CONTENTS

DIVINE NAMES OF ARUNACHALA 2
EDITIONAL Mistakes 3
THE FOUR ATTRIBUTES OF AN ATTRIBUTE-FREE GOD Lakshmi Nandyala 9
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION Sadhu Om 13
KEYWORD: ANIRVACANIYA John Grimes 19
POEM: THE NAMES OF LALITHA Ramesh Menon 23
RECOLLECTIONS PART TWO Vilacheri Ranga Iyer 25
HYAKUJO’S WILD DUCK Ama Samy 31
A LIFE OF S.S. COHEN Christopher Quilkey 39
THE CALL DIVINE: SEEKERS AND ‘SEEKERS’ S.S. Cohen 47
COSMOLOGY: PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS H.K. Suhas 51
POEM: THE ARUNACHALA, THAT IS ME Manjula Haragopal 59
THE ENDING OF KARMA M.R. Kodhandram 61
SMOULDERING FIRE Philip Pegler 67
POEM: PURNAMIDAM Geetha Ravichandran 74
BHAGAVAN AND ‘I’ I.S. Madugula 75
OUR BODIES James Charlton 79
POEM: A QUESTION Rahul Lama 83
REFLECTIONS ON CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION Vijaya Ramaswamy 85
BOOK EXCERPT: ROSE PETALS VOLUME FIVE Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji 91
POEM: SUMMER HOME Neera Kashyap 100
MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: THE LORD COMES TO KABIR Nabaji Siddha 101
POEM: TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN Upahar 108
OZHIVIL ODUKKAM Kannudaiya Vallalar 109
BOOK REVIEWS 121
ASHRAM BULLETIN 126
Divine Names of Arunachala

7. ओ शिवाय नमः
रङ्ग शिवाय नमः
Prostration to the Auspicious One.

The word ‘śiva’ is generally taken to mean ‘auspicious, propitious, gracious, benign, kind, benevolent, friendly’. Another root is ‘vas’ meaning desire. It can also come from ‘si’ which means ‘in whom all things lie, pervasiveness’ and ‘va’, that is, ‘embodiment of grace’.

According to the *Siddhānta-kaumudi*, the name Śiva comes from the root ‘sin’, which means ‘sleep’. “All sleep in him, hence he is the lord of sleep.” Another etymology uses the Sanskrit root ‘sarv-’ meaning ‘to injure or to kill’ to denote ‘one who can kill the forces of darkness’.

In the Vedas, śiva meaning ‘auspicious’ is an adjective that describes the peaceful aspect of Rudra. “May you appear to us, O Rudra, dweller among the mountains, with that form of yours which suggests no evil, which is auspicious (śiva), not terrifying, most kindly to us.” (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 3.6)

Auspicious is the nature of the ultimate as described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, v. 7: “Invisible, inactive, beyond grasp, without qualifications, inconceivable, indescribable, it is the essence aimed at through the notion of Self, ever aloof from manifestation. Calm, peaceful, auspicious (śiva), it is the nondual, unmanifest Fourth stage.”

It is said that among all knowledge the Vedas are Supreme. In the Vedas, *Rudra Ekādaśa* is Supreme. In the *Rudram* verses the *Pañchakṣari* (five-syllabled mantra namaśivāya) is Supreme. The glorious *Pañchakṣari* contains the great two-syllabled word ‘Śiva’. Indeed He is the essence of the Vedas. Knowing that He bestows auspiciousness, wise people pray to Him and overcome the difficulties of birth, death, old age, and disease. Ramana Maharshi composed a soulful prayer for the cure of His mother’s illness wherein Śiva is praised as the destroyer of death.
Mistakes

There are four great sayings (mahā-vākyas) that were enunciated by the great Yogaswami of Jaffna. oru pollāppum illai: “There is not even one wrong thing.” muzhudum uṇmai: “All is Truth.” eppavō muḍinda kāriyam: “It was all accomplished long ago.” nām ariyōm: “We do not know.”

What is one to make of such statements? There is no wrong action, everything is as it should be. Then what is one to make of the following: In May of 1996, there were up to some 30 expeditions clustered at the base of Mount Everest in preparation of an ascent. There was a tight schedule and teams were under pressure to use the brief window of opportunity to reach the summit. On May 10th disaster struck the upper slopes of Mount Everest. Two experienced guide leaders and two of their clients died in a violent blizzard that suddenly swept over the mountain top. Altogether nine climbers perished during the ferocious storm as they either tried to reach the summit or were on the descent. One of the most poignant moments of the tragedy was the radiophone call between a team leader and his wife who was in New Zealand. They spoke one last time as he lay dying in the bitter cold of the summit. He had refused to leave the area in a desperate search for a client who had disappeared.

1 Natchintanai (Songs and sayings of Yogaswami), Sivathondan Society, 2004, Thiruvadi Trust of Sivayogarswami.
Though the climbers had expensive and technologically advanced equipment as well as the expertise of seasoned and respected climbers, it was insufficient to save lives. Courage, audacity, desire and a capacity to absorb large amounts of pain on the long trek up the mountain were inadequate. It was human error as much as any factor which contributed to the catastrophe. There were radio reports sent to the team members with accurate daily weather forecasts so they knew about the storm in advance but they were determined to get their amateur clients to the summit.

Obsessed by the thought of a successful ascent, in the back of their minds was their duty as professionals, the publicity and its fame and the possibility of more clients in the future. Yet the tragedy also brought out the best in them, in that some team members time and again braved the treacherous conditions in a frantic search for survivors.

Anyone of these factors rightly considered and acted upon could have averted disaster but once the combination of factors coalesced, nature took its own inevitable course. If one was to select one attitude that was most responsible for the calamity, it is a sort of defiance, a sense that any person can and should attempt to go against the powerful forces of nature. The only way we can make sense of this incident is by exercising rationality and piecing together a linear cause and effect. Otherwise it appears senseless. Was it a preordained series of lapses in judgement that caused the catastrophe? When did the inevitable train of events begin that led to that fateful day? It could have begun even before they reached the base camp. We are confused and yet in the wisdom of Yogaswami, “It was all accomplished long ago.”

In our spiritual quest we are mountaineers. We climb our mountain and things happen beyond our expectations let alone control. They may not be as catastrophic as the extreme example quoted above but there is a lesson in humility to be learnt by us all. Some of us are brave leaders, some diligent believers and some lazy camp followers, all of whom have their part to play. If we are to climb our mountain then our equipment must be in order but above all, we should be sensitive to the conditions and act accordingly. Yes, we should have faith in what we do, but be open to the unknown, for “We do not know.”

We are surrounded by the laws of cause-and-effect. Whatever we do or don’t do results in an effect. The Kaṭha Upaniṣad speaks of
the razor’s edge we walk. It is also apparent that we are unable to influence or bend these existing laws that govern our world; at least we cannot do so until they become unimportant and irrelevant. They are intractable and no amount of wish fulfilment can dispel them. Our day dreams of being the best in whatever field attracts us are nothing but ways to feel good and negate the anxiety and inadequacy we experience when coping with an earthly reality that does not conform to our desires. ‘If only, if only…’ is our common cry when things do not go the way we want. Our task then is to live a good life by recognising and using the laws wisely. Who then is a wise person? A wise person is one who is aware of the consequences of their action.

How then do we start? We begin with what is in front of us right now no matter how trivial it may seem. It is one step at a time. Though we cannot precisely recognise it with any certainty we do know there is a purpose in all this. There is a higher power that transcends cause and effect if we would but open ourselves up to it. It is called Grace and our mistakes are just as much grace as our right actions. “All is Truth.”

For us the principal question is why do we exist? Are we but machines that respond to cause and effect? This has never been satisfactorily answered though all of us have at one point been overwhelmed by it. For many the question quickly fades. For others it becomes a life-long obsession that takes them along various avenues of enquiry unique to their temperament. That paramount question leads us naturally to self-enquiry.

Who am I? This, by itself, is just an empty rhetorical question, but once empowered by Bhagavan it becomes a living force that has the capacity to cut through our illusions. It is a Brahma-astra, an invincible, diamond-edged weapon. Those who are sincere receive from Bhagavan this tool that will revolutionise their lives.

The question for us who are devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is how we can live in such a way that we create the right equanimity of mind and heart so that we can listen to the inner voice of the guru and be attentive to the gift of wisdom he has to give.

One of the most remarkable stories in nature is the ability of wild geese to follow a precise direction over thousands of miles and over the highest mountains, to find summer feeding grounds where they can procreate and then turn round and fly the same route back
again. The barnacle goose flies non-stop for two to three day above the North Sea without sight of land from northern Scotland to the Svalbard Archipelago in the Arctic Circle, a distance of over 2,000 kilometres. Do they have an inner magnetic compass or do they sniff the faint scents carried by the various thermals they ride or do they observe the topography below or watch the pattern of the stars? We don’t really know for certain. But we do marvel at their capacity. Do we too have an internal compass that could guide us over all obstacles if we followed it?

If so what is it that governs our flight to the unknown? What instruments do we employ so that we may safely reach our goal? The most basic device we deploy is sensitivity to suffering. It is a barometer that tells us exactly where we are in the greater scheme. Most forms of suffering are immediate though some can be delayed for decades and if we believe in reincarnation, lifetimes. Suffering, for better or worse, wakes us up. Suffering is the sharp prod which forces us to confront our ignorance. Suffering nags us to ask why.

Due to a gaffe we may feel like idiots but this is good because it means we have tasted humility and have let go of our own false perception of who we think we are. For on our journey there is nothing we can take with us. Not our earthly wealth, nor our ideas, our attitudes, our merit or even our sins, which we keep carefully hidden as if they were jewels. We are eventually cleansed of all that stands between us and what we can only call turīya (the fourth).

We make errors every day but should not be disheartened. It is part of life’s pattern. Some successes are serendipitous like Alexander Fleming failing to clean a petri dish which resulted in the discovery of penicillin. If we never made a blunder we are either super-human or so insufferably arrogant we are blind to our own faults.²

Miscalculations are unavoidable, they are part of our fabric and if accepted not as obstacles but as opportunities, they lead to wisdom. Consider a classical Hindustani musician who in elaborating a raga makes a ‘wrong’ note. The musician then has the opportunity to flow with the new expression and creatively make it part of the

² “Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise in their own esteem, thinking themselves to be learned, fools treading a tortuous path, go about like blind men led by one who is himself blind.” Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1.2.5.
development. We must be courageous and take risks and if we make an error, we have learnt something valuable while spreading our wings. “There is not even one wrong thing.”

The question is what do we do when we are obviously wrong? We can stubbornly deny it in the face of the facts. We can close our eyes because the shame is too much to acknowledge. The greater the error, the weightier is that sinking sensation in the stomach. The problem now is that the fault will not go away; it may just leave a bitter taste in the mouth. If we accept responsibility, even if the blame is not entirely ours, we have a chance to liberate ourselves from the causes and consequences of our suffering. No one wishes to cause themselves distress so the fact that we suffer from an action shows that we acted in ignorance.

We have an opportunity to embrace the defect and learn. Mahatma Gandhi positively relished the opportunity to correct a mistake in his own character. Who has not looked back on lessons in life that were excruciating and not realised that the heavy cost resulted in the creation of something fine and exalted that never can be taken away from us: wisdom. Our task in this life is to create wisdom. Call it consciousness, jñāna, insight or intelligence; we are all in search of the light that guides our way on a path that is often dark and full of obstacles.

There is a verse in the Bhagavad Gītā that declares our challenge: “No one experiences freedom from activity (niṣkāmya karma) by abstaining from action; and no one ever attains liberation by mere renunciation of action.”

Bhagavan gives us a solution to that conundrum in Upadēśa Sāram. After the opening two verses describing action (karma), Bhagavan reveals the first of a progressively refined series of steps that lead to liberation. “Niṣkāmya karma (desireless action) which is done [motivated by love] for God [surrendering its fruits entirely to him] purifies [our] mind and [thereby] it makes [us] recognise [what is correct] the path to liberation.”

Right action by itself cannot directly lead to liberation but it does transform our minds and makes us ready to ask in the most profound manner that ultimate wonder: who am I?

---

3 Bhagavad Gītā, Ch.3, v.4.
According to Vedanta, the *nirguna* (attribute-free) *para brahman* is the ultimate and impersonal divine reality. Though paradoxical, the *rishis* (seers) have further described That as Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent. These qualities ascribed to God carry a much deeper meaning and they are concepts rather than simple words.

God is beyond time and space. He is spoken of as *Kalahita* (kālātītaḥ), that is, beyond the three aspects of time, which are past, present and future. He is called *Adhirita* (adhṛtaḥ), not supported by anyone or anything. Nothing supports Him; rather He is the supporter of all. He is both immanent and transcendent. These concepts are hard to comprehend and that is one of the reasons why it is stated that God

Lakshmi Nandayla has been living in US for the past 17 plus years. She has a Masters Degree in Computer Science from California State University and loves reading books and listening to discourses by Swami Tattvavidanandaji.
cannot be understood with one’s rationalizing mind. In order to realize or understand Him, one has to go beyond one’s intellect.

\[
yato vāco nivartante |
aprāpya manasā saha |
ānandaṁ brahmaṇo vidvān |
na bibheti kadācaneti |
\]

“Whence the speech and mind return without objectifying or reaching it – the knower of that bliss of Brahman fears naught.”

That Brahman or Absolute Truth cannot be described by words nor can it be comprehended by the mind.

In order to understand the Omnipresence nature of God, let’s take the scientific approach which is nonetheless a meagre course in attempting to fathom the fathomless substratum of this universe. Everything we see around is composed of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and space (akasa). These are all said to have originated from the Absolute Consciousness.

\[
etasmādātmana ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ |
ākāśādvāyuḥ | vāyoragniḥ |
agnērāpaḥ | adbhyāḥ prthivī |
\]

“From this Self was produced space. From space emerged air; from air was born fire; from fire was created water; from water sprang up earth.”

This is the order of elements from the subtlest to the grossest. As we can see, out of the five elements, space is the subtlest. It is the closest example that we can relate to when we contemplate God. Consider the space around us. How vast it is! It surrounds us, extends to the sky above, and if we dive a little deeper, we notice that it is present even in an atom. Without space (akasa), the circulatory, respiratory and other systems in our body wouldn’t even work. Movement of any kind would be impossible if there is no room. So from the vast expanse of the endless firmament down to the nucleus of an atom, we have space everywhere. This clearly suggests the immensity of space. The subtler the matter, the wider it spreads. God is subtler than the subtlest space.

---

1 Ta ṭtirīya Upaniṣad, Brahmananda Vallī, Section IV, verse 1 (2.4.1)
2 Ibid., Section I, verse 2 (2.1.2)
THE FOUR ATTRIBUTES OF AN ATTRIBUTE-FREE GOD

anoraṇīyān mahato mahīyānātmā
guhāyāṁ nihito'sya jantoḥ |

“Subtler than the subtlest and greater than the greatest, the Atman is concealed in the heart of the creature.”\(^3\)

Space is an enormous three dimensional area in which all matter, such as the solar system, innumerable stars, and galaxies exist. If this idea had soaked through then let’s proceed further to think of something even subtler, out of which this space has emerged. That Supreme Consciousness (caitanya) with an even greater magnitude of subtleness and immensity is the all-pervading Brahman. This, I believe, illustrates the Omnipresent nature of God.

Therefore, the world we see around is only a play of consciousness and since the consciousness that is pulsating in me is the same as the one pulsating in you, my personality expands consequentially and the love I feel for the fellow being comes naturally to me.

As I perceive the consciousness throbbing in me, so I become aware of it everywhere around me. With this concept in mind, I feel His presence, whether I open my eyes or keep them closed.

We have just observed the all-pervading nature of God. Since He is everywhere or everything that we can see or imagine, there remains nothing hidden from Him. That which pervades the entire universe has knowledge of everything. This serves to explain the Omniscient nature of God.

kaviṁ purāṇam anuśāsitāram
anor anīyaṁsam anusmared yaḥ |
sarvasya dhātāram acintya-rūpam
āditya-varṇam tamasaḥ parastāt ||

“God is omniscient, the most ancient one, the controller, subtler than the subtlest, the support of all, and the possessor of an inconceivable divine form; he is brighter than the sun, and beyond all darkness of ignorance.”\(^4\)

Now let us see how God can be all-powerful. If at all that Supreme Being wills to make or break rules, or exercise control over any

---

\(^3\) Śvetāṥvatara Upaniṣad, Chapter III, v.20.
\(^4\) Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 8, v.9.
matter, there is no one to raise an objection nor anything to hinder His work. This is solely because nothing exists other than Himself. His ubiquitous nature affirms the absence of a second thing. Hence, this unlimited power or Omnipotence.

And most importantly, when we get our prayers answered or wishes fulfilled, we become aware of His kindness and generosity. This denotes His Omnibenevolence. Several instances in the lives of the devotees of Ramana Maharshi for that matter, of any other god or saint, testify to the Lord’s all-merciful nature.

Natesa Iyer, a devotee of Ramana Maharshi, hurt by the way he was dealt with in the Ashram kitchen, at one point, sneaks out of Ramanasramam. However, during a brief respite in Villupuram, he finds himself face to face with Bhagavan, who asks him the question, “How far have you gone away from me?” With heart full of repentance and reverence for his guru, Natesa Iyer traces back his steps to Ramanasramam. Bhagavan, who in reality was all along in Tiruvannamalai, upon Natesa's arrival, asks him the same question: “How far have you gone away from me?”

This particular instance can be interpreted from different standpoints. Nonetheless, we can say for certain that Ramana Maharshi was the personification of the Infinite Consciousness that is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. All these characteristics were manifest in the above anecdote.

These four indubitable and wonderful attributes of an attribute-free God give us the assurance of being in His immediate proximity at all times.

I have not propounded any new theory here, but only put some facts together which, upon analysis, have not only helped me feel His presence at all times and at all places but also suggested that now and again we can bridge the gulf between the secular and the sacred.

Experiential knowledge of the Truth is the goal of our life. Ramana Maharshi’s method of self-enquiry is irrefutable. However, if at times your mind escapes the realm of enquiry, I hope this approach helps you feel His presence even during those moments.

---

5 *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.184.
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Two

Sadhu Om
as recorded by Michael James

29th August 1978

Mey-t-Tava Viḷakkam, the first volume of Śrī Ramaṇa Jñāṇa Bōdham, a compilation of all of Muruganar’s previously unpublished verses, which had been painstakingly collected, preserved, arranged and edited by Sadhu Om, was due to be released at a function in front of Bhagavan’s shrine on 3rd September, so the ashram president asked K. Natesan to go and invite Sadhu Om to attend the function as a guest of honour. However, since Sadhu Om preferred to avoid the limelight he politely declined, saying that all credit for the book should go only to Muruganar, as the author, and to Bhagavan, as the sole source of his inspiration, but Natesan persisted,

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and Guru Vācakak Kōvai. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.
saying ‘You must come, because you are the mūlam (root) of this project’, to which Sadhu Om replied:

“Yes, but the root should never be exposed. What should be exposed and seen by people is only the trunk, branches, leaves and flowers of a tree, because if you expose the root, the whole tree will die. Therefore it is appropriate that this function should be attended by all the important people in the ashram, but you should not endanger all of us by inviting me and exposing me to the world. It is good to paint a building in order to make it look nice in the eyes of people, but you should not dig out the foundations in order to paint them, because the whole building would then collapse. What should be exposed alone should be exposed, and what should be kept hidden should always be kept hidden.

“Instead of exposing the roots of a tree, one should pack more mud on top of them in order to keep them buried deep out of sight, so that they can spread and do the work that they are intended to do, nourishing, sustaining and strengthening the whole tree. Likewise, instead of exposing me to the world, you should help me do my work by packing mud in my mouth [an allusion to an idiom used by Bhagavan in verse 88 of Śrī Aruṇācala Akiṣaramaṇamālai] and keeping me well hidden from the eyes of the world. In this way we will all flourish, and each of us will do the work for which we have come here.”

For a while Natesan continued trying to persuade him that he should attend the function, and finally he said, ‘You should come, and you can bring all your friends with you’, to which Sadhu Om replied:

“Everyone is free to do as they like, so whichever friends wish to attend will do so. And who are my friends? All are friends in my eyes, but no one is mine. As is said in verse 49 of Jñānācāravicārapaṭalam [the chapter of Dēvikālōttaram that Bhagavan translated into Tamil], no one belongs to me, and I belong to no one.”

Later that day, in reply to another friend who asked him, “How is the life of a sādhu?” Sadhu Om said: “A sādhu is like a cloud that rains its waters directly into the ocean [implying that the attention of a real sādhu is always flowing back to its source and is never diverted away towards the world.]”
Sadhu Om: In the purāṇas it is said that those who do aṅga-pradakṣiṇa [rolling around a deity or temple] around Arunachala will gain the siddhi of vajra-kāya [a body as hard or resilient as diamond]. We can see examples of this today in people such as Esaki Doctor, who once did aṅga-pradakṣiṇa around Arunachala and is now able to do pradakṣiṇa every day in the hot sun, leaving at nine in the morning and returning at noon. But we have come here for something different, because Bhagavan has taught us that such siddhis are transient and worthless, and that the only real siddhi (accomplishment) is ātma-siddhi (the accomplishment of self-knowledge).

Sooner or later Arunachala will remove all other siddhis from his devotees, but in most cases he will not give any such siddhis at all, and to all of us he will gradually give buddhi (clarity of mind) to understand that all siddhis other than ātma-siddhi are worthless. See what happened in the case of Esaki Doctor: at first he had a liking for name and fame, but after being given a taste of it for a while, he gained the buddhi to see that it was worthless, so now that it has been removed he continues to do pradakṣiṇa quietly and humbly without attracting any undue attention.

Therefore even if we begin to do pradakṣiṇa around Arunachala for any reason other than the ultimate annihilation of our ego, Arunachala will gradually purify our mind and thereby give us the clarity to see that eradicating our ego is the only worthwhile goal. He will never abandon any of his devotees, particularly those who do pradakṣiṇa, because in the end he will make each one of us see what needs to be seen by turning our attention inwards, as Bhagavan implies in verse 44 of Śrī Aruṇācala Aṃśaṭhānāmālai:

Arunachala, [in silence] you said: ‘Turning back inside, see yourself daily with the inner eye [or an inward look]; [thereby] it will be known’. What [a wonder]!

Sadhu Om: After coming to Bhagavan and taking him as our guru, we have to be ready to give up many of our previous beliefs, and to modify and refine other ones. He has given so many correction slips to
our old ways of thinking. That is, like a teacher correcting the errors in a student’s essay, he has corrected errors in the way that people have interpreted ancient texts, and he has also expressed in a more refined yet clearer manner many of the truths that were formerly concealed within the often obscure or indirect wording of such texts.

For example, by asking questions such as ‘How can meditation on any name or form enable one to reach that which is beyond all name and form?’ and ‘How can meditation on anything confined within time or space enable one to transcend time and space?’ he has pointed out the limitation of many practices that we were formerly led to believe would take us directly to our ultimate goal.

Every name and form is confined at each moment within a particular place in space, and whatever is confined within a place is also confined within a period of time. Therefore meditation on a particular place or on something located in a particular place can only be done in one state, because time and place differ from one state to another, since the time and space of our present state do not exist in dream, and the time and space of a dream do not exist in this state, and in sleep no time and space exist at all. Therefore how can any meditation on something that is restricted within time and place and that can be done in only one or two states of the three states enable us to go beyond time and place or the three states?

This is why he said in verse 8 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu:

Whoever worships [the nameless and formless substance, namely brahman, the ultimate reality] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is the way to see that substance in name and form. However, knowing the reality of oneself and [thereby] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is alone seeing [it] in reality. Know.

The Tamil word meaning ‘substance’ that he uses in each of the two main sentences of this verse is poruḷ, which like the Sanskrit term vastu means substance, essence, what is real or what actually exists, and the nature of this poruḷ was explained by him in the previous verse:

Though the world and mind arise and subside simultaneously, the world shines by the mind. Only that which shines without
appearing or disappearing as the base for the appearing and disappearing of the world and mind is \textit{poruḷ} [the real substance], which is \textit{pūṇḍram} [the infinite whole or \textit{pūrṇa}].

Since the \textit{poruḷ} is the infinite whole that shines without ever appearing or disappearing, it is the base or foundation from which and in which the mind and everything perceived by it, namely all names and forms, appear in waking and dream and disappear in sleep. Though the \textit{poruḷ} is therefore what appears as all names and forms, it itself is nameless and formless, so in order to see it as it is we must see it stripped of all names and forms.

However, though it is nameless and formless, the mind can attribute any name or form to it and worship it accordingly, and by doing so it is possible for the mind to see it in name and form, as he says in the first sentence of verse 8. However, since it is not actually any name or form, seeing it in name and form is not seeing it as it really is but is only seeing it as a ‘\textit{maṅṇomayam-āṁ kāṭci}’, a mental vision or mind-constituted image, as he says later in verse 20 of \textit{Ulladu Nāṟpadu}.

Therefore in the second sentence of verse 8 he explains how we can see it ‘in reality’ or as it actually is. Since the mind can rise and stand only by grasping form, as he says in verse 25, so long as it exists it will always see the one real substance as the multitude of names and forms that constitute this or any other world, so we cannot see the one real substance or \textit{poruḷ} as it is so long as we mistake ourself to be this form-perceiving mind.

Therefore in order to see the \textit{poruḷ} as it actually is we must see ourself as we actually are, and hence in the second sentence he says:

‘However, knowing the reality of oneself and [thereby] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is alone seeing [it] in reality.’

What we actually are is only the nameless and formless \textit{poruḷ}, so when we see the reality of ourself, the mind that we now seem to be will subside and merge forever in and as the \textit{poruḷ}, and this alone is seeing it as it really is.

It was previously believed that the term ‘heart’ refers to a place in the body where the Lord or \textit{ātman} dwells, and since the heart is also referred to metaphorically as \textit{guhā} (the cave or hiding-place), one of
the names of Lord Subrahmanya is Guhēśa (the Lord of the cave or the cave-dwelling Lord). However Bhagavan pointed out that ‘heart’ means the core, centre, interior or innermost part of ourself, as implied by the Sanskrit term *hrdaya* [which in some cases becomes *hrd* or in compound *hṛt*], and therefore refers not to any physical place but only to our real self.

For example, in verse 2 of Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam he explained clearly that what is called ‘heart’ or *hrdaya* is actually just Arunachala, the infinite space of pure awareness, in which this entire world appears and disappears like a picture on a cinema screen, and which shines eternally within each one of us as ‘I’.

Red Hill [Arunachala], all this [world-appearance], which is a [mental] picture, arises, stands and subsides only in you. Since you dance eternally in the heart as ‘I’, they say your name itself is heart.

Likewise Bhagavan pointed out that whereas various other hills, holy places and temples are said to be abodes of Lord Siva, Arunachala is not merely his abode but he himself. That is, just as the heart is not just the dwelling-place of ātma-svarūpa [our own real self] but ātma-svarūpa itself, so Arunachala is not just the dwelling-place of Siva but Siva himself. This is an important clue for those who seek to go beyond time and place and name and form: though Arunachala seems to be a hill, a name and form located in a finite place, it is actually what dances eternally in our heart as ‘I’, the one infinite and hence formless space of pure self-awareness, which is the real import of the term ‘heart’.

(To be continued)
John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

In the October 2009 issue of the Mountain Path, Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati wrote a clear exposition of the keyword also on anirvacanīya. This second article further highlights the importance of this concept in Advaita Vedanta.

Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent.¹

Tracing the source of ‘I’, the primal ‘I-I’ alone remains over, and it is inexpressible.²

A mystery is something that is not understood. When someone hears that something is a mystery, the mind, full of wonder and expectation, begins exploring whether the hearer or someone else, perhaps an Einstein, a specialist, a Sage or even God will be able to explain it. Some mysteries are explainable and others are not. Advaita Vedanta philosophy and Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi declare there

1 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Proposition 7.
2 Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk§340.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
are two mysteries that are totally, completely ineffable, inexplicable. Both Ātman/Brahman and the concept of avidyā/māyā are said to be anirvacanīya (ineffable, inexplicable, inexpressible, indeterminable) though for different reasons. Can one even speak meaningfully about the unspeakable?

If one does not speak, one is open to the charge of ignorance. And, on the other hand, if one speaks about that which is declared to be unspeakable, ineffable, one is open to the charge of inconsistency and contradiction. Bhagavan Ramana remarked, “...Reality is not with forms and names... It transcends speech. It is beyond the expressions ‘existence, non-existence’, and so on.”³ Who is the knower and what is the known? Adi Sankara said, The Absolute can never be properly denoted by any words, including the word ‘Absolute’ (Ātman/ Brahman).”⁴ Gaudapada wrote, “Ajāti is meaningful only so long as jati (birth) carries meaning. The absolute truth is that no word can designate or describe the Self.”⁵

It is true that Sri Ramana occasionally spoke about the phenomenal reality and also about Brahman (the transcendental reality). As the illusion (māyā) is anirvacanīya (ineffable) Brahman too is said to be anirvacanīya. The question therefore is in what sense both the phenomenal and the transcendental reality are anirvacanīya? Ramana said that the Self, Brahman, is anirvacanīya for it is the presupposition of speech. Brahman is prior to speech. And this is why speech necessarily always falls short of giving any description of Brahman. Brahman is the foundation of everything that is nameable and speakable but is itself beyond all naming and description. The anirvacanīyatva of Brahman is foundational, whereas the anirvacanīyatva of māyā is linguistic.

According to Sri Ramana, the Real is that which lasts, which suffers no contradictions, which is eternal and unsublatable. Things of the world may be said to be real until they suffer sublation. Thus they are called ‘what is other than the real or the unreal’ (sadasad-vilaksana), illusory (mithyā) and indescribable (anirvacanīya). Since they are

---

³ Ibid., Talk§140.
⁴ Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya 2.3.6.
⁵ Māṇḍūkyakārikā 4, 74.
cognized, they are not unreal (asat). Since they are sublated, they are not real (sat). By this criterion, Brahman alone is the absolutely real; never being subject to contradiction. All else can be called ‘real’ only by courtesy. The distinction between one individual and another, the existence of a plurality of things, the attribution of attributes to the Absolute are all concessions to the Truth made from the relative point of view.

Bhagavan Ramana said that the non-dual Reality appears as this pluralistic world through ignorance (avidyā/māyā). Ignorance is said to have a peculiar ontological status because it is neither real (like Brahman/Ātman) nor an absolute non-entity like a square-circle. Things of the world are seen and possess practical efficiency. As such, they are not totally non-existent. The world appears, even if it eventually disappears. Thus, it is inexplicable (anirvacanīya).

In answer to a seeker’s question, ‘How did ignorance arise?’ Lord Ramana replied, “Ignorance never arose. It has no real being.”6 “The Self alone is and nothing else.”7 “When you try to trace the ego, which is the basis of the perception of the world and anything else, you find the ego does not exist at all and neither does all this creation that you see.”8 This is, on the face of it, mysterious, inexplicable!

If one mistakes a rope on the ground as a snake, the snake only exists as an idea in one’s mind. One may think about killing the snake or how to avoid it, but the fact remains that there is no snake outside of one’s imagination. When a person sees the rope, the substratum upon which the false idea of a snake is superimposed, the idea that there is a snake that should either be killed or avoided instantly vanishes. The only thing that has disappeared is an erroneous idea. How mysterious to see a non-existent snake. How mysterious to see the rope as well. As well, this analogy contains the paradox that, in actuality, there is no seer and nothing seen.

The totally non-existent is that which cannot exist. It is not a case of ‘factual’ or ‘empirical’ non-existence, but one of logical impossibility. And, on the other hand, when the existent appears as-it-is-not, error

---

7 Ibid., Talk§264.
8 Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2-1-46 Afternoon.
arises. This leaves us with three categories of existence: the existent, the appearance, and the non-existent.

The water in a mirage appears and disappears even as the world of multiplicity appears and disappears. Neither entity fits the category of an eternally changeless existent. This experience of a changing existent is a riddle. To exist, by definition, is to be oneself, as one’s own nature. To exist contingently is to be oneself for a certain duration of time. Sri Ramana remarked, “You want somehow or other to maintain that the world is real. What is the standard of reality? That alone is real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging.”

Ignorance has a mysterious power. It is that which makes the impossible possible. Though it has no ultimate reality in itself, yet it can seemingly project creation and produce multiplicity. Seemingly omnipotent, ignorance vanishes when one enquires into the Self. Bhagavan Ramana said, “It does not function [aham vṛitti] in him at all.”

To pursue avidyā/māyā is only to fall deeper and deeper into its morass. The Self must be enquired into for there is no solution to ignorance, only dissolution. Contrary to what critics say, this facet of ignorance is not a defect, but an ornament. This mysterious power of ignorance both obscures and projects. Not only does it (innocently enough) obscure or conceal the Self, but then it (insidiously) pretends to be what-it-is-not by projecting the world of multiplicity.

The snake which is cognized as a rope has no being of its own apart from the rope, the substratum, on which it is superimposed. By itself it is non-existent. It is wrongly imagined to exist due to ignorance that not only conceals the nature of the rope, but also projects the appearance of a snake that is false. The same thing is true of the world. What the rope is to the snake, Brahman is to the world. The world no doubt is existent or real to an ignorant person who does not enquire into its ontological status. To an enquiring mind, however, the world is a puzzle defying rational enquiry. Owing its existence to ignorance, which is itself indeterminable, the world, too, does not

---

10 Ibid., Book 2, VI, ‘Aham and Aham Vritti’.
admit of a rational explanation as either real or unreal. That alone which exists forever is real.

The world is not real, because it exists only so long as there is ignorance. It ceases to exist when ignorance gets removed. Nor can the world be treated as non-existent or non-real. What is non-real, like a square-circle, can never be cognized. The world, however, is cognized, and so it cannot be dismissed as non-real. It cannot be both real and non-real simultaneously as that would violate the law of non-contradiction. Since its ontological status cannot be determined as such-and-such in terms of the categories known, it is said to be indeterminable (anirvacanīya).

To say that avidyā exists is to limit Brahman, and yet to say that it does not exist is to fly in the face of experience and the appearance of the world will not be accounted for. It is real enough to produce the world, but not real enough to constitute a limit to Brahman. Absence of reality does not render perception invalid. That which defies all categories of human thought is truly a wonder. How wonderful! Both the Self and avidyā/māyā share this trait – though for very different reasons.

\[\text{\textbf{The Names of Lalitha}}\]

\[\text{Ramesh Menon}\]

He loves the bilva
as you do the patali:
lip-red and moon-white;
\textit{Patalikusumapriyaa},
soft he comes, hands flower-full.

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.
Guest-Room for Gentlemen at Sri Ramanasramam
We continue with Vilacheri Ranga Iyer’s Notebook which was recovered from the Ashram Archives. Part One was published in April 2016. Ranga was a childhood friend and classmate of Bhagavan and in later years he came to Bhagavan for protection, solace and guidance.

One day Bhagavan told me that a man should get rid of the ego-sense, the sense of I and mine, whatever work he may be doing in the world and that then alone the ego will vanish and the Self emerge. Then he related the following story: “There was a powerful King. The neighbouring King tried to conquer him many times, but always failed. The King, who was thus victorious and who for many years prided himself on his strength and ability, one day suddenly renounced his Kingdom, sent for the neighbouring King, handed over his estate and kingdom to him and retired to the forest, to do penance. After many years of penance it occurred to him to go and beg in the cities and live there. He did so accordingly. Later he went and begged in his own city. Though some recognized him there, he would not allow them to show any respect to him but only to treat
him as a mendicant. Then he went and begged in his own palace and there again, in spite of entreaties from all, he persisted in being treated only as a mendicant and on no other footing. While he was thus living, begging in cities and eliminating the ego-sense, the King of a neighbouring state died without heirs and the people of this state, in accordance with ancient custom, sent round their royal elephant with water and garland in its trunk, intending to choose for their King whomsoever the elephant picks up and garlands after washing him with the water it was carrying. It so happened that the elephant chose the mendicant ex-King. He on his part did not decline but took up the Kingship. While he was thus reigning, his successor in his original kingdom died and his subjects came to their old King and requested him to reign over them as before. He consented. He ruled over two states now. But there was this difference between his old rule and his present rule. Formerly he used to do everything with the notion that he was doing it. But now he did everything with the conviction that God was working and that he was a mere instrument in God’s hands. And there was greater prosperity and happiness amongst his subjects than before.”

Once when I was visiting Bhagavan, a bhakta of his was copying out slokas from a notebook, sitting at quite a distance from Bhagavan. Coming to a sloka which he could not make out, he was making a pause, when Bhagavan gave out the sloka in question and the bhakta asked Bhagavan how he came to know which sloka he was trying to decipher. A workman who was engaged in putting up a pandal remarked, “Bhagavan saw your pen stops and so guessed.” Bhagavan said, “Yes!” What is there that Bhagavan does not know!

Once I had gone to Kumbakonam in connection with my work. It was a Mahamakham time then. As the day of the festival was approaching the place was getting more and more crowded. When it was two

---

1 Mahamakham is celebrated every 12 years in the Mahamaham tank at Kumbakonam. The Masimakham is an annual event that occurs in Masi (February–March). All the rivers of India are believed to meet at the tank on this day and a purificatory bath at this tank on this day is considered equal to the combined dips in all the holy rivers of India.
days more before *Mahamakham* there arose in me an urge to go to Bhagavan. I accordingly went to him. Bhagavan asked me wherefrom I was coming and I said, “From Kumbakonam.” Thereupon He said, “What is this! All people from here are going to Kumbakonam and you have come away from there!” I replied, “I have come to one who is greater than the God of *Mahamakham*!” I stayed for a few days with Bhagavan and then left. When leaving, I couldn’t bear the separation and tears flowed from my eyes. Bhagavan said, “You imagine you came from Kumbakonam and are going to Madurai. You are always where you are. You feel great pride in seeing me and being with me now. But when you come to my state, you will think there is nothing at all extraordinary about me.”

One day a *bhakta* asked Bhagavan if one *jnani* can recognise another. Bhagavan replied, “What is there for a *jnani* to recognise as he sees all as only Self?” In answer to my question, whether *jnanis* have dreams, Bhagavan said, “In the same way in which they have the waking world, they have the dream world.” Thereupon I asked Bhagavan what sort of dreams he gets. He said, “I dream about temples, sacred waters, etc!”

One day at Skandasramam a lady came and had darshan of Bhagavan, and when taking leave told Bhagavan, “My mind goes in many directions.” Bhagavan said, “Turn it from many directions into one direction.” After she left I remarked, “If one could do that, one is a *jnani*.” Bhagavan replied, “What is one to do? People, as soon as they come, want to attain *jnana*. They imagine it is so easy to get it. There are any number of difficulties on the way. They don’t realise it.”

At Skandasramam, on another occasion, a party of *bhaktas* who had just returned from a pilgrimage to Pandharpur came to Bhagavan and gave him ‘*biksha*’. After food, they made *bhajans* and at the end embraced Bhagavan and left. After they left, I also embraced Bhagavan and then observed his body had become red and suffused with blood. Thereupon I asked Bhagavan about it and he remarked, “They embraced me as they embraced the God at Pandharpur but that God is stone. This is a body and this is its *dharma,*” and laughed.
Once, Bhagavan related the following to me: “A man once did great tapas to attain jnana. God Siva appeared before him and asked him what boon he wanted. He replied, ‘Let me always have poverty and troubles.’ Siva replied, ‘What is this. There are all sorts of good things in the world which you might ask for. You might ask for becoming a millionaire or an emperor. Instead you ask for this.’ The bhakta replied, ‘If I am a millionaire my eyes will not see nor my ears hear (the things that really matter). I would be caught up entirely in the affairs of the world and will be involved interminably in a succession of births and deaths. That is why I want poverty and troubles, which alone will enable me to think of you always and lead me on to jnana.’”

Then I asked Bhagavan, “Is it not possible to attain jnana being rich.” Bhagavan replied, “One can attain jnana only as the result of ‘sat karma’, i.e. good acts. If one is rich, one will only yield to its attractions and it will be very difficult for him to turn to jnana.”

Once I came to Bhagavan and told him, “I am going to Spencer & Co. at Madras, with a letter of introduction for a job.” Bhagavan replied, “All right.” I went and got the job at Madras Spencer & Co. But I soon gave it up as it did not suit me. Next I took up a job in a cinema company and, on my way to Madras to purchase a film, visited Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked me, “What happened to your job under Spencer & Co.” I replied, “It did not suit me and so I gave it up.” Bhagavan remarked, “I knew even then.” Then I said, “If you had told me then itself I might have saved the cost of my trip to Madras!”

My son Ramanan had Bhagavan compose a work in Tamil describing the marriage of Bhagavan, the bride being jnana, just as the marriage of Rama or Krishna is elaborately sung in our books. When people of my family sang the above songs before Bhagavan, the bhaktas assembled there remarked, “What is this? They sing of Bhagavan’s marriage! Bhagavan who left his home and became an ascetic when he was 16,” and laughed. Then Bhagavan related, “When I was at Skandasramam a married Brahmin woman used to visit me now and then. Whenever she was present, if we sat for food she used to place a leaf-plate next to mine and serve on it all the several dishes served to us all. When asked ‘for whom is that plate’ she would reply, ‘It is
for *moksha* Lakshmi,’ the idea being that in the case of *jnanis*, *moksha* Lakshmi is always by their side.” When asked who that lady was, Bhagavan replied, “I don’t’ know who she is, nor does mother know.”

Once Bhagavan remarked as follows, “Some come and do *namaskaram* before me. I feel then as if they beat me.” I cannot make out what Bhagavan meant by this. After I thought over it, it dawned on me those people must be wicked people with bad thoughts, cheating and harming others. Sometimes I cannot grasp what Bhagavan was driving at immediately. Only afterwards I would realize his meaning. ‘That was Bhagavan’s will,’ I used to think.

Once, when I and my wife were visiting Bhagavan, my wife told me she had a great desire to go round the hill in Bhagavan’s company. I told her Bhagavan had stopped going round the hill and that she should not trouble him to do so for us. Thereupon she went round Bhagavan a dozen times, prostrated before him and said she had gone round the hill. She further added that she had secured the reward for going round the hill in the same way in which Subramania by going round Siva obtained the fruit which Siva offered as a prize for whoever went round the three worlds and returned to him first. Bhagavan said, “That place is this.” I asked, “Was it not Palani?” Bhagavan replied, “That was in different circumstances.” We imagined Bhagavan was Subramania.

One day I noticed Bhagavan’s gums had receded. I asked him, “You are younger than me. How is it your gums are already like this? He replied, “One person, to test me, gave me poison. I took it. It did not take away my life. But it ate up my gums.” I replied, “There was a Goddess to prevent the poison getting below the neck in Siva’s case. There was none here.”

*(To be continued)*

RECOLLECTIONS
Duck, Watanabe Seitei (1851-1918), ink and colour on silk, Meiji period
Hyakujo’s Wild Duck

Case
When Great Master Baso and Hyakujo were walking together, they saw a wild duck fly past. Master Baso said, “What’s that?” Hyakujo said, “A wild duck.” Master Baso said, “Where did it go?” Hyakujo said, “It flew away.” Master Baso twisted Hyakujo’s nose. Hyakujo cried out in pain. Master Baso said, “When has it ever flown away?”
— Hekiganroku, case 53

With eighty enlightened disciples, Master Baso (Matsu Tao-i, 709-788) was among the greatest of all Zen masters. He is known for introducing to Zen physical shock tactics such as hitting and shouting that would help students come to awakening. One of his principal successors, Hyakujo (Baizhang Huaihai, 720-814), the main character of the above mentioned case, would go on to organize the Zen monastic customary and rules that prevail in many Zen temples even today. Hyakujo’s students were Obaku and Isan (Obaku’s famous student was Rinzai). Baso was the founder of the Zen school
of Hungzhou, which was the name of the area where he lived and taught. His teaching was radical mind-to-mind transmission. For him, the ordinary mind is no other than Buddha-nature but Baso’s teaching method varied according to the needs of the student:

A monk asked why the Master maintained, “Mind is Buddha.” The Master answered, “Because I want to stop the baby from crying.” The monk persisted, “When the crying has stopped, what then?” The Master said, “Not mind, not Buddha.” The monk then asked, “How do you teach a man who does not uphold either of these?” The Master said, “I would tell him, ‘There is not even a single thing’”. The monk again questioned, “If you met a man free from attachment to all things, what would you tell him?” The Master replied, “I would let him experience the Great Way.”

The complete story of Baso and his attendant Hyakujô follows from the nose-twisting with Hyakujô having a flash of insight. The attendant hurriedly returns to the attendants’ quarters, where he begins to shed tears. His fellow attendant asks why he is crying. Is it because he is homesick or because someone has scolded him? To all such inquiries, Hyakujô answers in the negative. “Then why are you crying?” the attendant insists. Hyakujô says:

“Because the Great Master twisted my nose so hard that I am still feeling the pain.” “What was the conflict that led to this?” his friend asked. “Go ask the Abbot himself?” said Hyakujô. When he went to ask Baso, the Master said, “He himself understands it perfectly well. Go and ask him.” He then returned to Hyakujô, saying, “The Abbot says you understand it and refers me back to you.” Upon this Hyakujô laughed out loud. His colleague was amused as well as amazed and queried, “A moment ago you were crying. What makes you laugh now?” Hyakujô said, “My crying a moment ago is the same as my laughing now.” The attendant was bewildered.

The next day in the Dharma Hall just as the Master sat down to preach, Hyakujô came and rolled up his mat. This made the master descend the platform. Hyakujô followed him to his room. The Master said:
“Just now, before I began my sermon, what made you roll up my mat?” Hyakujô said “Yesterday Your Reverence twisted my nose and I felt acute pain.” “Where did you apply your mind yesterday?” asked the master. All that the disciple said was, “Today, my nose doesn’t hurt anymore.” Thereupon the master commented, “You have profoundly understood yesterday’s episode.”

Although the scenes and actions have changed, the subject remains the same. Baso’s tactics were meant to lead his disciple to discover the “I.” So, when Hyakujô said, “Yesterday I felt acute pain...but I feel no pain today,” Baso was satisfied that the disciple had made a discovery. This is all the more certain as his statement has no logical relevance whatever to the question. Self-discovery, then, is the real meaning in this instance as indeed it is the meaning of all of Zen. But what is the main thrust of this cryptic story?

The basic and fundamental human drive is the desire to know, to know the real as the real. The act of questioning is the foundation of this desire to know. Zen’s three basic requirements are Great Faith, Great Doubt and Great Effort. Great Doubt actually means Great Questioning. What a miracle that by human intuition the real can be known at all. The universe and reality are not closed books to the human intellect. Our intellect reflects the reality of the universe. Science is one form of knowing among others. Knowing is not merely memory, fantasy or calculation. Real knowing, according to the Upanishads, is to become the known: “He who knows the Supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman” (Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.2.9).

The miracle of miracles is that in knowing, one becomes the known. This form of knowing in which one becomes the other is love. In the Christian tradition, contemplative knowing of the divine is the heavenly beatitude. Ultimately, knowing leads one to mystery; for one is mystery and the universe is mystery. Knowing the mystery is becoming one with the mystery. Meister Eckhart says it like this: “My ground and God’s ground is the same ground.”

---

MOUNTAIN PATH

The ground is love. However, this does not mean becoming homogenous and non-differentiated. Actually, union of becoming one in love differentiates — the greater the unity, the greater the individuality. Such knowing and loving is creative. Creativity takes form in imagination and in our actions in the world.

Let us now look at the koan in detail. Usually, when Zen students focus on a koan, they must focus on a single word, phrase or sentence which is the nub of the koan. The nub of the present koan is, *Where did it go?... It flew away.*

The story seems ordinary and yet contradictory to common sense. Of course, the duck has flown away and disappeared in the far-away horizon. This is true. Yet Baso calls Hyakujo to awaken to the non-dual Zen dimension of reality.

First, there is the ordinary day-to-day reality, i.e. going and coming, birth and death, yesterday, today and tomorrow, self and other — all limited, temporary, passing, without stability or security. Our bodies are imperfect, fragile, mortal and bound to suffering, old age and death. They fall under the law of the passions — likes, dislikes, fears, anxieties, lust, greed, anger, hatred and so on.

Hyakujo says of the duck, ‘It flew away’. Hyakujo understands ‘it’ in the conventional sense, and indeed, from the conventional point of view, the duck has flown away. But ‘It’ in Baso’s question refers to Emptiness,\(^2\) namely, Emptiness that comes in the form of a duck.

But Emptiness does not fly away. There is no space or time in Emptiness. Emptiness, knowable as consciousness, is all-pervasive, ever-present. Emptiness is this I, the self, personalised in consciousness, particularised through imagination.

---

2 Emptiness (Śūnyatā) is a central principle in Mahayana Buddhism and maps fairly closely onto Vedanta’s Cidākāśa (such as presented in *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*) as well as Dēvikālōttaram’s mahaśūnya, “the great all-pervading Void, formless and vast like the sky” (v. 23). Cidākāśa or space-consciousness is Pure Awareness which contains all things. From the Vedanta perspective, Cidākāśa is Brahman as Formless Absolute, and the world and all temporal functioning are merely a mental projection. The Zen flavouring is similar in that there is only Mind (sometimes called ‘no-Mind’), vast like space, reflecting a world. All dualities such as ‘seer’ and ‘seen’ collapse into pure ‘seeing’ where nothing has any inherent independent existence and thus is said to be empty.
The verse to the koan reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wild ducks. Do you know how many?} \\
\text{Baso sees and the two had words with each other.} \\
\text{Exhausted is all talk on the sentiments} \\
\text{Of clouds on the mountains} \\
\text{And the moon over the ocean.} \\
\text{Still Hyakujô didn’t understand} \\
\text{And said, “It flew away.”} \\
\text{He wanted to fly away.} \\
\text{But Baso held him fast.}
\end{align*}
\]

Emptiness neither comes nor goes. And yet, Emptiness is also form, the world itself. For Hyakujô, Emptiness takes form as a wild duck. But the duck has never flown away. How could it? The duck is Hyakujô himself — pure awareness, the Self. Hyakujô and the duck are not-two.³

There is a koan that runs, *Standing nowhere, let the mind come forth.*

Emptiness is your home-ground. Nowhere is the ground of your very self. Emptiness is your self and the self embraces all the world, is present to all of reality. Moreover, the self is consciousness and through imagination can become each and everything. The primordial consciousness of the self embraces all the world and is present to all. The passing world of change and dualities is none other than the ultimate reality of Emptiness that is your self. Your self moves on both levels. Your self and the world are not-two and not-one. Hence the Christian image of Jesus Christ, both human and divine—100% human and 100% divine, two natures, one person.

³ Hyakujô sees the duck as an ordinary bird flying in the sky. But Baso wants to bring home the fact that ‘duck’, ‘sky’, and ‘world’ are labels for phenomenal representations in Mind. Since there is only Mind (Emptiness), there is no ‘away’. Hence seeing the duck from Baso’s point of view underscores the fictional dimension of ‘world’ (duck) and of ‘out there’ (flown away). For Master Baso, the only thing that is real and knowable is phenomenal representation right here and right now, i.e. *things as they are*. This can be called Mind, or Emptiness.
The duck has never flown away. The duck, like all the world, is Hyakujô himself. And still, Hyakujô is truly himself, indwelling this body-mind-spirit. The world comes to presence in the in-between of the student and the master, between Baso and Hyakujô, which is consciousness that is embedded and extended.

**Bibliography**


Born as Arul Maria Arokiasamy in 1936, AMA Samy joined the Jesuit order and took priestly ordination. In 1972, he traveled to Japan with Hugo Enomiya-Lasalle to train in Zen under Yamada Ko-Un Roshi. He began teaching Zen in the 1980s and, in 1996, established Bodhizendo, the Zen centre at Perumalmalai, Kodaikanal, where he lives and teaches. The present article is adapted from his upcoming book, *Zen: Heart Broken, Heart of Love*. 
Left to right (standing): 1) Unknown 2) A.W. Chadwick 3) S.S. Cohen, 4) Swami Sathyananda Maharishalu. Sitting: Unknown (ca. 1938)
Among the early non-Indian or western devotees who formed the regular circle around Bhagavan, S.S. Cohen was a notable member. In the early years of his residence from 1936 he lived close to Sri Ramanasramam in a simple mud-walled cottage he had built at the sadhu enclave in Palakothu, but after he returned from a long yatra in 1940, the building had collapsed and he built a new house near Ma Taleyarkhan’s residence. The final five years of his life were spent in the ashram before his absorption in Arunachala on the 27th of May 1980. According to his request, he was buried in the ashram’s compound.

He wrote several books on Bhagavan and his teaching, one of which, Guru Ramana, is an authoritative book in the literature. Cohen was not a European nor was he a Christian. He was an Oriental – or a Sephardic Jew – regarded as different to the Ashkenazy Jews, that is, one who was born and raised in Europe. At a time when being Jewish was not exactly socially desirable he did not allow that to bother him in the least for he never let his religious origins blur his love of India and Sri Ramana Maharshi. He was always referred to as ‘Cohen.’
As far as we know he never visited Israel and saw India as his home. He stated in a journal: “Some Jews treat India as a second Israel; some others, like my humble self are keener still, and take Israel as a second India. These love India as the tenderest of mothers, who treasures in her immortal soul the most precious spiritual gems which lighten ‘cruel’ life’s heavy burden, sweeten it, and give it a meaning and a goal.”

A man of action and principle he took Indian citizenship.

Sulaiman Samuel Cohen was born in Basra, Iraq, in 1895. He came from a very poor Jewish family, and was the eldest of eleven children. As an adolescent he witnessed the murder of a senior police officer and this had a profound impact on the sensitive youth.

Cohen wrote a ‘How I Came to Bhagavan’ article for *The Mountain Path* in which he wrote:

“But my case was different: it was the result of a twenty-year-long quest for the Guru, a quest which was sparked by what then appeared a mere accident. I was only eighteen when a strange book fell in my hands. I call it strange, because in a country – Turkish Mesopotamia and now the Republic of Iraq – to which very few books had access (in 1914), this book appeared to be a phenomenon. It was *Esoteric Buddhism* by A. P. Sinnet, which I first took for a book on magic. I devoured it and was captured by it; the very sound of its oriental terms – *Kamaloka, lingasharira, devachan, anupadhaka* and what not – had the effect of abracadabra, of a soothing incantation on me, and haunted me for many weeks.”

“The long duration, the devastation and the universal suffering caused by the First World War effaced much of this romantic picture.

---

1 *Israel and India*. (July 1952) p.27. I am indebted to Prof. Boaz Huss, who teaches at the Department of Jewish Thought, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. He published a detailed article with extensive footnotes on Cohen’s Jewish background and connection with Israel. See ‘A Jew Living in an Ashram: The Spiritual Itinerary of S.S. Cohen’ in *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, 2015, number 15.

2 ‘How I Came to Bhagavan’, *The Mountain Path*, 1968, Vol.V., No 4. It is interesting that Cohen would have read *Esoteric Buddhism* in English at the age of 19. Basra had a British enclave since 1723, which was managed by the British East India Company. In 1898 it came under the direct control of the Indian Government. One can assume that Cohen grew up fluent in English. He also read and spoke Arabic, and presumably Hebrew at home. The present state of Iraq was founded by Great Britain in 1920.
from my mind till ten years later I found myself in India nursing a friend who had made a fortune on the stock exchange and had lost it overnight forever.”

As a young man, Cohen arrived in Bombay, where he worked as a shop assistant and was trained as an accountant. There he joined the Theosophical Society, and met its president, Annie Besant (1847-1933). At her request, he moved to the headquarters of the Society in Adyar. Cohen lived there for over five years during the 1920s, and studied at the Theosophical Brahmavidya Ashram. He became acquainted with the other leaders of the Society, including C.W. Leadbeater and J. Krishnamurti. He was one of the founders of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists, which was established at Adyar during the jubilee congress of the Theosophical Society 1925. He was dynamic in the Association, which saw the opening of several branches in India, Iraq, Europe, and the U.S.A. He was secretary of the committee that built a synagogue in the Adyar compound.

He was still an active member of the Theosophical Society in 1931, when he was based in Kandy, where he worked as an examiner of Arabic studies for the University of Ceylon. He was politically aware and was involved in protests against the discrimination of Jews who had joined the Theosophical Movement in Basra and had been excommunicated. In a letter published in October 1932 in Israel Messenger (a Jewish journal published in Shanghai) he wrote:

“Let us by all means be frank over the poisonous germs that are feeding on the heart – the purity, the spiritual beauty and the fundamental truths – of our religion. Let us confess that our orthodoxy is moving in a dreamland of its own making blissfully ignorant of the passages of time over its cherished traditions and obsolete dogmas.”

It is clear from these excerpts that Cohen was not concerned with the rigid letter of the law, even though as child and young man in Basra he would have deeply imbued the Jewish tradition in that small, tightly knit enclave. Cohen was a sharp-minded, free thinker who was concerned with the spirit of truth and who was on a quest, which accounts for his interest in Theosophy and its search for the eternal truths universal to all religions.

---

3 Ibid.
Interestingly, in comparison to the Jews who arrived in India from Europe, and who distanced themselves from Judaism, Cohen spoke openly about his Jewish origins and had an active interest in Jewish topics, including the State of Israel.

During his stay at Adyar he studied Buddhism, Vedanta and Theosophy. He was a man who was gifted with an exceptionally astute mind and a ready wit. He was not prepared to take anything on blind trust. Slowly he reached the conclusion that though he had learnt much he still was frustrated. “Vedanta seemed to me to offer the greatest possibilities in that direction. My only need was then the guidance of one who himself had had that experience and thus could with authority and competence lead me to it. For five years, five long years, I waited in Madras, but not a word, not a whisper did I hear of Bhagavan, who lived a stone’s throw, as it were, from me.”

Cohen was not a meek individual who remained quiet when he saw injustice. After the death of Annie Besant in September 1933, Cohen was actively involved in the elections for the new President. *The Theosophist* published a letter by him in which he raised objections to the decision not to publish the public manifesto of Earnest Wood, who had campaigned for the office of president against George Arundale.

He was increasingly dissatisfied with purely theoretical knowledge and found the tense atmosphere in the Theosophical Society uncongenial as Arundale began to assert his position after his election as president when he made J. Krishnamurti unwelcome in the society. Among others Cohen left Adyar, and returned to Bombay to take up professional work again as an accountant.

During this period, a friend sent him Paul Brunton’s, *A Search in Secret India* (1934), and he was straightaway attracted. “His next attempt was on hearing of the Maharshi in Bombay ….. Again he threw up his work and set forth on the quest, and this time he found the guidance he sought. He went to Sri Ramanashram with the intention of staying fourteen days and stayed fourteen years ….”

On the 3rd of February 1936, Cohen arrived at Ramanashram. In his memoirs, he recounts his first encounter with Sri Ramana:

---

“I was led to a small dining room, at the door of which I was asked to remove my shoes. He was the Maharshi himself... I was alone in the Hall with him. Joy and peace suffused my being – never before, had I such a delightful feeling of purity and well-being at the mere proximity of a man. My mind was already in deep contemplation of him – him not as flesh, although that was exquisitely formed and featured – but as an unsubstantial principle which could make itself so profoundly felt despite the handicap of a heavy material vehicle ... It is needless to say that from that day Ramanashram became my permanent home.”

After four weeks he wrote to his employer in Bombay and resigned his position. Cohen showed his resignation letter to Bhagavan who observed that the letter was written from right to left.

“... on the fifth of April [1936] devotees gathered in my hut, and about noon Sri Bhagavan himself strolled in on his way back from his usual walk, and refusing the special chair I had made ready for him, he squatted like the others on the mat-covered floor. Ceremony over, Bhagavan left. I followed him from a distance, waited till the devotees cleared away and approached him. “Bhagavan”, I said, “you have given a home for my body, I expect your Grace to give the eternal home to my soul, for which I closed my business and broke all my human relationships.” He stopped in the shade of a tree, gazed silently on the calm water of the tank for a few seconds and replied: “Your firm conviction brought you here; where is the room for doubt?” Where is the room for doubt indeed!

“Three years rolled by and Bhagavan continued to pass daily by my hut. In the beginning he used to take shelter, from the midday sun on my verandah for about five minutes, during which I made myself scarce in order not to inconvenience him, till one day I foolishly placed a chair, quietly, for his use, which made him once and for all boycott my verandah. Despite his full knowledge of our adoration of and utter self-dedication to him, he was extremely sensitive to the slightest suggestion of trouble which might ensue from him to us, or for the matter of that to anyone thus placing a special chair for him, in expecting him every day at a fixed hour he interpreted as interfering with my rest — hence the boycott.”

---

In 1952, he published a book based on the notes he had taken during conversations between Sri Ramana had his devotees, which has become a standard in Sri Ramana literature, *Guru Ramana: Memories and Notes* (1952). In 1965, Cohen published a condensed translation of *Srīmad Bhāgavata* (1965). Cohen’s other published works include: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (1959); *Advaitic Sādhanā: or The Yoga of Direct Liberation* (1975); *Residual Reminiscences of Ramana* (1975); *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses on Reality), by Ramana Maharshi: Translation and Commentary (1978) and he wrote the epilogue to B. V. Narasimha Swamy’s *Self-Realisation: or Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (1976). He also wrote articles for *The Call Divine* which was published out of Bombay in the 1950s and 60s.

His writings show a depth of knowledge and understanding of the subtler points of Advaita. There was an incident which reveals his unruffled and dispassionate nature. Another devotee and Cohen were standing together outside the Nirvana room, waiting for the final act on the 14th of April 1950 when Bhagavan left his body. The end came at 8.47 pm. and the devotee, unable to contain his emotions, shouted an expression of grief. Cohen put a finger on his lip and with a stern expression asked him to be quiet. But the devotee could not contain his emotion and left him and entered the new hall where he was sobbing. It was there that Viswanathan Swami embraced him and spoke comforting words. All the while Cohen was calm and resolute, even in the face of the knowledge that the sun of his world, too, had gone.

Some five years after the *mahānirvāṇa* of Sri Ramana he left Tiruvannamalai and settled at Madanapalle in what is now in southern Andhra Pradesh. Being a theosophist he was given space in the Rishi Valley complex where he built a small cottage. But eventually he had to leave Rishi Valley in 1958 as Madanapalle was too cold, and being asthmatic he found it hard to breathe. He moved to Vellore some 80 kms north of Tiruvannamalai and resided at 3, Infantry Road. He treated people as a homeopath but never practiced it for a living.

He lived frugally from his small investment in shares. This was characteristic of Cohen for he was a resourceful man without self-pity. He had a sharp intellect and a playful sense of humour which
he sometimes indulged in teasing the overly earnest. He enjoyed the give and take of a spirited conversation. He also had a strong sense of self-respect and dressed immaculately in white kurta and pyjama pants. He never married.

After many years in Vellore, Cohen’s friends took him back to Tiruvannamalai in the mid-1970s. During the last years of his life, he resided again in the ashram. On the 27th of May 1980, he passed away. According to his request, he was buried in the ashram’s compound.

Among the memoirs of Cohen are the following:

“When I asked S.S. Cohen as to what was the last question he had put to Bhagavan, he replied: ‘It was in 1949. Bhagavan was seated outside the New Hall, facing Arunachala. Muruganar and a few others were by His side. I reverentially approached Bhagavan and said: “I want to do only the right thing. The difficulty is that I do not know at the time of decision taking whether what I wish to do is the right thing or not. If you could give me a formula, a yard-stick, with which I could arrive at the right decision, at any cost I will do only that right thing and not falter. Please guide me.”’

‘Bhagavan became very stern and said: “There is no such short-cut for living. You have to take your own decisions, take the responsibility for them and reap their consequences too.”’

During his last years in the ashram he could be seen near the Old Hall in the morning, sitting in his wheel chair. The deterioration was clear to those who regularly attended the ashram. V. Ganesan writes:

“I cried on seeing his pathetic condition and told him: ‘Mr. Cohen! You are the most intelligent sadhak I have met. Why are you talking so incoherently?’ He then adjusted himself and squarely looked at my face, and said: ‘When the body becomes old, you lose control over it. And so over the mind also. You are not the body and you are not the mind! So, don’t give any importance to how the body or the mind behaves. They are not ‘me’.’”

It was clear to many who observed Cohen in those final days that he was beyond his failing body and broken mind, for in his eyes one could see a state of solid peace and unflinching awareness, independent of the fluctuations of time and space.

---

S.S. Cohen wrote a number of articles in the 1950s for The Call Divine, which was a magazine based in Bombay and dedicated to Bhagavan. The following was published on the 1st August 1955 in Volume 3, Number 3, pp.619-623. Cohen’s observations about the dangers of delusion for those who think that have ‘realised’ are just as relevant today as when he wrote it.

Of all places in the world an Ashram is the one place where, for various reasons, many illusions nourish without one is aware of them; so that he who is not careful or mentally well-balanced runs the risk of moving counter to the purpose for which he has taken all the trouble to meet a great Rishi and benefit by his holy presence for some time. The most common illusion which has come to my notice during my long residence in Sri Ramanashram, at Tiruvannamalai, is that of the person who professedly comes to learn but soon begins to teach, being firmly convinced that he has more fundamentally grasped the Master’s teaching and has made for quicker progress than his neighbour, a much older disciple. What is worse, he does
not shrink from loudly claiming his easy victory and disparaging the other devotees on every occasion that offers.

The ‘Seekers’ do not seem to have learnt the meaning of humility, which is the foremost virtue of a sadhaka. For the mind turned bright by its own purity cannot but rightly assess the difficulties of the task ahead and the relentless fight to be put up in the ups and downs of the long and arduous road. A pure seeker allows no outward appearance to cloud his judgement, but gratefully seeks the help of senior and more experienced sadhakas. For what depths of suffering these may not have touched, and what crucifixion they may not have endured to spiritual heights of which they cannot speak, nor the newcomer has an inkling. Sane outlook, the strongest weapon in the battle of ordinary life, is much more so in the life of the spirit wherein no landmarks nor measuring rods enlighten the Yogi for his direction, the distance he travelled and the progress he made, and where any slip may lead to dismal failure and regret.

It is not for nothing that the blessed ancients laid down the ashtangas as the eight stages or expedients to Perfection. The very first anga, yama, consists of the ten virtues to be acquired, of which fortitude, which combines humility with patience, is one of the foremost, before the next anga, niyama, the stage of practice, is entered. So entering an Ashram with the sincere determination of realising God, involves a process of self-denudation of everything that smacks of the ego, which does not end in a month or two, a year or two, but which may take a lifetime, and absorbs all one's faculties and concentrated energy. Those who are not prepared to make the spiritual path their sole life-occupation and become sadhakas, and sadhakas only, should not dream of being able to snatch Self-Realisation from the Guru in a matter of hours or weeks and quickly return to their old haunts and pet habits and avocations. They who fancy themselves being singled out by God Almighty for the gift of a touch-and-go ripeness, which enables them to leap with one jump over the path, simply delude themselves.

It is but natural that, coming as they do from the blazing world of competitive business and the error-ridden, modern social life, they should get much peace, and even a glimpse of the Reality, in the presence of the Master, and the holiness which emanates from him.
But they should not mistake that will-O’-the-wisp experience as the final Realisation and start looking down upon the ‘dull-witted, blank-faced old disciples’. They do well to study the Master’s teaching and the standard Advaitic literature on the subject of Self-Realisation and Mukti to know what it fundamentally means. Besides, true seekers always minimise their attainments and virtues, and ever-and-anon check them with those of the Guru to gauge the efforts they have yet to make. I know a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan who ended by attaining the highest state by no other means than filling his mind and heart of the Master's Divine qualities. For years he daily sat inside and outside the darshan Hall in wrapt contemplation of the Master till he reached the mental purity which is the permanent state of the Liberated man. In 1938 I had the inestimable privilege, of spending three days with him in his small Ashram in Kumbakonam, in the South, to which he had since retired, and heard from his own lips his fervent adoration of Sri Bhagavan and the detail of his sadhana Unfortunately he is no more in the flesh to tell his tale, but a few years before the Master’s illness he passed into Mahanirvana. When on his deathbed and he was brought to Tiruvannamalai at his own request to have a last look of Sri Bhagavan the Master was exceedingly kind to him. He went to his bed in Palakothu and filled him with the bliss of his Grace, which he richly deserved.

The Guru of the mighty magnitude of Sri Bhagavan is not here only to teach, but also to be a model of Perfection and a touchstone by whom the disciples test their virtues and progress. And that requires a long residence with him. All the yogi scriptures enjoin a protracted company of the Guru (guru sangha) for these and many other advantages. The ingenuity which after a flying visit claims ability to dispense with this sangha and succeeds must be very unique and extraordinary, indeed. But when it becomes so common it gives rise to the suspicion of some fundamental common inhibition, which impedes rather than quickens.

Everywhere in the Scriptures enlightened guidance is given to him who is a genuine striver for Release, and everywhere emphasis is laid on constant practice, on solitude and on surrender of all activity, etc. which reveal the spiritual life to be one of incessant efforts and vigilance.
When after the great battle of Kurukshetra, the victorious Pandava Princes returned to Indraprastha, their Capital, Arjuna confessed to Sri Krishna that the Supreme teaching which the Lord had given him on the battle-field had gone out of his ‘degenerate mind’ and begged of Him to repeat it now that his (Arjuna’a) mind was free to listen attentively.

The Lord was displeased with him, yet repeated the same teaching in the form of parable with extensive advices on ‘the best line of conduct’ of a wise man, saying among others: “He who wishes to apply himself to the final Emancipation should give up all action, restrain his senses, and abstain from earning and from parading his asceticism. He should not live by any occupation or perform any action which involves expectation of profit... He should resort to concealed piety and adopt the mode of life necessary for experience (of the Brahman). Though undeluded he should act in the manner of the deluded so that others may have no special respect for him ...” (Anugita xxxi, 45/51)

Sri Sankara says in verse 367 of his Vivekachudamani that “the first steps of yoga are control of speech, non-receiving of gifts, nor entertaining of hopes, freedom from activity, and always living in a retired place.” This is the advice of mighty Beings, and genuine seekers should heed it and meditate over all its implications and learn to be less loud about their achievements, and little more considerate towards those who, devotees of great devotion and detachment had the patience and endurance to sit infinitely longer than they at the sacred Feet of the Master.
Cosmology: Physics and Metaphysics

H. K. SUHAS

Preface

The latest theory of cosmology, ‘Cycles of Time’, as put forth by Roger Penrose\(^1\) and debated by others including Stephen Hawking who has written the magnum opus *Brief History of Time* appears to be tantalizingly close to the Hindu philosophy on cosmology. The Hindu philosophy is more like a pyramid that encompasses a wide ranging of thoughts and practices that represent many paths to God realization. These are: Advaita; Visishtadvaita; Dvaita; Sankhya; Upanishads or Vedanta; Veda; Brahmanas; Mimamsa; Shaivism; Vaishnavism; Raja Yoga, Gnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Kriya Yoga, Patanjali Yoga, Vasishta Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Mantra Yoga.


Professor H.K. Suhas retired in 2008 as Deputy Director General of the National Informatics Center, Dept of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt of India, New Delhi.
Recently, the Nobel-winning physicist Steven Weinberg stated in an interview published in Sunday edition of *Times of India* dated 22nd March 2015, “[It is]..Nonsense to say modern science existed in ancient Greece or India.” He goes on to say that the two key reasons for the evolution of science were:

(i) The Renaissance of 15th and 16th centuries which led to an increased concern with the real world and a turning away from the scholastic theology.

(ii) The invention of printing with movable type which made it possible for the books of scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo to circulate rapidly throughout Europe.

He is of the opinion that looking further back, we can point to the growth of universities from 13th century onward. He also observed that “We have learned to keep questioning past ideas, formulate general principles on the basis of observation and experiment, and then to test these principles by further observing and experiment. In this way the modern physical science (and to an increasing extent, biological science as well) has been able to find mathematical laws of great generality and predictive power.

“Our predecessors in the ancient and medieval world often believed that scientific knowledge could be obtained by pure reason, and where they understood the importance of observation, it was passive, not the active manipulation of nature that is characteristic of modern experiment. Further, their theories of the physical world were often muddled with human values or religious belief, which have been expunged from modern physical science.

“These observations are well taken and are true in the sense that the ancient wisdom was based on ‘meditative process’ and ‘pure reason’ and ‘not based on active manipulation of nature through experiments’.”

Science depends on the making of postulates that need to be verified by experiments or observations and in this process of validation of the postulates, the postulates undergo changes to bring the theory in line with the experiments and observations. But what needs to be acknowledged is the fact that in the Hindu philosophy, the conclusions that were reached by following the path of reason were more from the plane of meditation on the origin and purpose of life rather than through experiments and manipulation of the
data. What is startling is that these conclusions that were arrived at through the path of ‘pure reason’ are provocatively close to the modern theories that are based on mathematical laws and verifiable physical parameters.

Consider the observations of a few of the eminent scientists:

(i) Werner Heisenberg: “After conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense.”

(ii) Erwin Schroedinger: “In all world there is no kind of framework within which we can find consciousness in the plural; this is simply something we construct because of the temporal plurality of individuals, but it is false construction...The only solution to this conflict in so far as any available to us at all lies in the ancient wisdom of the Upanishad.”

(iii) Brian David Josephson: “The Vedanta and the Sankhya hold the key to the laws of mind and thought process which are co-related to the Quantum Field, i.e., the operation and distribution of particles at atomic and molecular levels.”

(iv) Alfred North Whitehead: “The vastest knowledge of today cannot transcend the buddhi (intellect) of the rishis of ancient India; and the science, in its most advanced stage now, is closer to Vedanta than ever before.”

(v) Julius R Oppenheimer: “What we shall find in Modern Physics is an exemplification, an encouragement and a refinement of old Hindu wisdom.”

(vi) Albert Einstein: “We owe a lot to Indians who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discoveries could have been made.”

It is agreed that the main vehicle of these discoveries by the Indian sages and mathematicians, who also had discovered Zero (0) without which computation and computing machines – computers would have been impossible, was meditation and not scientific instruments as is the present status where the experiments and observations are used to validate the theories. The ancient Indian rishis had discovered all these

---

truths and established various branches of science like mathematics, astronomy and medicine without the help of any instruments.

Therefore the accepted thought process that the invention of telescope has resulted in science discovering that earth is not flat, the earth is not the centre of solar system, or understanding the time-scale of the universe, were responsible for ushering in the era of scientific discoveries is questionable, because many of these discoveries had been made thousands of years earlier by the Indian sages through meditating upon the origin of universe and life;

Or in other words, the facts that the earth is not flat; the earth is not the centre of solar system; the precise movement of planets around sun; the retrograde motion of Saturn; the occurrence of solar and lunar eclipses; the sun light having seven colours; the sub-division of time to very minute level time scales of the dissolution; the distance between earth, moon and other planets and sun and its relation to 108, the mythical number of beads in the Hindu / Buddhist rosary were all known to the ancient Indians, thousands of years ago, and who cast almanacs (called panchangam) based both on Lunar and Solar movements. Not only did the ancient Rishis of India know about the movement of planets around the Sun, they also knew about the movement of solar system around another more massive and powerful centre, which they called ‘Vishnunabhi’ which brought about the cyclical changes in human awareness.

Consider the following:

“The Indian astronomers went even further, giving a physical reason for how the dual star or binary motion might allow the rise and fall of human consciousness to occur. They said that the Sun (with the Earth and other planets) travelled along its set orbital path with its companion star, it would cyclically move close to, then away from, a point in space referred to as Vishnunabhi, a supposed magnetic centre or ‘grand centre’. They implied that being close to this region caused subtle changes in human consciousness that brought about the golden age, and conversely, our separation from it resulted in an age of great darkness, the Kali Yuga or Dark Age.”

http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Hindu_Cosmology.htm
The Ancient Wisdom of Yoga

“A more plausible alternative to mainstream archaeological and pale ontological Darwinian dogma is a recurring cycle of movement and time around the recently discovered black hole Sagittarius A, located at the centre of our Milky Way Galaxy. This black hole was known to the ancient rishis of India thousands of years ago as Vishnunabhi, the Grand Centre of Enlightenment.”

The ancient Indians, for that matter even the Mayan and Egyptian civilizations had their own almanac. The rationalists may argue that the calculations are not accurate to the last second. But then, even the modern science has not said the last word yet. The very process of scientific discovery, learning and correcting the postulates and hypotheses and refining the scientific theories is an on-going exercise. Today, the physicists have turned their attention to the consciousness and research is on to understand, ‘What makes consciousness?’.

The same is true with health sciences. It would be wrong to presume that health services have come of age only after the discovery of antibiotics. If one takes a look at both the ancient Indian health system of Ayurvedic medicine and also the ancient Tibetan medicine, the stress is more on curing the cause of disease and therefore they are holistic medicine. Today, this kind of treatment for setting right the very system is becoming a very popular way of treating the sick, where there are no medicines, leave alone the antibiotics.

Take for example the number 108 which appears often in both the Hindu and Buddhist practice. In India, the number 108 is a sacred number, suggesting completeness or wholeness. It is widely used in different contexts. Thus there are 108 beads on the Hindu and Buddhist rosary. The Buddhists know of 108 arhats or ‘worthy ones’.

The number 108 is related to the distance between Earth and Sun and also between Earth and Moon, which is roughly 108 times the diameter of Sun and Moon respectively. However, the distance between Earth and Moon is more accurately 110 times the lunar diameter, while the mean distance between Earth and Sun (150 million kilometres) comes out at 107.8 times the solar diameter (1.391 million kilometres) — close enough! Measurements of their respective

---

9 [http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Hindu_Cosmology.htm](http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Hindu_Cosmology.htm)
distance from Earth with simple equipment (such as a stick) do indeed yield a value of around 108 in both cases. Equally astonishing is the related astronomical fact that the Sun’s diameter is 108 times that of the Earth, which is why, remarkably, the two orbs appear of roughly equal size in the sky.

The meditative process that was adopted by the sages thousands of years back to unravel the mystery or secrets of life both of creation and dissolution and creating a happy, healthy and peaceful society brought out the two cardinal principles of Hindu philosophy:

(i) You are That.

(ii) Ayurveda – A healing science aimed at making a healthy, happy and peaceful society by stressing on addressing the cause of disease.

The word Ayurveda comprises two words, Āyu means life and Veda means knowledge or science. Ayurveda believes that a person is made of 5 elements, pañca-bhūtas, ether (space), air, fire, water and earth. The disease is caused when there is an imbalance in these five elements. Āyurveda aims at setting this imbalance right thus addressing the root cause of a disease so that one becomes healthy and leads a peaceful life. Further, a few of the elements combine to form physiological functions like:

(i) Ether and Air elements in dominance form vata dosha
(ii) Fire and water elements in dominance form pitta dosha
(iii) Ether and Earth elements in dominance form kapha dosha

Thus every individual is made up of a unique proportion of vata, pitta and kapha and therefore every individual must be treated differently even though the symptoms may be the same.

Thus the Hindu philosophy has given to mankind two profound truths about life:

(i) You are That.

(ii) Every individual needs to be treated medically differently even though the symptoms may be the same.

These are distinctly different from the western concepts of theology and health science. Further these were held and taught and practised widely over thousands of years before the telescope came into existence; printing technology was discovered; and antibiotics was discovered.
The aim of this article is to highlight the view of cosmology as described in Hindu philosophy which is essentially based on meditative and pure reasoning processes and compare the same with the modern scientific view of cosmology. The aim is to comparatively present the terminologies that have been used in ancient India and modern physics to explain the same concept. But the terms used in the ancient times and the modern times are different which in any way does not make the ancient wisdom, which had meditation as the basis, irrelevant and irreverent. The ancient Indian wisdom is tantalizingly close to the modern physicist’s view of cosmology.

Recent discoveries have shown that the big bang theory is no more a credible theory of the origin of cosmos in light of the scientific discovery and therefore the big bang which was assumed to be the cause of the cosmic noise has also lost the credibility. However there is an agreement between the Hindu concept of Shabda or Omkar with the scientifically observed microwave cosmic background.

The major difference between the way Hindu sages and the modern day physicists have handled the various issues related to cosmology lie in the definition of critical deciding factors:

(i) Hindu view of Sankhya philosophy revolves around the interplay amongst sattva guna, rajas guna and tamas guna: the three gunas are represented by Rudra’s trishula, which form the essence of life.

(ii) Modern day scientists and physicists talk of energy and matter. Penrose for the first time has brought the third factor called entropy, which is the ‘unavailable energy or wasteful energy’.

The terminologies used by philosophers and physicists are different and in many ways represent the same idea. For example, entropy (unavailable or wasteful energy) is inversely proportional to sattva guna: purity. The more the entropy, less is the sattvic guna or purity; energy as rajo guna; and matter as tamo guna.

It is interesting to note that the middle shula (madhyamashula) in trishula (the trident or weapon of Lord Shiva and his amsha [derivative] Rudra) is longer than the two adjacent shulas which are mirror images. Thus, the madhyamashula represents entropy – unavailable or wasteful energy and therefore reduces sattva guna which pushes the universe or cosmos towards the state of destruction. The two adjacent shulas represent rajas (energy) and tamas (mass).
Further, in the 1990s the researchers from Australian National University, Canberra and Johns Hopkins University accidentally discovered the presence of ‘dark matter’ in the universe. They were trying to measure the rate at which the Universe was expanding and were hoping to get data that would support the theory that pull of gravity would slow down the expansion process. But the data that they got was rather indicative of the Universe expanding faster! After repeated checks, it was confirmed that the Universe was indeed expanding faster.

This accidental discovery of the universe expanding at a faster rate resulted in naming this unknown entity that is speeding up the expansion of the universe as ‘dark energy’. Dark energy is the name given to an unexplained force that is drawing galaxies away from each other, against the pull of gravity, at an accelerated pace.

It must be recorded here that the existence of dark energy is not yet scientifically proven as the proof would have to be accompanied by quantitative justifications and the scientists are currently working on this problem.

One notion is that the dark energy can be looked upon as anti-gravity in the sense that gravity pulls things together while dark energy pulls them apart.

Therefore, subject to the confirmation and quantification of dark energy, we can look upon the cosmos as a play between gravity that pulls everything together and the dark energy that pulls everything apart.

The time cycle of this play is in a few billions of years and in this time frame the cosmos expands till such time that push from dark energy becomes less than the pull from gravity. Once this happens, the cosmos starts contracting till the push from dark energy becomes more than the pull from the gravity. Therefore this movement to and fro which takes a few billions of years goes on without a beginning or end, *ananta*. Further during this time cycle, the black holes get formed, swallow the other entities in the universe, pop out and again the process repeats without an end.

In whatever way one looks at the current state of cosmology, one cannot deny that the Science is inching intriguingly close to the Hindu view of the cosmos as put forth or visualized by our sages meditating upon the mystery of life.
The Arunachala, That Is Me

Manjula Haragopal

The divine in you, Arunachala, is the divine in me;
The towering light that you are Arunachala,
    I am the same, do you know?
The vibrant violet of your fragrance that encompasses all our souls,
    Arunachala,
sense it in my prayers that emanate always for you.
The immaculate indigo of your dhyana that pervades all the beings,
    Arunachala,
feel it in my thoughts that dance around you.
The balmy blue of your throat that protects this cosmos,
    Arunachala,
find it in my ecstatic tears that flow warmly for you.
The glimmering green of your blessings, the life sap of the multitude,
    Arunachala,
witness it in my smile that glows specially for you.
The youthful yellow of your radiance, the elixir that is, Arunachala,
    see it energising my sinews with the rhythm set by you.
The opulent orange of your compassion, that permeates throughout,
    Arunachala,
feel it in my chant of your name, eager to entice you.
The resplendent red of your third eye, that soothes and scalds,
    Arunachala
feel it in my veins that ebb and flow with life, bestowed by you.
The white blaze of light that you are Arunachala,
    see it in my eyes, as piety or with pity, as decided by you.
    …and accept me Arunachala, for I am nothing but you;
    and nothing without you.
You merged the vigour of colours Arunachala
    into the great white light that is you;
Unify all the colours in me into a tiny flame that becomes one
    with the all pervading you,
    Arunachala Siva…
Cow Lakshmi Samadhi at Sri Ramanasramam

D. Thiyagarajan
The events in our daily life occur to us based on the vasanas stored on our soul and we are made to experience them as per our prarabdha. These events induce us to perform various actions through the body, mind and speech. Every event occurs before us like a 3D film show; the scenes are already there in our system and are projected outside at a preordained time. The actions we have to perform are also there in the film. This we call as karma. Our karma begins to work the moment we wake up and subsides when we go to sleep. It works even in our dreams wherein we take a dream body and perform various actions. The body lasts in the world so long as karma for it exists.

M R Kodhandram is a postgraduate from the IIT Madras who has settled in Tiruvannamalai 15 years ago to pursue spiritual life. He has translated and written commentaries in English on Bhagavan's Upadesa Saram, Bhagavad Gita Saram and Atma Bodha. He has also translated and written commentaries in English on Andal's Tiruppavai and the ancient Tamil scripture Tirukkural.
Thus our whole life is a sequence of actions performed by us till our death. How do these vasanas occur in our system? They are the results of our past actions based on desire or will (sankalpa). The results of such actions become the seed for future actions. Thus a chain of actions and results make up our life giving us birth after birth. The same actions we keep doing again and again. Is there any glory in such repetitive existence? How does one terminate this vicious and seemingly unending cycle of birth-and-death syndrome in which we are inextricably caught?

The answer lies in the way we perform our actions or karmas. nīṣkāmya karma or desireless action performed as an offering to the Lord purifies our mind and orients it towards the path of Liberation (Upadēśa Sāram, verse 3). If our karmas are performed in such a way as not to leave any residue, then their seeds will die off. This is called karmakṣayam. This means, we have to perform our daily actions in a detached manner without any expectation of a favourable result or craving for more of such actions if found pleasant. We should also not feel upset if actions we have to perform are unpleasant. That is, we should not have elation or dejection on any account in the performance of our duties. All such dualities are not good. Bhagavan says that we should see through all events in life as a mere witness, as one who watches a film-show knowing that it is a film-show. That is, we should not get deluded by the events that occur and get emotional in the process.

This means, we should play the allotted roles of our life well as the situation demands — a mother, father, daughter, teacher, wife etc. — without forgetting our true nature as the unchanging and eternal Self that is the same in all. (All the changes that take place in our life pertain only to the body and mind, and our real Self does not undergo any change.)

Thus we should perform all our duties without any attachment or expectation of a particular result and remain balanced even while facing adverse situations or provocations. However, if we are finding it difficult to face a situation, we should quickly seek the help of Bhagavan by praying to Him to give us the strength to manage the situation. And with Bhagavan’s Grace, we will be able to see through the situation without reaction.
Thus we have to be constantly alert and aware of ourselves so that we don’t react to the situations we face. We should realise that all that we see and face in the world are unreal, a film already shot and kept inside us and being projected before us outside so that we may experience the fruits of our past actions. The total lot of karmas accumulated on our soul based on our actions done in the past births is known as the sanchita karma. Out of this, some are chosen for experiencing in this birth and is known as the prarabdha karma. In addition, we have made fresh karmas in this birth which come under the category ākāmya karma. Even some of this is chosen for experiencing in this birth and the rest are added to the sanchita karma for experiencing in future births.

This is the way the Nature settles our accounts. If we remember this, we will be careful the way we lead our lives so that we don’t add fresh karmas in ignorance. Also, we will be able to play our roles carefully without getting entangled anywhere and allow the scenes to go off smoothly. If we forget this truth even for a while, we may react and get emotional due to involvement and interfere in the event thereby not allowing the film to proceed smoothly. If the film proceeds smoothly, then the karma would end smoothly without leaving any residue, thereby lightening the burden on our soul. If there are reactions to the events as mentioned above, then karmas will not end fully and there will be a residue like how a candle leaves a residue on burning. The residue we leave will come back to us later on and we have to face them willy-nilly.

Ideally, karmas should burn off like camphor without leaving any residue. Then the karma would end fully and the soul would be lighter on its load. This is the way to end all our karmas so that we can lighten the load on our soul and become fit for pursuing the sadhana of self-enquiry that would take us to our Supreme destination of no return.

Bhagavan cautions us against getting involved or interfering in others’ affairs by identifying ourself with them. This normally occurs out of attachment. Our involvement or interference should be only based on duty or when specifically requested for. Even then, we should do such actions in a detached and disinterested manner. Thus we should not think much of others’ problems and get
involved because each person suffers only on account of his own past misdeeds. However, if we are affected by others’ sufferings, we can pray to God to help them. This will surely benefit them. Suffering is the way Nature teaches us to make corrections and thus purify ourselves.

Bhagavan teaches us to enquire into the reasons for our reactions or emotions — anger, quarrels, jealousy, pride etc. — and identify the root-cause and resolve not to repeat them in the future. We can also pray to Bhagavan to strengthen us in our resolve. Such enquiry and resolve would destroy the residue formed (if small) and also serve as a superimposition on our weak spots, thus providing a check on our mind’s reactions for similar situations in the future. Thus we should steady the mind again and again through enquiry and make it positive till we are stabilised in the Self. The enquiry should be done at the heat of the moment when the vasana is rising and done so thoroughly as to develop a distaste or disgust for our tendencies.

Also, whenever our Conscience pricks while doing an action, we should quickly enquire into the correctness of our action and understand whether such an action is good or bad and whether it will subserve the purpose of our life. For instance, a smoking tendency will induce us to smoke. If we are alert, we can enquire and realise that it is harmful and we have got the urge through the genes we have inherited from our father or grandfather who are smokers. Such an enquiry will help us not to smoke. But if we have already fallen a prey to it, enquiry will still help us to come out of the habit by superimposing correct knowledge on this bad habit. Thus whenever we are attracted to smoking, if we enquire, the tendency to smoke will progressively weaken and we will be able to strike it down in the course of time. If we also pray to Bhagavan to help us to give up the bad habit, we will receive the benefit of His Grace which will speed up the process.

Similarly, we can enquire into all our bad actions and habits and correct them. Also, whenever the mind develops negative thoughts or projects into the world and craves for this and that, we can put an end to them through a proper enquiry. Thus enquiry is the best way to end all our faults, desires, attachments, negative emotions and bad qualities and thus purify the mind and make it fit for pursuing the spiritual path.
How to know what is right or wrong for the purpose of correct enquiry? Through the study of scriptures, listening to the words of the wise (satsang), service to the wise and pondering over what we have studied, listened or observed, we will be able to discriminate between right and wrong. Thus, acquiring the right knowledge and using it to end our ignorance and emotions is the way to purify the mind. We should avoid the habit of classifying events as good or bad but only consider whether our actions are good or bad. All events must be treated alike and the mind kept balanced under all circumstances. Surrendering to Bhagavan and practising His teachings will fetch us sufficient Grace to conquer the mind and merge it in the Self thereby fulfilling the purpose of life. Thus seeing through the events as a witness will help us to end our prarabdha without leaving any residue. And merging the mind in the Self through self-enquiry will result in the destruction of the ego which is Liberation.

Thus Bhagavan’s Self-enquiry is two-pronged in approach: The first is the discriminative enquiry to purify the mind and rid it of all the faults, negative emotions and bad qualities. This is the preparation required to qualify for the second step. This preparation may take a number of years and we should be patient and persevering and hold onto Bhagavan with faith and surrender. Once the mind has developed sufficient purity and reduction of ego, it can be internalised and taken to its source through self-enquiry and meditation which is the second step in the process. In this manner, we will be able to achieve the purpose of life which is Liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. May Bhagavan bless us with the spirit of enquiry so that we may achieve the purpose of life speedily!
A staunch devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi since the age of seventeen, Philip Pegler returned to England following an extended stay at the Ashram in 1974, only to experience a pressing need to integrate his increasing understanding of Eastern spirituality with the Western culture from which he had come. It was by no means a painless process, but he recently drew upon those valuable experiences in the writing of two companion volumes of mystics in the Christian tradition, who had been friends of one another and who had become Philip’s mentors. Both biographies received generous coverage in the Mountain Path in 2013 and 2016 respectively and the following article relates to the second volume reviewed last October and entitled Meeting Evil with Mercy.

It seemed a fitting end to such an important phase of my lifelong pilgrimage in quest of Truth – a rather arduous path which had always seemed to pass along the most circuitous of routes. I was reminded of that yet again as I made my way carefully up the narrow path to the back door of the fine Victorian church, edging past a
colourful array of vegetables and flowers ranged in pots down the length of the small backyard, before reaching mindfully into my knapsack and placing a small package of books on the back step as I had been asked to do. Then I stepped back and paused for a moment in silent recollection. It was a sacred task completed. I could go on my way now.

Life is impermanent and time never stands still. It had been more than thirty six years since I had been married at this very place (Holy Trinity Church, in Prince Consort Road, near London's grandest of musical venues, The Albert Hall in the heart of the capital) but it seemed more like just the day before yesterday. Nevertheless much had changed in the interim. The remarkable Christian priest who had conducted the wedding ceremony there was no longer alive, yet even that sad but irreversible fact did not prevent me presenting that collection of six books to him as a parting gift out of the fullness of my heart.

It was only natural that I should wish to do so, for he had meant far more to me than just an officiating priest – he had been a valuable spiritual guide too and I had just finished writing a book about his inspiring life and work. It was the least I could have done out of my gratitude for his patient advice. Here then were some copies of my work for present-day members of the church congregation to read as a reminder of their priest-in-charge - still greatly missed. To leave the books alone there outside in the open on the step for collection seemed a solemn and symbolic act of closure. It had been a great privilege to write this biography, but now it was finished and it was with a trace of regret that I turned to make my way back down the church path.

****

Who then was this quietly unassuming but profoundly wise man, who had made such a deep impression on me while I was still a young man? Born into a prosperous Jewish family in South Africa in 1927, Martin Israel had already established a successful medical career in England by the time he adopted Christianity and became an Anglican priest there in 1975. By that point he had also embarked upon a parallel literary career as a prolific spiritual writer and had begun to earn a
sound reputation as an inspired preacher and accomplished conductor of retreats for both laymen and clergy.

Assiduous in parish duties, Martin grew in authority and candour even as he gained in rich diversity of experience. As his confidence grew, increasingly he came to terms with an agonising diffidence, which had mostly stemmed from acute sensitivity and shyness in youth. Loneliness as an only child and intractable family issues at home, resulted in severe depression in later life, but the burden of this dark shadow only made him more compassionately understanding towards those people drawn to him for spiritual direction and counselling.

His pastoral work soon extended into healing – and even into the obscure and difficult work of exorcism of evil influences, which Martin termed ‘the ministry of deliverance’, since it often required entrusting disembodied, earthbound souls into the providential care of God through rapt prayer. That he was able and willing to undertake such challenging and dangerous inner work extending into subtle realms beyond the gates of death, says a great deal about his rare and very particular gifts of mystical intuition and psychic sensitivity, which set him apart from other clergy – and marked him out as somehow different from them to say the least. Such mysterious considerations as rescue work in the afterlife, hardly lend themselves to credible explanation in conventional circles, but still he wrote about these esoteric matters of the paranormal with fluent ease and matter of fact conviction.

Martin's highly unusual and wide-ranging healing ministry lasted more than a quarter of a century, but eventually however the unremitting demands upon his time and energy took a heavy toll. With little warning, after many years of conscientious application to his duties and while still acclaimed by a growing circle of avid readers as well as by an admiring church congregation, he was overwhelmed with alarming rapidity by debilitating illness. After an acute breakdown, which occasioned a dramatic near-death experience, he miraculously recovered, only to spend his final years mostly confined to a wheelchair in ever-increasing disability. Despite such poor health, continually supported by carers, his inherent quality of radiant spirituality was even more apparent as he flowed out in even greater measure of love to all visitors.
The gifted doctor turned priest had responded ardently to God's summons to sanctity, but by this time he knew more fully what such an invitation entailed, having plumbed the depths of suffering in a long and useful life dedicated in service to others.

How poignantly appropriate it all seems now. The healing power of pain was a vital part of the courageous approach of this unconventional Christian guide, who always emphasised the sanctity of life and the sacrament of the present moment. Although his formal church ministry ended abruptly twenty years ago – a decade before his death in 2007 - his incisive message regarding the true significance of evil and the hidden value of suffering remain more relevant than ever in today's deeply troubled world, living as it does under the dangerous threat of terrorist atrocity.

This was the compelling reason I had decided to set my presentation of these valuable teachings against the menacing backdrop of turbulent events in the Middle East. And the title chosen was deliberately stark to reflect the dire nature of a hugely critical world situation. It seemed to me that a book called Meeting Evil with Mercy – an Anglican priest's bold answer to atrocity, could hardly be more apposite for our time.

***

Sometimes things occur that seem to plainly foreshadow events yet to come. With benefit of hindsight, how true this appears to be with respect to one of Martin Israel's earliest books, published in 1983. His striking choice of title then seems particularly prescient nowadays as an apt description of an unstable world, continually teetering on the brink of catastrophe.

Martin had originally entitled this work Smouldering Fire to indicate how, after a person has been deeply touched by grace, that individual can never fully return to their former life as an unbeliever. This is because once the fire of God's love has been kindled in the human heart, it will never be extinguished, but will continue to burn on even in the face of adversity. The fidelity of God's love is absolute, for never will He abandon what He has made. We are granted free will to refuse this gracious invitation to the more abundant life, but ultimately we are forever safe in the merciful embrace of the Supreme
Reality, whether we recognise it or not. Time and time again, my own experience has borne this out.

The steadfast message that mercy brings (the sub-title of this article) is all about the constancy of God’s love in the midst of life's vicissitudes. And that supreme love springs forth from the very essence of our own being. That much I had learnt from a close study of Ramana Maharshi’s teachings, and now Martin Israel would complement and deepen my understanding. We live, move and have our true being in the Absolute. This is the mystical essence of Christianity even as it is of Advaita Vedanta.

Smouldering Fire refers to the undying love of God that gave us life and sustains us still. It is a terse but expressive phrase inviting several possible interpretations. For example the same spark of life that illuminates the human heart is also glowing deep within the collective unconscious of humanity, awaiting a crucial moment of revelation when it too can be released to shed reassuring light and warmth upon the world-wide community.

But just as personal suffering transpires whenever an individual persistently denies the bidding of conscience, so does the wider world experience severe tribulation whenever the profound principles of natural harmony governing the universe – the fundamental law of love – is persistently violated. God’s mercy is offered by Providence as the salve for universal sorrow, but the same divine love can appear punitive and vengeful when stubbornly opposed and misunderstood. Such is the tragic futility of human suffering due mainly to ignorance and ill will.

This has been all too evident in recent years as, fanned by the searing wind of fanatical hatred, the smouldering fire of resentment under harsh, authoritarian rule has blazed forth into the kind of fierce conflagration that has engulfed the Middle East in remorseless conflict. Brutal civil war and multiple atrocities have given rise to untold suffering along with a refugee crisis of vast proportions. Inevitably then it was the despair of increasing devastation, which increasingly had provided a grim background to this biographical study.

***

All these terrible things had not yet come to pass when Martin Israel died some ten years ago. Yet growing up as he did in pre-apartheid
South Africa during the Second World War and well aware of the horrors of Nazi oppression in Europe where some of his Jewish relatives had been persecuted and killed, he was under no illusion regarding the menace of evil expressed through deluded human beings.

Martin fully realised that, while evil was a relative and not an absolute truth, we still need to be utterly realistic concerning its merciless potential for total destruction. He was unequivocal that the cruel threat of evil is real enough on its own level and needs to be contained decisively. Even so he had not a shred of doubt concerning the beneficence of the universe either, since as far as he was concerned God is Love and wrath is simply not in His nature.

The bottom line is that evil is not merely some massive mistake on the part of the Almighty, but belongs instead to the inescapable duality of the opposites – it is the inscrutable play of light and dark and no facile analysis can ever do it justice.

The heart of this unassuming priest's healing message remains immensely liberating. The dark elements within us, which we see reflected so graphically in the outer world, can be our greatest teachers when viewed constructively, he taught – for we can learn far more from hardship than we do from ease. This is the invaluable secret of the healing power of pain.

In his own words, pain in its many guises is a summons to life and a hidden opportunity not to be missed. According to our own measure, each one of us is called to this interior dialogue with light and shade in the depths of mind and heart wherein neglected suffering awaits our courageous exploration. It is sometimes an arduous sadhana, which paradoxically may prove both a stern challenge and a saving grace. Nothing whatever in our experience need be excluded from the creative process of learning to live in a fully mature way in the vivid present moment. Everything can be grist for the mill. This is how the paths of devotion and service may be seen to coincide with the direct way of Self-knowledge – even as Bhagavan himself taught.

“We have to accept that our life on earth is fraught with danger and suffering no less than relief and joy,” Martin once wrote, before stressing that: “each experience is a stepping-stone towards completion of the person into something of the stature of Christ.”

In emphasising the vital importance of offering a merciful response to the affront of evil, he would urge his readers to contemplate the
uplifting examples of ordinary men and women in our own era, who have laid down their own lives in defense of the noblest of ideals. He regarded for instance some of the priests and nuns incarcerated in Nazi concentration camps during the holocaust as truly saintly by virtue of their great heroism in the face of appalling cruelty.

But such courageous witness need not be to outer atrocity – the terror may lie within. In this respect Martin highlighted how Sri Ramana also continued his great work of prayer, healing and teaching as his mortal body was slowly destroyed by cancer. Bhagavan's radiance flowed out to all living forms and his influence on the spiritual life of many people has been unequalled in its purity and love. Each one of us, to the best of our ability, Martin added, will have to prepare an account of our lives at some fateful juncture.

All that we can do in order to accomplish this is to behave as responsibly as possible moment by fleeting moment – although inevitably then we will discover much that is unpleasant is brought to light both in ourselves and in the greater world. But we need never be concerned about any unforeseen consequences of greater mindfulness since the unveiling of the face of evil is the work of the Holy Spirit. So remember – all the difficulties we are obliged to endure find their proper place on a path that has Self-knowledge at its joyous end, and an increasing sense of profound peace along the way. Martin Israel – such a reliable, Christian guide, who had once told my wife and I that he had never ceased to pray for us since the day of our marriage, also gravely wrote the following words: *We cannot turn back, but we are assured of divine assistance in our journey onwards towards the great destination. As we walk in awareness of God's presence so we are strengthened to continue with the work of lightening the darkness that is always around us. This is the work of the saints of all ages.*

***

As I turn aside from this rewarding study of Martin Israel's inspiring life to consider other spiritual topics, I am left with an abiding sense of his universality. Conscientious as he was, he left no stone unturned to reveal the truth of things – and wrote more than twenty books covering every conceivable aspect of spirituality. All of his work is marked out by clarity and compassion – and virtually all of his
publications are readily available for a fresh readership, being either still in print or available on-line. (Additional writings, a testimonial volume and audio recordings may also be obtained from the Churches' Fellowship of Psychic and Spiritual Studies in England, of which he was President for many years.)

Although Martin found his final vocation as a Christian priest, he spoke with a clear and decisive voice of the essence at the heart of all faiths. He was a mystic in the most profound sense of the word - consciously at one with the totality of Being, which is the source of all wisdom. He was that rare individual to whom the vision of wholeness came naturally and who embodied the deep truths of which he wrote with such penetrating candour.

---

Purnamidam

Geetha Ravichandran

When I told you that I thought the beautiful Sanskrit mantra actually talks of love, you said it’s chanted at the burning ghats when water is sprinkled and the bed of flaming logs consume all dreams and desires. Maybe love is just a crackle that sends sparks flying which singe as they settle. It’s the memory that breathes in the ashes, that feels so real. And specks of warmth let the mind heal and rise to a new wholeness.

---

1 Om Purnamadah Purnamidam/ Purnat Purnamudachyate/Purnasya Purnamadaya/ Purnameva Vaśishyate/ Om śantiḥ, śantiḥ, śantiḥ.
Given that I have been studying and trying to internalize for the past half-century or so the principal lesson that Bhagavan has taught, and considering that I have already outlived even the Western lifespan, it’s not too early for me to recapitulate what I have learned.

This is very important to me, and may be of some use to others who are on a similar quest.

Ordinary people approach extraordinary personages and saints for a variety of reasons, mostly personal. That’s probably why not all sages appeal to all people. They don’t strike a chord with them.

Back in 1950, when I first heard the late professor O. Ramachandриah at the university report the passing of Bhagavan and briefly talk about him in the spacious corridor of the Andhra University Arts & Commerce College building, something instantly attracted me to Bhagavan. That had never happened to me before because, even

Indusekhara Sastri Madugula, who formerly taught English at various universities and colleges, is a frequent writer for the Mountain Path and lives in Austin, Texas. He has written a book on Adi Sankara and is convinced that all life is a self-evident affirmation of advaita.
as a teenage college student, I was skeptical of people’s tall claims about their favourite god-men. I was not impressed either by whose pontifications or by their cheap tricks to boost their fan base. I was ‘modern’ and ‘rational’, whatever that meant.

Not so with the very first news – sad as it was – of Bhagavan. Something just clicked and goaded me to know more about him and learn what he had taught.

I believe in retrospect that that something had to do with Bhagavan’s personal example of a simple life, his utter lack of desire to acquire followers or establish a spiritual retreat to “save” sinners, and his constant living in the Self – though I had no idea what it was. It’s just his total lack of showmanship that won me over, having already known about showmen and their guile.

There was one other factor: I was at a very basic level familiar with Sankara’s postulation, the distillation of the Upanishadic teaching, that all of us are endowed with godliness, if only we knew it. It cannot be any simpler: the creatures cannot be different from the Creator. Golden ornaments remain gold, no matter the process. Thus Sankara declared once and for all, on Scriptural authority, ‘Thou art That’ and ‘I am Brahman.’ Those were the beginnings of curiosity in me.

It was in the context that Dr. Ramachandriah’s conversation occurred that, you might say, changed my life forever.

‘I? Brahman?’ Are you kidding me? I was just a first year B.A. (Honours) student, scared to death about exams and grades and the prospects for a job. It was OK for Sankara to say what he wanted or, for that matter, the sages of yore to say what they wanted, but is there anyone today who has really seen himself as the ‘I’ that Sankara and the Upanishads spoke of?

There was my answer: Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi who had just departed. He was the ‘I’ that the ancients had spoken of, the ‘I’ that’s everywhere in everything and everybody moving and unmoving. And this is the ‘I’ that I have tried to study, understand, and pursue ever since. Bhagavan exemplified it in our own lifetime and exhorted us to keep on inquiring into it. So we don’t have to take the validity of it on faith from the ancients. We know that it can be done here and now. That is the tremendous gift that mankind has received from him.
Allow me to tell you what it has meant to me personally over a lifetime and how it has worked for me, as I try to make peace with the world – and myself. This is how I understand it:

(i) This ‘original’ ‘I’ is our natural state, everything else along the way being fake and illusory. Since it is our natural state to be happy and blissful, why not try and recover it from the mess of the daily grind?

(ii) Just for trying, I find that we will be amply rewarded in terms of a steady mind that is unshaken by vicissitudes, and may even strengthen our resolve to find our roots.

(iii) The nice thing about this approach – through constant inquiry and course correction – is that it will help you realize that all faiths and belief systems have the same basis, even if their adherents do not always know it. Better, it has nothing to do with religion at all. It’s a scientific truth that does not need a label to help you practice it. Nobody owns the truth, especially the highest Truth.

(iv) The entire creation starts looking beautiful, even the bad and ugly, because everything has a purpose and its own place in the world.

(v) The practice of self-inquiry has the tremendous benefit of cleansing your mind through filling it constantly with the thought of nothing but the Self so that there is never any room for negative or self-destructive thoughts. Since the mind is defined as an agglomeration of thoughts and since the ‘I’ has control over the mind, by pre-filling the mind with it, the mind vanishes. Which is a wonderful thing on all levels. The peace – I almost said ‘peace of mind’ but the mind doesn’t exist at this point – we get to enjoy is incomparable.

(vi) In the place of a multitude of energy-sapping emotions in your mind, you begin to see in everyone and everything the same ‘I’ that is you, the same Consciousness with a capital C.

After all, that is the purpose of life – to find out who you are and how you are related to everyone and everything else in the universe. You are Consciousness and you are related to everyone and everything through that Consciousness.

“There are no real fragments of the one supreme consciousness. The fragments appear only because of ignorance. To the sage
in the supreme state, that consciousness shines as one whole, not divided into parts.

“Consciousness is one, omnipotent and equal. Its unequal distribution is only an illusion. And because space is unreal, its equal distribution is also unreal.”

That’s my special debt of gratitude to Bhagavan, who powerfully pointed out the ‘I’ to me and showed me the direction in which I had to travel. Fifty years is but a short hop in the soul’s cosmic journey, but I am glad that, thanks to Bhagavan, I am on the right track.

---


---

The Ashram Water Situation

The north-east monsoon failed in late 2016 and so far the summer rains are disappointing. Sri Ramansramam and indeed much of Tamil Nadu, is without adequate water. The Ashram has sent out mails to devotees asking them to kindly defer from coming to the Ashram until July or August or until the Ashram gets sufficient rain. We had some rain in May but it is not enough to relieve the pressure. The situation is critical and the Ashram has to buy tanker loads of water each day. A sign of the desperate situation is the Ashram’s timeless iluppai tree which has began to show signs of water-stress. Plant-and root-boosting organic supplements were given and an underground watering system with perforated tubing was installed to better ensure ongoing hydration.

The Ashram kitchen has discontinued water-filtering by reverse osmosis and now relies on standard carbon filters for the Ashram drinking water. Reverse osmosis generates ‘reject water’ which the Ashram can ill-afford just now. However in Ashram ‘reject water’ never goes to waste even in the best of times but is always made use of for plants and other gardening purposes. But plant watering is now being kept to a minimum.
The Kaveri River supports a flock of pelicans. It can be fun to watch a pelican take off from the water. At first she swims faster and faster, in a straight line. Then she flaps vigorously. A small gap appears between the water and the pelican. But she cannot completely become airborne without sustained effort from her feet. The feet must push back against the water.

Like the pelican, we can flap about, trying to transcend our daily situation. But then a false teacher might come to town, preceded by an advertising campaign. We are fed falsehoods, to the effect that there is nothing to be done, except to understand that we are already free of our negative tendencies. We are told: ‘Oh, there is nothing you can do! Your nature is Pure Awareness! You inhabit the Spacious Silence of the Divine!’ Beautiful, flattering phrases are uttered, from an assumption of the perspective of Absolute truth. We believe that Bhagavan lived out his life from such a perspective. But he did not overlook the sufferings which occur within the conventional world. He knew that we can be like pelicans taking off. We need to maintain a sustained effort.

The most recent book by James Charlton is Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne, soft cover edition 2014, Bloomsbury, New York. He can be contacted c/- PO Box 13, Blackmans Bay, Tasmania, Australia 7052.
Perhaps it is true, from the Absolute perspective, that we are ‘translucent consciousness’. But in the conventional world in which we have to reside, we tend to have regrets and fears. We may be translucent in some areas, but opaque in others.

Bhagavan neglected his body, until he was ‘picked up’ and looked after by an early devotee. Abiding in cosmic bliss can lead to the side-effect of separating the spirit from the body. The vast majority of us are not destined to by-pass our bodies in this way. After all, our bodies are the first and most natural gateway to genuine spiritual development. To divide the spiritual life from the physical life is a dualistic approach. Unless this is our particular and strange ‘calling’, it would be a false dualism.

And yet, it is a well-known part of Advaita Vedanta that we have over-identified with the form that we take, that is, with our bodies. We hear that we need to wake up from the day-dream of form. Some say that this was a prominent part of Bhagavan’s message to us.

It might be helpful to see that every piece of teaching is delivered from one perspective or another. The truth does not ‘hang out’ in space. There is no point of view that comes from ‘nowhere’. Each viewpoint reaches us from a particular perspective, whether this is delivered to us by our tradition, by our guru, by the scriptures, or by our next door neighbour.

From their Western perspective, many missionaries would have found the life of wandering sannyāsins, dependent on handouts, to be one of India’s less attractive features. A prominent Western notion of a spiritual person included overt activity. By contrast, many Hindus seemed dis-engaged from the world.

Perhaps a small minority of missionaries were able to be attentive and to listen. If so, they would’ve found that the holy people of India had intuited that God has three ‘faces’ and that God can choose to appear in human form. These two beliefs, in a triune God and in the possibility of incarnation or enfleshment, would have provided common ground. There are many three-fold ways of looking at things, the most basic of which is ‘God, cosmos, humanity’. But Hinduism is distinctive, because it often regards these three ‘entities’ as appearances in the Self.

The missionary version of Christianity came from a particular perspective. It has been called a ‘contingent’ perspective. That is to
say, we exist, but we did not need to exist. We are not the Self (Ātman) and not Ultimate (Brahman). We are embodied, finite creatures who need to receive a share of grace. Grace is the open-hearted and broad-minded goodness of God. According to Meister Eckhart, each particular, physical body is ‘a word’ from God and should be valued as a real gift. But Eckhart was a mystical thinker, and so he accepted a Hindu-like paradox. That is, the body was both ‘real’ and ‘not real’. Ultimately, to Eckhart, the body was ‘no-thing’.

Hinduism, in its many forms, also comes from a particular perspective. This has been called a perspective of ‘underlying Ground’. It is also known as a ‘Being’ perspective. This means that I can know I am Brahman, since Brahman ‘grounds’ everything. But I cannot know Brahman in itself, because Brahman is ‘Being’ itself, and can never be accurately named. Brahman ‘dwells’ in infinite mystery.

One of the down-sides of ‘I am not my body’ can be a feeling that a life of renunciation is the ideal. It’s only the ideal if it’s our particular calling from the Beyond which dwells within us. Another down-side of ‘I am not the body’ can be a neglect of bodily senses. But, what if the Lord looks at the world through our senses? There is a saying that the Lord has no feet but our feet and no hands but our hands. Such commonplace sayings tend to have an origin in the deep intuitions of our holy ancestors.

Psychotherapy once had an over-whelming emphasis on giving a label to one’s feelings. People were asked ‘What are you feeling?’ and then ‘How do you know that you’re having that feeling?’ The aim was to help a person ‘to get out of their head’ and to ‘re-enter their body.’ This was undoubtedly helpful for many people, as far as it went, but it sometimes lacked balance. Recognition of our feelings needs to be balanced by what we actually do in the world. We are creatures who very obviously need to act, as well as to feel.

One of the good sides of the teaching ‘I am not my body’ might be a heightened sense of spiritual urgency. We can develop an increasing focus on God’s will, which turns out to be our own true will. Our deepest desires intuitively point to spiritual things. We sense that God does not stand over us, with an external ‘will’ ready to impose on us. Bhagavan’s interpreters say that the Master wants us to apply ourselves, so that we can learn to live from the inner depth of our
true identity. This is not a life that is easily reached. There will be less clinging to concepts, and less rejecting.

In a recent issue of this magazine (Vol. 52 No. 4) the Editorial states that: ‘We begin to realise that Bhagavan is everywhere and wherever any of us gather in his Name he is there; wherever any one of us prays to him, he is there; wherever any one contemplates him, he is there.’ The immensity of this statement is hard to miss. It is reminiscent of words attributed to Jesus: ‘For where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them.’ (Matthew 18:20 NRSV).

Bhagavan and Jesus represent somewhat divergent ways of looking at the cosmos. Each has their unique and unassailable particularities. But they share a universal vision for each person to discover who they really are. For this to happen at a deep level, effort is required. Grace will be given, as we apply ourselves. There is no ‘cheap grace’ whereby we can expect spiritual benefits without an honest facing up to our particular private demons. The way of truth usually seems to be slow. Many things will keep appearing in our minds. It takes time for discernment to develop, so that we are not caught up in these ‘mind appearances’.

It would appear that Bhagavan was not very concerned with either dogma or ritual. In the church of my childhood, there was a dogmatic list of beliefs but a disapproving attitude towards ritual. When first I ‘met’ Bhagavan, part of his appeal lay in the stories that he largely ignored the rituals which took place around him. At the same time, he accepted that ritual was necessary at the level of conventional truth.

Some of Bhagavan’s reported statements are attractively paradoxical. For example, when he speaks of I AM (aham) we have an affirmation that we have awareness of our own being (cit). The I AM can perhaps be interpreted, at this point, as ‘condensed consciousness’ or as ‘continuous present-moment awareness’. But the I AM also refers to the Divine Presence, to its immediacy. In precious moments, we may be aware of the supreme I AM, the Reality of the Presence. An experience of I AM can therefore be at a finite level and also at what could be described as an eternal level. In a paradox that is appropriate, we may affirm a ‘local experience’ of I AM, within an ‘eternal experience’ of I AM.

But we are not encouraged by the scriptures to pursue ‘peak experiences’. Instead, we are asked to occupy ourselves with gaining
knowledge in the sense of ‘awareness knowledge’. It is self-knowledge (ātma-jñāna) and self-vision (ātma-darśana). Some degree of faith is necessary. Faith is thinking with assent. It is our ‘following-through’ with a thoughtful inclination to accept and receive. Faith brings the ‘fingers of God’ into our own fingers.

Our bodies are meant to inhabit a life of balance. We balance transcendence with our involvement in the immanent world of manifestation. The word ‘immanence’ comes from the Latin ‘manere’ which means to dwell or inhabit. As in the Bhagavad Gītā 6:29 (Easwaran trans.): ‘They see the Self in every creature and all creation in the Self. With consciousness unified through meditation, they see everything with an equal eye.’ Thus an experience of ‘I AM’ connects the world of the Unmanifest with the world of manifestation. It is a balanced ‘I AM’. It keeps transcendence and immanence together.

A Question

Rahul Lama

A question could contain immense power, and shed light to deeper truths.

They are jewels, found in the depths of a still mind.

The finer the question, The sharper the search. The simpler the question, The humbler the response.

Of all the questions, the Kohinoor of Questions is, ‘Who am I?’

The Guru plants this jewel in your crown, then He cultivates its growth, till you reap your freedom.
Nandi Statue at Matrubhuteswara Shrine, Sri Ramanasramam

D. Thiyagarajan
Reflections on Conflict and Reconciliation

Western Narratives, the Bhagavad Gita and Glimpses from Indian History

Vijaya Ramaswamy

The Mahābhārata is a great Indian epic, written over two thousand years ago and comparable in terms of its many little narratives within a mega narrative, to the Greek Odyssey. It describes the fratricidal conflict between the sons of two brothers and their allies. The result is death and annihilation on both sides.

In the closing pages of Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace’s Prince Andrei remarks to his friend Pierre:

“War is the vilest thing in the world … [men] come together to kill each other, they slaughter and maim tens of thousands … and then they say prayers of thanksgiving for having slaughtered so many people … how does God look down and listen to them?”

Vijaya Ramaswamy is Professor of Ancient Indian History & is the Chairperson, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her email address is: vijukrishnan@gmail.com
Like some other Russian thinkers and writers, Tolstoy was deeply influenced by Hindu philosophy. During the early years of India’s freedom struggle many Indian nationalists were unsure whether they should struggle for ‘Home Rule’ or fight for complete independence. It was at this juncture that Tarak Nath Das wrote to Leo Tolstoy seeking his advice and support for the Indian cause. Tolstoy’s now famous epistle ‘A Letter to a Hindoo’ was written on 14th December, 1908, in response to this letter. Tolstoy stated that it was only through the principle of love, and its application through non-violent methods of protest, that India could win independence from the British.¹

M.K.Gandhi, soon to become known as ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi, wrote to Tolstoy, soliciting his advice on the future course of the Indian freedom struggle. He also sought his permission to translate Tolstoy’s letter into Gujarati and to publish it in Indian Opinion in 1909. This was Gandhi’s own newspaper, created for the anti-apartheid struggle of the Indians in South Africa. Thus Gandhi’s passive resistance or ‘satyagraha’ was inspired partially by Tolstoy’s reflections on the futility of violence.

Here I focus on the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gītā in the context of conflict and origins of conflict. The Bhagavad Gītā (referred to hereafter as the Gita) is a part of the Mahābhārata text and occurs in Book VI, the ‘Bhishma Parva’. The Gītā is reverently addressed as the Gitopaniṣad because it consolidates the essence of all the Upaniṣadic teachings. It covers the major epistemological strands in Indian philosophy, from the Vaiśeṣika to the Mīṁāṃsā.

The narrative of the Gītā foregrounds the great war and its deadly aftermath. The Gītā has been at times criticized because it appears to advocate violence. This kind of criticism reached a peak in 2011 in the Bhagavad Gītā trial in Russia. The trial of the Russian edition of Bhagavad Gītā was initiated in June 2011 by the state prosecutor's office in Tomsk, on the charge that it advocated religious extremism and violence. This argument was based on an assessment of the book by scholars belonging to Tomsk State University. They concluded that Bhaktivedanta Swami’s translation and commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā incited religious, social, and racial intolerance.

The trial caused a storm of highly critical articles in the Indian, Russian, and international media. At the first hearing the federal judge Galina Butenko found the Tomsk University assessment inadequate and commissioned another assessment from Kemerovo State University, postponing the verdict until December 28, 2011. On December 28, 2011, the judge dismissed the court case, a decision praised by the pro-\textit{Gītā} communities both in India and Russia. On January 26, 2012, the Tomsk prosecutor’s office filed an appeal against the judge’s ruling, but by May 2012, the Tomsk regional prosecutor’s office said it would not challenge the appeal court’s refusal to declare the \textit{Bhagavad Gītā} to be extremist literature.

In the \textit{Gītā}, Krishna makes it clear that ‘to engage in conflict for the defence of the land and its people is the \textit{dharma} of every  \textit{kṣatriya}’. In verse 33 he says:

“If you do not engage in conflict in this war fought for a righteous cause, You would have failed in your \textit{svadharma} and will therefore have incurred sin.”

Verse 37 of the same second chapter says:

“If you die, you attain heaven and if you win, you enjoy the bounties of this earth. Therefore, O son of Kunti, get up with a firm resolve to fight.”

Do these verses mean that the \textit{Gītā}, which was the constant companion of Gandhi, the votary of passive resistance and the apostle of \textit{ahimsā} or non-violence, was a militant text?

Wendy O’Doniger in her 2014 essay ‘War and Peace in the Bhagavad Gita’, reviewing a new book in the ‘The New York Review of Books’, supported the perception of the \textit{Gītā}, as a text inciting conflict by quoting verses 26 and 27 from Chapter XI which describe a monstrous creature (\textit{virāṭ puruṣ}) who is both creator and destroyer, crunching between his molars the bodies of both Pandava and Kaurava warriors: the conflict was inevitable since the battle had already been played out in the cosmic imagination.

Here O’Doniger agreed with the argument of the book she was reviewing, \textit{The Bhagavad Gītā: A Biography} by Richard H. Davis (Princeton University Press, 2014). I, however, wish to point out that the \textit{Gītā} says that both the so called victors and vanquished, the just
and the unjust, are swallowed by the universal principle of death and destruction which inevitably must follow birth: ‘Our warriors and the warriors of our rivals, the sons of Dhritarashtra, enter the cosmic mouth of annihilation and are crushed between your teeth.’ (Ch.XI: Verses: 26-27)

Truth and reconciliation are implicit within the conflict. The Pandava brothers together take part in the last rites of their eldest brother who was their principal opponent in the Mahābhārata war. After this fratricidal war, there is a further carnage with the death of the Pandava children at the hands of a vengeful Kaurava ally. Kunti, the grief stricken grand-mother of these children consoles and is, in turn, consoled by, Gandhari, the mother of the deceased sons of Dhritarashtra who had challenged Kunti’s sons’ right to inherit the throne and hence provoked the war. Thus the two opposing families come together in their grief. In the aftermath of the war, the parents of the defeated Kauravas and the mother of the victorious Pandavas walk away together into the dense forest, opting for a life of penance.

Arjuna as a kṣatriya, is exhorted by Krishna to fight, for the safety of the land and its people, as well as to establish the just principle of royal succession. But, Krishna warns, his mental attitude, as a warrior, is all-important: he must make himself totally free from ‘feverish hatred’. This is expressed in verse no.30 in chapter III of the Gītā:

‘Offering unto me your actions, freed from both desire and despair./Fight dispassionately, free of feverish hatred.’

Here the Gītā resonates closely with the Bible which, likewise, teaches that one should hate evil but not the perpetrators of evil actions. It is precisely this deeply humane attitude which makes reconciliation possible during conflict: it is also the principle that inspired Mahatma Gandhi’s satyagraha.

The Gītā’s ideal of ahiṃsā does not require refraining from violence at all times. But it does require a high level of spiritual realisation — it demands that we reach and embody a state of consciousness in which all distinctions of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are transcended, in which one makes no differentiation between the sufferings of the ‘self’ and the suffering of ‘others’.

Interesting historical parallels with Buddhism and the rule of Ashoka (268 BCE to 232 BCE) can be drawn here. After the Kalinga
war in 261 BCE, which left thousands dead on both sides, Ashoka transformed his entire life and embarked on establishing peace and the Buddhist dhamma, based on the principle of ahimsā or non-violence. His 13th rock edict, describing his dhamma vijayā (victory of dharma), states:

“Eight years after becoming king, I conquered Kaling. About a lakh and a half people were enslaved and More than a lakh killed. This filled me with sorrow. Why?…

Because I believe that winning people over through dhamma is better than conquering them by force. I am inscribing this message for the future [to read and learn from], so that my son and grandson Should not think about war. Instead they should try to think about how to spread the dhamma…”

And as history shows, that is indeed what they did, with extraordinary success.

To sum up, the Gītā teaches us ‘passionate detachment’: it argues for the need to fight a just war but, at the same time, to always keep space for humane reconciliation. Emperor Ashoka, however, as a devout Buddhist, rejected this stance and instead argued that we should eschew war altogether, with no exceptions made, in order to pursue peace. The choice is left to us.
Altar at Matrubhuteswara Shrine, Sri Ramanasramam
Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji (1954–2010), known as ‘Guruji’, was an eminent South Indian saint and Sadguru who lived and taught in the tradition of Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918). Spiritually precocious, he was influenced in his teens by Sri Bhagavan's biography, and took his early sadhana on the hill, becoming free in 1976 with the great avadhuta, Sri Poondi Swami, when he was barely 20 years old.

Thereafter, he dedicated his life to the loving service of Sai Baba, becoming renowned for his exposition of Baba’s teachings and their embodiment in his own life, a path of ‘clarity and focus’ he called Saipatham, ‘the path of Sai’. His wisdom and purity of conduct endeared him to many as their Sadguru, while the power of his presence captured the hearts of thousands during his darshans in Shirdi.

Out of his love for Arunachala and Sri Bhagavan he founded the beautiful Sai Baba Dhyana Mandir on Girivalam Road in Tiruvannamalai. [His literary works include many articles and books on Sai Baba in Telugu and an important work in English on the Aratis to Sai Baba at Shirdi.] His English satsangs have been edited
Devotee: Guruji, what is peace of mind?
Guruji: Not splitting the mind into pieces. [Guruji laughs]
Peace of mind is keeping it in one piece.
Devotee: Does that mean there are no pulls in different directions?
Guruji: Pulls split the mind into pieces. They don’t allow it to stay in one piece. We always experience pieces of mind, and if the pieces aren’t there, we have peace of mind.

***

Devotee: What is the difference between our mind and the ‘no-mind’ state of a saint?
Guruji: The mind which we have, they don’t have! [Laughter]
What we call mind – our deepest impressions, our understanding or misunderstanding, our appreciation or lack of appreciation, our sorrow or happiness and all our reactions to these things – these they don’t have. It is very difficult to explain.

Even Ramana Maharshi said, “I can’t describe it to you.” If great sages like Ramana can’t describe it, I would be a fool to attempt it!

***

Devotee: Guruji, I wonder what is the best way to use the mind?
Guruji: Can you use your mind? In order to use it, it should be in your control. So what is the point of my telling you how to make the best use of your mind if you haven’t got control over it? If I tell you, can you do it?
Devotee: At times when emotions are very strong it would help to have some reasoning.
Guruji: The fact that you have such strong emotions shows that your mind is not under your control. The problem is not with the mind, but
with the emotions that trigger the thoughts. As your emotions, so your thoughts. So, when you get an emotional harmony, a stability, then your mind will be calm and under your control. Then, automatically, you’ll know how to use it and how to make the best use of it. When you want to use it, you’ll use it, and when you don’t want to use it, you’ll keep it aside, and just store it somewhere. [Guruji laughs]

There are also certain thoughts that don’t have a particular emotion attached to them. They are stray thoughts and they can be controlled by different practices.

**Devotee:** Is there a need to control even stray thoughts?

**Guruji:** Yes, because they weaken our attention and focus. Our energy is being used and misused by stray thoughts that are useless! They’re like those stray dogs always barking outside in the street, disturbing us. When we have some control over stray thoughts they become like pet dogs, only barking when there’s a need.

The main problem is we don’t have a strong enough desire to get rid of even these. Why do stray thoughts come? They come to fill the gap of not having a strong, positive emotion that can give rise to a meaningful thought.

When there is such a vacuum or void, then stray thoughts come and fill the gap. They are the stuffing that fills the hollowness. So, a positive emotion is needed to strengthen our focus.

**Devotee:** Do you mean by focusing on love for the Sadguru, we can bring the other emotions under control?

**Guruji:** Yes, controlling the emotions through love – experiencing and expressing love, triggering love, inculcating love, and so on. When I talk about controlling stray thoughts, that is what you do when you sit quietly in meditation, or repeat Baba’s name, or focus on Baba’s picture, or read about him. There are so many techniques, ‘stray techniques’, which you can adopt and practise anytime.

**Devotee:** But when the emotions are disturbed, techniques don’t seem to work.

**Guruji:** The only technique for that is love. It is not in your hands. That’s why I don’t ask you to do anything. You can only take care of your stray thoughts. When you take care of them you will become a pet, Baba’s pet. Otherwise your mind is like a stray dog. Whatever we see attracts us and we run after it. Whenever something is offered,
Guruji: Your identity is based on your emotions, not on your thinking mind. What you are, the basic personality, is the emotions, they are deeper than thoughts. Based on your emotions the thoughts arise. That is why in Vedanta they say, the heart is like the sun and the mind is like the moon: the moon gets its luminosity from the sun.

The mind is like the screen and the heart is like the projector – that is the analogy Bhagavan gave. Just think of it and you’ll come to know. If you want to effect any change, you have to work at the level of the heart – on the projector, not the screen. The problem is, your mind is often opposed to your heart. When they become friends, you see they are only parts of a larger whole that complement one another, and then mind and heart start to evolve.

Devotee: How can we know the mind?

Guruji: How do we come to know anything? By observing it. In order to know me better, you have to observe me: What is he doing? How is he sitting? How does he do things? Like that, to know your mind, you have to observe. When you go on observing and noticing, then you’ll get to know all the mechanisms of the mind.

If you have a discerning eye for what is going on in your mind, you’ll notice that during a particular time only particular thoughts appear. They come in a cycle. For example, while brushing your teeth, some thoughts arise, notice them and mark them down. The next day, when you are brushing your teeth, you’ll notice the same kind of thoughts are there. Or, when you’re walking down the stairs, a particular thought will arise and not occur again for the next twenty-four hours until you walk down the stairs again. Suddenly the thought appears again on its own.

The mind works in different cycles. And, based on the workings of the mind, its habits and cycles, so many spiritual practices have been designed: mantra, japa, dhyana, pranayama, all these things. They are all centred on getting rid of these cyclical patterns. That’s why a
fixed hour of meditation is good. Not that one has to meditate only then, you can meditate longer or leave early if you have urgent work.

You won’t necessarily notice the difference immediately, but by going on practising, you’ll start to feel the difference. For instance, if you meditate between nine and ten in the morning, and seven and eight at night every day, after a month or so, wherever you are, whatever you’re doing – even in an office or in a meeting – the mind starts to get calm.

Automatically, the state of meditation is induced without any effort. This is due to the nature of the mind. You need not understand all the intricacies of it. You will come to know by continuing to observe it. Then it won’t trick you – you can trick it! [Laughter] Now that you have taken up the job of detection, keep your mind under constant surveillance! [Guruji laughs]

***

**Devotee:** What is the connection between stopping thoughts and experiencing bliss? And how are concentration techniques helpful for that purpose?

**Guruji:** In the *Yogasūtras*, Patanjali says that the object of yoga is not concentration. He says, ‘Yogaś citta vṛitti nirodhaḥ’ – ‘to stop the flow of thoughts is yoga.’ That is his definition. We are all trying to concentrate on one thing or another, to make our minds one-pointed so that the mind deeply expands. Sticking to the sense of expansion is in one way also concentration. There, instead of focusing on a limited object, you are concentrating on an expanded object.

Usually, what we mean by concentration is being one-pointed, continuously sticking to a particular object or function of the mind. Some people say to just watch the watcher and keep awareness of your own ‘I’. Others say to watch the flowing thoughts. Still others say, “Why watch thoughts that are not so glorious when we can watch a glorious form like Sai Baba?” There are many different methods, but they all give you the post of a watchman – to constantly watch something or other, to achieve a continuous watchfulness or mindfulness. It is not a matter of trying to get awareness – awareness is already there. But instead of being aware of so many objects, we want to make it aware of just one object, whether it is Sai Baba,
our thoughts, our mind, or the so-called Self, whatever suits our temperament. The nature of the mind is that it is constantly moving from one thing to another. If we stop that movement, the mind will stop. In order to get to that state, these teachings want you to hold on to one object.

Now I have explained what concentration is. The question was, in what way is concentration related to bliss? Because a kind of bliss seems to be the objective of everyone who practises meditation. Whether you call it bliss, the unconditioned state, liberation or nirvana, they are all different words for a state of fulfilment. In what way is the watching of a particular object and the stoppage of thoughts congenial to the experience of bliss?

We have been given to understand that bliss is something already embedded within us, but thoughts act as obstructions that veil the bliss like a curtain. So, if you stop the flow of thoughts and remove the curtain, you will experience the bliss already inside. That is why it is called insight – by constantly watching inside, different curtains are removed, and then you’ll take sight of what is behind the curtains. This is the concept that underlies those teachings.

There are thousands of techniques, but, as far as I know, most of them focus on removing obstructions to something that is already there, naturally, inside you. The fundamental problem is that you always relate to bliss as an object. It is already there and you only have to tap into it, or find the right key that opens the door to it – to that room of bliss!

Even concentration on form leads to formlessness. By concentrating on one object, the mind’s habit of constantly moving from one object to another is stopped, and the mind remains focused on that one object. Then, automatically, it becomes introverted, becoming one with full awareness. In Sanskrit they call this *Chaitanya Ghanata*. Whether the techniques are useful or not and whether they are really related to your fulfilment or not, is a different subject.

What I’m trying to tell you is, instead of thinking how to stop your thoughts, try to think of why the thoughts are coming. Trying to stop the thoughts is going against the current. Even trying to watch the mind is also, in one way, going against the current. Why aren’t you able to watch your mind when you are really interested in something,
or when you are having negative thoughts or getting angry? Why do you become one with the thoughts?

For example, you have been on a retreat meditating for three months, watching your mind, and the moment somebody insults you, the whole matter ends there and then! You become one with the thought and get angry. What is happening here? So long as you are not interested in the content of the thoughts, you can watch them, but the moment the content is something interesting, or something you need or feel strongly about, then you become one with them, you are no longer able to watch. This is the natural tendency of the mind.

Of a hundred thoughts, probably only five or six are really needed and relevant. But all thoughts express something within you, they are trying to catch hold of some sort of fulfilment in you. They’re seeking something, but failing to get it. A thought is just like a wave – it comes and goes, then vanishes; it dashes against the shore, then recedes. Again, another thought will come, meet the shore, recede and produce another thought. Why are these thoughts coming? What is their aim and what are they about, what are they addressing? Are the thoughts really troubling you, or is it their content?

Even when you are happy and blissful, in an ecstatic mood, you have thoughts. And the more you think about what gives you happiness, the happier you’ll feel. Doesn’t thinking about our object of love, our Beloved, give us happiness? So these thoughts can help increase the bliss.

If the thoughts disturb your peace of mind, if they are negative, or come from a mood of unhappiness, you say, “Oh, I’m getting lots of thoughts, let me take a sleeping pill and go to bed!” Actually, the thoughts are not the problem, they are harmless, innocent. Why do you always treat them like an enemy, and try to fight them? What have they done to you?

Why don’t you take the content of the thought as your subject of enquiry, because that is what really matters. It’s not the thought, but how you actually respond to its content. When you are sitting in meditation, so many thoughts arise. Whether you observe them or become one with them, whatever it may be, what is the content of the thoughts? Just think about it. They reflect your emotions: your
likes, your dislikes, your loves, your hates, your desires. And some simply come out of habit.

Why do habits keep on repeating themselves? Because sometimes following a habit makes us happy. That’s why it is so difficult for us to stop a habit. As long as the mind is not engaged in something immediate, it sticks to what is already past and ruminates on it until something new happens – whether it is happy or unhappy, praise or insult – then automatically the previous thought stops and a new one arises.

Our thoughts are another form of words, in fact. Words are not only the spoken sounds, there are also unspoken words, all our thoughts. In a drama there are two types of speaking: dialogue or soliloquy. Our thoughts are our soliloquies, we talk to ourselves in our thoughts. There is such a human need for expression that even when nobody is there, we express at least to ourselves. [Laughter]

***

Devotee: Does fulfilment have no name or form?
Guruji: It has a form, and you’ve just named it ‘fulfilment’. Depending upon the language, you can give it any name. All our emotions, all our feelings and thoughts have some kind of form. That is how we differentiate between one emotion and another. Just think about it – happiness, envy, anger, discontentment, peace, fulfilment – they each have their own form. If they had no form they would be merged with one another. How would you be able to distinguish between happiness and unhappiness?

And what kind of form is it? If you have the patience, you can know. It will take you from the gross to the subtle. When you speak, every sound has a form of its own. Going deeper, you’ll find every thought has a form of its own. Which feeling, which emotion does a thought spring from? It, too, has a form. This going subtler and subtler, reveals more and more subtle insights and takes us to the base. That is what vipassana is about.

***

Devotee: How can we visit the place where thoughts come from?
Guruji: That’s what all this is about, why you’re sitting here – to buy a ticket to travel there! [Guruji laughs]
Devotee: Where is the ticket? Where do we travel to?

Guruji: You’re all sitting here in a travel agency. Paying the price of your patience, your ego, your mind, your devotion, and paying the price of love, you buy the ticket to go to that place. First have the ticket, go to that place, get yourself familiarized, then I will give you my address. [Laughter]

---

**Summer Home**

Neera Kashyap

rain comes to the hills
after the city desert
just as I enter home:
    light, irregular, drumming —
rain and heart beats flow as one

here in solitude
    Mind follows to sink in rest
in vistas of blue hills
then like a crouching cat… waits
to blot the hills with other thoughts

plump pink clouds nestle
in the blue rain washed ranges
I smile at the hues —
a girl rises from a sparse field
smiles at my pink umbrella.

A peach tree in a
luscious orchard never fruits
a forest fire flares —
a singed orchard and the peach
shocked into pale pink flowering.

Summer Home is based on the traditional Japanese Tanka structure of 5/7/5/7/7 syllables per verse.
Nabhaji continued, “O jīvanmuktas, thus Tamal and Jijabibi looked after Kabir as the very life of their lives. However, Kabir’s mind was restless. He was lost in thinking about the Lord’s parting instruction to him to search for a Guru for attaining the Truth.

Kabir thought, “I wonder if my life is going to be lived in vain just as a wife left alone at night by her spouse, the head that does not bow down to the Lord, a forehead without religious mark, a mind without clarity, husband without love in his heart, heart without purity, austerity without compassion, village without water-source, country without a ruler, learning without wisdom, japa without concentration or worship without devotion fail to bear fruit.

“My life will be worthless, like wealth breeding greed, a house resembling a battleground, wealth earned by dishonourable means, rule without justice, a land without sādhus, a peepul tree without shade, attachment without love, a body worn out by diseases, a life without charity, a lake without water, rains falling on hilltop, a wife
disrespectful of her husband, doubts that never get cleared, a sannyāsi not free of attachment, a life without contentment, charity performed by evil-doers or disciple treating the Guru as an ordinary mortal, are of no value. Alas! my life without a Guru to uplift me is barren. When will my doubts be dispelled? Will I ever be initiated by a Guru into the right practice? When will I attain the bliss of Brahman?”

With a depressed heart, he wandered around the city. He heard about the greatness of Swami Ramananda as a man of great wisdom and knower of mystery of the mahāvākyas, adored and revered by many for his austerity, dispassion, sense-restraint, effacement of ego, direct experience of Self, compassion and, wakefulness into unity. Desirous of meeting the great soul, Ramananda and getting initiated by him, Kabir reached his abode. However, as disciples were always around the Swami, he did not get an opportunity to approach him even after waiting the whole day. Next day, resolved to have an audience with the Swami in the early hours before the disciples could surround him, he entered the ashram before daybreak.

When the close disciples saw him inside the ashram, they sprang to their feet and warned him in an angry tone, “O outcaste, you have entered these gates to steal something! You were, perhaps, under the impression that we were asleep at this hour. Get out of this place.”

Bowing to them, Kabir said in a supplicatory tone, “O revered brahmins, why are you so hot tempered, being the chanters of Vedas? Shouldn’t you practice sattvic nature of harmony and peace? Should you not first find out the reason for my visit before hastening to conclusions?”

The disciples said, “Don’t utter vain words. We are not deceived by your clever talk. We are unfortunate to have seen your inauspicious face in the morning. Alas, what evil fate awaits us today! You, a slaughterer talking about sattvic nature! What an anomaly it is! Just as a woman of low morals and pure devotion, evil man and wisdom, high priest and a juggler are ill-matched, so is your life style and aspiration for spirituality. You have no business here. Leave before our devotees arrive for their morning obeisance to the Guru.”

“O honourable men! Though you are men of scholarship and great virtues, you baselessly surmise that I have come here to steal your riches. Your unjust accusation pierces my heart. One should not
brand a person indiscriminately as bad or good. I humbly bear with your unjust suspicion. I have been cherishing a great desire since a long time to have a sacred glimpse of the holy Teacher. Yesterday, I waited in vain till evening for his darshan. I got here this early so that I could see him and pay my respects before others arrived. Please be kind enough to allow me to approach the Swami. May the Lord bless you all with auspiciousness.”

On hearing these words, the disciples laughed loudly and ridiculed him, “O uncultured fellow! Can a lame reach out to the honeycomb on the top of a tree? Can you dig the earth to pluck a coconut? Can a calf dare a tiger? Can ill-gotten treasure endure? Likewise, your desire to meet the Swami will never fructify. What is his status and what is yours? People of high rank and wealth have been waiting for days for his darśan! You, a mere straw and a brag, aspire for his darśan. Let us throw you out this minute.” They came bounding towards Kabir with raised hands.

Kabir said with folded hands, “O men of piety and great fame! How fortunate am I to receive blows at your hands. Your touch will burn away all my impurities. Like the sentinels at the gate of Lord Vishnu and the celestial bull in Kailash who are always blessed with the sight of their Lords, you are fortunate to be in the proximity of the venerable Swami who destroys all six sins and uplifts you by his mere look. Won’t you take pity on this lowly person and enable me to have a holy view of him? After that you can thrash me to your heart’s content and throw me out.” He fell at their feet and appealed to them pathetically.

“Why do you seek a meeting with him? What is your true purpose? What do you hope to gain by this?” demanded the arrogant brahmins.

Once again falling at their feet, Kabir petitioned, “O brahmins of great merit! I want to be initiated by the holiest of the holy. Will you intercede on my behalf, speak a few kind and nice words to him about me so that he will be moved to favour me with his grace?”

“Oh, your sights are set very high indeed. It is like a destitute aspiring for royal pleasures, worldly person for renunciation, miser for heaven, egoist for Knowledge and an outcaste for brahminhood. You, a cow-slaughterer seek initiation from the Swami! What a fantasy you nurture in your heart, to earn the showers of his grace! While mighty
rulers, erudite scholars, wealthy men, holy ascetics, righteous men and great siddhas have been trying in vain to receive his initiation, what chance do you have to get anywhere near him? The devotees have started arriving. Don’t you touch and pollute them and provoke their wrath. Get out, now.”

“Allow me to stand in a far corner and feast my eyes on Swami’s holy person.” begged Kabir.

“You are very obstinate. Though we have a great mind to thrash you, we don’t want to pollute ourselves with your touch, for which we will have to take a bath again and perform expiatory rites. If you refuse to listen to our polite words, we have no option but to deal with you harshly.” They started pushing Kabir with a stick towards the entrance.

“O twice-born, you are shoving me like cowherd driving cattle. If you touch me, what harm will befall you? I too have taken my bath and come wearing clean clothes. You are taking things to the extreme of vanity. This ashram is common to all and you cannot exercise your authority like this. Don’t come near me. So much for your intercession that I hoped for,” said Kabir in utter disgust.

The brahmins incensed by his audacity, furiously spat out abuses, “O tramp, you have no means even for a morsel of food, yet you are consumed by conceit. If you are a person with even a vestige of self-respect, you would have left by now, just as a noble woman learns her lesson from a mild reproof, or a good cow obeys its master with a single thump. Now strong maladies call for strong measures!”

As they came rushing at him with a stick, Kabir jumped and snatched away the stick and said, “O cruel men, you are devils without mercy. You are barking like dogs. You cannot discriminate between good and bad. I can easily vanquish you in a trice with the stick and I will be justified in doing so. Yet, I spare you, because you are the servitors of the venerable teacher. For this reason alone I am meek before you. You are transgressing the limits of righteous behaviour and it is not good for you.”

Kabir flung away the stick and stood looking in the direction of the Swami with adoration. At that careless moment, the disciples jumped on Kabir and beat him into a pulp and threw him out.
KABIR ATTACKED BY DISCIPLES OF SWAMI RAMANANDA

Kabir bemoaned, “Oh, I was stupid to look upon them, being the beloved disciples of the holy teacher, as my own. As a result I am subject to this ignominy. How will I get to see the Swami hereafter? Just as snakes around the sandalwood tree, thorns on the rose bush and blemish in the moon inhibit easy access, so do mean people surround a saint. They cause pain and loss to devotees by depriving them of the benefit of his company.”

Undaunted by these assaults, Kabir merged with the crowd of devotees and entered the ashram. He joined the chorus of hymns with joy and eagerly awaited the arrival of the Swami. Alas, the disciples, catching sight of him, became inflamed with his cheek. They caught hold of him, throttled him, hurt him with their nails and beating him blue and black, threw him out. The helpless Kabir, tortured mercilessly with kicks and blows by the ferocious disciples, was like a small sparrow assailed by the all-powerful Brahmastra, or Abhimanyu surrounded by Kauravas, or Hanuman cornered by demons.

The virtuous Kabir, grief-stricken, lamented loudly, “O Sadguru, O Awakener of souls, I have taken refuge in you. I came just to have your darshan. But, see the atrocity of the evil brahmins on me. Is there no one to come to my aid?”

Hearing these cries, Swami Ramananda rushed out and, noticing the plight of Kabir asked angrily, “Who has done this, bleeding this poor child to death?”

“O Swami, he belongs to a low caste, he slaughters cows and eats the flesh, he is full of deceit and arrogance, he is manipulative, and he is mocking us by kneeling down here as the Muslims do during namaz. Bumping into us, he touched and polluted us. Now we have to resort to reparation of the sin. He had the nerve to tell us that he has come for initiation from you. As he made a great deal of trouble here, we gave him a good beating and sent him out. Now, Holy One, it is up to you, whether you want to grace him with initiation,” said the disciples in hushed tones.

The Swami exploded in anger, “What! Incredible! I should consider initiating this vile creature who is given to eating flesh? Initiation is given only to worthy students. If it is done to the likes of him, both the teacher and student will surely end up in the worst of purgatory. Is mantra initiation a mere trifle that one can get it for nothing? Do
you know the qualifications required for such a sublime treasure to the soul? One should be beyond sense pleasures in this world and the next, free from attachment, wise in scriptures, dispassionate towards relative existence, tranquil in nature and have pure devotion to the Teacher and adherence to all inner and outer discipline. He should certainly not be a slaughterer and meat eater. Who allowed this fellow inside the ashram? My disciples have dealt with you appropriately. You dare to ask me for initiation! Then, this befitting punishment is the initiation that I am pleased to bestow on you.

“A householder immersed in worldly pleasures seeking initiation, — how disgraceful! A slaughterer aspiring for renunciation! Kasi is a holy place where Hindus live. Now, you redirect your steps towards Varanasi where the Muslim king rules. Go and beg his favours, a suitable destiny for you. I think, you have come here to make fun of us. Don’t ever visit this part of the city. O disciples, show him the way out.”

Before the Swami could turn to leave, Kabir, in one long stride, landed himself at his feet and implored, “O venerable one, O pure one, O supreme master, O awakened one, you are verily the eternal, self-luminous, liberated one whose fame has lit up the three worlds. You are the embodiment of knowledge and bliss. You are the transcendental and impersonal.”

Touching his eyes again and again to the Swami’s holy feet with great reverence and love, Kabir continued, “The world sings of your blemishless fame. When a child comes to the cool shade of its mother, fleeing from afflictions of the world, can she turn her back on it? Should the mother rebuke the child as dull-witted?”

The Swami responded, “Oh… you talk as if you are very wise. You flaunt yourself without humility. At such a young age, you want to impress others like a man of erudition. It indicates your lowborn nature. I don’t want you here even for a moment longer. O brahmins, toss this creature out.” Instantly, the disciples pounced on him, beat him to their heart’s content and humiliated him with spiteful words.

“Oh, these disciples,” lamented Kabir, “wearing sacred thread, are verily the messengers of death. They have just waited for a signal from the Swami to pulverize me. I am going through all this hardship for nothing. I have missed the opportunity of glorifying the holy Master
with love. All my suffering is in vain! It must be my evil destiny, or my devotion is not up to the mark.”

Kabir reached home tired, torn and badly wounded, embarrassed about his failure to propitiate the Guru. He was at a loss to explain his plight and therefore kept silent before his parents.

Tamal asked, “What happened? Why are you bleeding? Who did this to you?”

The mother was frightened at his condition. Embracing him, she asked, “My beloved child, how did you manage to reach home in this condition? When I tried to whack you, the great God couldn’t bear it. He accepted those blows on His back. You show me the culprits who injured you like this.”

Kabir said, “O mother, listen to this strange story. You cannot gain anything without sweat or hardship in life. Without austerity, one cannot attain eternal bliss. Without concentration, there is no meditation. I have to suffer this at the hands of Sadguru Ramananda’s disciples to earn his grace.”

On hearing this, the parents gathered all the Muslims in the neighbourhood and, directing abuses at the Swami, set out for his ashram.

But Kabir restrained them and said respectfully, “O meritorious folks! You are not aware what blessedness has been conferred on me through their ill treatment. I am uplifted by this and it is by God’s grace this has happened to me. Unworthy as I am for such a rare fortune, my sins have been washed away making me fit for the Guru’s grace. Now, nothing can obstruct the rays of his gracious glance from falling upon me! Anger has clouded your vision and you are not able to see the import of this incident.”

Some elders in the crowd said, “Being a Muslim, why did you seek initiation from a Hindu Swami? If you engage in forbidden acts, you have to suffer the aftermath. God himself has taught you a good lesson to cure you of your inclination towards an inimical faith. We wonder, how they spared your life. We wish they had cut you to pieces, so that we would not have a heretic living amongst us. A tiger, even when starved, will not go in search of grass. But, posing as a wise person, you have betrayed our Faith. We are fools to take cudgels against your offenders. You are not going to attain liberation
in this way.” Disappointed and enraged at Kabir’s attitude, the crowd dispersed.

Kabir’s parents shed tears at the plight of their son and were worried as to how this situation was going to be resolved. Kabir consoled them with loving words and assured them that God would not forsake him and that everything would eventually work out favourably.

O revered Siddhas, Kabir spent his days like a carefree, joyful child for a while.

To Whom It May Concern

Upahar

You are:
among all things the inexplicable;
of thought and speech the animating wind;
of love and sorrow the indifferent essence;
in every lineage, the unbegotten;
of every object, its infinity;
among all truths, the inexpressible;
of hidden treasure the most ancient cave;
in flowing transformation ever-changeless;
in every prayer, the silent recognition;
of every darkness, the deep radiance.

In the golden hall of the heart, You only are
the all-unmaking, all-renewing dancer;
in endless worlds the free and joyful player;
in every circumstance, the quiet knowing;
of every moment, its eternity
You are.
Chapter 8

The Nature of the [pure] *avasthā*

The subject of this chapter is the state of the *jīva* which has passed through the preparatory stages of *cariyai*, *kiriyai* and *yokam*, transcended the 36 *tattvas*, and is preparing for its final union with Sivam. Tirupporur Chidambarama Swamigal (TCS) notes, ‘Since it tells of the state of those who are established in the pure *avasthā*, this chapter is entitled, ‘The nature of the *avasthā*.’ Thus it deals with the state of consciousness which lies beyond the states of waking, dream and deep sleep.

Taking on a body, they experience and exhaust the fruits of their former actions, and go on to seek another body. Starting

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nāṟṟepadu*, and a translation of the biography of Māṇikkavācakar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666.
in this world and going even beyond the realm of the gods, they go on experiencing through the five senses until they finally become disillusioned. It is only then that grace will arise in them, so that former pleasures are seen as suffering. What a wonder is this! I am helpless to describe it! (190)

The meaning of the verb \textit{uṇ}, here translated as \textit{experience}, is \textit{to eat, drink, take food}. In metaphysical terms it means \textit{to experience, consume the fruits of actions performed in a former birth}, until one has \textit{ozhittu – exhausted them}. However, in the process of doing so, unless the individual is free of the personal consciousness, the ego and its source, \textit{āṇava malam}, the acts performed in that birth will only generate further fruits to be experienced in subsequent births, and so on \textit{ad infinitum}, through all the realms of men and gods.

The verb \textit{mazhungu}, here translated as \textit{disillusioned}, means \textit{to be blunt or dull}, as an edge or point. Hence it comes to mean \textit{to be obscured, deprived of lustre, to fade as the lustre of a jewel or the glory of a state}. Here it seems to indicate those for whom worldly pleasures have lost their savour, hence \textit{disillusioned}.

Grace is nothing other than our natural state, our true being, which arises when we turn away from the lure of the mind and the senses. However, since it is beyond the mind and senses, it cannot be sought by those means, as earlier verses have shown. It is always there waiting when we turn away from that which prevents us from seeing it. It will appear precisely at the moment we stop seeking it and give ourselves up to it. Hence it is sudden and unexpected, a source of wonder to the recipient.

Featured in the compositions [of the Sangam and other poets], which are spoken of as gems, and the \textit{kovai} compositions [of Māṇikkavācakar and others], countless love situations are described. In these there are two kinds of love: the mutual and the one-sided. Of these, one-sided love is comparable to renunciation, is it not? (191)

\textit{Love situations} translates the words \textit{ācai turai}. \textit{turai} is the technical term for a short piece of prose which precedes a section of verse,
setting the theme for those lines by giving such details as who is speaking and to whom, and the events that led up to, and might follow, the situation being described. This is often referred to as a *colophon*.

The earliest Tamil poetry is secular, one of its principal subjects being the love between a *hero* – *talaivaṉ*, and a *heroine* – *talaivi*. Eventually a genre developed called the *kōvai – necklace*, things strung together, which was an attempt to arrange the entire context of love poetry into a continuously developing story. With the arrival of the Vedic religion in southern India and the rise of the *bhakti* movement and its poetical tradition, the hero and heroine began to be used as metaphors for the soul and god. The *Tirukōvaiyār*, or, to give it its full title, the *Tiruccitrambala-k-kōvai* of Māṇikkavācakar, which constitutes the eighth *Tirumuṟai* along with the *Tiruvāchakam*, is the greatest and best known example of this kind of mystical *kōvai*.

Just as the faithful heroine will never desire another, but will remain true to the hero even if her love is not reciprocated by him, the true renunciant will never abandon his devotion to the Lord but will continue to trust in his grace, even if his devotion appears not to be reciprocated. Eventually the Lord will soften towards him and reward his devotion, just as the hero, moved by the heroine's chaste devotion, will eventually show compassion towards her.

The renunciant, exhibiting the eight *sattvic* qualities, [freedom from desire and so on], and the ten states [a one-pointed mind and so forth], discards the personal consciousness, remaining alone as himself, before becoming [immersed in] the love [of the Self]. However all these subtle experiences only serve to demonstrate the instability of those pure states. For those established in the non-dual state which is without defect, no such experiences whatsoever will arise. (192)

TCS lists the eight *sattvic* qualities as follows: *nirācai* – freedom from desire; *tavam* – austerities; *porumai* – patience; *kirupai* – compassion; *cantōḍam* – cheerfulness; *vāymai* – truth; *aṟivuḍaimai* – wisdom and *aḍakkam uḍaimai* – reserve.
TCS lists thee ten states referred to in the verse as follows:

- a one-pointed mind in which he sees the world, not as the form of māyā, but as the form of divine grace.
- determination to cast off the habits of the mental and physical faculties.
- sighing with grief at the thought of the sufferings endured in previous lives.
- a gentle heat suffusing the body as he is overcome by grace.
- giving up food and all the rest.
- reluctance to engage in verbal disputes with others.
- keeping silence.
- exhibiting no awareness of worldly distinctions, as if he were insane.
- falling into a faint, as the vital air (prāna vāyu) deserts him.
- remaining still with no conscious awareness.

All these subtle experiences translates the words kūrthathu ellam, literally – all that is subtle. The verb kūr has, as one of its primary meanings, to be keen, acute, penetrating, as the intellect. Until he reaches the final non-dual state of union with the Self, the renunciant, although he has realised the illusory nature of the world of the tattvas, will continue to experience the aforementioned cuttāvattai – subtle states until that final union occurs. However even these states will fluctuate, succeeding each other as they wax and wane in various degrees.

When speech ends, the mind continues to operate; when that ceases, that is the experience of grace; when that comes to an end, that is the motionless state in which the individual consciousness is lost (parai yokam), and when that ends, that is the state beyond bliss (cukātitam). For those who possess the merit of attaining that state, the unreal does not manifest. For the rest, it is manifold.

Even when we are not speaking, or consciously formulating thought internally, there remains a constant mental chatter which goes on automatically unless we are vigilant, asking ‘Who is it to whom these thoughts arise?’ and so on.
Since our true nature is only the Self, the Self is always seeking, through the simple fact of its existence as the true reality, an opportunity to reveal itself to us. This opportunity will arise most easily when the mind is inward-turned, not grasping at external phenomena. The irresistible power of the Self, in its dynamic aspect of its revealing itself, is called arul – grace. Ramanananda Saraswati, in his unpublished translation, translates the word arul as intuition, which is quite a good description of grace seen from the viewpoint of the recipient. Few are they who do not at some point in their existence experience the powerful sense that the world around them is not what it seems, and that the true reality dwells somehow beyond its compass.

The state of parai yokam mentioned in the text is described in the Madras Tamil Lexicon as ‘the state of the individual soul in which it loses its self-consciousness expecting grace from Siva.’ It may equate to the state of pure witnessing, referred to by Sri Ramana as ātma sphuranā, the ‘I [am] I’ state.

“Again sphuranā is the foretaste of Realisation. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If the man mistakes himself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from him. They are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject’s enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self.”

TCS notes that since parai yokam and cukātitam are mentioned in sequence, a term intermediate between them is implied, cuka-p-peṟu – the attainment of bliss, i.e. when parai yokam ends that is cukam – bliss, and when cukam ends, that is cukātitam – the state beyond bliss. It is not easy to differentiate clearly between these preliminary states, arul, parai yokam and cuka-p-peṟu, which may perhaps best be thought of as aspects of the same state, the state which immediately precedes cukātitam, and follows upon the loss of the ego, the individual consciousness. What is clear, however, is that only cukātitam denotes the inalterable state of mukti – final liberation.

---

The assertion made in the final sentence, that for those who have reached the highest state, the unreal does not manifest, whereas for the rest, it is manifold, is explained by Sri Ramana:

“The aspirant starts with the definition that the Real exists always, then he eliminates the world as unreal because it is changing, and hence cannot be Real. Ultimately he reaches the Self and there finds unity. Then that which was originally rejected as being unreal, is found to be part of the unity. Being absorbed in the reality, the world is also real. There is only existence in realisation and nothing but that.”

In other words the world is not unreal, but at the same time it is not anything which exists separately from the unity of the Self, sat-chit, existence-consciousness, other than which nothing is.

When the [physical, sensory and mental] faculties fall away, [the world will seem tiny and insignificant.] as if viewed from [the top of a high] mountain. And when the individual consciousness becomes detached from those faculties, the mere thought [of what he has suffered] will bring forth sighs of grief. As grace overtakes him, his body will grow feverish and will cause him fear, and as bliss arises and a divine madness takes hold within him, he will forsake speech and cease to care what others might think of him. (194)

As the hold of the sensory and other faculties on the consciousness of the disciple weakens, the phenomena that they convey will gradually fade into the background of the Self until they are no longer distinguishable, just as for someone climbing a mountain the world at ground level will gradually fade and cease to be visible. [See also v. 43 and note and v. 184, where a similar idea is expressed.]

TCS says that the words ‘and he comes to know himself’ are implied as a corollary to becoming detached from the body-related faculties. Focusing the attention on the Self is the exact counterpart of turning it away from the world of the senses. The commentator gives the following graphic illustration of the renunciant’s feelings on realising how much he has suffered due to the dominion of the

---

mind and senses: ‘there are deep sighs of grief at the thought of how for time without measure he has been gnawed at by those faculties, as an earthworm is gnawed at by ants.’

The final words of the verse nāṇum oḍungum mean literally, modesty will subside, cease. Fearing the body and its attachment to the world and swept up in the bliss of the Self, the renunciant will no longer have any fear of the offending society by not performing pujas, not taking ritual baths and so on.

He will perspire; his eyes will overflow with tears; upon perceiving the unreality of the world, his body will grow feverish; he will cry out and then freeze as if paralysed. As grace arises, speech and thought will desert him, and as that grace becomes his whole reality, ecstasy will boil up within him like the roiling clouds, and the hairs of his body will stand up on end. (195)

On the day that grace overwhelms him, his mind will die, and his delusion will be banished; womankind will seem like the very devil, gold will seem of less worth even than brass, and he will eat what food is given, knowing it to be an illusion. The very fear [of association with those things] will make him seem insane, his very sanity appearing as delusion to others. (196)

TCS says that the implication is that gold will seem, not just equal in worth only to brass, but actually more worthless even than that, saying that they will see [it as] shell tokens or small pebbles.

The author speaks of the renunciant eating delusion-food, food in delusion – māyattu ūṇ uṇḍu, Realising the impermanent and fundamentally illusory nature of the senses, and that even his desire for food is part of that illusion, he will not seek out food of choice, but will eat only what is given, and of that, only enough to sustain his body.

The reaction of the renunciant on realising the true nature of worldly appetites such as lust for women, desire for money and craving for food, whilst in reality being a manifestation of clear-mindedness
and sanity, will appear as madness to those who are still under the sway of those illusions.

Picture a mother who, having remained barren for many years, finally bears a son, who subsequently leaves home. Just as she will rejoice, grasping him to her breast and weeping when she finally sees him return, so will the renunciant laugh and weep with joy at the thought of the limitless ages spent in futile births, and the absence of any sign of grace till now. (197)

The ills of birth do not exist for those possessed by the madness [of divine grace]. In them there is no separation; they walk with a measured gait, unmindful of the body, and not caring about the opinion of others; they speak softly and are frail of body, having no craving for food; [desiring only divine grace, they are like a spurned lover], mounting the palmyra branch; hearing and the other senses do not affect them, nor does the mind touch them. (198)

In the love poetry of the Sangam era the last recourse of the spurned lover is to threaten to dress up a maḍal – palmyra branch as a horse and ride it through the town or village, holding a portrait of his beloved and proclaiming her cruelty towards him. The jñāṇi resembles him in that he cares only for the Self, having no concern for what people might think of his conduct.

Occasional snatches of song; the hint of a smile; a sharp, unblinking gaze; a distracted air of amazement even when objects of worthless pleasure are heaped upon them; a quiver of revulsion [at the sight of such objects], and a complete insensitivity to them; total impassivity [in the face of danger]; a tendency to leap up [in transports of bliss], followed by a return to clear awareness – [such are the traits of those who have attained the state of bliss]. (199)

Whereas the previous verse describes a renunciant acting under the influence of divine grace, this verse describes one who has passed from the state of arûḷ – grace and parai yokam into the blissful state
which immediately precedes divine liberation. See v. 193 and notes, which describe the states leading up to final liberation, *cukātitam* – *the state beyond bliss*.

Who can comprehend their amazement at the blissful joy that overwhelms them? They will be like the lame who regain the use of their legs; or those who master a difficult skill after much effort; or those who sing out loud in the throes of lustful infatuation. The world will view their behaviour as pure madness. (200)

TCS prefaces this verse by saying that it answers the question as to why those who have attained *puraṇānantam* – *unalloyed bliss*, should dance about and sing in such a fashion.

The word *unam* means *defect, want, degradation, meanness, vileness*. Following TCS it has been translated as madness. We might say something like the *degrading behaviour of a madman*. Clearly, to sing and dance for the reasons stated in this verse would seem, at the least, immodest, and at the worst degrading to the person engaged in it. Similarly people at large, having no comprehension whatsoever of the reason for the sage’s conduct, would invariably see it as reprehensible.

Surrendering your consciousness [to the bliss of the Self], exchanging the ‘I am the body’ idea [for grace], so that it is no more, abide in true knowledge through the divine madness in which even the concepts of gain and loss [of the Self] do not arise. Does an unmanned ship on a perfectly still ocean pitch and roll, or remain perfectly still? [So let it be with you]. (201)

Fundamentally the body and the world we take to be real are identical. Seen from the standpoint of the Self, they are merely the interplay of the sensory, mental and physical faculties. Once identification with these is ended, there is no more body and world as such. They are simply a picture which appears fleetingly upon the unchanging screen of the Self.

TCS notes that in the comparison in the latter part of the verse, the waveless ocean represents the state of *silence-bliss* – *maunānantam*,
the absence of any crew represents the cessation of the operation of
the faculties – karuvikaḷ iṟanthu nitrāl, and the unmoving vessel, the
consciousness of the jnānis who are free of the personal self – potham
iṟantha ūṇikaḷathu arivu.

When people laugh at him, he laughs back at them; if they
drive him away, saying, ‘Fie on you, you devil!’ he makes the
cremation ground his home; as he wanders as a naked ascetic,
he rejects nothing as ‘unclean’; celebrating the death of the ego
in song, he dwells in the firmament of pure consciousness; he
dances the devil dance, clapping his hands in accompaniment;
his dance is the dance of bliss. (202)

[Wandering] as a naked ascetic translates the words tikampari āy.
Sanskrit digambari means a naked mendicant. A digambari is one
whose clothing – ambara, is the four directions, the sky – dish (dig,
in combination). The word is probably used in a figurative sense,
as Hindu ascetics, unlike the digambar sect of Jains, for example,
rarely go completely naked.

Since to him all is the Self, every place is like every other;
nothing can defile him by its contact, and he remains impervious to
any reproach of defilement from others due to his dwelling in places
that are stigmatised as defiled by society, eating food that is deemed
unclean, etc.

The words devil dance translate the Tamil word tuṉaṅkai, a form
of dance, referenced in the earliest Sangam anthologies, performed
on the battlefield in imitation of flesh-eating she-devils, feasting on
the carcasses of the dead, and in mock battles in village festivals.
Winslow’s dictionary says, ‘Dancing of devils, or persons imitating
them, striking the elbows on the sides, the hands being raised upright.’

Only the Lord of Chidambaram could know the hearts of those who
look bizarre with their excessive ornaments, [holy ash], and strange
clothing; who affect true knowledge in their speech; who dance
and prance about, performing rituals in the guise of austerities, and
affecting a feigned air of wonder. (203)
The translation has been somewhat expanded to bring out the meaning. The verse itself simply says, ‘Only the Lord of Chidambaram might know the strange ornaments, clothes, speech,’ etc. The idea is that the performance they put on is so good that only the Lord himself, or another jñāni, could possibly know that they are fakes. The ornaments would have consisted mainly of rudrāksha beads, worn to excess on the head, ears, arms, chest and throat. TCS says that the wearing of much holy ash is also implied.

The words the affectation [of true knowledge] in their speech translate the Tamil phrase viḷiyāl apimāṉam. – apimānam, Sanskrit abhimāna, has, according to the Tamil dictionaries, the meanings self-respect, sense of honour, greatness of mind, nobility of soul, whilst in Sanskrit it has the meanings high opinion of oneself, self-conceit, pride, haughtiness, conception (especially an erroneous one regarding oneself). Taken in the Tamil sense the phrase means affecting nobility of soul in speech only; whilst in the Sanskrit sense it would mean revealing their self-conceit in their speech, which amounts to the same thing. The false guru fools everyone including himself regarding his spiritual attainment, or rather, lack of it. The Tamil word for word, speech used here is viḷi. It has the general meaning of sound, and is also the technical term in Tamil for the vocative case, the case of address.

Observing the profound delusion in which even the gods, Vishnu, Brahma and Indra, flourish, [believing themselves immortal], then pass away, the jñānis shake their heads in disbelief; and seeing the frenzied contortions visited upon the people of the world by the same delusion, they cry out, ‘Alas for them!’ As for the jñānis, seeing themselves only as the Self, they dance to the rhythm ‘tām tām’.

According to Puranic and other sources, the universe, including all the gods, are reabsorbed into the absolute Reality, Parashivam, at the end of each age. As the new age begins, a new Vishnu evolves, who creates a new Brahmā as the creator of the worlds. When even the gods are not eternal, what folly is it then for mankind to act as if their paltry existences are enduring and significant?
For them, all that has its root in desire has gone; the idea ‘I am That’ is no more; infused with the divine love in which there is neither knowing nor absence of knowledge, they dance the silent dance of blissful joy; they move about with the playful innocence of children. (205)

The organs of sense, cognition and action are all driven by desire for the objects of sense; without desire, these will cease to operate. The jñāni and small child are similar to the extent that they both possess an innocence and naivety, the former because the world and its convoluted workings no longer affect him, and the latter, because they have not yet begun to do so. Therefore the toddler, innocently pottering about, is in one regard a good metaphor for the realised sage.

Do not view them simply as enjoying the bliss that is gained after transcending everything that gives rise to pain and pleasure. See them as people [who see both the suffering of the world and the bliss of liberation], like the eyes of the cat, which people ridicule; or a man standing on the bund of a large irrigation reservoir or on the top of a mountain; or as the sun at the zenith. (206)

This verse gives a series of similes illustrating the state of someone who has become liberated whilst still in the body; who remains fully aware of the body and the world, and of the final state of liberation without having any attachment to either state, just as a cat can see equally well by day or night.

An ēri is a large lake or reservoir, often created by building a high dyke or bund at the lower end of a large, gently sloping area of ground. On one side of the bund therefore is a vast expanse of water, and on the other, a large area of irrigated farmland. Only someone standing on top of the bund can see both of these simultaneously, just as only the gaze of the jñāni can encompass both the bondage of the world and his own state of liberation.

Only when the sun is at the zenith can it see both the place of its rising and the place of its setting. Similarly, only the jñāni can simultaneously be aware of the suffering of birth and the bliss of liberation.

(To be continued)

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche arrived in north America in 1970. During the next seventeen years he gave innumerable talks, seminars and retreats on Tibetan Buddhism. Since his death in 1987 there has been a steady flow of publications by Shambhala based on his lectures. The experienced editor of this present book under review is Judith Leif who has been responsible for many important texts. Shambhala publications are an object lesson for any publishing house for their meticulous editing and attractive presentation.

The four works under review are titled: ‘Glimpses of Mahayana’ (1973), ‘Glimpses of Shunyata’ (1972), ‘Glimpses of Space’ (1975), and ‘Glimpses of Realization’ (1975). Though the talks were given relatively early in his American sojourn they contain higher teachings that normally are given after years of intense practice. The sharpness of some questions after each talk are indicative of the intelligence of listeners and why Trungpa felt confident to give them out.

Before any review of Trungpa’s book we should be aware that he was recognised as the 11th Trungpa in the Kargyupa sect and was an authentic teacher in the Tibetan tradition. One could argue that there was a pre-Trungpa era, a Trungpa period and a post-Trungpa era in modern spirituality based on the great eastern religions established in America. His influence has been that great. His credentials were impeccable and his knowledge and wisdom are patently clear to any reader who takes up this book. The subtlety and comprehensive range of his knowledge makes many self-styled modern teachers with eastern leanings look immature. We are in the presence of a master. We will be giving a brief introduction to each book or subject and then an extended quote for Trungpa’s explanations are superb and any explanation by the reviewer would simply obscure the topic.

The first book ‘Glimpses of Mahayana’ gives us a basic understanding of Buddha-nature in the light of Hinayana and...
Mahayana traditions. “Another attribute of buddha nature is that it does not dwell on anything, which means that we cannot categorize it as being associated with good or bad, pleasure or pain. Enlightened intelligence shines through both pain and pleasure; in other words, through any kind of cognitive mind. So the unconditioned cognitive mind that functions in our basic being is the true enlightened mind. There’s nothing very obscure about this. It has nothing to do with mystical experience or anything like that at all. It is functional, simple, direct, intelligent, sane, and pragmatic.”

The second book ‘Glimpses of Shunyata’ speaks of Shunyata, a core notion in Mahayana. “The idea of shunyata depends on what is not shunyata—which is based on ego’s manifestation. We would like an ego manifestation of solidity: ‘I would like to understand that; I would like to comprehend that; I would like to attain enlightenment.’ So the idea of shunyata is based on the ambition to understand what shunyata is. If you are willing to give away that basic ambition, then shunyata seems to be there already. Therefore the shunyata principle is not dependent on that or this; it is based on transcending dualistic perceptions—and at the same time dwelling on dualistic ideas.”

The third book on unconditioned space contains two seminars, ‘The Feminine Principle’ and ‘Evam’. In the first Trungpa speaks about manifestation and prajnaparamita (transcendental knowledge) which is considered to be an expression of unconditioned space. He refers to it ‘The Feminine Principle’. It is “unborn, unceasing; its nature is like that of the sky.” He discusses the manifestation from the unknown and the process by which reality as we perceive or not-perceive it exists. This series of talks is particularly abstruse and common logic is turned upside down. He says for example: “So we can say that reality can be realized only by realizing its unrealness. This is tantric jargon.” For I would advise anyone reading this book to read it last along with ‘Evam’ which is a continuation of these lectures for Evam stretches the boundaries of logic. A further example: He discusses two principles: “e represents basic accommodation, basic atmosphere, which could be said to be empty or full—it doesn’t really matter, that’s purely a linguistic problem. Then we have vam, which is what is contained within that vastness, whether it is full or empty. What is contained, if it’s full, is emptiness; what is contained, if it’s
empty, is fullness.” This teaching requires a profound understanding and mental discipline to grasp and even then the word grasp fails to encompass what is necessary. In fact, I am surprised it has been published because of its esoteric nature. Trungpa held nothing back.

The fourth book ‘Glimpses of Realization’, was originally titled ‘The Three Bodies of Enlightenment’, and it concerns the three bodies of enlightenment: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya.

This book is more accessible and gives a good overview of the idea of liberation and the means, using Buddhist mahayana concepts. Dharmakaya is ‘the indivisibility of nirvana and samsara.’ The word sambhoga literally means, “interested in pleasure.” Sambhogakaya is the energy of the reality in which we exist. And lastly, nirmanakaya is the bodily manifestation of our desires, fears and aspiration. It is the stuff we work with in order to free ourselves from the cycle of samsara.

This book is not for the faint-hearted but is so rewarding for us beginners if one preserves, particularly the first two books or sections.


The name Gorakhnath evokes multiple responses from a wide cross section of yoga practitioners. His name is so prevalent both in yoga texts and puranic myths about yogis, gods, the places he visited and supernatural powers that one wonders if the name Gorakhnath refers to but one historical person. In the Śiva Purāṇa he is known as an avatāra of Lord Siva. In the Skanda Purāṇa he is regarded as one of the Nāths. Gorakhnath means lord of the cattle. Legend has it that his guru Matsyendranath was responsible for his conception and birth. Gorakhnatat is said to be the author of Ḫaṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, Vibhinna Tantra and Shyama Rahasya. He was also called Goraksha meaning ‘beautiful form full of virtues’. The most respected source of Gorakhnath’s life is said to be Kabir’s Gorak Nath ki Goshti.
(story), in which Gorakhnath declares himself to be the grandson of Adinath and son of Maysyendranath. Though the book’s author does not quote a source, he claims even Sankaracharya said that he was a paramahaṁsa. The Marathi classic Jnaneshvari gives a definite time line revealing his ancestry and importance at the time of composition ca.1290 AD. It was Jnaneshwar who turned the Nath tradition in a new direction with the introduction of the Wakari order of saints with their dedication to Lord Vitthala and the emphasis on devotion and jñāna. This sampradāya is the most influential in Maharashtra today.

The author claims that “Gorakhnath was essentially a Vajrayana Buddhist and deeply connected to Shaivism because of his teacher Matsyendranath. Some say he was native of Punjab and from there travelled to many parts of India, and his chief seat is at Tilla Jogian Temple, in Jhelum district.” Gorakhnath’s greatest contribution was to cut across distinctions of varna (caste) and āśramas (stages of life) and make knowledge of yoga accessible to all. There were originally twelve main sub-sects of Gorakhanth but with time and disputes there are now just six, each with their own distinctive principles with some engaging in practices that are on the fringe of social acceptability. The main centres of the sect can be found at the Pashupatinath, Nepal; Girnar, Gujarat; Pai Dhumi in Mumbai; Kolkata and Puri. Followers of Gorakhnath are called either naths or kānphaṭās (split-eared).

The author has gathered together an impressive collection of data on the origins and paths of Hatha Yoga, Buddhist Tantras and Siddha and Tantra traditions of Hinduism. As an amateur enthusiast he has not been afraid to cut across those delicate academic boundaries that separate the various hoary traditions and over which pedantic scholars spend their careers squabbling over to their endless delight, indignation and edification. There are doubts over some of the author’s claims of the syncretic unity of Shaivaites and the Tantric Buddhists but the author is to be applauded for his love of the tradition and the mass of facts he has brought to bear about the various schools of yoga spawned or sustained by that semi-mythic being called Gorakhnath. The author supplies several appendixes with lists of Nath saints, sages, siddhas, avatars of Shri Dattatreya et al. This is a book for those who wish a general overview of the Gorakhnath paramparā, in all its richness, glory and bewildering complexity.

We published an article in the previous issue of the magazine on the life of Sri Sivabala Yogi (1935-1994). His teachings are fully revealed in a considerable book yet to be published, titled Guru Upaniṣad, but in the meantime the questioner and compiler, Gurprasad has given us with the consent of the guru, a Laghu (smaller or condensed) Guru Upaniṣad. Even so this is a major book dense with spiritual knowledge. One realises quite quickly after a short perusal of this book that Sivabala Yogi is no ordinary person. His vast knowledge of yoga practices which are the means to obtain advanced states of consciousness, and his comprehensive understanding of the metaphysical nature of reality are self-evident. Throughout the book is the constant refrain about the importance of the practice of dhīna and control of the mind if one is to understand the higher teachings. The tone is one of common sense and practicality.

Sri Sivabala Yogi gives detailed instructions on the path of sevā, love and devotion, knowledge, silence, powers, samadhi, realisation and tapas. Many readers who have years of meditation practice will be familiar with the broad sweep of most of the teachings given here with their characteristic common sense but what is different here is the comprehensive nature of the explanations given in a reasonable, matter of fact and logical way. We are in the presence of a master.

“Every seeker begins the quest from duality (i.e. a jīva’s current state of ignorance) and passes through qualified monism (in which an aspirant experiences his or her subjectivity, i.e., ‘I’ sense or has vision of God) to end in non-dualism (i.e. destruction of the ‘I’ sense or mind or ignorance). In other words, duality is experienced in the stages up to manolaya (subsidence of mind), qualified monism in lower samādhi and non-dualism in the highest samādhi.”

Part Five of the present book under review is an extensive extract about the life of Sivabala Yogi followed by a detailed questioning of him about his life and the teachings he directly imparts.

The book can be ordered on amazon.in — Christopher Quilkey
Sri Vidya Havan
This year’s Havan took place on Friday, 17th March, commencing at 7 am with navavarana puja followed by homa. Final offering took place 2.30 pm followed by deeparadhana. Procession into the Mother’s Shrine ensued and abhishekam was performed with final deeparadhana taking place around 3 pm. This year Dr. Anand, son of the president Sri V.S. Ramanan led the officiating.

Each year at the Ashram, the Sri Chakra and the Meru Chakra are rededicated in yagna called Sri Vidya Havan. The havan is an elaborate worship of the Divine Mother as enjoined in the scriptures. This is an important annual ritual meant to re-energise the Sri Chakra and the Meru Chakra.

Aradhana 24th April
The 67th Aradhana commemoration began in the early hours of 24th April with nadaswaran music in the Samadhi Hall. There were elaborate decorations with vetiver fibers and flowers. The Hall was full at 5.30am for Tamil Parayana while purohits gathered in the Mother’s Shrine for mahanyasa japa. Abhishekam followed at 8.30 am at Bhagavan’s Samadhi and the final arati was at 10.45 am. Some 2,000 guests joined for Bhagavan’s prasad which was offered at five serving stations. This is besides the special Narayana Seva at the western gate, when hundreds of sadhus, poor and pilgrims were provided with food.

There were several music performances in the New Granthalaya auditorium over a five day period. On the night of the 21st May ‘Thevaram Isai’ was presented by Kum. J.B. Keerthana to the acompaniemnet of flute by Sri. J.B. Sruthisagar. A flute recital was offered on the 23rd by S. Rajaram accompanied on violin by Sri. Duran Srinivasan among others. On the 24th there was Ramana music by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar. On the 25th, RMCL hosted the annual Ramana Pada Pancharatnam with selected verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai set to the five ghana ragas of Thyagaraja. On the 25th evening there was a special ‘Bharatanatyam’ Kumariis by Aparna & Aryamba.
Mahapuja
Mahapuja celebrations are an annual event in the ashram. It is one of the four principal events in the ashram calendar. This year’s celebrations commenced early morning of the 20th May with mahanyasa japa in the Mother’s Shrine with elaborate decorations. Live online streaming allowed devotees around the globe to view the event, which culminated in deeparadhana around 10.30am. The Mother who gave the world our master is also a jivanmukta in her own right. Her Grace and guidance is an essential part of the ashram. Earlier in the evening of the 19th May there was a riveting 100 minute Ramanajali offering by RMCL in honour of Mother Alagammal.

Old Hall Sofa
Recently, restoration experts made minor repairs to the sofa and fabricated an independent stainless steel frame brace to support the original wooden-framed image of Sri Bhagavan. Otherwise the sofa required no major repairs. In future, devotees are kindly requested to refrain from offering flowers at Bhagavan’s sofa as the ashram wants to avoid attracting ants and other insects.

Pali Thirtham
Due to the severe drought Pali Thirtham is bone-dry and the Ashram took the opportunity to dredge, deepen out and clean the ancient tank which in recent years has been afflicted with almost continuous algae blooms. During the severe heat of summer workers dredged truckloads of sludge from the tank floor, the residue of prolific algae growth in recent years, all of which can be put to good use as fertiliser for Ashram gardens.

Obituaries
Sri S.V. Gowri Shankar was born on 15th October, 1940 to Venkatesa Subramaniam and Apitha Kuchamba. His mother, a native of Tiruvannamalai and a long-time devotee of Bhagavan Ramana, insisted that the boy should be called ‘Ramana’. The lad studied locally until the age of fifteen when he shifted to Kolkata. He did his B.Com. in corporate law. In July 1970 he was married and came with his spouse to Sri Ramansramam for their ‘honeymoon’. He then set up house in Kolkata where he raised five children and worked as a legal
counsellor. In 2002 he suffered a heart attack and knew that Bhagavan was calling him back. He lived his retirement years near the Ashrama with his son Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal, principal of the Ashram Vedapatasala. In the third week of March this year he visited his two younger sons in Srirangam where they served in the Vedapatasala. On 27th March, he reported that Lord Subrahmanya, Kanchipuram Mahaswami, Seshadri Swamigal and Bhagavan Ramana were coming for him. ‘All were calling’ him home, he said. Medical reports revealed no discernible ailment. He returned to Tiruvannamalai with his family and upon arrival on the 28th March, the family took him to Rangammal Hospital where tests showed that vital signs were normal. He remained conscious and perfectly lucid up until 9.35 am and quietly merged at the Feet of Holy Arunachala at 9.45 am. Known for his generosity, exquisite manners, unassuming nature, kindness and acceptance of all people, as one who never imposed on anyone, Gowri Shankarji will be missed.

Born in 1925, Sri T. V. Manian began his career at the age of sixteen as a junior clerk in Tata Iron and Steel Co. He educated himself while working and earned the degrees of M. A. (Economics) and B. E. (Mechanical). Devotion to Tirupati Venkateswara, practice of the yoga taught by Swami Sivananda, and regular recitation of Vishnu Sahasranamam brought him to Bhagavan Ramana. He experienced the joy of Arunachala pradakshina till the age of 88. Up until February this year, he walked for a furlong to the Ashram and circumambulated the shrines. On April 12, 2017, he sensed that the end was imminent. Devotees from Ramanasramam came to his residence and chanted Aksharamanamalai. He joined in the chanting, shedding tears of joy and thanked the devotees, declaring, “I won’t die today”. On April 30, 2017 at the age of 91, this devout, creative, self-made and self-reliant man merged at the Feet of Bhagavan.