater, a marvel in craftsmanship, excelling that of the trained hands of the women.

Repeated *Giri-pradakshina*

Visitors arriving from outside Tiruvannamalai used to offer bhiksha to Bhagavan. Those were times when a mere five rupees was enough for a collective repast. We were few in number, and things did not cost much. Once the bhiksha was over, the sponsor-devotee would express a wish to go along with Bhagavan on giri-pradakshina. Acceding to their wish, Bhagavan would set out and we would all follow at a slow pace, meditating or chanting devotional hymns. Sometimes, by the time of our return it would be day break. Such was the joy of going with Bhagavan that we never used to get tired. The next day we would manage to catch a nap to make up for the sleepless night but Bhagavan would not get a chance to rest. There would be a stream of visiting devotees. That day another devotee would take his turn sponsoring bhiksha, and would in turn make a request for giri-pradakshina. Bhagavan would readily agree, not wanting to disappoint him. He would signal us not to let them know about the previous day's circuit. These outings used to go on sometimes for days in succession, Bhagavan forgoing sleep at night and during the day. But for us who were then youngsters, it was as easy and interesting as play.

The Traits of True Penance

At one time Ramakrishna Swami and I were both serving Bhagavan, but there wasn't much for two to do. We felt that it was not proper to take ashram food without doing justifiable work for it. So we used to go alternately by turns, one to *bhiksha* (begging) and *tapas* (meditation) while the other served Bhagavan eating with him. Ramakrishna's brother was sending him twenty-five rupees each month, which was then a substantial sum. Sowbakyam Ammal, a resident of the town, was serving food to sadhus charging a mere five rupees a month. Her twin objectives were serving food for sadhus and having *darshan* of Bhagavan. For my tenure outside the ashram, Ramakrishna Swami would pay her five rupees monthly to cover my meal cost and a similar amount to cover his own meal when it was his turn to go out. We would live on just one midday meal a day provided by the lady. She used to dispatch our food to Virupaksha Cave where we would be lodged.

During one of his turns off, Ramakrishna went to stay in Virupaksha Cave for a spell of meditation. After three days, he had a vision of a huge effulgence. Surprised and equally delighted, he wished for a vision of Kumbakonam town in that effulgence. He wanted to test if the phenomenon would endure. And lo! He did see that town in that brilliance. He next wished to see Ramanasramam at Kumbakonam, and that too appeared! He was immensely thrilled, believing that the effulgence was really Lord Arunachaleswara Himself, providing visions of all that he wished to see. He returned to the ashram and told us about it. We were greatly surprised. When it was reported to Bhagavan, he dryly commented, “Well! Well! Is that what penance is? Nice indeed! He goes to do penance, gets a vision of Kumbakonam, and in addition to it, that of Ramanasramam at Kumbakonam! Isn’t it great tapas! Let me now tell you what true tapas is! Tapas means making the mind rest in its source, in *atma-sphurana*. Seeing this or doing that are not stable states of abidance.” Bhagavan says the same thing in *Upadesa Undiyar* too:

Absorption in the Heart of Being whence we sprang,/Is the path
of action, of devotion,/Of union and of knowledge.

To know the Self is but to be the Self,/For It is non-dual. In
such knowledge/One abides as That.

Singular Devotion and the Significance of Obeisance

I once went on a pilgrimage to the Kovilur *mutt* (monastery). Sri Mahadeva Swami, who was the *mutt* head then, had earlier served as the head of the Isanya *mutt* at Tiruvannamalai, which was one of their branch *mutts*. At that time, he used to come visiting Bhagavan regularly. He would converse freely with all of us. Every Deepavali, he would send Bhagavan a bottle of bath oil, soap-nut powder, new loin cloth, etc. Even after shifting to Kovilur as head of the *mutt* there, he had left behind instructions to Sri Natesa Swami, his successor at Tiruvannamalai, to continue the practice.

Mahadeva Swami also gave us monetary help during the time of the construction of Skandasramam. Objections came from his headquarters for providing funds to an establishment not connected with their *mutt*. His reply was, “We and our *mutts* may come under jurisdictions and control. But Bhagavan and his state transcend all

such factional boundaries. We are indeed fortunate to be of service to him. Still, if I am not permitted to donate from the funds of our mutt, I shall bear the expense from my personal account.” Such was his devotion to Bhagavan.

After some days’ stay at the Kovilur mutt, when I returned to the ashram, Bhagavan, as was his wont, enquired with interest about my trip. I told him that Mahadeva Swami had been very cordial and had enquired after Bhagavan and the other residents of our ashram. I reported that Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar² and his entourage had come visiting while I was there. Bhagavan asked me what Chettiar did on arriving there. I said that, tying his *uttareeyam* (formal wear worn by dignitaries over their shoulder, a mark of their high social status) reverentially around his waist, he prostrated before the mutt head and received from him *prasad* (gift) of *vibhuti* (sacred ash). Bhagavan now asked, “Did you do likewise?” I faltered, and replied in the negative. When he questioned why, I said, “After getting the great fortune of offering obeisance to Bhagavan, how could I salute anyone else?” Giving me a meaningful look, Bhagavan said, “Ah! You venerate Bhagavan too well, don’t you? Smart indeed! It seems your Bhagavan is confined to this building, to the sofa here, to a five, six foot frame! He isn’t present anywhere else, is he? If your devotion is that exclusive, you have no business to go visiting any other holy premises. But if you do, you should follow the protocol there that tradition demands. Wherever, whomsoever you salute, if you invoke your favourite deity or guru while doing it, your obeisance is received by Him. That is the proper way.” The point made by Bhagavan went home. From then on, whoever I happened to salute, I would meditate on Bhagavan while doing it.

Protecting the Disciple Who Has Sought Refuge

Dandapani Swami became an ashram inmate and took charge of the kitchen some years after the ashram moved downhill. He used to prepare a different variety of *chutney* each day. He would grind it into a paste in the stone mortar, with Bhagavan assisting him, and at

² An industrialist, banker, educationist and philanthropist, and the founder of Annamalai University in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu.

times Bhagavan would do the grinding with Dandapani assisting.³ Permanent residents of the ashram were few, just seven or eight of us. So Bhagavan used to freely join in the kitchen chores – grinding, vegetable dicing and the like. Dandapani, an adherent of orthodox Brahmin traditions, would not permit non-Brahmins like me to do the grinding. As a result of doing the repeated daily grinding Bhagavan’s right small finger got blistered. We were distressed and appealed to Dandapani Swami to suspend for some days the making of dishes that needed grinding but he paid no heed. So I appealed to Bhagavan with an aching heart, “Please Bhagavan, no more grinding till your blisters heal. It would be irreverence on our part to let you do it and eat what has been prepared by you, enduring pain.” The next day Dandapani again went about preparing a chutney of sour greens which involved heavy grinding. We did not assist in the job. It was Bhagavan who did the laborious job of grinding that day too. While eating, I refused to be served that chutney and someone reported it to Bhagavan.

At the next meal, Bhagavan sent for me and asked cryptically, “May I eat? What do you say?” His question left me puzzled and he continued, “You see unless I do what others tell me to, they refuse to eat. I must obey their orders. Everyone who comes here is all meekness in the beginning. As the days go by they start bossing around, and want the Swami [Bhagavan] to dance to their tunes.” These words, tinged with sarcasm, pained me. Not stopping at that, in the following days too Bhagavan rubbed it in by asking, “May I have my bath? May I eat? May I go out?” It was more than I could bear. I expressed my mental anguish to Ramakrishna Swami, and said that I had decided to go on a trip to Tirupati to recover my mental composure. I decided to take the 6.30pm train and obtained Bhagavan’s permission to depart.

Past three thirty that afternoon Bhagavan, all of a sudden, started out on giri-pradakshina. Ramakrishna Swami suggested that I could join the pradakshina on my way to the railway station. I did so carrying the spare clothing required for my trip. That day Bhagavan walked very slowly, slower than his usual pace. I felt that running past Bhagavan would be discourteous and so fell behind. As we were

³ The traditional South Indian kitchen grinder requires two people to operate, one to twirl the heavy stone pestle, and the other to keep pushing the raw material to be ground into the stone mortar’s cavity.

crossing the Kubera Lingam shrine [some three kilometres short of the railway station], we saw my train at a distance, puffing past Tiruvannamalai station! Bhagavan pointed out, laughing, “Look there! There goes your train! Hurry up! Go flying and catch it!” The others too laughed out. Missing the train but feeling helpless, I remained silent and returned to the ashram along with the others.

That night after supper, Dandapani Swami reported to Bhagavan, “It seems he asked you not to do grinding work, and you retorted, ‘I am supposed to do whatever he bids.’ Upset by your remark, Kunju wished to set out to Tirupati to unwind himself. He now feels sorry for his insolence and seeks your forgiveness.” Bhagavan at once shot back, “I? Annoyed at him? He did no wrong. Seeing my blistered palm he could not bear to eat his food. What is there in this to cause me anger? I am angered so he wishes to take off to Tirupati! Very smart of him! Even our ashram food he eats without relish. He would add water to the curry and sauce and swallow our food as if it is bitter medicine. What would he get outside? What would he eat? Besides, his former mentor, Malayala Swami, taking his hands and putting them in mine, entrusted him to me, asking me to look after him always. Tomorrow if he comes and demands the whereabouts of his former disciple, am I not answerable? But this fellow wants to head off to Tirupati! To Tirupati indeed!” This light-hearted banter of Bhagavan at once made me happy and at ease. I realised that the whole episode was a drama enacted by Bhagavan to dispel my egocentric notion that I was rendering service to Bhagavan and taking care of him! When one takes refuge in Bhagavan, why feel befuddled or concerned about anything whatsoever, I reasoned.

Devotees’ Foolhardiness and Bhagavan’s Forbearance

Each year on Bhagavan’s *Jayanti* day we used to perform giri-pradakshina along with him. As Bhagavan had discontinued giri-pradikshina we could not bear to do it that jayanti day without him. We decided instead to trek to the peak of the hill the next morning. At five a.m., we hired four *coolies* to carry our food in advance and to wait for us at the Seven Springs midway. After saluting Bhagavan we departed. We were a group of about forty, including Ma Taleyarkhan S.S. Cohen and a few others who lived in the Bose Compound and

some outstation visitors. Having sent all of them up the mountain via Guhai Namasivayar shrine at the base of the hill, seven of us – myself, Muruganar, MunagalaVenkataramiah, Kalyana Sundaram Iyer from the book depot, Thompson, an English man, a friend of his who was a *zamindar*'s son, his bodyguard – began our ascent from the Pachai Amman temple on the opposite side of the hill.

It was our clandestine plan to seek out on our way the banyan tree mentioned by Bhagavan and to join the rest of the party at the hill top. Our first lap was to cover the three hill streams mentioned by Bhagavan. Starting at six we crossed the three streams by noon and reached a very steep spot. It was so sheer that neither the base nor the peak of the hill could be seen. We were stranded in limbo. Muruganar was missing! Controlling our panic, on closer observation we found him lying by a bush. We called out to him, when, raising himself with difficulty, he began to crawl like a baby on all fours. We queried, "What is this, Swami? Why do you crawl?" and his semi-conscious reply was "How else to walk?" Munagala was lying flat, breathless. Kalyana Sundaram's condition was awful. Thompson sat still, traumatized. His zamindar friend and the body guard began sobbing. The root cause of all this distress, yours truly, stood immobilized by shock!

I thought my end was nearing and began to weep, grieved that I was going to die without seeing Bhagavan's countenance again. On the other hand, even if I survived the ordeal, what if one of the others lost his life? How to face Bhagavan carrying the news? In that event, I would kill myself then and there. With these terrible possibilities crossing my mind, everything turned dark and, body atremble, I lost my senses. Till that day I had never asked for any boon from Bhagavan. But that day, in spite of myself, I began to pray with my mind, word and body, "Oh Bhagavan! Do forgive us and save us from the misfortune of dying without darshan of you!"

Almost at once I spotted at a distance a woodcutter cutting firewood, and called out to him. Taking us for forest guards, he was afraid to come near. I waved my ochre coloured clothing and shouted, "We are all ashram residents. Do not fear us. We shall pay you what you want. Do come!" He then approached us and asked, "Swamis! You can't go to the hill top from here. Where do you want to go?" We told him that we were headed for Seven Springs. Taking hold of our arms,

one by one, he made us leap back the way we had come, rescuing and reuniting us. A tiny rain cloud then appeared and drenched us, as if the heart of Bhagavan was showering grace on us. Invigorated by the refreshing rain drops we managed to reach Seven Springs.

The main party, from whom the seven of us had separated ourselves due to our ill-fated plot, had scaled the peak by morning and had returned to Seven Springs where, finishing their meal, they were waiting for us. We were a sight, blackened by the charred wild grass, clothing torn, and bodies bruised. Listening to our misadventure, they teased us, saying that it served us right. We had our meal, and only then remembered that we had all the while been carrying snacks – biscuits and curds – but in our distress had forgotten all about this. After resting for a while we came down to Virupaksha Cave, almost home.

The seven of us, bruised and blackened, dared not appear in that state before Bhagavan. We sent off the Thompson trio to their residence in the town, and likewise dispatched Taleyarkhan and company to their lodgings. The remaining four of us waited there until dark, then started out under cover of darkness, heading for Palakothu to have a bath first and make ourselves presentable before Bhagavan. However, Thompson's party was keen to first have darshan of Bhagavan, by whose grace alone their lives were saved, they felt. They hired a horse cart, reached the ashram, and, without being seen by Bhagavan, offered obeisance from outside the hall and then proceeded to their lodging. Munagala too did the same. Not knowing anything about this. I first finished my bath at Palakothu and by seven pm., went to Bhagavan and saluted him, wearing an expression of meek innocence. I got a jolt when Bhagavan asked, "After mischief mongering is over, you now come and stand in front of me! That zamindar boy, wearing a black makeup, ran off after saluting from outside the hall. Munagala, looking worse, did likewise. You now stand here, with a pose of innocence! What were you up to?"

I blurted out to Bhagavan all that took place, concluding, "We did not seek prior permission from Bhagavan, lest you forbid us to proceed. But we were amply 'rewarded' for our lapse." So saying I again saluted him. "Yes, I would certainly not have allowed you to go. All right. All right," he acquiesced. We took Bhagavan's 'all right' as his grant of pardon and felt relieved. ▲



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

16th August 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om: In this first chapter of *Maharshi's Gospel* Bhagavan implies that the actions our body and mind are destined to do will continue whether we attend to them or not. The reason why he implied this was to encourage us to attend only to ourself and not to be concerned about anything else (which is what he also implied in verse 31 of *Bhagavad Gita Saram*, which is his translation of *Bhagavad Gita* 9.22). However we should not infer from this that the body and mind and their actions are real or that they actually exist when we do not attend to them, because their appearance is just a dream, and things that appear in a dream seem to exist only when we are aware of them. This entire world is an imagination or mental fabrication (*kalpana*), so when our mind ceases to imagine or project things, they cease to exist.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

However this should be told only to those who are mature enough to accept it. For others it should be said that the world will continue unaffected if we attend to ourself. Whenever anyone asked Bhagavan whether they should give up their job or whether their family would be taken care of if they renounce, he would generally reply, 'Who asked you to renounce? Whatever work you are destined to do you will be made to do,' because by asking such questions they exposed that they were not yet ready to renounce.

When a devotee asked Bhagavan whether *brahmacharya* is necessary, what he meant by *brahmacharya* was celibacy, but Bhagavan replied, 'Celibacy is not necessary. If you abide in *brahman*, that is real *brahmacharya*'. If the devotee had been mature enough to be celibate, he would not have asked that question. But people ask such questions and then write books saying that Bhagavan said that *brahmacharya* and renunciation are not necessary for those who follow the path of *atma-vicara*. To understand Bhagavan's attitude regarding such matters, we should not ask questions but should carefully observe what he replies to questions asked by others. To understand his view is not easy unless one's mind is mature enough.

When I decided to resign my job, Janaki Mata came to know of my intention, so she asked Bhagavan whether I should do so, and he replied as usual saying that outward renunciation was not necessary, so for more than a year I had to wait. However when I finally decided to write my letter of resignation, I put it in a stamped but unsealed envelope and gave it to him, and he read it, put it back in the envelope and returned it to me without any comment.

From this I learnt that we should not mention what we intend to do even to our friends, but should just do it. If we act with the confidence that this entire life is just a dream and that what matters is only attaining self-knowledge, grace will take care of everything else. But until we are mature enough to have such confidence, working to earn a living will seem to be necessary.

19th August 1978

Sadhu Om: The *rishis* who were practising ritualistic actions in the Daruka Vana believed that there is no God except *karma* (action), so in the first verse of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan explains that since

karma is insentient, it cannot be God and cannot decide which action is to give which fruit when, so the way and time in which each action is to give fruit is determined only by God. In the second verse he explains that even after the fruit of an action has been experienced the seed of that action, which is the *vasana* (tendency) to do the same kind of action again, remains, thereby causing one to become ever more deeply immersed in the ocean of action, so *karma* (action) can never give liberation.

However in the third verse he explains that if we do action without any desire for its fruit but simply because of love for God, offering its fruit to him, that will purify our mind and show us the way to liberation. This means that karma done in such a spirit is not itself the path to liberation but can lead us to the path by purifying our mind, because only a purified mind will be able to grasp the fact that liberation cannot be achieved by any action but only by surrendering oneself entirely to God, and that one can surrender oneself only by turning within to vigilantly watch one's ego and thereby prevent it from arising to do any karma.

In verses 4 to 7 he then explains the relative efficacy of the different types of action that one can do for the love of God. In verse 4 he says that *puja*, *japa* and *dhyana* are respectively actions of body, speech and mind and that in this ascending order each is superior to the preceding one, meaning that they are increasingly effective in purifying our mind.

In verse 5 he says that if one considers all things to be forms of God and reveres them accordingly, that is good *puja* or worship of God.

In verse 6 he describes different types of vocal worship and *japa* (repetition of a name of God or a mantra sacred to him), saying that *japa* done in a loud voice is more effective (in purifying one's mind) than praising God by singing hymns, that *japa* whispered faintly within one's mouth is still more effective, and that *japa* done mentally is the most effective of all and is a type of *dhyana* or meditation.

And in verse 7 he says that steady and uninterrupted meditation on God, like the steady flow of clarified butter, is better than meditation that is frequently interrupted by other thoughts. This is because the more we love God the more our mind will be drawn to think only of him, and what purifies our mind is not the action itself but the love

with which we do it.

Up to verse 7 Bhagavan was discussing actions, which all involve an outward flow of our mind, but in verses 8 and 9 he shows us how we can divert our love for God to go beyond action to our natural state of just being, which is the state of complete self-surrender and hence the most perfect expression of love for God.

In verse 8 he says that rather than *anya-bhava* (meditation on God as something other than oneself) *ananya-bhava* (meditation on him as not other than oneself) is ‘the best of all’, meaning that it is the best of all practices of *bhakti* and of all forms of meditation, and in verse 9 he says that by the strength or intensity of such *ananya-bhava* being in *sat-bhava* (one’s natural state of being), which transcends meditation, is *para-bhakti tattva*, the true state of supreme devotion.

So long as we consider God to be something other than ourselves, when we meditate on him our attention moves away from ourselves towards our thought of him, and this outward movement of our mind is an action or karma.

On the other hand, when we consider him to be ourselves and meditate on him accordingly, we will no longer be meditating on a mere thought of him but only on ourselves, so our attention will not be moving away from ourselves but will just rest motionlessly on ourselves, its source, so this self-attentiveness is not an action or karma but our natural state of just being (*summa irupadu*).

This is why Bhagavan says in verse 9 that by the intensity and firmness of *ananya-bhava* we will remain in *sat-bhava*, and that by being so we will transcend all *bhavana*, imagination, meditation or thinking.

Thus what Bhagavan implies in these first nine verses is that though we cannot attain liberation by any action or karma, if our actions are motivated only by love of God and not by any desire for temporal gain, they will gradually purify our mind and enable us to understand that God is what shines in us as ‘I’, so the best way to meditate upon him is to meditate on nothing other than ourselves, and that if we meditate only on ourselves, all actions will cease, and thus we will subside back into the source from which we rose.

Therefore in verse 10 he says that subsiding and being in the source from which we rose (which is ourselves as we really are) is itself *karma*,

bhakti, *yoga* and *jnana*, meaning that it is the most perfect practice of all spiritual paths, which are generally classified in four categories, namely *karma yoga* (the practice of desireless action), *bhakti yoga* (the practice of devotion), *raja yoga* (the practice of disciplines such as breath-control as a means to control and subdue the mind) and *jnana yoga* (the practice of knowledge, which Bhagavan explained is only *atma-vicara* or self-investigation).

In verse 8 Bhagavan included a relative clause to describe *ananya-bhava* more fully, namely ‘*avan aham ahum*’, which means ‘in which he is I’, and which implies that since he (God) is ‘I’, by meditating on ‘I’ (which alone is *ananya*, ‘not other’ than oneself) one is meditating on him.

However, in Sanskrit he translated this clause as ‘*soham iti*’, which means ‘thus: he is I’, and because of this some people interpret ‘*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*’ to mean *soham bhavana*, meditation on the thought ‘he is I’. This interpretation is not correct, however, because *ananya-bhava* means ‘otherless meditation’ or ‘meditation on what is not other’, so it cannot mean meditation on the thought ‘he is I’, since any thought is something other than oneself.

Moreover, in verse 9 Bhagavan explains that by the strength or intensity of *ananya-bhava* one will be established in the state of being (*sat-bhava*), which he describes as *bhavanatita*, which means ‘transcending (or gone beyond) meditation’, and which therefore implies being beyond any kind of thinking, so from this we should infer that what he means by ‘*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*’ is not meditation on the thought ‘he is I’ (*soham bhavana*), because meditation on any thought is a mental activity, so like any other action it would tend to be self-perpetuating, as Bhagavan implies in verse 2.

In order to go beyond thinking our mind must subside, and since it rises, stands and flourishes by attending to anything other than itself, it will subside only by attending to itself, the one who rises to think anything.

When aspirants start to follow the path of *bhakti*, they generally do so with the idea that God is something other than oneself, so they worship, pray to and meditate on him as if he were another. However, since God is not other than ourself, we can never reach him so long as we consider him to be other, so we eventually need to be told that he

is actually just 'I', which is what Bhagavan refers to when he says in verse 8 '*avan aham ahum*', 'in which he is I'. However, when we are told that he is 'I', what we should infer is not that we should meditate on the idea 'he is I', but only that we should meditate on ourself alone.

As Bhagavan often used to say, why should we meditate on God as someone distant and unknown when in fact he always exists within us and is clearly known by us as 'I', our own Self? Since 'I' is our nearest and dearest and what we are always clearly aware of, the simplest way and most effective way to love God and to meditate on him is to love him and meditate on him only as 'I'. ▲

(To be continued)

Darshan

Upahar

She kept a steady watch by night and day,
pacing the ancient walls in constant hope;
searching the lost horizons of His advent
through sweet and dolorous seasons of the heart.
The universe was granted and forgotten;
the memory of His countenance her prayer
and secret fire, spiralling within.
She listened deep into the breathing void.

All came undone: time out of mind, she saw
her footsteps flowing back with sudden joy
into the inmost chamber of the presence,
already hers; and all creation laughed.
A great love bowed her down, and, looking up,
she lost all bearings in His endless eyes.

KEYWORD

Manonasa

JOHN GRIMES

A devotee of Bhagavan Ramana remarked that the *Yoga Vasishtham* says that the *chitta* (mind) of a *jivanmukta* is *achala* (unmoving /unchanging).¹ Bhagavan replied, “So it is. *Achala chitta* (unmoving [unchanging] mind) is the same as *shuddha manas* (pure mind). The Jnani’s *manas* is said to be *shuddha manas*. The *Yoga Vasishtha* also says that Brahman is no other than the Jnani’s mind. So Brahman is *shuddha manas* only.”²

In other words, *śuddha mānas* is a synonym for Brahman, the Self, *svarupa jnana*, etc. In the sacred literature various terms have been employed for the destruction of the mind or *manōnāśa*: *śuddha mānas* (pure mind), *akhandakara vritti* (unbroken experience), *prajna* (true knowledge), *citta vritti nirodha* (cessation of the mind’s fluctuations) etc.; that is, the state of mind of the jnani.

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 16-09-1938. Talk§513.

² *Ibid.*

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. in Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

There was a devotee who remarked to Sri Ramana that *manonasha* (destruction of the mind) implied that one could no longer function and therefore was frightening. Sri Ramana replied, “Many fear that with the destruction of the mind, they themselves will cease to exist. But *manonasha* is nothing to be feared. What we conceive of now as mind is only a combination of *rajas* and *tamas*. By their elimination, the mind becomes *shuddha* (pure). Such a mind is one’s own real nature (*svarupa*). The activities of one whose mind has been purified by Self-attention will continue to be done. He will even appear to do the work with greater attention and involvement. Yet he is unaffected and always stays in the felicity of non-dual bliss.”³

For many devotees and seekers of the Self there seems to be a lot of confusion about the exact meaning of the term ‘*manonasha*’. It is usually translated into English as “the destruction or annihilation of the mind.” Does this mean that the entire mind is destroyed or only the egotistical (impure) mind? This confusion arises because of the above quote stating that there is a pure mind as well as an impure mind. Does this imply that the destruction of the entire mind is freedom or does it mean only the destruction of the impure mind?

Sri Ramana gave an analogy for the phenomenon of *manonasha*.⁴ A person has a bull that is kept in a stable. If the door to the stable is left open, the bull will wander out looking for food. Sometimes it finds food but more often finds trouble in the cultivated fields. The owners of these fields beat it with sticks and throw stones at it to chase it away. Still, the bull comes back again and again, suffering repeatedly because it doesn’t understand the notion of field boundaries. The bull’s habit is to look for food. Ramana said that the bull is the mind, the stable is the Heart from whence it arises and to where it returns, and the grazing in the fields represents the mind’s painful addiction to seeking pleasure in outside objects.

Sri Ramana said that generally mind-control techniques forcibly restrain the bull to stop moving around, but they don’t do anything about the bull’s fundamental desire to wander and get itself into trouble. A person can tie up the mind temporarily with various spiritual

³ Godman, D., *The Power of the Presence*, vol. 2, p. 234.

⁴ Op.cit., Talks, 22.10.1938, §563 and 01.07.1936, §220.

techniques but when these restraints are loosened, the mind just wanders off again, becoming involved in more mischief, suffering again. The bull can be tied up, but it won't like it. All one achieves is an angry bull.

Lord Ramana likened self-enquiry to holding a bunch of fresh grass under the bull's nose. As the bull approaches the grass, if one moves in the direction of the stable door, the bull will follow. In this way one can lead the bull back into the stable. It will voluntarily follow because it wants the pleasure of eating the grass that one is holding in front of it. Once it is inside the stable, one then allows it to eat the grass that is always stored there. The door of the stable is always left open and the bull is free to leave and to roam about at any time. There is no punishment or restraint. The bull will still go out repeatedly because it is its nature to wander about in search of food. And each time the bull goes out, it will suffer.

Thus, every time one notices that one's bull has wandered out, one should tempt it back into its stable with the same technique. One should not try to force it into submission. Sooner or later, even the stupidest and wildest of bulls will understand that there is no point wandering around outside because this *always* leads to suffering and punishments. Even though the stable door always stays open, the bull will eventually learn to stay inside the stable and to enjoy the food that is always there.

This process of conquering the bull Sri Ramana called self-enquiry. Whenever one finds the mind wandering around in external objects and sense perceptions, one should take it back to its stable, which is the Heart, the source from which it rises and to which it returns. In that place it can enjoy the peace and bliss of the Self. When it wanders around outside, looking for pleasure and happiness, it just gets into trouble, but when it stays at home in the Heart, it enjoys peace and silence. Eventually, even though the stable door is always left open, the mind will choose to stay at home and will not wander about any more.

Now, what concerns us is that for Self-realisation, a permanent Self-abiding, the mind must be brought under conscious control. As long as the bull (the mind) is alive, and the door is still open, there is always the possibility that the bull will stray. However, if the bull is well trained, it can never be tempted outside again. Similar is the

case when the mind goes voluntarily into the Heart and stays there, it feels no urge whatsoever to jump out again, the mind no longer identifies with the outside world. The Self then destroys it, and the Self alone remains.

Lord Ramana said that the Self can only destroy the mind when the mind no longer has any tendency to move outwards. While those outward-moving tendencies are still present, even in a latent form, the mind will always be too strong for the Self to dissolve it completely. It is for this reason that Sri Ramana's Self-enquiry works and a forcible restraint doesn't. A yogi can keep the mind restrained for eons but such a mind will never be consumed by the Self. So long as desires, samskaras, vasanas are present, the mind will eventually wander out.

Ultimately, it is the grace or power of the Self that eliminates the final vestiges of the desire-free mind. The mind cannot eliminate itself, but it can offer itself up as a sacrifice to the Self. Through effort, through enquiry, one can take the mind back to the Self and keep it there in a desire-free state. However, the mind can't do anything more than that. In that final moment it is the power of the Self within that pulls the last remains of the mind back into itself and eliminates it completely.

Self-realisation (*sahaja-samadhi*) happens when the (egotistical) mind actually 'dies' irreversibly in the Self. The idea of memories and a dead mind seem contradictory. If there is no mind, then how do memories survive? This appears impossible for the ordinary mind of an individual. However, according to Sri Ramana, a dead mind is one in which there is no thinker of thoughts, no perceiver of perceptions, no rememberer of memories. The thoughts, the perceptions and the memories can still be there, but there is no one who believes, 'I am remembering this incident,' and so on. These thoughts and memories can exist quite happily in the Self, but what is completely absent is the belief that there is a person who experiences or owns them.

In a dead mind mental activity may still continue, but there is now no ego who seizes upon an idea or perception. This is the difference between a quiet mind and no mind at all. When the mind is still and quiet, a person who is 'still there' may attach herself or himself to a memory, but when there is no mind at all, when the mind is dead, the idea that there is a person who might *identify with* an object of thought

has been permanently eradicated. That is why Sri Ramana called it a 'dead mind' or a 'destroyed mind'. It is a state in which the possibility of identification with thoughts or ideas has been eradicated totally.

Sri Ramana declared that the mind of an enlightened person is dead. However, jnanis seem to think, to remember, in just the same way that ordinary people do. Thus, mustn't jnanis have a mind to perform these tasks? They may not be attached to their minds, but these minds must still be there, otherwise they couldn't function in the world. This is our dilemma. This misconception arises because people are not able to conceive how anyone can function, take decisions, and so on without a mind. Because ordinary people continuously use their mind, they naturally assume that a jnani must do likewise.

People think they are persons inhabiting bodies and possessing minds. So when they look at a sage they automatically assume that he too is a person functioning through a body and possessing a mind. The sage doesn't see himself that way at all. He knows that the Self alone exists. He knows that all the actions and words that arise in his body come from the Self alone. He doesn't make the mistake of attributing them to an imaginary intermediary entity called 'mind'. In this mind-free state, no one is organising mental information; no one is deciding what to do next. The Self merely prompts the body to do or say whatever needs to be done or said in that moment.

When you listen to the words of a sage, you are not listening to words that come from a mind; you are listening to words that come directly from the Self. In his written works Bhagavan uses the term manonasa to describe the state of liberation. It means, quite unequivocally, 'destroyed mind.' The mind, according to Sri Ramana, is just a wrong idea, a mistaken belief. It comes into existence when the 'I'-thought, the sense of individuality, claims ownership of all the thoughts and perceptions that the brain processes. When, through Self-enquiry, the mind is dissolved in its source, there is an understanding that the mind never really existed, that it was just an erroneous idea that was believed in simply because its true nature and origin were never properly investigated.

Sri Ramana sometimes compared the mind to a gatecrasher at a wedding who causes trouble and gets away with it because the bride's party thinks he is with the bridegroom and vice versa. The mind

doesn't belong to either the Self or the body. It's just an interloper that causes trouble because we never take the trouble to find out where it has come from. When we make that investigation, mind, like the troublesome wedding guest, just melts away and disappears.

Bhagavan said, "Of course we are employing the mind. It is well known and admitted that only with the help of the mind, the mind has to be killed. But instead of setting about saying there is a mind, and I want to kill it, you begin to seek the source of the mind, and you find the mind does not exist at all. The mind, turned outwards, results in thoughts and objects. Turned inwards, it becomes itself the Self. Such a mind is sometimes called *arupa manas* or *suddha manas*."⁵

Sri Ramana said, "Sadhakas (seekers) rarely understand the difference between this temporary stilling of the mind (*manolaya*) and permanent destruction of thoughts (*manonasha*). In *manolaya* there is temporary subsidence of thought-waves, and, though this temporary period may even last for a thousand years, thoughts, which are thus temporarily stilled, rise up as soon as the *manolaya* ceases. One must, therefore, watch one's spiritual progress carefully. One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought: the moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness and enquire within as to who it is who experiences this stillness. While not allowing any thoughts to intrude, he must not, at the same time, be overtaken by this deep sleep (*yoga nidra*) or Self-hypnotism. Though this is a sign of progress towards the goal, yet it is also the point where the divergence between the road to salvation and *yoga nidra* takes place. The easy way, the direct way, the shortest cut to salvation is the Enquiry method. By such enquiry, you will drive the thought force deeper till it reaches its source and merges therein. It is then that you will have the response from within and find that you rest there, destroying all thoughts, once and for all."⁶ ▲

⁵ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 8-11-45 Morning.

⁶ Swarnagiri, Ramanananda, *Crumbs From His Table*, Chapter 8, 'Control Of Mind Vs. Destruction Of Mind'.

Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verses 34 to 36

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 34

For a person of average intelligence, in the world, there is a single family, consisting of wife, children and relatives. For a person of great learning, there is not one, but a great multitude of families consisting of books in his mind, which hinder the practice of yoga. Know this.

Commentary

This verse is a sharp comment on the 'learned men', who flaunt their vast learning. Samsara consists of the multitude of thoughts arising from ego-sense. For a common man of limited learning, the number of thoughts floating in his mind is very small, consisting of his concern for his own body and his family. But in the case of a man of vast learning, every book he has studied gets added to his 'family' and his mind gets very densely populated with families consisting of the thoughts arising out of such studies. Such a great family of bookish knowledge becomes a great obstacle to his pursuit of self-enquiry.

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

The ego, instead of getting attenuated, with such bookish study, fattens itself more and more, fed by conceit and adulation.

Jnana comes only with the elimination of ego. Textual knowledge, on the contrary, strengthens the ego and thus becomes a great obstacle to enlightenment because, like the camel finding taste in its own blood when it chews thorny bushes, the mind gets constantly engaged in the pursuit of sastric texts and relishes vainglorious argument. What is required is not research but to find out who is the searcher. The learned man, soaked in the pride of his learning, is engaged in verbal arguments displaying his own erudition and eager to defeat others. Bhagavan castigates this acquisition of useless textual knowledge as acquiring a 'big family'. All the quarrels and ego clashes one finds in families are very much present in the family of books.

Saint Thayumanavar, in his *Siddhar Ganam*, verse 10, declares, "Only those who have not delved deep into bookish lore are good people. I, with my vast learning, am spending my time only in finding counter arguments to all the statements made by other learned people. My whole life is getting spent only in futile *pūrvā-pakṣas*."¹

Kannudaya Vallalar in his *Ozhivil Odukkam* also declares that *sivanubhavam* is the experience of the Lord bestowed by the Grace of a jnani, not by the grinding routine of knowledge acquisition. The experience of those who spend their time in textual lore, without qualifying themselves to become vessels to receive Grace is like that of the pestle that grinds what is in the mortar, without knowing its taste. Such a man is caught in the complex web of his own learning.

Bhagavan says, "When a man scorched by the sun becomes cooled by taking bath in a mirage or when one succeeds in cooking on a painting of fire, then one can attain liberation through theoretical knowledge!"²

For the learned man to escape from samsara, there is only one way – namely, to start on the self-enquiry , 'Who am I?' If he does not do this, all his knowledge is in vain says Bhagavan in the next verse.

¹ *Purva paksha* is the technique whereby a philosopher first argues from the standpoint of the opposing argument to test the validity of his understanding of the opposing position. It was employed by Adi Sankara in reestablishing the *Sanatana Dharma*.

² *Ramana Paravidyopanishad*, Verse 54.

Verse 35

What is the use of their mastery of worldly knowledge for those who do not aspire to wipe out the writ of Fate, if they do not enquire as to whence they were born and dive deep within to find their source? What else are those men, who parade their repertoire of knowledge, mere gramophones which mechanically reproduce the sounds they have received and recorded?

Commentary

The ego of the learned man often arises in the form ‘I am a learned man of letters’. This takes for granted the authenticity of the ego-sense, which is in the form of the ‘I’. What this ‘I’ is he does not know. If he realises the fact of his ignorance and seeks to efface that ignorance by enquiry into the ‘I’, then he can become free from the fate that pursues him all the time.

If he does not do so, Bhagavan asks what then is the difference between him and a gramophone? The gramophone or tape-recorder repeats profound words but is not itself profited by doing so. Bhagavan asks the eloquent question “O Arunachala! Who else are these men but mere gramophones which receive, record and reproduce sounds?”³

As long as we seek enlightenment in outside sources like books and not within our own hearts, the knowledge so strenuously acquired is only like a recording stored in a machine. Such knowledge is of little use to the seeker; it only adds to his ego.

We are reminded of the description of the universal Mother in *Lalitha Sahasranamam*:

Antarmukha samaradya, bahirmukha sudurlabha.

(For those who seek the Self within, it is very easily attained. For those who seek it outside, it is quite impossible to be attained.)

There is the beautiful incident of Bhagavan writing a verse to illustrate this. When Somasundara Swami, a resident devotee, requested Bhagavan to write an *aksharam* (a letter) in his notebook, Bhagavan wrote the verse:

³ *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, Verse 35.

*Ekam aksharam hr̥di nirantaram
Bhasate svayam likhyate katham*

It means: “The *Askshara*, the Eternal One, shines resplendent in the Heart of everyone as the ‘I-I’. You have asked me to write an aksharam (letter). Who can ever write this letter?

Bhagavan is punning on the meaning of the word *Aksharam* which means, in Sanskrit both ‘letter’ and ‘eternal’. The Tamil translation of this sloka by Bhagavan reads thus:

“That source of every sound that thou desirest in thy notebook,
Shines resplendent in the Heart forever.
Who can put it into writing?”⁴

Verse 36

The unlettered ones are easily redeemed, not the learned scholars whose egos have not been eliminated by the spiritual quest. The not-so-learned ones are saved from the vicious grasp of the possessing demon of pride; they are saved from the pangs of verbal and mental efforts; they do not go about seeking fame and rewards. Know that the unlettered ones have escaped not just from one evil, but from many.

Commentary

Pride, which is an exaggerated notion of oneself, is an outcome of bloated ego, which continuously postpones the day of its own extinction. It is ironic that the learned man’s pride is more devastating than that of an illiterate man. The scholar who falls victim to his pride, is in many ways far less fortunate than the common man. The latter is more fortunate because he escapes many evils that the learned man is prone to. Some of these evils are set forth in this verse. Learning does not lead to happiness, either here or in other worlds.

It is to be noted that Bhagavan is not condemning studies of scriptures *per se*. He says that learning that is not motivated by the higher goal of spiritual enlightenment is to be condemned as it leads to many problems. It makes one’s pride swell. In constant pursuit of fame and fortune, he becomes restless and distressed. He is constantly

⁴ *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, see ‘Nine Stray Verses’.

propelled to hunt for glory and wealth. In many ways, an illiterate man is more blessed than the learned man whose erudition has not resulted in humility and tranquillity, but contributes to the heightening of his ego, not its extinction.

Bhagavan was always absolutely humble despite being the very embodiment of Cosmic Consciousness. We shall give but one instance. Once during the Deepam festival, there was a very heavy downpour. Thousands of villagers, who had come barefoot to the town temple, also came to seek Bhagavan's blessings. The Ashram authorities feared that with their slush-covered feet, the visiting villagers would make Bhagavan's Hall and his holy feet dirty. So they moved the wooden railings before Bhagavan's sofa a few feet away, so that the villagers would not be able to come near him and touch his feet but only worship him from a distance. On seeing this Bhagavan did not utter a word. Instead he got down from the sofa and sat near the railing so that the villagers could get close access to him. On seeing this, the ashram authorities exclaimed: "Why do you allow them to soil your place and feet. They can very well have your darshan from a distance." Bhagavan said, "No, you got it all wrong. They are not coming here to have my darshan. They are all the living representations of Arunachala. They are coming here so that I can have their darshan." This is the pinnacle of humility.

Muruganar beautifully portrays the play of humility in Divinity:

"Flimsy straw floats high atop
The flood, while to the bottom
Sinks the heavy pearl.
Men in the world are high or low
By what they are
Not by where they are."⁵

The next verse shows how even the adepts who employ their erudition to become free from bondages would slip and fall from their pursuit by becoming victims of flattery. ▲

(To be continued)

⁵ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 499, tr. Prof. K. Swaminathan.



Sri Poondi Swami, circa 1974, showing Chinmudra (sign of gnosis)

Eighteen Days with Sri Poondi Swami

RAM BROWN CROWELL

No reason can be given for the nature of god, because that nature
is the ground of rationality. — Alfred North Whitehead

In November 1976, I had the rare good fortune of staying eighteen days in the presence of Sri Poondi Swami, the legendary *avadhūta* and *ajagarabhāvin*, who remained unmoving for eighteen years before his *mahasamadhi* in 1978, now almost forty years ago. There will be few left alive who saw the Master then, fewer still who have left a record of meeting him in English, and none who stayed so long in his company. Accordingly, much that is related here is not found elsewhere. Therefore, I feel duty-bound to record my account to venerate the Master's memory before time forever removes the

Ram Brown Crowell graduated from Syracuse University in 1968 with honours in English and Philosophy. After doctoral work in Classical Greek & Latin at Columbia University, he studied Sanskrit and Hathayoga at Ananda Ashram in Monroe, N.Y. under Dr. R.S. Mishra, for two years before travelling overland to India in 1974, where he lived as a sadhu for five years and visited many masters. He departed in 1983 for the West. In 1991 he returned to India with his wife, Linda S. Bonner (Bhakti). He met his guru, Sri Sarath Babuji, in Shirdi, in 1998, and remained at his feet until his *mahasamadhi* in 2010. Since 2005 he has resided in Tiruvannamalai. He may be contacted at <ram@saimail.com>.

possibility. I am grateful to the *Mountain Path* for providing the most suitable venue, and emphasize that I write as one humble recipient out of many thousands who were blessed by the Master's grace.

I heard of Poondi Swami long before I met him from numerous Indian saints and sādhus, but never from Westerners, as it seemed few had ever met him. This corresponds with what I was told when I left, that I had stayed the longest of any foreigner up to then.

Avadhūta comes from the Sanskrit prefix 'ava' meaning 'away, down, off'; 'dhūta' is an adjective meaning 'shaken (off), removed, abandoned, deserted'. An *avadhūta* is one who has 'cast off' his body consciousness and worldly conventions, and wanders homeless, alone, often naked (*digambar*), over the world. He belongs to the highest class of ascetics called *Paramahānsas* or *Digambaras* ('sky-clad'), who are freed-in-life (*jīvanmukta*) and continue in liberation through *laya* (mergence) or *yoga* (union). They are self-reliant, requiring nothing from the world or society. They may not even beg for food, but live on leaves and herbs of forests as Bhagavan Ramana himself did during his early years on the hill.

Ajagarabhāva ('python-mood') is the yogic term for an *avadhūta* who remains unmoving for long periods; their historical incidence is very rare. 'Ajagara' means 'unmoving' in Sanskrit (*a-jagara*), and 'python' in Hindi; 'bhāva' means 'mood' in both languages; the term acquires its aptness because a python can live for months without food, being content to wait until its prey comes to it. In the whole spectrum of ascetic phenomena perhaps nothing fascinates so universally as the phenomenon of immobility, no doubt because we intuit it is not humanly possible to remain unmoving for days together without some kind of divine assistance. It is clearly superhuman, so some kind of superhuman aid is needed to do it. When this power is combined with *jīvanmukti* and various siddhis, as with Poondi Swami, the effect is irresistible. To be in his company was to experience the vibratory field of his *sannidhi* (presence) and its vacuum-esque, mind-numbing power, with concomitant experience of deep peace and security.¹

¹ Sri Babuji observes that Shirdi Sai Baba's guru seems also to have been an *ajagarabhāvin*. Cf. *Shri Sai Baba* by Swami Sai Sharan Anand, Tr. V.B. Kher (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1998), p.22; and (in more detail) his *Shri Sai the Superman* (Shirdi: Sai Baba Sansthan, 5e 1998), pp.16-17, where his immobility is clearly stated.



Sri Poondi Swami – Early Days (pre-1957)

I first heard of Poondi Swami from Sri Pada Baba, known as ‘Sri Padji’, in Brindavan, in April 1975, when I was fortunate to stay at Jai Singh Ghera, the ancestral home of Srivatsa Goswami, whose father, Purushottam Maharaj, was a distinguished *ācārya* of Bengali Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism (*achintya-bhedābheda-vāda*). In their beautiful garden saints and sadhus could hold satsang in privacy, and there one moonlit night I had darshan of Sri Padji. He told me that once when travelling in South India he was passing the night on Arunachala when suddenly a beacon of white light shone in the distance towards Kalasapakkam. Coming down from the mountain, he had followed the light until he found it emanating diamond-like from the body of Poondi Swami! Sri Padji was reputed to be a great adept so his story made a deep impression.

At this time, also at Jai Singh Ghera, I met a young Tamil sadhu known as ‘Siva Baba’, a *brahmachārī* of the Giri order from Jyotir Math in Badrinath, who was on pilgrimage to holy places since his guru’s *mahasamadhi* some months before. He befriended me and allowed me to travel with him over the next two years, doing yatra (pilgrimage) on the sadhu circuit through the holy places and byways of Hindustan. I learned how to live in remote areas by carrying my own food or live on *prasād* left over from temple pujas, sleeping inside *dharamsalas* or outside in gardens or on temple *maṇḍapams* or *ghats*. Baba also taught me how to navigate the sadhu code of conduct governing behaviour at temples, ashrams and holy places (*tīrthas*), which was helpful to me later in Kalasapakkam.

Siva Baba’s Guru was Sri Gnanananda Giri of Tirukoilur, the great *Jñāni* and *Siddha* (Tamil *Cittar*), who possessed all eight major powers (*aṣṭa-mahā-siddhis*); Baba had once watched him disappear “body too” before his eyes into mist! He was also an adept in *rasāyana* (Siddha Alchemy) who had mastered the *kaya kalpa* (body immortality)²

(cont.) Swami Sai Sharan’s testimony came directly from Sai Baba. Scholarly mention of *ajagarabhāva* occurs in *Samnyāsa Upaniśads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*. Translated with Introduction by Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.104.

² An extraordinary account of this secret science occurs in *Maharaj: A Biography of Shriman Tapsviji Maharaj, a Mahatma Who Lived For 185 Years*, by T.S. Anantha Murthy (San Rafael, California: Dawn Horse Press, 1986). Unfortunately, it is now out of print and very rare.

through which he extended his lifespan to 160 years, before taking *mahasamadhi* in January 1974. Baba said Gnanananda often spoke of Sri Poondi Swami, praising him as “Topmost of the Top”, and had sent him several times for his darshan in Kalasapakkam.

Over the next year with Siva Baba I had darshan of many masters not yet known in the West – Sri Anandamayi Ma (in Rajpur and Kankal), Sai Baba (in Samadhi Mandir) and of Choṭani Baba in Shirdi, Sri Godavari Ma in Sakori, and Mummdivaram Balayogi, also an *ajagarabhāvin* sitting near Rajahmundri, in Andhra Pradesh, whose body glistened like gold. Baba then took me to see Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, widely respected throughout India as a great *tapasvin* and *jīvanmukta*. A great admirer of Sri Bhagavan, he had also often visited Poondi Swami, about whom he is said to have remarked, when asked about the latter’s status, “If you think of saints like lightbulbs, then he is the transmitter behind giving them current.”³ Considering the Sankaracharya’s stature as virtually the Pope of orthodox Hinduism, there could be no higher seal of approval.

By April 1976 my funds were running low and I had to stop travelling. Reluctantly, I parted from Baba and accepted a friend’s invitation to stay at the Theosophical Society in Adyar until I could make further arrangements. One night at a dinner given by the President in his quarters at the Society, I met a Swami from Sringeri Sarada Pitha named Hamsananda Saraswati who had a double M.A. in Sanskrit and English from the University of Madras, and was an adept in *Cittavaiṭṭiyam* (Siddha Vaidya), the Siddha system of medicine native to Tamil Nadu. It traces its origin traditionally to Agastya (*Akattiyar*), and the works on worship, medicine and alchemy ascribed to him. It is held to be *sui generis*, not derived from Ayurveda. In contrast to Ayurveda’s use of herbs and organic compounds, it makes more use of salts, metals, mineral poisons, and inorganic elements such as mercury, sulphur, gold, copper and iron, though herbs are not excluded. Alchemy in Siddha medicine has a soteriological function, and uses the occult correspondence between

³ This compliment was repaid by Sri Poondi Swami using the same metaphor according to Bharanidharan, *Six Mystics of India* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1996), p.207.

matter and man's subtle psycho-physical bodies to attain *jīvanmukti*. Hamsa was an adept in *rasavidyā* who, after many failures, had finally succeeded in transforming base metal into gold. When I asked him if he could show me, he said he had been compelled to give up the practice as the tiny amount of gold it produced was not worth enough at current prices to recover the cost of making it. How far his psycho-alchemical interests had taken him became clearer later in his connection with Poondi Swami.

Hamsa was ardently devoted to Poondi Swami, with whom he had a long and intimate relationship, and whom he considered his *anugraha guru*, one who teaches just by sheer grace. When Hamsa heard I wanted to visit him, he graciously offered to accompany me and act as my guide. This was fortunate because without his knowledge, assistance, and skills as a translator, much of my visit would not have been possible. By this time my remittance had come and I was again free to travel. We decided to leave Adyar for Poondi in the first week of November 1976.

I said good-bye to my hosts and left by bus with Swami Hamsananda for Kalasapakkam, the tiny agricultural hamlet about 30 kms from Tiruvannamalai, where Poondi Swami was living. Here we put up in the *dharamśāla* (which is still to be seen), across the street from where Poondi Swami was sitting, which was actually the local bus stop. The village consisted then of little more than about twenty small, tiled houses lining both sides of a single-lane country road running alongside the Cheyyar (Seyyar) river basin. It was an extremely remote, rustic place, with no shops, eating places, bathrooms, indoor plumbing or electricity. There were only two wells and the water in the biggest was not potable when I was there. When the sun went down there was only candlelight. Locally, Poondi Swami was called 'Poondi Mahan', 'Poondi Deva', 'the Master', or 'Attru Swamigal' (River Swami).⁴

⁴ I heard he was also called 'Somrat Maharaj' (King of the Soma drinkers), an obscure reference, I believe, to *Uttara* (higher) *Gītā* (v.34), ascribed to Gauḍapāda, Śāṅkara's preceptor, and dear to Advaitins, that runs, *Yogāmrtarasam pītvā/vāyubhakṣaḥ sadā sukḥī*, meaning, 'Having drunk the nectar-juice [Soma] of yoga, the Wind-eater (is) ever happy', applied to Poondi Swami since he seemed to live only on air. See *Uttara Gita, with translation of its commentary by Sri Gaudapada*, by V. Srinivasan (Madras: The Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, n.d.), verse 34, p.30.

The Master sat a few feet back from the roadside in a small, tiled house with two *pyals* (verandahs) on either side; the right one was a square, four by four feet; the left one where Swami sat was rectangular, two feet wide by four feet long. Only remains of the right *pyal* now exist, where a *mūrti* of Swami has been installed. Next to it was a small room which functioned as a godown during Master's time. It had a door opening on his left where he tossed everything he received from visitors. Since he seldom returned what was offered, it was filled to the rafters with old garlands, fruits, plantain leaves, cigarette packets, match boxes, bits of paper and leftovers, but strangely enough, there was no bad smell, nothing rotted or decayed, and I saw no ants or flies. No one dared to touch or remove anything without his permission. Anything accepted by the Master appeared to remain fresh indefinitely.

Two wooden stakes about four feet high and a yard apart were set in the ground about eight feet in front of the Master, connected at waist level by a wooden crossbar; from here one could stand and take darshan during formal times set for visitors, morning and evening. At other times, when the Master was not in 'yoga' or '*niṣṭha*', explained below, one could approach him directly to give an offering and say something or touch his feet. Cats and dogs slept peacefully near him, enmity forgotten. Cats were especially drawn to him and often curled in his lap, as can be seen in many photos, and were constantly frisking about or sleeping blissfully at his feet. Sparrows flew in and out, settling in his hair, which he kept in a huge *jati* (matted hair) wrapped around his head like Lord Siva's, whom indeed he resembled in every way, with long dreadlocks falling down his shoulders. There was a regal bearing about him which some thought meant he had been in the army long before. I've seen pigeons alight on his palm and remain motionless until it was moved again. While I was with him the Master was served by two devoted attendants, Chimta Swami and a former tailor named Subramaniam, one of whom was always at his side.

When I was there, Subramaniam Swami brought food to the Master mornings and evenings, but I was told the Master had often refused to eat for long periods, and until three years before he had let none near him. One never knew what he might do next, or whether he might stop eating or speaking, and if so, when he might start again. His ways were mysterious and unpredictable; sometimes he would talk freely

when approached if he was in the mood, replying directly, sometimes with ‘hmmm’ or some oblique, cryptic remark, or saying “*Nalladu, poi-tu varain*” (“Good, go and come.”). But much of the time he kept a stoic silence, looking indifferently upon whoever came before him, whether the visitor be familiar or new. If he was not inclined to give *vibhūti* (sacred ash) or *prasād* it was impossible to get it from him, no matter how hard one begged or tried.

He never asked for food; when it was brought he would eat only if spoon-fed, like a child; sometimes he refused it outright. He sat through the day and never seemed to sleep at night, but remained awake in *niṣṭhā*,⁵ gazing into space, or leaning on a wall cushion until Subramaniam prevailed upon him to recline on the ledge beside him for a few hours. Then a curtain was let down concealing him from frontal view, although one could see around it from the side. Often it was reported next day he’d been seen that night on a nearby riverbank or spotted in a town far away; such bilocation reports were routine.

Swamiji’s morning began typically at 4 am. Bharanidharan’s account describes well what I observed: “We heard the Swamiyar cracking his fingers. Soon afterwards, the boy from the tea-shop arrived with a cup of hot tea, calling out ‘Swami!’ The Swamiyar sat up immediately. After he finished drinking the tea, he coughed noisily. Subramaniam went up to the Swamiyar, wiped his face with a piece of wet cloth, changed his shirt, smeared his forehead with *vibhūti*, applied *chandan* (sandal paste) and *kumkum* (sacred red powder) between his eyebrows, garlanded him, removed the curtain and performed his usual *pūjā*. Those who were standing around and the people who had arrived by the first bus offered their worship. The Swamiyar had opened his ‘shop’ for the day. The lucky ones would benefit by stopping there and getting blessed.”⁶

In form, he was a giant of a man, nearly seven feet tall, with penetrating eyes, an unkempt look, and a totally unfathomable, unpredictable manner, with six toes on his left foot (faithfully

⁵ *Niṣṭhā* is an important technical term in yoga and Vedanta, meaning ‘steadfastness or stability of state’, or ‘self-absorbed’. It is the first of two *dakṣiṇās* (with *saburī*, patience) asked of his devotees by Shirdi Sai Baba, and is a meditative term in Indian Sufism.

⁶ Bharanidharan, op.cit., p.209.



Sri Poondi Swami, typical look (Nov. 1976)

portrayed on his two *arcā-mūrtis*). His arms were very long, like depictions of Lord Rama's, perhaps reaching below his knees, and his hands were huge, the biggest I'd ever seen. His eyes were large and laser-like; at times, especially in formal darshan, they shone with a reddish glow like embers: an unforgettable sight!

The Master had a number of idiosyncrasies. He had a quizzical, right-sided look, head poised obliquely, stroking his beard (see photo on the previous page), which seems the converse of Sri Bhagavan's typical, left-sided gaze. When he drank coffee, instead of tilting his head back, he put the cup to his lips head upright and slurped the coffee with his tongue as a cat does milk, not removing the cup from his lips nor stopping until it was empty. When he smoked, he would puff on the cigarette or bidi without pausing like a steam engine, moving the cigarette back and forth to his lips between puffs until it was finished. Sometimes he did this serially with three or four cigarettes at a time offered by successive devotees. I have seen him with three cigarettes alight in his left hand, given by successive devotees, holding them with every two fingers, then begin to smoke them furiously one after the other. Even odder was the indisputable fact that very little smoke appeared to be exhaled – what happened to it?

There were two times when it was not possible to approach the Master. The first I witnessed during the first ten days I stayed with him, when he would spend several hours each day making facial contortions, shutting his eyes, clenching his teeth, moving his eyebrows up and down, shaking his head, and performing a series of rapid, jerky, disjointed movements with his arms, then whirling and flailing them about at a speed not thought humanly possible – which might continue for hours!⁷ Some visitors who witnessed this eccentric behaviour – which with all respect could only be construed as insane – would, after getting down from the bus and watching for a few minutes, simply turn around and get back up again, shaking their heads. At these times he was said to be 'in yoga' and could not be approached. I must say it ceased after the first fortnight of my stay.

The second time was when he was in profound absorption, staring into space, oblivious to his surroundings, obviously in some kind of trance (*samādhi*). At these times, which occurred anytime day or

⁷ Bharanidharan's 1971 account says he also witnessed this. (*Ibid.* p.213) .

night, sometimes for hours, he was said to be ‘in *niṣṭhā*’ and could not be disturbed.

The story of his discovery on the banks of the nearby Cheyyar [Seyyar] river has achieved the status of legend and there are various versions. Hamsa wanted me to hear it firsthand so he introduced me to the family of farmers to whom it occurred. The farmer who originally found him was no longer alive but I was introduced to his wife, I believe, and another old woman who had been present when it happened. Hamsananda translated the story as they related it in Tamil, as follows. Around 1957, a local farmer was driving his huge, black buffaloes down to the Cheyyar river for a drink when one of the animals’ rear hooves caught in the soft mud and was sucked under. When the farmer bent down to release the hoof, he noticed blood on its underside, so he looked at the mud below to see its source. And, lo! he discovered the blood was coming from a human skull where the buffalo’s heavy hoof had grazed it! Calling out for his friends to help, he began digging feverishly to excavate mud from around the head, until they were astonished to uncover a giant of a man, almost seven feet tall, sitting in a deep *samādhi* from which he could not be awakened! Since previously Poondi Swami had been seen sitting in the riverbed for weeks without moving, it was speculated that when the river flash-flooded after the recent monsoon he became immersed in mud while sitting in the sand of the riverbank.

Four men with difficulty lifted him up in his sitting position onto a palanquin and carried him to the rear porch of a nearby house, and thence to the local burial ground where he spent the next three years in a lean-to constructed by the villagers. In 1960, he was taken to a *pyal* (veranda) of a house opposite the bus stand, so the growing crowds could more easily see him. He remained day and night there without moving, periodically not even speaking or eating, apparently requiring nothing external, and continued in this condition up to his mahasamadhi in 1978, more than eighteen years later.

A fluctuating assortment of resident sadhus were in regular attendance upon the Master, perhaps thirty in number, who stayed for days or weeks at his feet. Many slept in the *dharamsala* where I stayed, sleeping in rows on the floor, while others slept in the nearby forest or by the roadside. No prepared food was available, so itinerant

sadhus had to fend for themselves or beg *bhiksha* from the few local householders. Some yogis lived off leaves and herbs in the forests, others appeared to live solely on chai made by a nearby chaiwalla or by Chimta Swāmī who acted as factotum for the sadhus. One sadhu called Bombay Baba lived by ingesting four or five smooth stones each morning the size of golf balls, then passed them harmlessly in his stool the next day, as a way of assuaging his hunger while effectively fasting. It saved money and seemed a useful practice in a place with no food. I was invited into local homes for meals several times out of curiosity, for foreigners in those days were still rarely seen. But mainly I took my meals with Hamsananda by invitation from Subramaniam Swami. These were served in a large tent erected behind the master on the site of the present Samadhi-mandir. It was after one of these that I was shown a specimen of Master's *nirmālya prasād* that was uniquely unforgettable. *Nirmālya prasād* is normally the remains of an offering presented to a deity or holy person, usually fruits, food or flowers. In this case it was a specimen of the master's stool (excreta), the size of a chocolate-coloured laddu or golf ball, kept treasured in a silver bowl wrapped in cloth, and brought out for me with great reverence. To my unimagined surprise, when bidden to smell it, its fragrance was so divinely intoxicating that it produced ecstasy! Strange as it sounds, I found later that this was not an unknown phenomenon in hagiographical literature.⁸

After about a fortnight I could distinguish two groups among the Master's resident devotees. The first was a small class of *siddhas*, or advanced adepts, who wore only *lungotī* or a single, nondescript

⁸ Similar, well-attested prodigies of supermundane bodily purity can be found in the Catholic Church involving a class of saints called Incorruptibles or Beati ('The Blessed'). Their deceased remains remain undecaying and life-like, with some bodies (mostly female) exuding an essential oil whose supernatural fragrance likewise induces ecstasy. The oily exudate is preserved in vials treasured as sacred relics by devotees, often passed down reverently for hundreds of years. I witnessed this for myself in Vancouver in 1983, with oil obtained from the 18th century tomb of a Russian orthodox woman saint, and can testify to its divinely-exhilarating fragrance. There is a fascinating scholarly study on the subject: *The Incorruptibles: A Study of the Incorruption of the Bodies of Various Catholic Saints and Beati* by Joan Carroll Cruz (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books & Publishers, 1977). As with stigmata and *ajagarabhāva*, it appears a saint's spiritual purity can be so powerful as to divinize even his body, should divine grace be so inclined.

piece of cloth, usually white in color. They were not seen in the day but came and went at night like bats. They never spoke and were not approachable. What kind of benefit were they getting? It must have been in silence from the Master's *sannidhi*, itself the priceless *cintāmaṇi* or wish-fulfilling jewel of liberation. As Sri Bhagavan once said to Muruganar, "A Jñāni has no *sankalpas* (intentions) but his *sannidhi* (presence) is the most powerful force. It can do wonders: save souls, give peace of mind, even give liberation to ripe souls."⁹

The second was the much larger group of itinerant sadhus of various denominations, Saiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta, or of no obvious affiliation, who dressed according to their inclination or *sampradāya* (tradition). Among these, with Hamsa's and Chimta Swami's help, I could identify the following types (I consult my notebook from the time):

1. Daśnāmi sannyāsins from one of the ten renunciate orders founded by Adi Sankaracharya (788-820 CE), who was their main guru;

2. Non-Daśnāmi sannyāsins whose main guru is Dattātreyā ('Guru Datt');

3. Nāth yogis who follow the Goraknath Sampradāya (c. 9th-13th cent. CE). They have big wooden earrings called *kundals*, wear black *poonals* (sacred threads) and dress in any color but never blue or white. Their main guru is Goraknāth (an historical figure, said to be the 'inventor' of haṭhayoga) and are often good haṭhayogis;

4. Vairagis (Vaiṣṇava) sannyāsins, who put *nāma* on their forehead, wear gerua (orange), and whose main guru is Sri Ramanujacharya (1017-1137 CE);

5. South Indian sadhus of no obvious affiliation ("no *sampradāya* in South India"), including some Nāgas (generic for naked ascetic) and Avadhūtas; this includes Tamil adepts of the first class mentioned above. "The first three groups put *vibhūti* only (on forehead); if they do *Devi pūjā* they put *kumkum* also." (Chimta Swami);

6. Aghoras (fire-worshippers) who keep fire with them, and Rāja-yogis, given to meditation (*dhyāna*), who are always sitting;

7. Tamil *Cittars* (Siddhas) who practice Siddha medicine (*Cittavaittiyam*) and alchemy (*Rāsayāna*). They were adept in

⁹ *Padamalai: Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*. Edited by David Godman (Boulder, Colorado: Avadhuta Foundation, 2004), p.8.

hathayoga, and knew herbs and potions. Some could be seen in the mornings like the Nāth yogis performing *āsanas* and *shatkarmas* like *dhauti* (cloth-swallowing), *neti* (nasal cleansing), and *bandas* like *uddhīyāna* and *navli* (stomach lifting and rotation of the *abdominus recti*). These were the largest sub-group.

There were also day visitors who came by bus or car and went back again, perhaps two or three dozen daily while I was there, dozens more on weekends. But this transient traffic did not disturb the deep current of continuous darshan taken by resident devotees. The Master was the unbroken cynosure of all our attention and his regal presence palpably dominated the atmosphere around him for a radius of many metres, even kilometres. His presence had a field-like quality, like magnetism, that subdued thought and was felt most strongly at night. Nighttime was thus a special time for resident devotees and many things happened then around the Master. He was said frequently to give *swapna* (dream) darshan or impart *upadesha* (instruction) at night in dreams. To embrace this possibility some sadhus even slept or meditated recumbently in the daytime as well, a practice I have not seen elsewhere before or since.

I should like to close this account with my personal experience of the Master's divine power and grace. On the sixteenth evening of my stay I was standing at the bar for the evening darshan, gazing intently into the Master's right-sided look. Suddenly a tiny shaft of white light shimmered serpent-like in the Master's left eye, then shot into both of mine. It went down immediately to the bottom of my spine, then rose slowly up it as though someone were blowing softly into the bottom of it like a tube. When it reached the back of my head I experienced such intense bliss I lost body consciousness, and fell in a swoon at the Master's feet. Luckily, I was standing between two *sannyāsins* who grabbed me as I fell and held me upright until I regained consciousness. The whole drama lasted less than a minute; never before or since have I felt such ecstasy.

That night I had divine dreams and saw coloured lights flickering inside my body. I realized that what I had been searching for was available here with this great Master, and I determined to surrender to him and ask to be accepted as his disciple. Hamsananda had seen what happened and agreed to help. I wrote a note of request to Poondi



Sri Poondi Swami (circa 1960)

Deva, collected traditional firewood (as sacrificial fuel), *dakṣinā* (a \$1 U.S. bill and 8 cents) and some lemons (considered auspicious to offer an *avadhūta*). I planned to approach him at night in the traditional manner. Hamsananda agreed to accompany me and translate my request into Tamil, acting as interpreter. Swamiji's attendants, who had also witnessed the incident, agreed to seek the master's permission to approach him the following night to make my request; this was given.

Accordingly, at 3.30 am the following night, I stepped behind the curtain accompanied by Swami Hamsananda. Master was sitting upright exactly as before, Subramaniam and some other men were standing nearby, arms crossed, waiting to serve. Placing my note, firewood, lemons and *dakṣinā* (gift) at his feet, I did *danḍa namaskār* (body flat on ground like a stick). When told to rise, I knelt at his feet with a beating heart while Hamsananda read out my note, stopping now and then to translate it into Tamil.

The Master accepted my *dakṣinā*, then returned it to me; the lemons he held for a moment and also returned; one is still intact, unspoiled on my *pūjā* altar. There was then a long pause. Then he began speaking in short, simple phrases, pausing so Hamsa could translate what he said, which I noted down afterward so I wouldn't forget. He said, "My son, I'm not your guru. There's a *akṣara* (letter) on your forehead [called *Brahma-likhitam*, the destiny Brahma writes on the forehead of each creature]. By this I know I am not your guru."

Sadness overwhelmed me. But worse was to come. He said, "Soon, you will leave India. You will go [pause] to Ca-na-da [pronouncing each syllable distinctly, as though saying it for the first time]. There you will meet one woman and marry her."

At this I was devastated: I'd never been to Canada and had no desire to go; leaving India and marrying were the last things I wanted to do. Master's words sounded a death knell to all my hopes and dreams. I broke down, I'm ashamed to say, and began sobbing, drowning out Master's last words. Thank god, Hamsananda remembered them: "After marriage you will return to India, and in 1998 you will meet your guru."

When I was told this later, I recall being unimpressed: 1998 was so far away from 1976 it might as well be in another life. Now I shudder

to realise how immature I was then not to appreciate the import of what had he told me: he'd assured me I'd meet my guru this birth, actually granting me the request I'd been praying for.

As implausible as it seemed at the time, each of Master's predictions came true. I did leave India, I did go to Canada, I did meet and marry my wife there. In 1991, we returned to India where we have lived since. At last, on April 1st, 1998, I had my first darshan in Shirdi of the great saint who became my guru – Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji – the very one who attained realisation in Poondi Swami's presence two years before my visit! When I learned this, the final 'coin dropped' and I realised Master's last prediction made so long ago had now also become true! The wheel of time had revolved full circle to another level: the Master was not my guru, but my guru's guru (*paramaguru*), or guru once removed. Truly, the Master had seen this from the start, for him past and future alike held no secrets. He had used his *divya dr̥ṣṭi* (divine vision) graciously to foresee what I had prayed for, but did not have the maturity to realise then.

By the time Poondi Swami entered *mahāsamādhi* on November 3rd, 1978, he had touched and transformed inexplicably the lives of many thousands from all walks of life. From all over India sadhus, seekers, saints and sages of every description and stage of attainment, were drawn to him and blessed by his grace, while his distinguished peers like Sri Bhagavan, Sri Gnanananda Giri, and the Kanchipuram Sankaracharya, regarded him with utmost respect. He was a veritable *jñāna-sāgara* (ocean of knowledge), from whose boundless depths any cup could be filled.

The virtual 'University of Yoga' conjured into existence by the power of Master's brooding presence during his lifetime no longer exists, and learned discussions of his divine state are no more to be heard in the shadowed precincts of his *Samādhi*. Yet his presence there is alive and active as before, and can be felt emanating from his *Samādhi* now as palpably as it did then from his living presence. Many today who have never met him find in his *Samādhi* a fathomless source of mystical experience and truth beyond name and form. No visitor to Sri Ramanasramam should miss visiting it if at all possible; it is a worthy companion-site to Sri Bhagavan's own celestial 'living' *Samādhi*.

MOUNTAIN PATH

As for me, I remain forever grateful for the three blessings that fulfil my life by the Master’s grace: my wife, my Guru, and my long association with sages and beloved *kalyān-mitras* of India, which continues to the present day by Śrī’s grace.

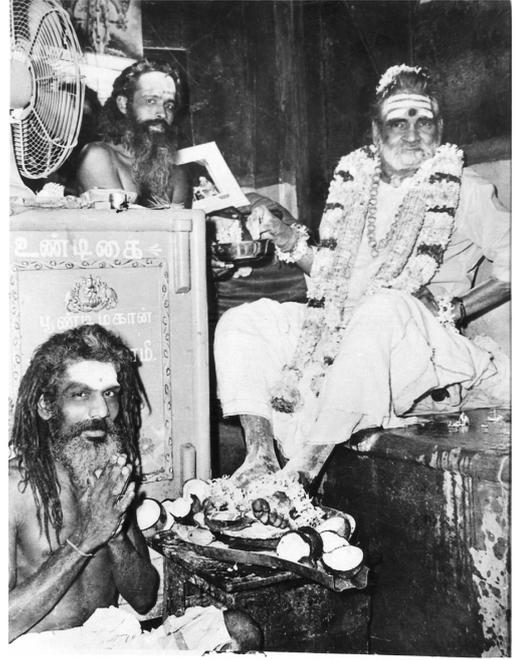
My prayer is,

“Bless me, O Lord, that I may have more and more love for Thee, and whatever different births I may undergo hereafter, may I be born in the house of those who love Thee and associate always with holy men and true lovers of God.

This is my only prayer.¹⁰ ▲

Dedicated with deep gratitude to
Swami Hamsananda Saraswati of Sarada Pitha, Sringeri

¹⁰ Śrīmad Bhagavatam Mahapurana, I.19.16, King Parikshit’s prayer to Sri Krishna.



(Left above): Swami Hamsananda Saraswati of Sringeri; (Right above): The Master with his attendants, Subramaniam Swami (top) and Chimta Swami (below)

Sri Poondi Swami and Adi Sankara's *Pañcīkaraṇam*

RAM BROWN CROWELL

A mong all the various groups of sadhus resident around Sri Poondi Swami the chief activity in common was attempting to account for the Master's superhuman state. There was constant, ongoing discussion and speculation as to what exactly had taken place and how it had resulted in his *jīvanmukti* and phenomenal manifestation of *ajagarabhāva*.

The Tamil *Cittars* (Siddhas) proposed homologizing his internal process to a form of alchemy by which the seat of mind in the subtle body is distilled by drugs (Tamil *moolagars*) into the finest essence of consciousness, *chidākāśa*, using the gastric fire (*javālā-agni*) of the *maṇipūra* as an alembic while in meditative trance (*samādhi*). The mind so transformed shines like white light (*tējas*), fire's subtlest state, said to be the 'body' of the Supreme Being manifest in a dense form of bliss called technically in Advaita, *chidghana*.¹

¹ *Chidghana* - lit. 'massed, luminous consciousness'; an important technical term in *Advaitasastra* for the highest bliss of Brahman and the *unmani-avastha* (no-mind state) of the greatest *avadhuts*. It is synonymous with *Paramananda-Sandoha*, lit. 'mass of bliss', or Bliss Infinite, the state of final beatitude (v.s. *Pancikaranam*, Glossary, p.63, in edition cited below, footnote 6.)

For the Yogins, Sri Poondi Swami's state was ascribed to the science of herbs and drugs (Skt. *oṣadhi*), practised as an adjuvant to yoga, and said by Patanjali in *Yogasūtra* 4.1 to give rise to siddhis or supernormal powers (though properly speaking the eight major *aṣṭa-mahā-siddhis* arise not from drugs but from reliance on the Self (*svātantrya*), and manifest only in those free from desire (*vāsanā*); for this reason they are the mark of the true adept). There was much knowledgeable discussion of herbs by this group – my journal lists a half-dozen with their Tamil names and corresponding benefits – and one Cittar interviewed with Hamsa's² help referenced a text called *Agastya Periapuranam*, which is perhaps to be identified with the *Pūraṇacūttiram*, a late alchemical work ascribed to Agastya.³ Transubstantiation theory has a long history in India. It is central to the Āgamas (Tantras) and Vaiṣṇava/Buddhist Sahajiyā/Vajrayāna Tantras, as well as the Tamil Cittar tradition, the pan-India Siddhāchārya movement, and the medieval Nath Sampradāya.⁴ So its prominence as an explanation for Poondi Swami's state should not be surprising.

The Yogins also revered the Master because he exemplified to perfection Patanjali's two sutras on posture in his *Yogasūtras* (II.46-7). These sutras state that posture is perfect when it is *dhīra* (steady) and *ananta* (endless), both qualities Poondi Deva clearly exhibited. When perfection of posture is attained, Patanjali says (*YS* II.48), its fruit (*yogaphala*) is freedom from the *dvandvas*, or pairs of opposites, the source of all suffering. Since experientially this state entails ego-transcendence, the Yogins rightly saw Poondi Swami's *ajagarabhāva* as tantamount to *mukti*, which it surely was. It is worth noting that Lord Vishnu as Narayana, the Cosmic Man or Satpuruṣa, is typically

² Swami Hamsananda's background is given in the parent article to this paper, 'Eighteen Days with Sri Poondi Swami', appearing in this issue.

³ Cf. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* by Kamil Zvelebil (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), p.222, n.4.

⁴ See S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1976), pp.134-235, and George Weston Briggs's *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982; orig. 1e Calcutta 1938) for two classic accounts of transubstantiation theory central to Tantra and the Medieval Nath Sampradāya; they are dated, but still useful. A good modern survey is David Gordon White's *Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

depicted as resting on the serpent of Time, *Ādi Śeṣa*, who is praised also as *dhīra* and *ananta*, again equating rest and immobility with timelessness and bliss.

Of all groups, I had most contact with the Daśnāmi group because my guide was a member of it; as I recall, three others were also his brother-disciples from Sringeri Sarada Pitha. As a group, they were articulate and well-educated, proficient in Sanskrit, and learned in Advaita scriptures such as *Pañcadaśī*, *Vedāntasāra*, *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi*, *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* and *Brahmasūtra-Śāṅkarabhāṣya*, upon which they held long, animated discussions. Several could speak English when they wished.

Of all explanations for Sri Poondi Swami's state, the most intriguing was Hamsananda's own, because it revealed the depth of Poondi Swami's wisdom as both saint and teacher in a new light. Hamsananda said the Master's state resulted from "firing his *pañca bhūta tattvas*" (five body-elements) by a meditative process (*upāsana*) known as *Pañcīkaraṇa-vidyā* (quinduplication-science). This was a secret knowledge that enabled the incomparable *Asparśa-Yoga* ('touchless yoga'), introduced by Gauḍapada in his *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Kārikā* (at MK III.39 and MK IV.2), to bear fruit.⁵ But there it is explicated primarily as a theory (*darśana*), not as a practice (*sādhana*).

Hamsa said *Pañcīkaraṇa* is the practical *sādhana* meant to accompany Gauḍapada's *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* and engender the experiential realization of *Asparśa Yoga* as the final view (*Siddhānta*) of *Ajātivada*, the crown jewel of Advaita Vedānta. In essence, *Pañcīkaraṇa* forms the *prayoga śāstra* for *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* with Gauḍapada's *Kārikā* and *Śāṅkarabhāṣya* (commentary) and, as such, forms a *sādhana* manual for *Aśparśa Yoga*. But, whereas the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* is an 'open' text that may be studied without initiation, *Pañcīkaraṇam* is a 'closed' text (*gupta-vidyā*), whose meaning is restricted to a qualified disciple (*adhikārin*) hearing it directly from a realized guru, ear-to-ear, in so-called 'hot' transmission, as Hamsananda

⁵ *Asparśa Yoga* is a key soteriological term in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* and occurs also in Sankara's commentary on MK.IV.2. For discussion see *Gauḍapāda: A Study in Early Advaita* by T.M.P. Mahadevan (Madras: University of Madras, 4e 1975), pp. 197-199; 216-218; and *Asparśa-Yoga: A Study of Gauḍapāda's Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* by Colin A. Cole (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), pp. 103-112.

claimed to be doing under Poondi Swami. Even though secret, Hamsa said printed evidence of the tradition existed in an obscure Sanskrit text called *Pañcīkaraṇam*, a brief *prakaraṇa* (manual) ascribed to Adi Sankara.⁶ There is also a *vārttika* (specialised commentary) on it by Suresvaracarya, a direct pupil of Sankara, called *Pañcīkaraṇa-Vārttikam*, attesting to its authenticity and importance.

Pañcīkaraṇam (I'll use final 'm' for the text, final 'a' for the process) is a very short work of seven verses, which, unfortunately, is unfinished, so its meaning is lost to scholarship. Consequently, it has been little-noticed in scholarly literature, both in India and the West. The text however exists in a printed edition published by Advaita Ashram in Calcutta, cited by Hamsa.⁷ A scholarly discussion of the Sanskrit text in French with an Introduction in English is published by Motilal.⁸ There is also an English translation of *Pañcīkaraṇa-Vārttikam* by A. Mahadeva Sastry⁹ and a redaction of it by Karl Potter in Vol. 3 of his *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*.¹⁰

Hamsananda said preservation of *Pañcīkaraṇa-vidyā* has traditionally been entrusted to Sringeri Sarada Math, as it is for *Śrī*

⁶ The ascription to Sankara is accepted by S.K. Belvakar and A. Mahadeva Sastry, and was confirmed as genuine by Kanchipuram Sankaracharya Chandrasekharendra (v.s. *Pancikaranam*, in the edition cited below, p.x, n.11).

⁷ *Pañcīkaraṇam of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya: Text and Vārttika* with Translation by Ramakrishna Seva Ashrama of Vrindaban (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1e 1962; 7e rep. 1997). 'Pancikarana' occurs once in *Pancikaranam* (last verse), twice in *Pancikarana-Vārttikam* (7,10) and once in *Pancadasi*, at IX.64, which, S. S. Raghavachar says, assigns an authoritative status to it and authenticates its traditional title (*Pancikaranam*, *op. cit.*, p.x). It is of interest to note, in connection with Sringeri's prominence in other contexts in this article, that the author of the *Pancadasi* was Swami Vidyaranya, whom tradition holds in 1377 A.D. was elected Sankaracharya of Sringeri Math.

⁸ *Le Pañcīkaraṇa, Contribution à l'étude philologique d'un texte attribué à Śaṅkara* by C. Buoy (in) *Pandit N.R. Bhatt Felicitation Volume*, edited by P.S. Filliozat, S.P. Narang and C.P. Bhatia (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), pp.207-309.

⁹ *Sureśvarācārya's Praṇava-Vārtika*, translated by A. Mahadeva Sastry (in) *Dakshinamurti Stotra of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Madras: Samata Books, 3e 1978), orig. 1e-1899; pp.190-209.

¹⁰ *The Pañcīkaraṇa-Vārttikam of Suresvara*, redacted by Karl Potter (in) *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 3 – *Advaita Vedanta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils* edited by Karl Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), pp.560-562.



Sannidhanam (Samadhi) of Sri Poondi Swami

Vidyā, the secret science of Śakti worship discussed below, which Hamsa used devotionally together with *Pañcikaraṇam*, though the exact nature of their relationship remains a mystery. It must be remembered that I was a foreigner, uninitiated, and a *mlechha* (ritually impure), and thus thrice-unqualified to be taught much, a situation I had to respect. Indeed, I remain grateful for the modicum I was permitted to learn by the Master's grace, which I record here in loving memory and testimony to his greatness.

In Adi Sankaracarya's *Pañcikaraṇam*, the quinduplication process is first related to the five elements (*pañca mahābhūta tattvas*), then to the four states of consciousness by a process of sublation (*bādha*), wherein each state merges by *laya* (dissolution or absorption) into the next subtler state, until all are resolved into the subtlest *tattva*, *ākāśa*, the vehicle of pure sound (*Śabda Brahman*). Pure sound is *Praṇava* (AUM), the highest *bīja*, 'literally' the sound body of Brahman, which is *asparśa* ('touchless'), thus is the yoga so-named. The mind's *laya* into this state produces a bliss (*rasa*) so intense it sublates even the need to eat or move.¹¹

Pañcikaraṇa is defined as the five-fold combination process by which the five subtle rudimentary elements (*pañca-mahābhūta tattvas*) become gross and create the physical universe of Nature and inner world of conscious awareness. The basic process is described in Suresvara's *Vārttikam* as follows:

"Each of the five elements must be divided into two equal parts. One of these two parts should be further split into four equal parts. Now to one half of each element should be added one quarter of each of the other four halved elements towards the formation of one gross element. Thus in Ether (*Ākāśa*) there will be five constituent parts. Half of it will be Ether and the other half will consist of the four parts contributed together by all the other four elements. Thus it is to be known in the case of each of the other four elements, like Air, etc. This process is the five-fold combination (*Pañcikaraṇa*) according to the wise." – *Pañcikaraṇam-Vārttikam*, 8-10.

¹¹ "*Om* is the eternal truth: that which remains over after the disappearance of objects is *Om*. It does not merge in anything. It is the state of which it is said: "Where one sees none other, hears none other, knows none other, that is Perfection." Talk§634.

[This means that Ākāśa has 50% itself and one-eighth of each of the other elements. Jñāna is said to be a *kārya* of Ākāśa, so has in it the four other *mahābhūtas* also: it is 1/2 Ākāśa, 1/8 Vāyu (Air), 1/8 Vahni (Fire), 1/8 Āpaḥ (Water) and 1/8 Pṛthvī (Earth). *Nota bene*: It is not meant that physical ether (Ākāśa) is consciousness, but that pure consciousness is, like ether, an all-pervading continuum.]

In Adi Sankaracarya's *Pañcikaraṇam*, the process is taken further and amalgamated to the four states of consciousness, meditated in correlation with the three and one-half *mātrās* (units) composing OM (A+U+M+ dot, *anusvāra* = silence, *turīya*), the sacred *Praṇava*. The *mātrās* are homologized to the three states of waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*swapna*) and deep sleep (*suṣupti*), with the fourth state (*turīya*) as their substratum. Adi Sankaracarya states as follows:

“Now ‘A’, the waking personality (state) (*jāgrat*), should be resolved into ‘U’ the dream-personality (*swapna*), and the ‘U’ into ‘M’, the deep-sleep personality (*suṣupti*). Again, the ‘M’ should be reduced to ‘AUM’ and the ‘AUM’ into ‘I’ (*turīya*). ‘I’ am Ātman, the Witness of all, the Absolute, of the nature of Pure Consciousness; I am neither Nescience (*avidyā*) nor even its effect, but I am Brahman alone, Eternally Pure and Free, Ever Enlightened, Existence Absolute. I am Bliss Absolute, One without a second (*Advaitam*) and the Innermost Consciousness (*Antaryāmin*). Remaining in this state of absolute identification is called ‘Samādhi’ or the Super-conscious state.”
– *Pañcikaraṇam*, op. cit., v.6.

The *sādhaka* who knows *Praṇava* in this way attains identity with *Turīya* or Brahman immediately. Realisation of *Turīya* is said to occur by *Adhyāropa-apavāda*, a form of meditative sublation (*bādha*), defined as “the negation of illusory super-imposition (*adhyāsa*), consisting only of name and form (*nāma-rūpa*), and consequent discovery of Brahman, the underlying Reality.” (*Pañcikaraṇam*, op.cit., p.30, n.1). In truth, *Sat* (Reality) doesn't change, only what is false disappears, leaving *Brahmānubhāva*, the ultimate experience of realisation.

However, while these theoretical discussions are ‘open’, the experiential practice they entail, called *Pañcikaraṇa*, is ‘closed’ (*rahasya*). It appears to be a kind of visualization process, as outlined by Hamsa in rudimentary terms as follows, which I record from notes kept at the time:

“Each of the elements gives rise to an *antaḥkaraṇa* (mind factor); *ākāśa* creates *ākāśa* in you. When you see space outside you create space inside. When the great ones sit staring into space, they are doing *Pañcīkaraṇa*, coming down into heart. *Pañcīkaraṇa* involves something higher than the subtle body; its field is higher than the *sūkṣma*. Earth (*Prthvī*) gives rise to *manas*. Water (*Āpaḥ*) gives rise to *buddhi*. Fire (*Agni*) gives rise to *citta* (memory). Air, *prāṇa* (Vāyu) gives rise to *antaḥkaraṇa* (mental faculties). *Ākāśa* is connected with *Jñāna-svarūpa* and *Ānandamaya-kośa* (bliss sheath). Beyond the bliss body only *Ātman* is. If you create *ākāśa* inside, everything else is created – that is the theory.”

“When *Pañcīkaraṇam* happens for a man who is extrovert, his inner experiences are lost; for an introvert, his outer experiences. Introverts are essentially ascetics, unconnected with society; extroverts are connected to society, it’s more difficult for them to become free. *Pañcīkaraṇam* establishes a balance between these two tendencies, called *sahajabhāva*, the natural, effortless state of liberation.”

“The process of *Pañcīkaraṇam* involves visualizing your astral body (*sūkṣma-śarīra* or *linga śarīra*) or mental body (*vijñānamaya-kośa*) as seated in front of you, and receiving subtle *ojahsic* [astral sunlight] energy down through the fontanelle to the *sahasrāra* with your breath (*vaśi*, that is, ‘*Śiva*’ reversed). Visualize the breath descending into your body, imagined as seated in front of you, not as coming into your own body. Think of the element (*tattva*) as being drawn down into the body with the breath. The subtlest element (*ākāśa*) contains all the others through *Pañcīkaraṇa*. When the subtle mind purified by *laya* merges into *ākāśa* you experience liberation.” To accomplish *Asparśa Yoga*, ‘objectless seeing’ is necessary.

“For ‘objectless seeing’ first locate your ‘sight not on the object but on the space itself in-between. Objects are only what obstruct your sight; normally our vision rests on them only. Here, you must let your sight come to rest on space itself – ‘subtracting’ the object – and try to *see* that space. You’ll have seen that blank look of Swami – he’ll suddenly go blank with a man in front of him – he’s looking at the space between them, this creates a space within. While gazing into this objectless space, ask yourself, ‘how am I seeing, how does seeing take place?’ – because subjective consciousness occurs in

that question. Then just observe. Not to murmur [the question] but actually to think how you see: *it's attuning to a certain frequency of thought*. Ask yourself, then just observe. You can't hear the question, but very subtly it is asked.

“Then ask, ‘Who’s the seer?’ ‘Who sees?’ This breaks the identification of the seer with the instrument of seeing, like the *vichara* of Sri Ramana in a slightly different context. When you find out who sees, immediately you’ll descend to the heart center – not the physical heart, but the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest, which you spontaneously point to when you refer to yourself. This situation is called ‘*Niṣṭha*’, it is the Master’s state. Then you do your meditation (*dhyana*) from there. This is *Asparśa Yoga*, the ‘touchless union’, of which Gaudapada speaks in his *Kārikā*.”

Hamsa said his understanding of *Pañcikaraṇam* was confirmed by the Master and that he had been guided by him in its practice over many years. While Hamsa gave me to understand that the Master had confirmed his understanding of *Pañcikaraṇam*, he did not claim that Poondi Swami ever said it was the medium of his own attainment – I should make this clear – although Hamsa clearly felt it accounted for his *ajagarabāva*, and was himself practising it for the same reason.

Features of the Master’s state could also clearly be correlated with this ‘firing’ of his *pañcha-mahābhūta-tattvas*, like his so-called *niṣṭha* and ‘yoga’ states and his bizarre manner of smoking. For Hamsanandaji, at any rate, Sri Poondi Swami was India's greatest modern exemplar of the secret science of *Pañcikaraṇam*, handed down in unbroken succession (*paramparā*) from Adi Sankara. What I report here is evidence of a living tradition at the time of writing (1976), operating in the presence of Sri Poondi Swami. Who would have thought such an advanced teaching was the subject of attention in such rustic circumstances in the presence of an (apparently) unlettered *avadhūta*?

Pañcikaraṇam also appears to have a connection to *Śrī Vidyā*, forming a kind of adjunct to it as well as to *Asparśa Yoga*. In *Śrī Vidyā*, the Mother is worshipped as the active, *saguṇa* form of Siva, the unmanifest, nondual Absolute (*Advaitam*), so Nonduality as a doctrine is formally maintained. This form of *advaitabhakti* or Devotional Nondualism is termed *Śāktādvaita*. The goddess in one of her *arcā* (worshipful) forms, as *Lalita Tripurasundari*, is made the

esoteric focus of ritual worship because of the recognition that “she is the source of the individual Self’s own self-cognitive reflection as ‘I’”.¹² It is therefore Her grace that actually (energetically) confers liberation. The subtle form of the goddess consists not of words but of pure *akashic* sounds called *bījas* (Skt. ‘seeds’), indeclinable seed-syllables (*bījakṣaras*), like AUM (*Pranava*), that give experiential access to the wordless dimension of her Self-nature (*svabhāva*) and, thereby, access to her soterial power.

Śrī Vidyā, like *Pañcikaraṇam*, is a secret science (*rahasya vidyā*) made kinetic only through qualified initiation (*dīkṣā*). Because it consists wholly of *bījas*, *Śrī Vidyā* is considered the purest, most powerful form of *mantra-vidyā*. Mother’s *yantra*, known as *Śrī Cakra*, is also used. Later, I was amazed to find the *guru-vandana mantra* used by Hamsananda to adore (*vandana*) Sri Poondi Swami was almost identical to that of the *Kamarāj* (or *Kādi-vidyā*) School of *Śrī Vidyā* used for the same purpose.¹³

The historical results of *Śrī Vidyā* worship are impressive. It is said to have been the form of devotion Adi Sankara himself used to become free. Indeed, two of *Śrī Vidyā*’s canonical texts, the *Saundarya Laharī* (Waves of Divine Splendour) and the *Śivānanda Laharī* (Śiva’s Waves of Bliss), are ascribed to him. *Śrī Vidyā* is considered queen of the *mantra marga*, the most effective way to induce Devi’s grace (*Śaktipāta*), which bestows the state called *chidghana* (lit. ‘massed consciousness’) – a bliss so intense it gradually renders the body immovable.

This actually happened to Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahasvaminah of Sringeri (d.1954) who was unable to complete his famous commentary on Sankara’s *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* due to deepening *samādhi* during his conduct of *Śrī Vidyā pūjā*. His guru and predecessor as the pontiff of Sringeri Sarada Pitha, Sri Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati Svaminah, as also the late, much-beloved Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Svaminah of Kanchi Kamakoṭi Pitha, have both been notable votaries of *Śrī Vidyā*; both were also renowned *jīvanmuktas*.

¹² *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Sri Vidya Sakta Tantrism in South India* by Douglas Renfrew Brooks (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996); orig. 1e SUNY, 1992, p.91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.89-91; 93-94; 104-107. I am indebted to Brooks for several points in this paragraph that supplement what Swami Hamsananda told me.

How far the amalgamation of *Pañcikaranam* with *Śrī Vidyā* is a valid hermeneutic for explaining Sri Poondi Swami's state, I am of course unable to say; I only recount what I saw and heard. It seems very unlikely that Poondi Swami was a member of a traditional ashram or math where he learned *Pañcikaranam* at a guru's feet. But certain cryptic remarks made by him and others suggest further possibilities.

Pooni Swami could have received guidance in *Pañcikaraṇa* from *siddhas* in *sūkṣma* on the subtle plane: Siva Baba, mentioned in the previous article, said Sri Gnanananda often said he communicated with Poondi Swami 'in *sūkṣma*' (subtle body). And, in both Bharanidharani's and Sri Babuji's accounts, high *siddhas* are spoken of with whom Poondi Swami apparently interacted at various times, whether at the Eswara shrine in the Parvatha Hills or at Kasi in the North before his *mahāsamādhi*. Sri Babuji's account specifically quotes Poondi Swami as saying just before his *mahāsamādhi* that he had gone north to meet various *siddhas*, eighteen in number, and had returned south only to leave his body in Kalasapakkam (in view of Mt. Arunachala?).¹⁴

Or, Sri Poondi Swami's state may have been precipitated by an irresistible descent of divine grace (*Śaktipāta*) called *tīvra-tīvra* ('intensely intense') in *Trika-śāstra* (Kashmiri Śaivism), a *Śivādvaita* form, one could say, of *Śrī Vidyā*. In *Trika*, this mode of *Śrī*'s grace produces such intense ecstasy it precludes even the need for food and movement, i.e., *ajagarabhāva*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bharanidharan, op.cit., pp. 221-222; and esp. pp. 224-226.

¹⁵ The *Trika* scholar B.N. Pandit gives a fascinating account of the most intense form of *śaktipāta*, which could possibly apply to Poondi Swami: "Such people need not perform any rituals, nor practise any yoga to attain this state. Their realization of the highest aspect of the Self is absolutely spontaneous. ... They become impatient to merge into their purest aspect, to shed off their physical form and become one with the Absolute. This type of liberation is known as *videhamukti*, or liberation without having a body.... Aspirants under the effect of the intensely intense form of *śaktipāta* may also stay in their bodies, but will linger on in a state of complete inaction, insentient like a log of wood. This highest type of Self-realization results in an extraordinary ecstasy that obliterates all interest in anything impure in nature. In this way, *tīvra-tīvra śaktipāda* brings about immediate release from all bondage." — B.N. Pandit, *Specific Principles of Kashmir Śaivism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), pp. 86-87. Personally, I would agree a spontaneous descent of grace is more likely as an explanation for Sri Poondi Swami's state than *Pañcikaraṇa*.

The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* also state that intense love of god has a similarly intoxicating effect (*Yajñatva mattō bhavati...*).¹⁶

Finally, there is an interesting ramification of *Pañcikarāṇa* theory in connection with Sri Bhagavan himself. In answering questions from learned visitors, Sri Bhagavan portrayed an extensive knowledge of *Pañcikarāṇa*'s operation in creation theory, one of the two great questions, along with the nature of karma, unresolved in the Vedic corpus; no fewer than six theories of creation are proposed in Vedānta and the six orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy (*āstika-darśana*). How the One becomes two and, given two-ness (plurality), how they become One again, are the two great concerns of Vedānta metaphysics, along with enquiry into Brahman. The movement from Zero to One (*śūnya* to *pūrṇa*) and back again, the *haṁsa* or breathing-in and breathing-out of the universe (*ahaṁ-sphūrṇa/Sṛṣṭi-Pralaya*), implies apparent change, if only from absence to presence, *avidyā* to *jñāna*. *Pañcikarāṇa* is the theoretical device used in Advaita metaphysics to explain and account for the categories of change and difference on every level, from macro to microcosmic. Indeed, it is difficult to speak about liberation without talking of change, considered real or apparent, and Sri Bhagavan shows great skill and his characteristic lucidity in utilizing the principles of *Pañcikarāṇa* to account for the so-called changes in the states of consciousness. In Talk§292 Sri Bhagavan mentions *Pañcikarāṇa* by name, a talk which Hamsananda recited entirely from memory.

Bhagavan also alludes to *Pañcikarāṇa* when he states, "The mind which comprehends space is itself space (*ākāśa*). The space is physical ether (*bhūtākāśa*), mind is mental ether (*manākāśa*), which is contained in transcendental ether (*chidākāśa*). The mind is thus the ether principle (*ākāśa tattva*). Being the principle of knowledge (*jñāna tattva*), it is identified with ether (*ākāśa*) by metaphysics Pure mind (*shuddha manas*) is ether (*ākāśa*); the dynamic and dull (*rajas* and *tamas*) aspects operate as gross objects, etc. Thus the whole universe is only mental."¹⁷

Again, in various Talks,¹⁸ Sri Bhagavan discusses the different mind-factors and changes in conscious states, sometimes at length (Talk§579), in terms broadly related to *Pañcikarāṇa* theory.

¹⁶ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, (Tehri-Garhwal: Divine Life Society, 1988), *sūtra* 6.

¹⁷ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§451.

When *Pañcikaraṇa* is applied to the four stages of consciousness, the key soteriological state to emerge is *susupti*, since it forms the doorway or bridge to *turīya*. It is therefore of interest to note that Sri Bhagavan, in describing his own state (that of the *jñāni*), refers to it in terms of *susupti*. In a fascinating passage, Sri Bhagavan says the *jñāni's* state is “neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat-susupti*. Call it wakeful sleep or sleepless waking or wakeless sleep. It is not the same as sleep or waking separately. It is *atijagrat* (beyond wakefulness) or *atisusupti* (beyond sleep). It is the state of perfect awareness and perfect stillness combined. It lies between sleep and waking; it is also the interval between two successive thoughts. *It is the source from which thoughts spring* [italics added]. It is Bliss, not transitory but eternal. From that the thoughts proceed.... If you are free from thoughts and yet aware, you are That Perfect Being.”¹⁹

But, ultimately, except for *adhikāri* adepts like Hamsananda, *Pañcikaraṇa* theories “create confusion where no confusion need exist.... They are mere conceptions. When and where will such conceptions end?”²⁰ Sri Bhagavan is firm in disparaging all such talk: “Ah! Fortunate is the man who does not involve himself in this maze!”²¹ Rather, they serve as metaphors for the alchemy of self-transformation inherent in the very idea of Realisation. Release from ignorance is at the heart of the soteriological process signified by *Pañcikaraṇam*. Sri Poondi Swami and Sri Bhagavan each exemplify in different ways the significance of *Pañcikaraṇam's* esoteric rôle in the ultimate transformation of Jīva into Śiva, or Brahman.

Oṃ Tat Sat Brahmārpanam astu. ▲

¹⁸ Talk§392, Talk§510, Talk§567, Talk§579 and Talk§ 609.

¹⁹ Op.cit., Talk §609.

²⁰ Op.cit., Talk §392.

²¹ Ibid., Talk §392.

Bibliography of Publications in English and Telugu on Sri Poondi Swami

1) The first notice of Poondi Swami to appear in English outside India to my knowledge was written by the controversial American teacher, Bubba (Da) Free John, and published in 1974 in his magazine, *Vision Mound*. It records a day-visit to Poondi Swami from Ramanasramam in August, 1973, with one or two photographs. It is no longer in print.

2) *The Way That I Teach: Talks on the Intuition of Eternal Life* by Bubba Free John (Middletown, California: Dawn Horse Press, 1978). In this early series of talks, Bubba Free John mentions Poondi Swami: “I went to the Poondi Swami and gave it all to him, because he represents the cultic figure in its most classically absurd form. The Poondi Swami is really what it is all about for the Indian who makes an idol of subjectivity out of the Divine. The subjective idol is not Truth, not God.” (Pp. 29-30.) In my view this betrays a rather superficial understanding of Poondi Swami. In a footnote John writes with less bias, “The Poondi Swami is a classic representative of the traditional practice of Kundalini Yoga, which seeks to awaken the dormant life-force, or creative power of the universe, that lies coiled at the base of the spine in man, and merge it into the subtle light of the brain via the manipulation of internal energy processes. The Poondi Swami’s practice is to give yogic initiation into this awakened energy through ceremonial ritual. He is literally approached as a Divine statue or object, and ceremoniously worshipped in the classic South Indian manner – ritually bathed with butter, sandalwood paste, honey, milk, and other foods, and then ritually washed, in the same manner as a piece of statuary considered to be a representation of the Divine.” (*Op. cit.*, p. 31, n.5)

3) *Six Mystics of India* by Bharanidharan (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1996); Chapter 6 is on Poondi Swami. It is an accurate, informed account of the author’s interactions with the Master over several visits from 1969-1971. It provides a multi-faceted portrait of the Master as I knew Him, and his many moods and idiosyncrasies, along with much interesting anecdotal material.

4) *An Example of the Perfect Saint – Sri Poondi Swamy* by Sri Sarath Babuji (Shirdi: Saipatham magazine, 1988); reprinted in this issue.

5) *The Saint of Poondi* by Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja (3 pages). A well-observed portrait of his two-day visit, sometime before 1974, by the Guru of Sri Sarath Babuji. Privately printed.

6) *Purnavadhuta Sri Poondi Swami* by Smt. Sainathuni Anasuya Ammagaru (Shirdi: Saipatham Publications, 2014). A revised Telugu translation of Sainathuni Gunasekar’s original Tamil anthology of devotees’ experiences (Chennai: A. Gunasekhar Rao, 2011). It is currently the most complete account of Sri Poondi Swami yet published, but unfortunately is not yet translated into English. The revised Telugu edition reprints an earlier version of this article written without access to my journal at the time; it requires correction and is superseded by this article. ▲

Sri Poondi Swami: An Example of the Perfect Saint

SRI SAINATHUNI SARATH BABUJI

Sri Poondi Swami was first seen around 1935 in a village called Kalasapakkam about 20 miles from Tiruvannamalai in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. He assumed the mien of a mad person when he first revealed himself to public gaze. With his well-built physique and gait, he appeared to the villagers to be a retired military man. He stayed first in the Kakkumkarai Vinayagar temple and then later in a dilapidated mosque by the side of the road. He later stayed in the Draupadi temple and under the trees by the side of the road. He used to wear a long shirt-like garment reaching below his knees and would never remove it even when it became torn and bedraggled. If someone gave him another shirt, he would not remove the old shirt but wear the new one over the old. His shirt pockets would be filled

Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (1954-2010) was an eminent devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba who became by Baba's grace a Sadguru himself for thousands in India and abroad. In 1974 he spent a month with Sri Poondi Swami which culminated in his experience of realisation before the great *avadhūta* when he was barely 20 years old. His testimonial was originally published privately in *Saipatham* magazine in 1988; it is reprinted here by permission.

to bursting with old, empty cigarette packets, cigarette stubs and old scraps of paper that he would stuff into them. He would never ask anyone for anything – even food or water. Even if anyone offered him food, they would have to feed him as they would a child. He would never feed himself. If someone put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it, he would smoke it.

He never talked to anyone on his own. As he never bathed, his body would be dirty and his hair matted with grime. Flies would be swarming over him, attracted by the grime and dirt, but he would never bother about them. If he started to walk, he would keep walking for miles together without stopping to rest. If he once sat down, it might be days or weeks and maybe even months before impulse took him to get up again. Once he got up, he would again move off and go where fancy took him. Nobody could foretell when he would sit still or move or where he would be at any time. Nobody knew his antecedents, his parents or where he came from. None knew his caste, creed or even his name. None ever heard him take the name of God or speak of spiritual matters.

The people of Kalasapakkam village dismissed him as just another mad man. It took a miracle to show them that he was not a mad man but a great Mahātma who had assumed the form of a mad man for his own mysterious purposes. A river named Cheyyar flows by the side of Kalasapakkam village. It is a seasonal river, which flows whenever it rains in the nearby hills, but remains dry for the rest of the time. The Swami used to sit in the burning sands of the riverbed. Earlier, we have seen that if the Swami sat in a place once, he would continue to sit there for days or even weeks. The sand of the riverbed was burning hot because of the fierce heat of the Indian summer. It was very difficult to walk across the riverbed because of the burning sand, which would sear the feet like a coal fire. But the Swami used to sit upon the sand, with no cover whatsoever, as if he were lolling on a silken mattress under the cool light of a full moon. It was normal for the river to have flash floods whenever the surrounding hills got a heavy shower of rain.

Once, when the Swami was sitting on the riverbed, a flash flood occurred. All those who saw the Swami sitting on the riverbed thought that he must have been swept away and drowned in the flood. Once



Purnavadhura Sri Poondi Swami — 'The Master' (Nov. 1976)

the flow ebbed, the villagers rushed to the spot where they last saw the Swami. To their amazement they saw him still alive and buried up to his neck in the sand. They dug him out of the sand and the Swami walked away calmly as if nothing extraordinary had happened. When the villagers saw the Swami was still alive after being submerged in the flood for so long, they realized he must be a great Mahātma and not merely an ordinary man. The Swami became famous in the surrounding areas and they started calling him ‘Attru Swamigal’ or ‘River Swami’. *Āru* in Tamil means river.

The villagers erected a small lean-to in a cemetery on the riverbank for the use of the Swami. The Swami spent most of the next three years in this lean-to. A villager called Manikya Nayanar, who was mad after money, thought that since the Swami was a *Mahātma* he knew the secrets of alchemy and could create gold. He used to pester the Swami to reveal the secrets of alchemy to him and fed him regularly in the hope that he would gain monetarily by the Swami. The Swami told him that he knew nothing of these arts and he used to advise him not to debase himself by this rapacious greed for gold. The man waited for a long time in vain for the Swami to teach him the secrets of gold making, which he was convinced Swami knew. Finally, unable to bear his disappointment, he tried to assault the Swami. The Swami calmly walked away from there and soon reached Poondi village, which was about two miles from Kalasapakkam. This happened around 1960.

He roamed hither and thither in that village until one day he sat down upon the raised porch of a house by the side of the road. He never left that porch again for the next eighteen years until he attained *mahāsamādhi* in 1978.

If someone put a fruit or food or drink in his mouth, he would eat it. No matter how many people fed him; he would eat on and on, and one wondered where all that food went. If anyone placed an offering in his hands, he would place it on the porch at once. No one would remove it from there. He would never give back the offering as his *prasād*. As time passed, the porch became so full of the offerings that there was no place for the Swami. His devotees lifted him and put him on another porch in the same veranda. Even then, the offerings kept pouring in and soon filled the house. The owners of the house gave the house to the Swami and vacated it to make room for the offerings. But the

Swami never left the porch nor did he ever enter the house. The porch, which was six feet by three, became the residence of the Swami. The devotees would throw the offerings into the house [godown] abutting the porch where they would lie in heaps but, amazingly, the offerings dried and lay there but they never rotted or stank.

If the devotees put him to sleep, he would sleep. If they woke him, he would sit up. He used to answer the calls of nature there itself, just as a child. The devotees would wash him and clean the place. He would talk briefly if anyone spoke to him, answering succinctly if anyone asked him anything. He was a perfect mirror in his conversation. If one talked to him informally, he would reply informally. If one talked to him with awe and respect, he would reply briefly with awesome gravity. The sastras say that the mind of the perfect sage is like a mirror which reflects truly the feelings of those who approach him. The Swami was a living definition of this spiritual truth revealed by *Mahātmās* such as Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He was the personification of the state of *ajagarabhāva* or passive immobility as defined in the *Avadhūta Gīta* and *Aṣṭāvakra Gīta*.

The *śāstras* say that the *Mahātma* who has realized oneness with God seems to the untrained eye as a person immersed in the darkness of ignorance and passivity born of indolence. If one saw the Swami sitting on the porch by the road, it would seem that he sat there with golden heaps of knowledge to distribute to all comers. His royal court was always open. He was freely accessible to all devotees. There were no obstructions created by formality or ceremony or protocol between him and his devotees. Of the hundreds of devotees who visited him daily, it is not possible to find out why they had come to see him or what benefit they obtained by his darshan.

One is reminded of Sri Sai Baba's guru when one sees Sri Poondi Swami. It is recorded that Sai Baba said, "I served my Guru with my heart and soul for twelve years. The duty, which I had enjoined upon myself for his service, was very arduous. He would never get up from his place for anything – even to answer the calls of nature. He was so immersed in the experience of God that he was not aware of the body or the mind inhabited by him. He used to eat, defecate and urinate in that state without moving from that place. I used to feed him, clean him up and change his clothes whenever necessary and serve

him.”¹ Once, a devotee showed a photograph of Sri Sai Baba to Sri Poondi Swami. The Swami looked with graciousness and pleasure at the photograph and said, “Oh, Sri Sai Baba! He is a very good man, worship him,” in a voice filled with kindness.

Three days before the Swami attained *mahasamadhi*, he told his close devotee, Sri Subramanian, that he would go North to finish some tasks and later come back to stay forever at Poondi. He told him again two days later that he had met eighteen *Mahātmās* in the North and told them whatever had to be told. The Swami was in normal health until nine a.m. on the third day, 3rd November 1978. His breathing slowed gradually from nine a.m. onwards and in fifteen minutes he peacefully left his body.

Even though the sky was clear, it became overcast and started raining heavily. The rain continued without letup for three days and it was not possible to do anything with the body of the Swami. However, this gave the opportunity to his devotees from even far-off places to come and have his darshan for the last time as they were informed by the radio. The body of the Swami was put in *samādhi* in a place close to the porch where he spent his last years. Even though three days had elapsed since the life had left the body of the Swami, it did not decay. It did not emit any foul smell nor had rigor mortis set in. The body was supple and his face had the same pleasant, lively look it had when the Swami was alive.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and the *Purāṇas* define an area with approximately a thirty-mile radius, having Arunachala as its center, as a circle of great spiritual power, within which they have said a realized soul of great power would always be living. One wonders who the present living *Mahātmā* is within this circle after the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Poondi Swami.

I (Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji) have had the great good fortune of staying in the presence of the Swami for a month in 1974. ▲

¹ *Sri Sai the Superman* by Swami Sai Sharan Anand (Shirdi: Sai Baba Sansthan, 5e 1998), p.17; and *Shri Sai Baba* by Swami Sai Sharan Anand, Tr. V.B. Kher (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 6e 1997), p. 22.

Sufism and Jnana Yoga

Part Two

Is God the Doer or the Witness?

CHARLES UPTON

One of the effects of the applicability and availability of the Qur'an to all Muslims is that the spiritual Path or *tariqa* is conceived of more in terms of the will than of the contemplative Intellect, at least to begin with. The sacred law or shari'ah applies to all Muslims, consequently the fundamental virtue is *taslim*, 'submission', which is understood by the Sufis to imply that only God is the Doer, that to claim for oneself the power to conceive and carry out action apart from the will of God is to deny Him. In the Hindu Vedanta, on the other hand – in line with its more intellectual and contemplative point-of-departure – God is most commonly seen not as the Performer of action, but as the Witness of it.

Islam shares with the other Abrahamic religions the emphasis on God as Performer of Action. Like the Hindu Brahma, the creator, or like the gods Indra or *Isvara* insofar as they may be taken as different

Charles Upton is a poet and writer. He has published some thirteen books on comparative metaphysics based on the Traditionalist/Perennialist School of Rene Guenon and Fritjof Schuon. He lives in Kentucky, USA.

guises of the One as Governor and Administrator of the universe, God is most often conceived, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as pre-eminently active rather than contemplative. God is omnipotent, and one of the not-always-elaborated but nonetheless inevitable implications of His omnipotence is, not simply that He can do anything He desires, but that all action, whoever the apparent actor may be, ultimately flows from Him. If “It is not I who live but Christ lives in me” [Galatians 2:20], then it must also be true to say that “It is not I who acts, but Christ acts in me.”

Outside of Sufism, the most explicit expression of the doctrine that only God is the Doer in the Abrahamic religions is to be found in the Asharite school of Islamic *kalām* (theology) which denies secondary causes (comparable in some ways to the *gunas*) and attributes everything – all forms, all events, even all choices – to the sovereign will of God as the First Cause, even going so far as to assert that events are not even proximately attributable to natural law, or secondary causes within the realm of creation, but are produced directly by God through His continuous re-creation of the entire universe, instant by instant – the famous doctrine of ‘occasionalism’.

On the other hand, according to the Advaita Vedanta of Sri Shankaracharya, God is no doer, He does not act. Likewise, from the standpoint of the Samkhya philosophy, God as *Purusha* is the Witness, but all actions are performed by *Prakriti*, universal Substance, through the interaction of the *gunas*. In the words of the *Bhagavad-Gita*,

Who sees all action
Ever performed
Alone by *Prakriti*,
That man sees truly:
The *Atman* is actless.

Likewise, in Saivite terminology, all action is performed by Sakti, the Power of Siva, while Siva Himself is the impassive adamantine *Saktiman*, the Power-holder, who holds the totality of *Mahamaya*, universal manifestation, as his Sakti by virtue of His absolute transcendence of it. He transcends it precisely through total non-identification with it; that is to say, by witnessing the totality of it.

Here Sakti dances while Siva looks on. However, as we all know, Siva Himself is also the consummate Dancer, and it is a central tenet of Saivism that Siva and Sakti are one in essence. And Sri Ramakrishna, like the Sufis, teaches that ‘only God is the Doer’ – not surprisingly, since he knew God primarily as Sakti. Likewise Allah tells Muhammad in the *Qur’an*, referring to the moment at the Battle of Badr when the Prophet threw a handful of pebbles in the direction of the enemy, after which the tide turned in favour of the Muslims: *It was not you who threw when you threw, but God threw* [Q. 8:17]. So does God act, or does He simply witness action? Or are these nothing but two different ways of seeing and describing the same thing?

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna: “Act, but dedicate the fruits of the action to Me.” This is the classic definition of *karmayoga*. The essence of this dedication-of-action, however, involves the ability to recognise God’s pre-existing title to *all* action. If we believe that we are the authors of a given action, we will be hard-pressed to totally dedicate it to God; some trace of the sense that God owes us something in return for our good deeds will always remain, and this is one of the attitudes the Sufis recognise as a mark of the *zahiri* or outer/exoteric perspective.

Only if we see all actions as coming *from* God will we be able to perfectly release all actions *to* God. Just as our very being is a gift from His Being, so all our actions are echoes of His Action; in the words of the *Qur’an*, *You cannot will unless Allah wills* [Q. 76:30]. And to see all actions as both coming from God and returning to Him is to transcend the sense that you are performing them, but simply to witness them. The effect of this is to lift the veil from the Heart, the *hridayam*; to disclose the *Atman*; to reveal God as the Indwelling Universal Witness. So we can see here that to understand God as the only Doer, and to understand Him as the uninvolved Witness of all action, as no doer at all, ultimately come down to the same thing. Given that God alone is, how could it be otherwise?

In Hinduism it is not only possible but normative to say *tat twam asi* – That art Thou – God is Who you really are. In Islam, given that it is based on human obedience to Divine law (though this is certainly also an integral part of Hinduism in the form of the *dharmas* of the various *varnas*), ‘God is Who you really are’ is a doctrine

rarely heard so explicitly, even among Sufis. When al-Hallaj said, “*ana l’Haqq*” and was executed for it, even many of his fellow Sufis condemned him. I believe that this radical difference in perspective between Islam and Hinduism has partly to do with a difference in the collective configuration of the human ego. Given the more intellectual orientation of Hinduism, the ego or phenomenal self is conceived more archetypally or transparently than it is in Islam, where the individual is seen more in terms of the will, which will tend either toward rebellion or submission.

Consequently the Sufi *adab* (etiquette) toward Allah is not to say “I am God” (‘Jiva is Siva’), but rather “I am not; God alone is.” This, however, is virtually identical with the Maharshi’s method of self-enquiry, based on focusing on the sense of ‘I’ by asking the question: Who am I? The points of departure are different, but the Goal is the same. When the Self is realised, when the I-thought is dissolved, God alone is. I believe that it is even possible (at a stretch) to identify *La ilaha* (“there is no god”) with *neti neti*, and *illa’Allah* (“but God”) with *tat twam asi*.

Self-enquiry and Vedantic investigation remains, along with surrender, a quintessentially Hindu approach to God-realisation, while in Islam surrender is the principal practice; the word ‘Islam’ itself means ‘surrender’. Both, however, were recognized as *margas* by Ramana Maharshi, who taught that self-enquiry and self-surrender ultimately lead to the same Goal. And the two methods may actually be more similar, in actual practice, than is often realised.

In almost every rendition of the Sufi path (and such renditions are nearly innumerable), the final two ‘stations’ are *fana’* and *baqa’*, Annihilation (in God) and Subsistence (in God). The self-referential ego is annihilated; the *fitra*, the essential human nature as Allah created it, remains. And, in terms of *fana’* and *baqa’*, self-surrender opens to the same realisation as self-enquiry, because what is surrendered are precisely the various layers of the ego, the identifications of the Atman with the five *koshas*. The essence of surrender is the surrender of self-will. To surrender self-will in the realm of action, to give up the notion that ‘I can do what I want’, is to renounce ownership of the body and recognise Allah as the body’s Lord: *it was not you who do*. To surrender self-will in the realm of the feelings is to renounce

the right to invoke them and repress them and indulge in them at will, turning all power over one's emotional nature to Allah by recognising Him as the ultimate Source of it, and of all the changes it undergoes; in the words of the *hadith*, "God holds the Heart between His two fingers, and turns it however He will." (We must always remember, however, that the spiritual Heart, *al-Qalb*, is not just the seat of the feelings, but the site of the Knowledge of Allah.)

To surrender self-will in the realm of thought is to allow one's thoughts to conform to objective Reality, to Allah, and thus to begin opening the Eye of the Heart. To surrender self-will on the level of bliss is to renounce the identification of one's experience of Allah with Allah Himself, thereby fully opening the Eye of the Heart and overturning the last idol. After that, all that had once been identified as 'me' is annihilated (*fana'*) and God is recognised as the only Reality ('there is no god but God'). Yet the phenomenal self, body, speech and mind, all that has once been identified as 'me', is still walking, talking, thinking, etc. Nonetheless if *only* Allah is, then no-one is really walking, talking, thinking but He.

In the words of a famous *hadith qudsi* often quoted by the Sufis, "And when I love him [My servant], I become his ears with which he listens, and his eyes with which he sees, and his hands with which he strikes, and his feet with which he walks." This is *baqa'*. The Maharshi was annihilated as a self-identified individual – yet he could still eat, talk, intelligently answer questions, write, compose devotional hymns, direct the affairs of the ashram, circumambulate Arunachala, fully play the part of a sentient human being. In reality, however, no-one was doing any of these things but God.

In my own Sufi lineage, which springs from the great Sufi saint Ahmad al-'Alawi of Algeria, himself part of the *Shadhili-Darqawi silsila*, we are taught that there are two levels of *ma'rifa* (*jñāna*): the *ma'rifa* of Allah and the *ma'rifa* of the Nafs, the second being higher and more complete. In Hindu terms, these are probably more-or-less identifiable with *Brahma-vidya* and *Atma-vidya*. How can we understand the difference between these two stations?

It's likely that I never would have grasped the essence of Ramana Maharshi's teaching if it weren't for the following passages by Perennialist philosopher Frithjof Schuon:

....for the ‘volitional’ or ‘affective’ man (the *bhakta*) God is ‘He’ and the ego is ‘I’, whereas for the ‘gnostic’ or ‘intellective’ man (the *jñani*), God is ‘I’ – or ‘Self’ – and the ego is ‘he’ or ‘other’.¹

....[when] the perception of the Object is so intense that the consciousness of subject vanishes, the Object becomes Subject, as is the case in the union of love; but then the word ‘subject’ no longer has the meaning of a complement that is fragmentary by definition; it means on the contrary a totality which we conceive as subjective because it is conscious.”²

Likewise C.F. Kelley, in *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge*, distinguishes between a ‘relational’ mysticism, such as that of Francois de Sales or St. John of the Cross, based on ‘a gazing at, a looking at’ its Divine Object, and the *jñanic* mysticism of Eckhart, who could say: “My truest ‘I’ is God.”

I believe that what Schuon calls ‘*bhaktic*’ is what Kelley calls ‘relational’; I would only add that relational mysticism can be based either on devotion to the Divine Object, or on the desire to know that Object, or both. So when we make distinctions between relational and *jñanic* mysticism, we should be very careful not to define relational mysticism as love without knowledge, or *jñanic* mysticism as knowledge without love. As Ramana Maharshi expressed it, “Bhakti is love for God with form; *jñana* is love for God without form.” According to Frithjof Schuon, “The love of the affective man [the *bhakta*] is that he loves God. The love of the intellectual man [the *jñani*] is that God loves him; that is to say, he realizes intellectually – but not simply in a theoretical way – that God is Love.”³

When the Divine Object (*Isvara, Saguna Brahman*) becomes the Divine Subject or Self (*Nirguna Brahman, Atman*) through the annihilation of the limited human subjectivity – which is to say, when the *Atman* is unveiled – then all that was once under the sign of that limited subjectivity is transformed into the direct radiant manifestation of the Self. This, in Sufi terms, is *baqa’*, Subsistence in God. Ibn al-‘Arabi, the Shaykh al-Akbar or ‘greatest shaykh’ of Sufism, says of this station:

1 Schuon, Frithjof, *Language of the Self*.

2 Schuon, Frithjof, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*.

3 Schuon, Frithjof, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*.

“...the recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of the Reality. He does not see the Reality Itself, which is not possible, although he knows that he may see only his [true] form in it...If you have experienced this you have experienced as much as is possible for created being, so do not seek to weary yourself in any attempts to proceed higher than this, for there is nothing higher...He is your mirror and you are His mirror in which He sees His Names and their determinations, which are nothing other than Himself.”

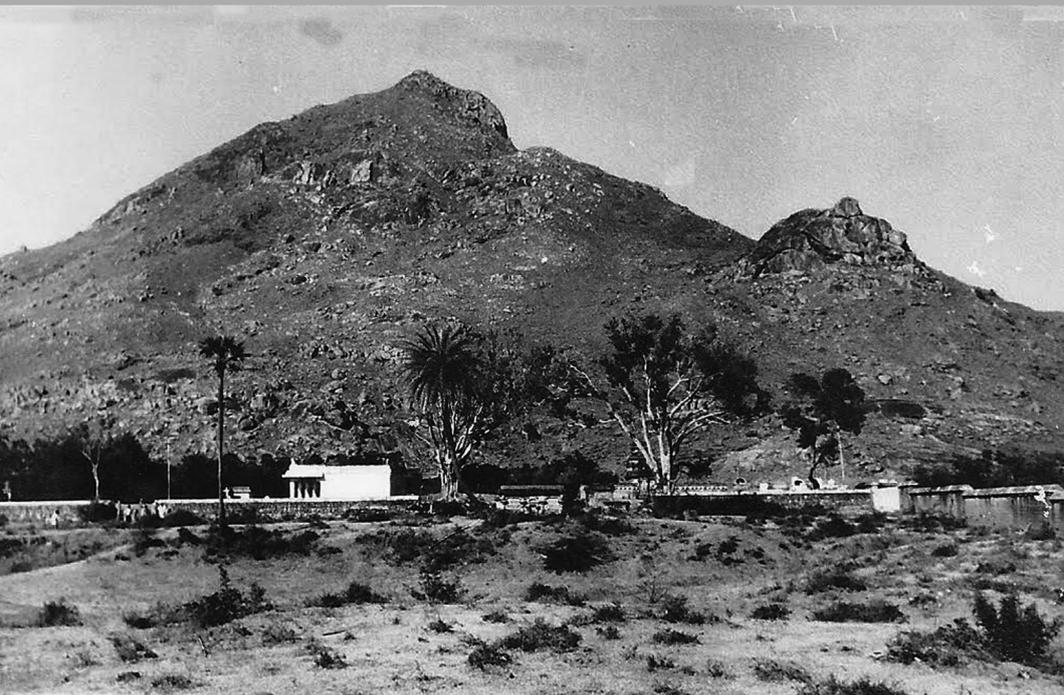
Meister Eckhart says precisely the same thing: “The eye through which I see God, and the eye through which He sees me, are the same eye” – the Eye of the Heart.

The entire story of the path leading from relational mysticism through annihilation in God to the unveiling of the Absolute Witness is told in the famous *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, “Pray to God as if you saw Him, because even if you don’t see Him, He sees you.” According to the esoteric meaning of this *hadith*, “Pray to God as if you saw Him” denotes relational mysticism, “Because even if you don’t see Him” posits Annihilation in God, *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and “He sees you” defines Subsistence before the face of the Absolute Witness.

In terms of a spiritual Way that begins, as Sufism does, with submission to God conceived of as the Absolute Other, *jñana* or *ma’rifa* starts as the intuition that God sees and knows us, in this very moment, infinitely better than we can ever know either ourselves or Him; and to know that you are known is to know the Knower.

In the words of the *Qur’an*, *I will show them My signs on the horizons and in their own souls until they are satisfied that this is the Truth. Is it not enough for you, that I am Witness over all things?* [Q. 41:53]. This intuition develops into the understanding that God’s knowledge of us is in fact our essential reality, that we do not exist in our own right, but only as a projection of one of His infinite Names. Ultimately we realise that what we call ‘me’ is fully objective to the Divine Witness within us, Allah as *Al-Shahid*, Who (in Eckhart’s words) is “our truest ‘I’”, given that (in Muhammad’s words), “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” ▲

(To be continued)



Isanya Mutt ca. 1930. The photograph gives us an idea of how deserted and bare Tiruvannamalai was during the early part of the 20th century

Moments of Bliss Revisited

Part Three

Padma's Association with Muruganar

PADMA VENKATARAMAN
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

For Muruganar to so readily accept the services of Padma in setting his verses to music and singing them, Padma must have been very musically gifted even at that early age. An essay by her published in a book entitled *Ramana's Muruganar* on the subject of her relationship with and service to Sri Muruganar, published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore, tells us that she continued to collaborate with him for a number of years after Bhagavan's passing. In the final section of the video we shall see further evidence of the absolute trust and confidence she has in Muruganar, telling us even that in her eyes he and Bhagavan are one and the same.

In the following short segment of video, Padma refers to some of the ideas expressed in Muruganar's verses. The ideas of speaking without speaking and so on, mentioned by Padma, occur in the following verse from Muruganar's *Tiruvempavai*, which is one of the poems from his *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, which is modelled on Manikkavacagar's *Tiruvachakam*.

He is the possessor of true knowledge,
who with the sword of his gaze
kills without killing and burns up our dear soul,
which is host to ego, from which it is not different.
Being, but appearing not to be,
he is the reality behind all that is not, but appears to be.
A radiant silence emanates from him
as he speaks without speaking the teaching of reality
that he has grasped, having learned without learning.
Praising the feet of the flawless jewel Ramana,
who has the power to fully grant us all delights,
may you flourish! Our maiden, arise!

Śri Ramaṇa Saṁnidhi Murai, v. 1462.

When Muruganar would sing his songs, which are the wealth of grace itself, his musical gems, sometimes I would set them to music and sing them. A number of days were spent in this way. Amongst Bhagavan's devotees I didn't know anyone apart from Muruganar. He was the only one I knew. He spoke in the most reverential terms about Bhagavan, and sang songs along the lines of, 'He kills without killing. He speaks without speaking. He is the Reality which even the unlearned can learn of and comprehend.' These were the kind of things I came to know in the company of Bhagavan's devotees.

A Mysterious Incident on Pradakshina

To perform pradakshina, as most readers will already know, is to perform ritual circumambulation of a sacred object, place or person, keeping it to the right, in other words, to walk clockwise around it. Pradakshina of the mountain Arunachala, often referred to simply as 'the Hill' is thought to confer the greatest of benefits. In the words of Bhagavan himself:

Really, it is difficult to describe the pleasure and the happiness one gets by this pradakshina. The body gets tired, the sense organs lose their strength and all the activities of the body become absorbed within. It is possible thus to forget oneself and get into a state of meditation. As one continues to walk, the body automatically gets harmonized as in the Asana state.

The body therefore becomes improved in health. Besides this, there are several varieties of medicinal herbs on the hill. The air that passes over those herbs is good for the lungs. As there is no vehicular traffic there is no worry about making way for cars and buses. One can walk care-free according to one's wishes.

Bhagavan's evocation of the Hill is hard to recognize these days, but until the early 1980s it was very much as he says. Until then, somewhat over a third of the 14 or so kilometres of the pradakshina path, from the Chengam Road to the Kanji Road, lay along a dirt track through areas of light forest, scrub and verdant rice fields. If one set out from Sri Ramanasramam there were very few buildings around the Hill in those days before the town of Tiruvannamalai itself with its great temple, even on the stretches which were paved by the thin, rudimentary strip of unlit, metalled road, and that those buildings were hoary with age, bereft of any colour other than tawny browns and soft greys and all crumbling into various degrees of disrepair, as for example the group of animal and human statues pictured in the inset, which once stood by the dirt road, opposite to what is now Unnamulai Amman temple, which was then an empty mantapam, a temporary resting place for the deities when progressing round the Hill.

In those days to perform pradakshina in the early morning, departing from the Ashram at around 3:45 a.m., was a truly awesome experience. It was not unusual for the walker not to see a single soul until well past the village of Adi Annamalai, when dawn began to break. There were no lights of any kind, except those of the moon and stars. At full moon the mountain would be bathed in an ethereal silvery radiance, and the path would be flooded by an intense light, which seemed like neither night nor day. But when there was no moon, or just the thinnest sliver of one, the path would be plunged into a deep darkness, which in the warmer months would envelop the walker in a soft caressing cloak, with the hazy outline of Arunachala still faintly visible by the light of the stars.

The reforestation of Arunachala had not begun in those days, so that at every step the walker was confronted by majestic views of Arunachala in all his facets and moods. The author of this article remembers vividly a night when, on an evening pradakshina around 9 p.m., a heavy thunderstorm broke out just as he reached the shrine

called *Panca Mukham* – Five Faces, where Arunachala displays an array of five separate peaks. She stood in awe for several minutes in a river-like torrent of rain as bolt after bolt of lightning bathed the whole bare and rugged face of the mountain in brilliant light for a split second before plunging it into total blackness again, as if Arunachala were displaying his infinite power of manifestation, then withdrawing it again just as suddenly. A light and shadow show like no other.

It is not surprising then that Padma should have found the experience somewhat unnerving, especially when Bhagavan had clearly implied that she would be better off with a walking companion. As late as 1984, Adi Annamalai village was no more than a huddle of traditional low-eaved and thatched mud brick houses, with the Adi Annamalai temple gopuram rearing up a couple of hundred yards away towards the mountain. No one would have been stirring and there would have been no source of light other than that of the moon and stars. In the pitch darkness the humped, rounded shapes of the rudimentary dwellings would look like nothing so much as huge, slumbering beasts.

The *Isanya lingam* mentioned in the following segment is one of eight *lingams* situated in the eight cardinal and intermediate directions. In Hinduism these are governed by regents called *Tikku-p-palakar* – Guardians of the Directions. As protectors of the earth, they are situated beyond the seventh circumambient sea in the Hindu cosmic scheme, in which the entire cosmos is divided into seven concentric island continents. They are noted in the *Arunachala Puranam* as seated each upon mountains or hills, which are named but cannot now be identified with a specific geographical location. They are Indra in the east; Agni in the south east; Yama in the south; Niruti in the south west; Varuna in the west; Vayu in the north west; Kubera in the north, and Icanan (Ishana) in the north east. At each of these points, a *lingam* is installed, housed in a small temple.

Padma Narrates Her Experience of Pradakshina

On one occasion, in the month of *Margazhi*¹ – pradakshina of the mountain should be done every month. I used to go often. I would

¹ The month of *Maargazhi* (mid-December to mid-January) is considered a very auspicious month for religious services. Its Tamil name is derived from the Sanskrit *Maargashirsha*, which is the fifth *nakshatra* (lunar month). For much of the month

inform Bhagavan and then go. It's the principal month (*Guru Masam*), *Margazhi*, the Month of the Bow (Dhanur Masam) – I informed Bhagavan that I was going every day. 'From tomorrow I'm going to go every day of *Margazhi*,' I said. What Bhagavan did, he looked at me... I didn't have a watch or anything of that sort. Early in the morning, whatever the time was [I would] go. Fired up by my determination to go for the whole month of *Magazhi*, I got up at three o'clock, bathed and came to Bhagavan at four o'clock. No one was around. It was pitch black. At that point I didn't even know what time it was. In those days it was the custom to perform *namaskaram* upon arrival, and to say, 'Bhagavan, I am going for pradakshina.' He would shake his head [in assent]. Accordingly, when I arrived, Bhagavan asked, 'Who is keeping her company?'. I had got to my feet very quickly, very ... Bhagavan's gaze was fixed on me as I crossed the doorsteps of the hall.

I was a little – it was very dark,² even when I had just about reached Adi Annamalai village. At that time I was still very young. I was afraid, very afraid. There was no one there, and now I was thinking also that this must be why Bhagavan had asked that question. There was a lady there called Ammani Ammal.³ She would usually go daily [for pradakshina]. There was someone like her, wearing a white sari, walking in the distance. She was a long way ahead. 'Ammani Ammal, Ammani Ammal, I'm here! I'll come and join you,' I said. But she didn't hear. She kept on going. Nevertheless, encouraged by the fact

(cont.) the sun is transiting the zodiac sign of Sagittarius, therefore it also has the name *Dhanur Maasa* (Month of the Bow), as Padma says. She also refers to it as *Guru Maasam*, which does not appear to be a known synonym for the month.

The word '*guru*' can have the meanings greatness, eminence, excellence, therefore Padma may be simply stressing its importance as she sees it.

² The word used here, *vityarkalam* can be translated as daybreak or early morning. Here the translation daybreak would not be at all appropriate. Tamil Nadu is relatively near to the equator and there is therefore less than one hour's difference between the longest and shortest days of the year. Thus even at the height of summer, dawn does not come till nearly 6 a.m. Padma would therefore be walking in complete darkness for the best part of two hours.

³ Ammani Ammal was a well-known and respected figure in Ramanagar. A moving account of an interview with her by V. Ganesan can be found in *The Mountain Path*, January 1985.

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that there was at least one person walking ahead, I carried on calling, ‘Ammani Ammal, Ammani Ammal!’ as I went along. She did not hear me, nor did she turn round to look back. But that lady in the white sari kept on going. How can I explain? ... I was alone ... [inaudible] ... At that time, when you went, you had to go right to the end...So, where the road to [the] *Isanya* [*lingam*] is – when I got to the *Isanya lingam* it was daylight. People had begun to go about their business – when I got there, there was no one there at all.⁴

[Padma is overcome with emotion and signals to the camera to stop recording.] ▲

(to be continued)

⁴ Unfortunately the speech in parts of this section of video is indistinguishable. However it is clear from her emotional state, on recalling the events of that night, that conditions were such that, to her, there was no logical explanation for the person in white’s sudden disappearance. The words ‘had to go right to the end’ imply that there was no alternative route that the figure in white could have taken such that it would remain unseen by herself. The *Isanya Lingam* is located on the old Pradakshina Road, which forms a shallow loop slightly to the east of the main road which leads directly into the town. It is adjacent to the main cemetery and cremation grounds of the town and there would have been few if any structures there in 1947 other than *Isanya Math* and the temple which houses the *lingam* itself. Early photographs show the area as barren and almost treeless with no other buildings. See the photograph on page 84, showing the view from *Isanya Math*, which is thought to have been taken in the 1930s.

The Place Where There is No Cold or Heat

Zen on Suffering, Illness, Old Age and Death

AMA SAMY

Engo's Introduction:

The words which command the universe are obeyed throughout the ages. The spirit able to quell the tiger amazes even thousands of holy ones. His words are matchless, his spirit prevails everywhere. If you want to complete your advanced training, you must enter the great master's forge. Tell me, who could ever show such spirit? See the following:

Main Case: A monk said to Tozan, "Cold and heat descend upon us. How can we avoid them?" Tozan said, "Why don't you go to the place where there is no cold or heat?" The monk said, "Where is the place where there is no cold or heat?" Tozan said, "When cold, let it be so cold that it kills you; when hot, let it be so hot that it kills you."¹

Tozan Ryokai (807-869) was one of the most distinguished Zen masters of the age. Twenty of his students went on to become

¹ *Hekiganroku*, case 43. *The Hekiganroku* or *Blue Cliff Record*, from 12th cent. Ch'an master Yuan-Wu, is among the most celebrated of koan collections and is still used in Zen training in the present day.

Fr. Ama Samy is founder and abbot of Bodhizendo, the Zen meditation centre in Perumalmalai, Kodaikanal. This article is adapted from his 2016 book, *Zen: Fragrant Grasses, Falling Blossoms*.

masters themselves and two of them were outstanding, Sozan Honjaku and Ungo-Doyo. Tozan with his student Sozan founded the Soto sect.² Tozan had dedicated himself to the Buddha-dharma even as a young boy and became a monk in his youth. He took a vow to save his parents from suffering and hell in the afterlife and he led a severe disciplined life. However, his renunciation was extreme: when his old mother was reduced to begging and came to the monastery where he was the master, he refused even to see her and she died lonely and abandoned. During the years of training in his youth, Tozan wandered from master to master asking questions and refining his knowledge of the dharma. He stayed with Master Nansen (748-834) for a while and studied with Isan (771-853). When he asked Isan about Chu Kokushi's *Sermons*, Isan said, "I would never tell you about this with the mouth given to me by my parents."

Isan sent Tozan to Ungan Donjo (782-841). Tozan immediately put the question to Ungan, "When inanimate beings expound the Dharma, who can hear it?" "The inanimate can," was Ungan's reply. Tozan again asked, "Do you hear [it]?" "If I did," said Ungan, "you would not hear my expounding of the Dharma." Tozan was still sceptical as to whether inanimate beings could really expound the Dharma. Ungan then raised his *hossu*³ asking, "Do you hear it?" "No, I do not," Tozan answered. Thereupon Ungan said, "If you do not even hear my sermon, how can you expect to hear the sermon of inanimate beings?" And he added, "Have you not read in the *Amitabha Buddha Sutra*: 'Streams, birds and trees are all chanting Buddha and Dharma?'"

At that point Tozan was made aware of the truth and composed a *gatha* to record his experience:

How wonderful! How wonderful!
 The inanimate expounding the Dharma –
 What an ineffable truth!
 If you try to hear it with your ears,
 You will never understand it.
 Only when you hear it through the eye,
 Will you really know it.

² *Soto-shu* [from *so* (Sozan) + *to* (Tozan)] is the Japanised name for the Caodong-school born of these two Ch'an masters whose Chinese names were Caoshan and Dongshan, respectively.

³ The ceremonial horse-tail whisk used by Ch'an masters.



Nothingness (Mu) by K. Bunsho

Ungan asked him, “Are you happy now?” His answer shows his usual candour: “I do not say that I am not happy, but my happiness is like that of someone who has picked up a bright pearl from a heap of garbage.” Of course, the ‘bright pearl’ referred to the new insight; as to the heap of garbage, very probably he had in mind the remnants of old habits which, as he confessed, were still in him.

Later, when Tozan bade farewell to his master, the latter remarked affectionately, “After this separation, it will be hard for us to see each other.” The student quipped, “Rather, it will be hard for us not to see each other!” Tozan asked the master, “After you have completed this life, what shall I say if anyone asks?” The master remained silent for a long while and then replied, “Just this one is.” This set the disciple to musing. Finally, the master said, “In carrying out this charge, exercise your utmost circumspection and care.”

While on his journey, Tozan continued to muse on the cryptic words – *just this one is*. Later on, in crossing a stream, he happened to see his own reflection in the water, and right on the spot he was thoroughly awakened to the real meaning of the words. Just this one is! He epitomized the experience in a *gatha*:

Do not seek him anywhere else
Or he will run away from you!
Now that I go on all alone, I meet him everywhere.
He is even now what I am.
I am even now not what he is.
Only by understanding this way
Can there be true union with the Self-So.⁴

The ‘He’ in the poem is not someone outside of oneself. It is oneself and more than oneself. In other words, it is Emptiness, the groundless ground of oneself.

Sometime in the spring of the year 869, Tozan fell sick. A monk asked him, “While you are sick, is there still someone who is never sick?” He replied, “There is.” “Does the never-sick one look at you?” “Rather it is for this old monk to look at him.” “How do you look at him?” “When this old monk is looking, I see no sickness anywhere.”

This was the Zen way of saying that the never-sick one is none other than his true self.

⁴ From John Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen*. 1975, Taipei, Taiwan.

THE PLACE WHERE THERE IS NO COLD OR HEAT

Now let us turn our attention to the case above. Heat and cold stand for suffering and sorrow – old age, sickness, death and all that go with them. The inquiring monk has been practicing a good while. Taoism claims that by ascetical practices, one can attain an immortal-diamond body, which is immune to aging, illness and even death. The monk imagines that by acquiring such a body, he will become immortal. *The Avatamsaka Sutra* proclaims the non-obstructed interfusion of the absolute and the phenomenal. The monk is excited by Tozan's answer, as if there is such a place. Of course, 'place' is a metaphor for a state. Perhaps the monk imagines there is some secret practice which the master has not yet imparted to him, a practice that will lead beyond the wheel of samsara.

Tozan has snared the monk. And now comes the thunder and lightning which will break open the monk's greed and illusion: *When cold, let it be so cold that it kills you; when hot, let it be so hot that it kills you.* It is in total acceptance of life and mortality that one is led beyond suffering and mortality. Acceptance does not mean that everything is okay. As *The Serenity Prayer*⁵ points out, it is the unavoidable and inescapable, as well as the intrinsic parts of our lives that we need to accept. Aging, suffering, illness and death are part of our lives. Inevitabilities include accidents, failures, defects, tragedies and the like. These can come upon us or we can bring them on ourselves, or they may be initiated by our inborn physical and biological conditioning. Even in the midst of these, however, our awakened hearts can be at peace.

When facing negative conditions, our attitudes of openness, trust, patience, endurance, compassion, courage, humility and prudence will be required if we are to live a meaningful life. As for the negative emotions – anger, fear, lust, anxiety, envy, jealousy, arrogance, narcissism, insecurity and depression – for these, we also need openness and acceptance. Free of fear, we need to have an attitude of embracing them. They are just emotions, thoughts or fantasies; they are not yet decisions or ensuing actions. As Paul instructs, 'Be

⁵ Authored by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Serenity Prayer* is most often rendered: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.*

angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger' (Eph. 4:26).

While accepting and feeling emotions, make the decision to choose and follow your deepest values. Find out who you want to be and how you want to live your life and conduct your relationships. Find out what your hopes are and what you believe in, what and whom you care for. In the inexorable life experiences of aging, illness, tragic loss and death we have to learn to accept and endure, not passively but in receptivity, in peace and equanimity, with compassion for self and others. Not in mere resignation but in the freedom of the awakened heart of faith, hope, love and joy. Our life-choices and attitudes affect how we live and how we will die and our attitude towards our eventual death will invariably condition the course our life takes. The end of life can come at any time and in any place. In the final analysis, it is not our efforts that are our freedom, peace and liberation. It is the self that is the mystery of Emptiness, the mystery that is graciousness – *that* is our abode of peace and freedom. And how we face our dying moments gives meaning retrospectively to our whole life.

When Tozan felt it was time for him to go, he had his head shaved, took a bath, put on his robe, rang the bell to bid farewell to the community and sat up till he breathed no more. To all appearances he had passed away from this world. Thereupon the whole community burst out crying grievously, as little children do with the death of their mother. Suddenly the master opened his eyes and said to the weeping monks, "We leavers-of-home (monks) are supposed to be detached from all things transitory. In this consists true spiritual life. To live is to work, to die is to rest. What is the use of grieving and moaning?" He then ordered a 'stupidity-purifying meal' for the whole community. Sensing that their beloved master meant to leave them after that liturgical meal, they were not in a particular hurry to have it be over. So they took seven days to prepare it. The master participated in the meal with them. After the meal, he said to them, "Please make no fuss over me. Be calm, as befitting a family of monks. Generally speaking, when anyone is at the point of going, he has no use for noise and commotion."

Thereupon Tozan returned to the Abbot's room, where he sat in meditation and quietly passed away. ▲

Bhagavan's Meerabai

RAMANAPRIYA

The name 'Sulochana', which in Sanskrit means 'She who has a good or blessed eye', found its complete justification when the twelve year old daughter of K.S. Venkataraman, ICS, had the darshan of Bhagavan Ramana in 1949 at the Old Hall of Sri Ramanasramam along with her parents. Her eyes became truly blessed. Young and precocious, gifted with a spiritual intelligence above her age, she was ready to receive the Grace. She suddenly realised that Bhagavan's gaze was fixed on her. It was a gaze which transformed many, transfigured quite a few, a gaze which could give an intimation of the extraordinary freedom within oneself, untouched by the shackles of the body, mind and thoughts. It had made mute people eloquent, and vice versa, making voracious readers spurn print and turn to the inner book which bestows omniscience. That gaze sowed in Sulochana, a student of Carnatic music from her sixth year, the seeds which would sprout making her the pioneer of Ramana Music, shaping her as the Meera of Ramana.

Young Sulochana was caught in Bhagavan's net of Grace. Later she was to meet great saints. She and her mother sang before the blithe

Ramanapriya who lives in Sri Ramanasramam, loves all music, especially Carnatic music, ghazals and Rabindra Sangeet and finds Ramana music spiritually the most uplifting.

spirit, the great Swami Sivananda Saraswati of the Divine Life Society and were blessed by him. Still later, she received mantradiksha from the ever-cheerful Swami Yatisvarananda of Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, the author of the excellent book *Meditation and the Spiritual Life*, and came into contact with other Swamis. They were all preparing her for an understanding of the gaze that was focussed on her that day in the Old Hall.

Sulochana Mami later realised that Bhagavan's Grace had been upon her right from the start. She saw his hand in every incident that happened in her life, she understood that every move that she made right from her girlhood was readying her for the role she was later to play under the banner of the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning (RMCL), Bangalore. That was the role as Bhagavan's Meera or, if you will, Bhagavan's Thyagaraja as her daughter Ambika Kameshwar writes.

Sulochanaji's birth itself was an act of Bhagavan's Grace. As she said, she grew up in an ambience saturated with music. Her mother had music in her. Her father, a jurist, was a passionate lover of Carnatic music and a fine connoisseur. They were gentle, talented, virtuous, pious, full of humanity. Sensing his little daughter's musical bent the judicious judge placed the six-year old child under the tutelage of competent music teachers, little knowing that four decades later she would lay the foundation for and, over a period of three dedicated decades, erect the grand edifice of enchanting, enthralling, ennobling Ramana Music. By the time she drew her last breath on August 23, 2016, Sulochanaji had notated about two thousand songs of and on Ramana, tuned hundreds of them, helped her lavishly gifted daughters Sarada and Ambika in creating innumerable Ramana ballets, trained a great number of devotees in Ramana Music and took part in 500 Ramananjali Music public offerings. If a flood of cassettes, CDs flowed from RMCL and if there were many TV Ramana serials, it was all in a good measure due to her devoted hard work.

Thanks to Bhagavan's Grace, Sulochana was very fortunate in her marriage to A.R. Natarajan whom she adored as 'my ideal husband'. As the young couple exchanged marital garlands in 1952, would they have known that they would sing Ramana's incomparable *Marital Garland of Letters* on Arunachala thousands of times in their lives?



It was doubtless a marriage made in heaven for they lived in perfect harmony, were blessed with two wonderful daughters, gave them the richest gift of a home filled with love and devotion to a peerless Sadguru and worked for him in unison. Both were born in highly cultured, elite families but were among the most unsnobbish and unassuming of people.

ARNji said that he would serve Bhagavan till his last breath and so he did. So did his blessed-eyed, ideal wife. For the ARN family, Bhagavan's *upadesa* '*Summa Iru*' literally meant '*Swayamaga* (*Suyama*) *Iru*' (Be as you are) and not 'Keep quiet doing nothing'. It is their nature to serve ceaselessly and they were true to their nature.

I marvelled at Sulochana Mami's unerring knack of finding the right raga for every song she tuned and notated. To give but a few examples *Sankarabharanam* for '*Achalane aayinum*', which I hum obsessive-compulsively, *Hamir* for '*Tarpara naalum*', *Ahiri* for '*Ahamukhamaagi*', *Bhairavi* for '*Namo Ramanayave*' and so on. Her creation *Ramana Pada Pancharatnam* marked the apogee of her musical creativity. When I told her so, she said, "It is Bhagavan's Grace."

Sulochanaji's face ever wore a smile – never a frown, nor even a wrinkle of worry. It was due to the Grace of the Guru who was *Ashoka*, the Sorrowless One, *Shoksanaasana*, the Destroyer of sorrow, *Abhaya*, the Fealess One and *Bhaganaasana*, the Destroyer of Fear. This quality of natural good cheer is found in her daughters Sarada and Ambika and Ambika's husband Kameshwar, their daughter Purna, her husband Sooraj and in every one of their fellow-devotees in RMCL. Because their music is the fusion of music and devotion, there is not a single false note in speech, not a *faux pas* in action and there is nothing but melody all along, all the octaves of their life of music and devotion.

A devotee of Eternal Ramana never dies. He or She is Absorbed in Him. To Sulochana Mami, Bhagavan's words were *Sabdabrahman*, Ramana Music was *Nadabrahman* and Ramana the Guru was *Parabrahman*. She has merged in what Bhagavan called the *Aadhaara Sruti*, the Fundamental Note that silently sounds in everyone as our own Being. That is what Sri Muruganar called Ramana the Self. ▲

The Creation of the Arunachala Animal Sanctuary

LESLIE ROBINSON

As with many things, the start of the sanctuary for animals began in a totally unexpected way.

I was on my way to the Himalayas to rent a cabin, do practice, contemplate, and take rides on a new Honda Activa that I hoped to buy. I had done focused sadhana for over forty years, had enough money, a clear mind, good health, a great Guru and a 'last stretch in front of me' (I was turning 70) in the Himalayas. Creating an animal shelter is not something I would have willingly chosen. Opening a Jewish Deli in Manhattan would have been just as much of a surprising choice.

The year was 2006. I had come to Tiruvannamalai intending to stay for ten days and then go on to the Almora region in the Himalayan foothills to continue (or should I say end) my journey. On Friday, three days before I was to leave, I ran into an animal activist who told me there was an article in the paper that said the Municipality was going to begin killing homeless dogs, on Monday, street by street, to cull the population. They had been doing it for decades to unsuccessfully try to stop the homeless dog population growth. I heard stories of extreme brutality. Clubbing. Strangling. Bounties.

The news descended on me like a ton of bricks. I made literally hundreds of calls. And so the Shakti willed that for the first time in forty years, we were able to actually stop the killing. There was a condition: a population control program (which the Municipality had no faith in) had to be put in place. There was no one to do it. And if I left, it would only have been a matter of time before pressure for the killing would re-manifest. And so my life as I had known it, ended. I understood that it was my dharma.

I literally gave everything else up. Just focused on the work for the first four or five years, spending time with no one other than those directly involved in the Work. Days...nights...during the night whenever I woke up. Eating alone, always. Going nowhere else. 24/7. 365 days a year. I couldn't have worked harder. But it wasn't until several months had passed that I realized I had nothing to do with almost all the important things that were happening: the magnificent people sent to me to do the Work – my students, money, land; it all just happened, it clearly was magical. Whether it was Siva...Bhagavan... my Guru...who knows? But clearly, unmistakably, it was Divine.

And so this magnificent Shelter, which I shall tell you about, unfolded. The energy inside is not my energy; it is not the energy of the staff; it truly is Divine Energy. If you close your eyes and rest the mind, you can feel the Grace. It is soft and gentle. And it's working on all of us "doing" the Shelter. Me. Dr. Raja Vishwa. Our beloved Staff. The Furry Ones.

I tell the Staff that the Work we are doing clears our minds. And perhaps, more importantly for me, I have connected with the supreme purity, the directness, of Bhagavan's "Self Inquiry". AND I can't leave. How much more auspicious for me is this Work, practising Self Inquiry and steeping myself in the words of Bhagavan, than spending the 'last stretch' in the Himalayas, riding the Himalayan foothills on my Honda Activa, contemplating, writing, doing practices... Clearly, Arunachala has turned me over to Bhagavan for this last journey. How much merit I must have accumulated to give me this Supreme Blessing! Om Namah Sivaya.

The Shelter truly is a Divine Manifestation. And it makes sense to me now, in this Sacred Land of Siva – Siva, who in the form of Pashupati is 'Lord of the Animals', *The Protector of Animals*,

THE CREATION OF THE ARUNACHALA ANIMAL SANCTUARY

the principal deity worshipped in Nepal. Rama and Krishna were wonderful, caring for and protective of the animals. But it is Siva who is *The Protector*. So it made perfect sense to me when I came to know that our beloved Bhagavan loved, cared for, and protected them. I mean, how else could he have acted?

And so my dear fellow sadhaks, the story of Arunachala Animal Sanctuary & Rescue Shelter...

We opened in January 2007.

My Guru, Baba Muktananda, over thirty years ago, told me that the physician heals with the Heart. So the very core of our Work is demonstrative love – hugging, touching, stroking, kissing, reassuring. Our belief is that deep healing only takes place if a creature feels safe, cared for, and loved.

I wish you could see the inside of our beloved Shelter. It would gladden your Heart. Our Staff is devoted and loving. The dogs and puppies, unlike other shelters, are not kept in cages but run free and are happy... The Animal Welfare Board of India, who oversee and approve all shelter and animal activity in India, in a public letter endorsing us said, “In the short span of time that they have been in existence, they have established themselves as one of the very best animal sanctuaries, veterinary clinics, rescue shelters and hospices in the Nation.

Our Staff of twenty, plus three full-time veterinary doctors, using traditional and alternative medicines, lifts suffering from over 5,000 homeless dogs and puppies, and thousands of other animals, big, small, wild, domestic – cats, cows, calves, sheep, goats, horses, monkeys, birds, squirrels, peacocks, snakes and other reptiles, eagles, mongooses, and on and on. We will care for *any* creature in need.

We have a really fine internet photo presentation that tells the story of our beloved Shelter. The link is

<http://www.arunachalasanctuary.com/photo/presentation>. (If you're an animal lover, copy and paste. It will warm your Heart to the core. There is truly nothing like it in all of India.)

When we first opened, the animal situation was awful... the worst I have seen. There were over 5,000 (more likely over 7,000) homeless dogs and their population was out of control. With no small animal vet within 75 kms, no treatment facility, rampant rabies, and widespread abuse, there was unbounded misery. Stunningly, there were 350

suffering and dying animals on the streets – mostly dogs and puppies, but monkeys, cows, cats and others, too.

We have now been open 10 years. The homeless dog population is decreasing for the first time in forty years, and has been decreasing for five years. *And* it is rabies-free. There are no more suffering and dying animals on the streets. There are over 10,000 fewer puppies born each year, almost all of whom would have suffered and died. There is no more widespread abuse, and thus fewer aggressive dogs, and only a small fraction of dog bites.

But the most important thing that has happened is that the relationship between the animals and the people amongst whom they live, day in, day out, has been totally transformed... and it gets better every year. It is the main thing when it comes to uplifting the quality of life of the homeless animals. If that relationship is not profoundly changed, in the long run the uplifting power of controlling the dog population, eradicating rabies, opening shelters, clinics, hospitals, emergency rescue services and having adoption programs, will be severely limited. The dogs are exposed to the same indifference, the same abuse, the same absence of protection when they are in harm's way, the same absence of help in their unending search for food and water, and the same absence of help when they are hurting.

In the poignant words of longtime resident Dev Gogoi, made at our fourth anniversary puja, "Public memory is short. Few can recall the rampant stray dogs everywhere, young and aged, starving and diseased, scavenging in the garbage heaps, fighting amongst themselves. In four short years, the roads are more peaceful, with few strays to be seen, and the natural loving relationship between humans and animals is restored to its true state."

Tiruvannamalai is possibly *the only municipality* of its size in the Nation that has no significant problem with stray animals.

Since opening (through June 2016): we have performed 6,296 sterilizations...given 11,933 anti-rabies injections...gone out on 3,652 emergency rescues...had 36,108 out-patient visits for treatment in the clinic, given 102,548 in-patient treatments...found good homes for 807 puppies/dogs, and 37 cats/kittens...treated 3,259 animals other than dogs – cats, birds, cows & calves, goats, lambs and sheep, monkeys, rabbits, squirrels, donkeys, pigs, peacocks, parrots, eagles, horses, bullocks, deer, snakes, turkeys, owls, ducks, mongooses, chameleons, and turtles.

THE CREATION OF THE ARUNACHALA ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Monthly: We are doing 50 to 100 sterilizations... giving 100 to 180 anti-rabies injections...going out on 80 to 140 emergency rescues... The clinic is very busy. We are getting 500 to 800 out-patient visits... Placing 5 to 20 puppies in good homes...treating 50 to 80 animals other than dogs... and giving 1,300 to 1,600 treatments to in-patients.

In the last several years, there has been a strong surge of activity. The number of monthly treatment visits to our clinic has gone from an average of 350 to over 700. The number of monthly emergency rescues has gone from 43 to over 100. They are almost all serious, and *traffic-related*.

The steady, strong increase in clinic visits is auspicious as we notice that people are opening their Hearts more and more to the animals and caring more for them. However, the increase in monthly emergency rescues is ominous. Tiruvannamalai has an almost unique traffic configuration, which is increasing the traffic intensity at an exponential rate and is incredibly harmful to animals.

Yet the amazing thing is that to walk around the streets, ours is probably one of the best scenes in the country. And it visibly improves each year. However, lying underneath is one of the most destructive traffic patterns for animals, not to mention people, and if the Shelter's services should stop at any time, a floodgate would open, filling the streets with an unimaginable number of dying and suffering animals, numbering well above a thousand a year – bringing it back not to the awful situation that existed in 2007, but to an almost unimaginable horror that is much worse.

How blessed I am to have been that is 'commanded' to do this Work that I feel has the blessing of our beloved Bhagavan. Could anyone think that he would not want the Voiceless Ones protected and cared for? It's difficult to imagine what he would have done to lift the suffering if he were still in the body amongst us. I didn't choose to do this. I have never done anything like this in my life. It 'descended' on me. And I couldn't 'not do it'. I, without effort, gave up everything else. And I do mean everything. I've lost interest in all the things I was interested in. I've lost the skill of having casual conversations. I am stunningly solitary, almost, isolated. Yet this is not through my own choosing...And this has been the supreme teaching in non-doership. If someone says to me "What a wonderful thing you have

put together!” They don’t understand. Inside me, I have no connection with it. From the deepest part of me, in truth, I didn’t put it together. I have worked very, very hard. But I did not put it together. I have no sense of having done anything. It is His manifestation. It is He alone that I serve. And there is nothing noble about it. I didn’t choose to do it. And I tell you, once more, that I am doing it because I cannot “not do it”. And I am here, because I can’t walk away.

Who is it that has lifted all this suffering? Who brought all this shakti together?...I place my head at your blessed feet dear Bhagavan. Please. Take me across. I am helpless.

The Shelter’s operating expenses are presently over seven lakh rupees a month, and it is supported by private donations. If you are inclined to help, please go to our website at www.arunachalasanctuary.com

Om Namah Sivaya. ▲

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

From her palms the rills
of salvation spring, turn to
rivers of freedom;
at your freshets, *Muktidaa*,
we slake our primeval thirst.

Mistress of the spume
in light’s exploding eye,
the delirium;
Layakari, you are the
tidal freedom in the gene.

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.

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Four

The Lord Comes to Kabir in the Form of a Fakir

Part One

NABAJI SIDDHA

“O holy men, who have fixed your life-breath on the crown of the head! Now, give your entire attention to this intriguing story.”

Kabir feeling remorse for his attachment to the piece of cloth, to the neglect of real wisdom, fixed his mind on the Lord. To further test Kabir, the Lord took the form of a Muslim fakir and came to him. He addressed him thus: “O meritorious boy! I have heard that you are kind-hearted and generous, so I have come running to you. I don’t have an alternate piece of cloth to wear. Will you kindly give me the cloth that you hold in your hand and remove my abject poverty? May your ignorance be reduced to dust! May all your sins be razed to the ground! O embodiment of dharma, divine boy, there is no greater sinner than a miser. Is there any better companion to a man than virtuous deeds, just as a piece of apparel is for a woman to cover herself? Have I uttered any untruth?”

“O fakir, O great renunciant, if your desire is for this piece of cloth, then take it. Jai Sitaram!”

On hearing this utterance, the fakir stepped back in shock and cried angrily, "O evil man, brainless fool, we hold that the eternal, blemishless, undifferentiated, independent, unattached, undivided, nameless, formless, desireless Absolute is the beginning as well as the ultimate. Why do you then pronounce the name 'Jai Sitaram'? Thereby you have glorified an individual and taken to Personal aspect; ignoring the formless Truth, you have offended our scriptures. How can you forget the all-pervading, all-permeating Bliss-Truth-Absolute? You have uttered blasphemy. I should not even stand near you anymore."

"O fakir, instead of taking the cloth, you have made me a culprit. This will lead me to hell. If I retain the cloth with me, which I have already offered to you mentally, I will be subject to great punishment by the Lord of death. Is it fair on my part to say one thing and do something else? You know that I am an innocent boy and yet you coveted this silk from me, worthy of adorning the Lord. Now it is not right for you to decline the offer and make me a sinner. Please take pity on this child and accept this cloth."

In spite of Kabir's pleading the fakir remained hostile and said, "Even if I take a fake coin from you who have spoken against our holy scriptures, terrible sins will afflict me."

"Primarily, I am an ignorant child though I am familiar with the precepts of knowledge of *nirguna*. Just as frozen butter turns to liquid ghee (clarified butter) when it is put on fire, yet remains the same in essence; just as gold and the ornaments made of gold, cotton yarn and the clothes spun of yarn, colour and the painting made of colour, a mountain and the idols carved out of rocks, iron and the implements made of iron, earth and the clay objects made out of earth, water and the salt extracted from water are not essentially different; similarly formless Brahman and the Lord of form and name are basically the same and not different from each other. As a matter of fact, the Lord with name and form is even superior to formless Absolute Brahman. Therefore, it is appropriate to take the Lord's name while initiating any action."

The fakir countered, "O Kabir, you are like a student becoming the advisor for his preceptor. Now, you tell me, which is the substratum – is it gold or ornament, earth or pots, yarn or cloth, iron or implements, stone or idols, colour or painting, formlessness or form?"

“O venerable elder, though you are learned, you are trying to hoodwink a child like me. The formless Brahman or Spirit is the substratum, but in its descent into matter as form, it carries on the activities of sustenance of the world. Further just as the sun and its rays, the moon and coolness, fire and heat, lamp and light, water and taste, penance and anger, anger and sin, desire and birth, birth and karma, karma and body, body and afflictions, affliction and misery; or charity and kindness, patience and peace, japa and dhyana, jnana and mouna, self-discipline and pride, ignorance and illusion, worldliness and frustration, renunciation and forbearance, austerity and non-violence, Guru and the Lord, Lord and Brahman, Brahman and bliss, bliss and liberation are inseparable, so are the *saguna* and the *nirguna* aspects. Since we are endowed with a body, name and form, it is more appropriate for us to invoke the Lord with attributes.”

“O Kabir, one cannot rely upon the forms which are destroyed at the time of the great deluge or the body which may perish any moment. By worshipping a personal deity, can we get rid of the afflictions of birth and death? Your perverted argument is like mistaking the poison for nectar. Anyone with a modicum of commonsense will prefer immortality by partaking of the nectar than encountering the dark valley of death by consuming poison. One should prefer eternal bliss instead of going to doom by depending on transient *saguna*. Your stupidity is amazing.”

Kabir explained, “O fakir, just as deadly poison turns into a precious ruby, the personal aspect – a reflection of Brahman in *sattva-guna*, the quality of peace and harmony – will unfailingly grant us eight-fold wealth as well as the bliss of the Absolute. We should never forget Him. However, at the time of the final deluge, everything, from jivas to the Lord who sustains the jivas, is obliterated. It is also logical that the waking state is far more preferable to the oblivion of deep sleep. Likewise, *saguna* is more within the comprehension of ordinary people than the notion of the Absolute.”

“O muddle-headed boy,” expostulated the fakir, “in the absence of Bismillah i.e. *nirguna*, there is no power, illusion or three gunas or reflection of three gunas. Your obtuseness has plunged you in confusion. Stake your faith on the *nirguna* and uplift yourself.”

Kabir said, “O great scholar of scriptures, if the abstract had not taken a form or materialized, there would have been no world, jivas,

advocates of *nirguna*, you or me. Therefore, Lord Narayana alone is to be remembered. Is there any other protector than Him? Get away from here.”

“O Kabir, the Trinity, maya and world are like the passing scenes in a dream or like mistaking the rope for a snake. You are against our teaching, you belittle the impersonal Truth. Your contention that the Personal Lord is Brahman and that He is eternal sounds absolutely crazy. You are out of your mind! The Absolute is motionless, how can such a Truth become the Lord and engage in the sustenance of the world etc.? Just as bliss tainted by misery, love by anger, space by form, similarly a Lord with form emanating from the formless Absolute is inconceivable. Why are you overcome by such madness?” The fakir made fun of Kabir and laughed loudly.

“O fakir, just as a whirlwind is created in windless space, thoughts remain unmanifest in deep sleep, fragrance is unrevealed in the seed, the sweetness of the fruit is dormant in the flower; similarly the Lord, who gives rise to the amazing phenomenal world of constant flux and movement, emanates from the formless and actionless Absolute. In the absence of the Lord, there is no illusory power, five elements, liberation and bondage, happiness and misery, merit and demerit, Guru and disciple, worship and the worshipped, motion and stillness, charity and generosity or you and I. You are talking like a dumb person.”

“O...O...Kabir, now are you going to refuse me the silk cloth, saying there is no charity or generosity in the state of the Absolute?” asked the fakir sardonically.

“Even if you ask for my life, I will readily place it at your feet. Is this piece of cloth a big deal? Take this and leave me alone,” responded Kabir.

Now the deceitful fakir started to speak amiably, “You are indeed large-hearted. You alone are truly wealthy. In spite of your good qualities, why are you so ignorant of the path of Knowledge? It is said that detachment is greater than action and devotion; but Knowledge is even superior to detachment. It is nothing but ignorance to reject this aspect and stick to devotion as the supreme tenet.”

Kabir exclaimed, “O loud-mouthed fakir rolling out empty words, you turn the truth upside down. What is the use of glorifying the

attributeless Absolute while the mind is filled with seething passions? Initially one should get devotion leading to detachment with which one distances oneself from worldliness and engages in the practices of jnana. Instead, you want to reach the top storey without climbing up the steps, risking injury to your skull. You wish me, a young boy, to meet with a similar fate, by directly pushing me into the path of Jnana. When one's devotion matures, he beholds the Lord, the Beloved in his heart, loosens the worldly fetters, restrains unbridled passions, gets rid of all his doubts and destroys the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. As one is thus nurtured in these disciplines, he gradually becomes mature enough to attain to the state of the Absolute."

"Aha..! it seems you are taking this body for the imperishable. Perhaps your Lord will fulfil this whim of yours! May you be blessed and have your wish accomplished," said the fakir sarcastically. He further enquired, "Will you apprise me of how this world emanated from the Brahman?"

Kabir explained, "This is beyond description and comprehension. Yet I will try to expound it as much as it is in my capacity to do so. First, Brahman caused the unmanifest Nature, i.e. *Moola Prakriti* – comparable to the state of deep sleep – to arise out of Itself; from this arose the three gunas. It is said, the reflection of Brahman in sattvic quality is the manifest Lord Vishnu. Out of Him, emerged Lord Brahma who created the innumerable universes and their inhabitants. In the formless state, it is Brahman; in form, it is Lord Vishnu. The Godhead is partly revealed and partly concealed.

"The scriptures portray the Lord as Brahman, hence He is the ancient Lord. In the initial stages of creation, He appeared as water, hence the name Narayana. By showers of rains, He caused green vegetation everywhere, so He is called Green-hued. As He bore down on the earth with rain-bearing clouds He is known as the grey-coloured One. He causes all auspiciousness by His mere will, so His heart is the abode of the Goddess of prosperity.

"He surrounds the world like a circle in the form of water, His weapon is called the Discus; since the primordial sound, Omkar, issues forth from Him, He is the holder of the Divine Conch. As the Prakriti has four corners, He is the four-faced Lord. He sustains the innumerable life-forms on earth, He is the Nourisher.

“The earth remains in space supported by the Lord’s special power Adishesha, on which He reclines. He quenches the fire of anguish in the heart of Shiva in the form of water, hence He is Rudrapriya, lover of Shiva; as granter of boons to His beloved devotees, He is the Varadha. As all-pervading, He is Vishnu; being the destroyer of sins, He is Hari; being imperishable, He is Achyutha; sporting in the hearts of all beings, He is Rama; creating the entire universe as a child’s play, He is the playful One; inherent in all (attached) yet free (unattached), He is the deceitful One; granting immortality to those who seek His refuge, He is the Lord of Vaikunta; as the Lover of His devotees, He is Bhagavan; being the sovereign of all worlds, He is Jagannath; as a servant of devotees, He is the Beloved. He casts a spell on the states of sleep and wakefulness through a mysterious world-play, so He is the Deluder.

“He is not easily attainable, so He is transcendent; He is adored by sages, hence Hrishikesh; as He is pleased with ascetics, He is Madhava.

“He is the source of everything. He is the creator, protector and destroyer. He descends into the world as incarnations at different Ages to protect the virtuous and destroy the wicked.

“Can one forget the Lord who is adored by the scriptures? Is it possible for obstacles to appear in the life of a God-lover, who remembers Him constantly? O fakir, you prattle all the time about Brahman; but does that Brahman breathe or talk? Now, I have laid to rest all your shallow arguments. Stop harassing me, O old man and quit this place.”

Wishing to try him further, the fakir said, “Bravo! Well done! Rejecting the transcendent, radiant, superconscious, perfect, pure, blemishless Absolute, and impelled by egotism, you are obstinately clinging to Hari. Now, tell me whether the seed came first or the tree? The father came first or the son? The master came first or the servant?”

Kabir replied, “O fakir, I don’t get intimidated so easily, just as the fox in the palm grove is not scared away by the rustling leaves; a chaste woman is not tempted to flirt with a passerby. O fakir, one who seeks eternal bliss will never settle for transient pleasures. A resolute man is not overshadowed by grief nor does a hero flee the battlefield! Should I pay any attention to your empty words? How do you get the

seed without tree? Unless a child is born, can a man become a father?

“The Lord is my refuge and I am His servant. Since you cannot humble yourself to see the truth, the Lord does not exist for you. Tell me, who rushed to the rescue of Draupadi, is it the personal God or Brahman? The Lord adorned with a tulsi garland lifts His devotees from worldly mire. There is no other God for me than Lord Vishnu. There is no other Divine name than Rama for me. Death does not pursue one who takes total refuge in the Lord. So let us not waste our time in futile discussions.”

The fakir said wearily, “O Kabir, though you are born in Islam which upholds the formless Absolute, you condemn the tenets of your own faith. It is like Vibhishana betraying his own kith and kin. I am not going to spare you. By evening you will receive a fitting punishment for all your transgressions. Right now I am going to report your misbehaviour to your mother – giving away the piece of cloth and turning away from your own faith.” With these parting words, the fakir left the place.

Stricken with fear, Kabir thought, “Oooo..! Though a priest, he is bent on causing me trouble, like a man who is unable to get rid of his spiteful nature even after taking sannyas. If my mother learns about my charity, she will hurl abuses at me, nay, she will kill me. Let me catch hold of the fakir’s feet and beg him to abstain from his vindictive act.”

However, when Kabir went after the fakir and pleaded with him, all his piteous appeals fell on deaf ears. The fakir rushed away to Kabir’s residence.

Kabir lamented, “I have jumped into the fire on my own, losing not only my earnings over an act of charity but also incurring the wrath of the recipient. Just as a scorpion keeps stinging when its tail is given a free play; or an innocent man is dragged into a street-fight in addition to losing his money; or a person soils himself when he spits out while lying on his back; in a similar way I have invited my own troubles.”

Perplexed at the situation and assailed by anxiety, Kabir walked towards a dilapidated house on the outskirts of the city and immersed himself in praying to the Lord to help him out of the crisis. He kept on chanting His divine names. ▲

ASHRAM CALENDAR 2017

Sri Bhagavan's 137th Jayanti	Thursday	12th January
Pongal	Saturday	14th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Friday	10th February
Sundaram Iyer Day	Wednesday	15th February
Maha Sivaratri	Friday	24th February
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	17th March
Telugu New Year Day	Wednesday	29th March
Sri Rama Navami	Wednesday	5th April
Tamil New Year Day	Friday	14th April
Sri Bhagavan's 67th Aradhana	Monday	24th April
Maha Puja	Saturday	20th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Wednesday	5th July
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Saturday	8th July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Friday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Thursday	21st September
Saraswati Puja	Friday	29th September
Vijayadasami	Saturday	30th September
Deepavali	Wednesday	18th October
Karthigai Festival Commences	Thursday	23rd November
Karthigai Deepam	Saturday	2nd December

TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

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

The world appears to you as real, but annihilates you when it subsides. Even when you are told that it is inert, a mere consequence of actions, it still whirls you about in delusion, like someone who has taken poison. However, the real impediment to true knowledge is your own defective understanding, the failure to know your true Self. (156)

When the individual self regards the world it perceives as real, and predicates its entire being upon that reality, as, for example, when it believes that its consciousness resides in the physical brain, it is entirely at the mercy of that fickle pseudo-reality, which can do away with it at any moment through its myriad forms of transformation,

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>.

decay and death. Until it is established in the Self, the *jiva* will view the absence of the world-illusion as a terrifying void.

In your state of limited, conditional awareness, your nature is veiled by the obscuration of the ego. However, like a bright, clear crystal, which holds the reflection of objects but is not affected by them, your essential nature is not affected. We have now explained to you your nature as the *jiva*, the form that the *jiva* takes, and your nature as the Self. Reflect carefully upon these matters. (157)

Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) explains the three terms mentioned at the end of the verse along the following lines: *cupaavam*, Sanskrit *svabhaava* – *own condition or state of being*, refers to the nature of the individual soul or *jiva*, as being inherently subject to the principle of egoity, *aanava malam*, just as the inherent nature of the crystal is to take on the colours of the things placed next to it. *uruvam*, Sanskrit *rupa* – *form, outward appearance*, refers to the form or appearance of the *jiva*, as being affected by the mind, senses, etc. whilst under the influence of *aanava malam*, just as the crystal is coloured in various ways when under the influence of the objects placed next to it. *corupam*, Sanskrit *svarupa* – *nature, self-nature* refers to the Self or Shivam, the reality that underlies the individual self, but which cannot be known until the veiling of *aanava malam* is removed, just as the crystal, although intrinsically bright and clear, will not be known as such as long as it is coloured by the objects standing next to it.

When the veiling is removed, the *jiva* is no more, and its substratum, the Self, remains, shining alone in its immaculate, non-dual self-nature, just as when the objects are removed, the crystal remains, shining clear and bright, unaffected by anything.

It [your true Self] is free of the states of awareness and forgetting, abiding as all-embracing pure consciousness. Like the ether, it contains all things [yet is not touched by them]. Granting its grace to the *jiva*, it is like sugar, feeding it with the sweetness of its own bliss. To such a one do these three,

(i.e. nature as *the jiva*, form as the *jiva*, and form as the Self, mentioned in the previous verse) belong. (158)

The Self is compared to sugar, because the nature of sugar is itself sweetness. Just as all things made out of sugar taste sweet, all experiences are founded upon the bliss of the Self, whose nature is bliss. Thus the Self imparts its bliss to itself, in the form of the *jiva*.

You make all kinds of sweets of various ingredients and in various shapes and they all taste sweet because there is sugar in all of them and sweetness is the nature of sugar. In the same way all experiences and the absence of them contain the illumination which is the nature of the Self. Without the Self they cannot be experienced, just as without sugar not one of the articles you make can taste sweet.¹

Having perceived and grasped [the world through the mind and senses], remaining entirely submerged in them, and having come to realise the nature of this defective, discriminating awareness, to then remain in [unattached] purity as pure consciousness, untouched by the five divine operations, the first of which is creation, just as Shivam remains untouched by these, is true renunciation. (159)

The five divine operations *creation, maintenance, destruction or involution, veiling and the granting of grace*, correspond to the operations of the individual consciousness. Creation is the arising of the world in conjunction with the mind and senses, and so on. See the notes to v. 33.

In the same way that Shivam provides the ground for all manifestation, but is totally unaffected by, and uninvolved in it, the task of the *jiva* is to realise that the appearance of the world that comes and goes in its consciousness is totally other than itself, and to remain untouched by it. In doing so, it will transcend that *jiva* nature and realise its true nature as Shivam.

¹ Osborne, Arthur (ed.), *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, 2002. p.134.

Who [amongst *jnanis*] will be cognisant of the world in which *jivas* live like a swarm of fireflies in the darkness? Know that to them the dawn of true knowledge is like [the rising of] the sun. [The great ones] have taught the five pure *avasthas* so that your defilement may be destroyed, just as the sun annihilates your shadow as it reaches the zenith of the heavens. (160)

The darkness is the darkness of ignorance, *aanava malam*, the principle of egoity, and the fireflies are the activities of the *jiva* in the world of *maya*. Both this darkness and the feeble, flickering illumination of the *jiva* consciousness will be invisible to the consciousness of the *jnani*, which bathes in the full light of the sun of the Self. The world of *maya*, full of *jivas* all trying to make sense of it with the feeble illumination of the intellect, simply does not exist for the *jnani*. It exists only from the point of view of those who labour under the delusion that they are subject to it.

TCS describes in detail how, in the realised sage, each of the five *avasthaas* – *states of the soul* – has been purified and transcended, being transformed into what he calls *cuttavattai*, Sanskrit *shuddha avasthaa* – *pure avasthaas*. The five *avasthaas* – *states of the soul* are *caakkiram*, Sanskrit, *jagrat* – *the waking state*; *coppanam*, Sanskrit *svapna* – *the dreaming state*; *cuzhutti*, Sanskrit *sushupti* – *the state of deep sleep, complete unconsciousness*; *turiyam*, Sanskrit *turya* – *the fourth state*, and *turiyaatitam*, Sanskrit *turyaatita* – *the state beyond the fourth state*. (See the note to v. 33 for information on the latter two states).

In the purified soul these are called *cuttaavattai*, Sanskrit *shuddhaavasthaa*, and are termed *ninmalacaakkiram* – *pure waking state*, *ninmalacoppanam* – *pure dreaming state*, and so on. The individual soul, or *jiva*, acquires this purity by freeing itself from the *tattvas* which limit it in each of these states of being, at which point it merges with Sivam, the Self, the universal consciousness.

Just as no shadow is cast when the sun is directly overhead, the consciousness of the *jiva* which is established in the heart centre, fully illuminated by the light of the Self, does not become caught up in the illusory nature of the ‘shadow’ states of consciousness, waking, dream and deep sleep.

The false appears to be real, but if one enquires into it, it will disappear, as when what appears to be a snake turns out to be just an image painted on a wall. Otherwise, Sir, if you perform rituals and austerities [to discover the real], it will be as if you mistook a post for a thief, and beat a drum to scare it away. (161)
 On being informed that the world and the body, which are of the nature of *maya*, are unreal like a mirage, you should try to comprehend their true nature. Rather than that, do you expect to be able to eliminate them, shaking them off and obliterating them completely? Similarly the way to escape from a fire that surrounds you in a dream, is simply to wake up. (162)

You say that it is the incontrovertible truth that the world is false. [If you fully realise the truth of your words], is it necessary still to go looking for ‘the real’? Why do you cast doubt upon this, repeatedly looking at the sun [of true knowledge] that banished the black darkness [of ignorance], then blinking and turning away? (163)

Here it is being stated that the aspirant must validate the fact that the world is unreal in itself from his own experience. TCS notes in his summary of the verse’s meaning: *jnana is the true realisation that all the faculties [of body and mind] are unreal.*

The image evoked in the latter part of the verse is that of someone who is not satisfied that the absence of darkness and the full illumination of his surroundings is sufficient proof of the existence of the sun, but insists instead on trying to look directly at it, to make sure that it is there. Unable to see it by looking at it directly, he nevertheless perseveres in his attempts to do so, repeatedly turning his head to look at it, then blinking and turning away, and so forth. In the same way the ignorant person is unable to seek assurance of the existence of the Self in the blissful serenity of his own being, but is driven to continually seek objective proof of its existence through the mind and senses.

[True *jnanis* and false *jnanis* alike] proclaim that birth is to be abhorred. However will you not recognise those who subside

inwardly as their external attachments subside, knowing that the body is an unnecessary affliction, and that true penance is the absence of all attachment, by the simple fact that they demonstrate their lack of attachment to the body [and senses] in their actual conduct? This is the trait by which you will know them. (164)

Many go about preaching that attachment to the body is the source of suffering, and that they possess the means to remove it, but these may be only words. The author therefore advises us to scrutinise the conduct of those who profess to be teachers of the truth, to ascertain that their words are borne out by their actual behaviour. To clarify the point being made, TCS adds the words true *jnanis* and false *jnanis* in his gloss.

Those who subside inwardly as their external attachments subside – the less one identifies with external things, thinking in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, the more one can subside into the inner peace of the Self, and the more one subsides into that peace, the less one is tempted to identify with those external things.

The word *mikai*, here translated as *affliction*, means *abundance, excess, that which is unnecessary, superfluous* and hence *arrogance, evil, fault, affliction, error, defect* and so on. In the non-dual continuum of the Self there is no body, therefore it is superfluous and unnecessary, and since it causes suffering to those who identify with its illusory existence, it is also an affliction. Compare *Tiru-k-kural* 345: *To those who have taken up the severing of the ties of birth, the body itself is an affliction. What then of other attachments?*

The phrase *onru ilaamaiye nonpu* – *true penance is the absence of all attachment* is an echo of *Tiru-k-kural* 344: The nature of penance is to be free of possessions. Possessions bring back delusion once more.

TCS notes that since the body and the senses are united as one, the word *mey* – *body*, is used figuratively to signify the senses, a figure of speech which is called *aakupeyar* in Tamil, *metonymy* in English. The use of the word *body* also reinforces the overall meaning of the verse, in emphasising the fact that we should pay attention to what the *body (mey)* does, as well as the *words (vaarttai)* it speaks. This verse

forms a link to the following chapter as, having dealt with the topic of non-attachment, the author now moves onto the topic of practical, physical renunciation. ▲

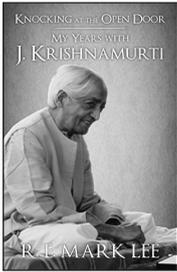
(To be continued)

Breathless

Ana Ramana

The sense of me seems to rise
on each hill of the breath.
The space between each inhale and out
is pure peace.
Thoughts follow like blindfolded birds
once there is breathing.
They flutter and frolic wildly until feelings
arise, vast histories,
images of past and future,
but their wings are tied.
They can go nowhere
but down into the abyss of small i.
With practice, in time,
the breath slows to a whisper
and pure presence thrives
in radiance, joy, and the sweet peach
of silence.
Some call it I-I
but it feels nameless, timeless,
me a mere phantom
as the heart soars and glides in vast galaxies
silent yet singing – of Truth, of no one,
of pure, supreme Being.

BOOK REVIEWS



KNOCKING AT THE OPEN DOOR My Years with J. Krishnamurti by R.E. Mark Lee. Hay House Publishers India, Muskaan Complex, Plot. No.3, B-2 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070. pp286, Rs399. ISBN: 978-93-84544-05-8 www.hayhouse.co.in

JK was a phenomenon in his day. His influence on those interested in a new approach to spirituality within the rising middle class and upper elite of India was immense. His annual circuit of talks at Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and occasionally other major cities was eagerly anticipated. His words were recorded and in time videoed for posterity. To attend one of his public talks or informal meetings was memorable for its intensity. The silence generated in his company during such talks was similar to a perfume that lingered long after the event.

JK died in 1986 in Ojai, California where his mission originally began to take tangible shape in 1922 with what was called ‘the process’. It marked the end of his apprenticeship under the guidance of Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society. It was an extraordinary life by any standards. Here was a boy chosen to be a ‘messiah’ who eventually renounced the power and pomp of the position to walk alone. He left behind a corpus of over 100,000,000 words that have been published, digitalised and stored. There are some phrases so identified with him that to utter them is to be immediately reminded of JK: ‘The Observer is the Observed’; ‘Choiceless Awareness’; and ‘The Answer is in the Problem’.

There has been a steady rise in the number of reminiscences of JK over the past years and Mark Lee is now editor of a small publishing house, Edwin House Publishing which specialises in the memoirs of JK associates.

Mark Lee was born in California and ten years after hearing about JK, first met him at Saanen, Switzerland, in unusual circumstances in 1965, the same year he visited India for the first time and there first met Asha, his future wife. Most of his professional life was spent in the educational field both in India and the USA. He was the founding

director of the Oak Grove School in Ojai and chief editor of the seventeen volumes of *The Collected Works of J. Krishnamurti*. His wife Asha is Indian and they have three daughters. Working directly under the demanding, eagle eye of JK, Lee has had more than his share of challenges and responsibilities.

For as many have commented JK was not an easy person to work with. Sunanda Patwardhan said to Lee: “One should never ask for a personal relationship with Krishnamurti. If he sees there is an interest in ‘the other’, then he and you are going in the same direction and a relationship is possible. Otherwise there is no common ground. For him there are no other grounds for a relationship.”

Lee’s long association with JK, coupled with Lee’s ability to write simply and to the point, makes this memoir a delight for any admirer of JK, the man, the myth and the public persona. There are some remarkable statements that throw light on JK. For example: he is reported to have told a “KFA trustee Albion Patterson in 1972, while tape-recording his replies to questions posed on his early life by the trustees in Ojai, ‘He [Krishnamurti] didn’t become fully enlightened until 1950.’” And in answer to a question in Ventura Court, one of many court appearances he was forced to attend due to the on-going clash with D. Rajagopal, the original custodian of his archives and of the money given for his work, JK was asked if he was the ‘world teacher’. “If you mean in the way Theosophy defined ‘World Teacher’, I am not. But if you consider I have travelled the world teaching, then I am [the World Teacher].”

Though today we do not overtly hear so much about JK, nonetheless, through his educational institutions, and the impact he made on those who met him and his legacy of talks and writings, his influence lives on in subtle ways, akin to an iceberg, with the majority of its mass invisible to the eye.

— Christopher Quilkey



ASHRAM BULLETIN

Navaratri

On Friday 30th September 2016 around 6pm, the image of the Goddess Yogambika was taken out of the *garbhagriha* in procession and installed in the mantapam in front of the Matrubuteswar Shrine. The Navaratri Festival commenced on Saturday the 1st October with evening Veda Parayana taking place each day from 4.45 to 5.30pm followed by Tamil Parayanam at 5.30pm and Navaratri puja at 6.15pm. Navaratri is the annual festival dedicated to Devi and begins on the first *tithi* (lunar day) of the bright half (*sukla paksha*) in the month from mid-September to mid-October and concludes on the tenth *tithi* with Vijayadasami. While Navaratri means 'nine nights', the number can vary from eight to ten nights depending on the way the *tithis* fall. This year there were actually ten nights of pujas. Classical concerts took place in the New Library Auditorium the first four nights.

Veda Patasala Graduation

Eleven senior Veda Patasala students having completed their curriculum in Krishna Yajur Veda, graduated on Vijayadasami night, Tuesday 11th October 2016, and were awarded certificates and honorarium by Ashram President, V. S. Ramanan.

Pavala Kundru Panthakkal Muhurtham & Mahakumbhabhishekam

Pavala Kundru (Hill of red coral) Temple is where Bhagavan stayed for 6 months beginning in the summer of 1898 and where he gave his famous upadesa to his mother, "Whatever is destined to happen, will happen no matter how much we try to prevent it..." The presiding deity of the temple is Pavalagiriswarar. There is a statue of Ardhanariswarar also in the *garbhagriha* of the temple. And according to the *Arunachala Purana*, it was here that Parvati came to do her penance in ancient times.

The final preparations for *Mahakumbhabhishekam* began with the *Panthakkal Muhurtham* which involves the sanctification of the corner pole of a '*pandal*' (a word of Dravidian origin which means 'shed', 'festival hall' or 'arbour'). Like laying the foundation stone, *panthakkal puja* is performed to ensure the auspicious and smooth functioning of an upcoming event. Five *kundas* (*homa* pits) were

dug for the sacrificial fires of the three days of *yagasala pujas*. The *Mahakumbhabhishekam* at the Pavala Kundru Temple was performed on 7th November, with full devotion.

Historically it is said that around 1790 Tippu Sultan camped at Pavala Kundru with his army during the wars with the British. The small temple was destroyed during the occupation and the present temple was probably built some hundred and fifty years ago.

***Mahakumbhabhishekam* Anniversary**

The third anniversary of the *Mahakumbhabhishekam* of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhuteswara Shrines was observed with homa on Punarvasu Day, Saturday the 22nd October, in the New Hall. *Sankalpa* and *Mahanyasa japa* began around 5.30am followed by homa at 8am. *Purnahuti* at 10am was followed by procession and *abhishekam* in Mother's and Bhagavan's shrines.

Sri Ramananda Madalayam – Desur

Sri Ramananda Madalayam in Desur was started by Akilandammal (Desuramma) in 1914 and was frequented by devotees of Bhagavan since its inception. It is one of the first establishments built in the name of Bhagavan. She took care of Bhagavan's devotees at her mutt if they fell ill. She attained *samadhi* in 1960. During the life time of Akilandammal, *Thevaram*, *Tiruvachakam* and works of other saints were chanted frequently here by devotees.

On the 26th and 27th November 2016, a group of devotees chanted *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* of Muruganar modelled on *Tiruvachakam*. The present in-charge of the mutt, Dr. Ravi and his family, made elaborate arrangements for the stay and feeding of devotees.

Obituaries

Hô Thi Tuyêt Mai, familiarly known among Ashram devotees as 'Mai,' came to India in the mid-1970s after reading Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. In November 1978 while *en route* to Nasik to have darshan of Sri Anandamayi Ma, a friend persuaded her to come to Bombay and meet Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The experience so affected her that after Ma's darshan the next day, she left Nasik and immediately returned to Bombay. The next three years were occupied

sitting at the feet of Nisargadatta Maharaj. Mai attended on Maharaj with great affection and care during the last months of Maharaj's life when he was ill with throat cancer. After his *mahasamadhi* in September 1981, Mai took up semi-permanent residence in Tiruvannamalai from 1981 and settled here permanently in early 1993. She always wanted to live in a house where she could have a good view of Arunachala and soon enough she found it.



Mai was born August 19th, 1949 in Biên Hòa, a suburb of Ho Chí Minh City, Vietnam. Mai and her family emigrated to France when Mai was just 17. Becoming a French citizen, she continued her studies in French schools and later trained in Belgium to become a fully qualified nurse.

In September 2016, Mai fell and broke her leg and a few weeks later had another bad fall. While otherwise healthy, on the 9th October in a premonitory vein, she remarked to a close friend who had cooked for her: "Now this body is eating these vegetables and plants but soon the vegetables and plants will be eating this body." A few days later, on the morning of the 13th of October 2016, while peacefully asleep, Mai merged at the feet of Holy Arunachala. All remarked how blissful she looked in her silent repose. Loved by all in Tiruvannamalai, Mai was known for her kindness, humility, sincerity and acceptance of all people.

Jayaben Pranjivanbhai Upadhyay, the Mother of Guruji Shree Gorji, was absorbed in Arunachala on 17th November, 2016. She was 93 years old. She lived at Shree Gor Ashram, Khareda, Morvi (Morbi), Gujarat. Her practice was to recite "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." She visited Sri Ramana Ashram three times and was very happy to donate 16 Gir cows to the Ashram. She was taken care of in her old age by Guruji Shree Gorji and Shree Aaimaa. For many years she served seekers and Sri Bhagavan devotees who came from various cities in Gujarat for many years with her cooking.

