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Divine Names of Arunachala

9. अक्षिपेयामृतेशानाय नमः
   oṁ akṣipeyāmṛteśānāya namaḥ
   The nectar of the Lord of the Universe which has to be drunk through the eyes.

In verse one of Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam, Sri Ramana Maharshi says, “Ocean of Nectar, Full of Grace, engulfing the universe in Thy Splendour! O Arunachala, the Supreme Itself! Be Thou the Sun and open the lotus of my Heart in Bliss!” In Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam, pleading as a supplicant on our behalf, He says, “Lord Supreme, I am ever at your Feet, like a frog clinging to the stem of a lotus-plant. It would be a true life indeed if you made me a honeybee sucking nectar (the joy of awareness in the Heart-lotus). If I died while yet clinging to your Feet, it would be a standing pillar (a monument) of disgrace for you, O blazing light of Aruna Hill, Expanse of Grace more subtle than the ether!”

The nectar or amṛta (amrita) to which this sloka refers is that mysterious elixir to be drunk through our eyes, which fills us with a sublime sense of bliss. For, the emergence of true jñāna brings with it the joy of pure existence. Amrita is the confirmation and completion of that awakening for Lord Siva does not just destroy our ignorance, but gives us that divine happiness we all yearn for.

Īśānyā refers to the Lord of the Universe.

1 Verse 6 of ‘Eleven Verses to Sri Arunachala’ from Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p. 115.
Hunger has so many faces. The most obvious is of course, the hunger of the body, of the stomach; but equally significant is the hunger of the heart for love; the hunger of the mind, for knowledge, for power or for control. Then of course there is the hunger for riches.

Just as the physical body requires regular amounts of food to sustain itself, so too we require emotional food and mental food to sustain our hearts and minds. Sometimes we require more food sometimes less, it depends on the circumstances but food we need in order not to just survive but to prosper. Hunger is a common denominator in whatever we do, feel or think. In one form or another it is an ever-present anxiety. Is there enough food for the next meal? Emotionally we ask, are we loved at all? Have we enough information to understand what is happening? Do we need more? How to make sense of this world that appears so chaotic and irrational, and seems to take a perverse, stubborn pleasure in thwarting our desires or what we think is the right thing to do? Do we have what it takes to understand? In other words, do we have enough of the right kind of food to energise our endeavours?

The task ahead of us on the spiritual path appears daunting. Are our resources adequate for the challenge? If we are honest we see that our own resources are limited and we look outside for guidance on
the journey. There are so many traditions now available that appear at times to be in conflict. There are so many books in so many languages, each with a different slant on what is important. In short there are many types of food but do they have the capacity to fulfil us? One person’s nourishment may be another person’s poison. We all need the food unique to our needs.

Ideas are not harmless objects that lie around that we stumble on as if by accident. We seek them, we own them. They can be powerful catalysts that ignite in us an ardent determination in the right circumstances. The problems we have today are that there are too many ideas and we fail to appreciate their individual worth. For example, several hundred years ago books were not freely available in India and people depended upon pundits for their knowledge. For people in medieval north India they had one book, Tulsidas’ *Ramayana*, which for them was completely and literally real, as real as the rocks and trees they saw. Lord Rama lived through the tale. He stirred their hearts and minds with ideals of nobility and adherence to the *sanātana dharma*. The *Ramayana* nourished them as no philosophical doctrine could.

What is it that profoundly stirs our heart and is able to sustain it against all obstacles? It is through the concept of food. Here we have a simple but effective approach to our task, our *svadharma*. Thought is food. It is energy and if directed correctly opens up new avenues of discovery and wonder. There are ideas that can change the world. Consider Mahatma Gandhi who gave India the idea of practising non-violence as a political tool. Because of the purity of his intention and sustained action in accord with this idea, he was able to infuse it with such power that it moved all of India.

Consider in your own lives, readers, where there were moments of profound discovery about your own sense of identity or about the way the world works which permanently altered the way you thought and acted. What was it that you discovered? First and foremost it was an idea. It was an idea that had the power to change you and you listened and saw the truth behind it and exchanged a now redundant truth for a new, nourishing understanding.

The word *Brahman* comes from the root *brh*, ‘to expand’. *Brahman* means there are no limits. Is our physical body unlimited? No. Are our emotions or thoughts unlimited? No, because whether we are aware
of it or not our emotional and mental impulses belong to a limited location we call ‘me’. Emotions and thoughts are subtle furniture in the mind; furniture that is invisible to our gross eye and a mind turned outwards. Through our samskaras and experiences in life we build a shelter for ourselves which contains the thoughts, memories and feelings which are familiar to us. We feel comfortable with them by inclination or habit. This inner landscape is subtle but if we had the right instruments we could map the individual mind with its thought-objects that we are so identified with. We think they belong to us and are ours alone.

Consider the clothes that people wear. Each person has their own clothes but as the saying goes, ‘they are cut from the same cloth’. We change them according to circumstance and their suitability. Thoughts are like clothes; feelings are like clothes. They are impersonal. Our mistake is to identify with them and consider them ours alone.

What type of cloth then is Brahman? It is invisible because it is not a thought or feeling. It is an experience that is not dependent on time and space. Though what it is exactly is impossible to say for it is incomparable and therefore indefinable. The implication is that we cannot contain Brahman with our mind. It is free of all attributes; it is not a material that can be measured.

Our purpose in life is to understand and be Brahman, to be limitless. And by that we mean that we are not obstructed by avidya or ignorance, which by its nature, restricts us. Imagine what it is like to be imprisoned in a room with no door, no window, no light. That is ignorance. We are imprisoned by our own limited thoughts and aspirations. Then what is this jñāna or knowledge that unlocks or removes the ignorance which causes unhappiness?

The key to jñāna is this sense of ‘I’ which remains unmoved throughout all experiences. But even then we can go only so far. We cannot destroy our own sense of false identification by ourselves. “The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through sadhanas other than atma-vichara, is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself.” It is impossible. The false ‘I’ cannot catch itself. It requires grace and the guru for jnana to dawn.

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There is a verse in *The Shining of my Lord*, which says “Do not become perplexed by thinking of concepts. Destroy *suttarivu* by regarding everything that is perceived as a dream-like appearance. By establishing the mind in the state of chastity through the practice of self-enquiry, settle without the slightest movement in the *swarupa* that exists in the Heart as the Heart.”

Until that happens we search for the right kind of food which will nourish our quest, until we are absorbed in the Heart. We eat food that is *sattvic* and avoid unhealthy food. We consciously feel positive thoughts that uplift us. We read the right literature that inspires us. We circumvent harmful thoughts and feelings. We refuse to indulge in negativity as best we can. Just as it would be unwise to walk into a dark hole in front of us and fall down, we avoid those black holes of anger, hatred, jealousy, lust by denying them any power to affect us. We do not buy ugly and harmful objects and place them in the house of our mind just so we can have the satisfaction of being unhappy. This is foolish.

We search for spiritual truths for they have the power to transform us in such a radical way that one never falls back into the old, conditioned patterns of behaviour that cause suffering. Consider Bhagavan’s teaching ‘Who am I?’ This potent idea has the capacity to change our lives. With this single tool we can go right to the heart of our being. Inevitably over the years with all the various explanations offered as a commentary, its original impact has lost some of its effectiveness unless one receives direct from Bhagavan the power to engage directly with this radically transformative idea. For ‘Who am I?’ is not a puzzle that has a conventional answer and we then move onto the next question. It is an idea that has to be lived to the extent that it enters the very marrow of our bones.

‘Who am I?’ is a living force; it is not a static notion that you pick up and put down. To the contrary, it takes on a life of its own and

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2 *The Shining of my Lord. Selected Verses from Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* and other Muruganar texts translated by T.V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman. 2017. pp.126-27. There are two footnotes which are editorial explanations of the quoted verse on p.127. The footnotes say: “*Suttarivu* is the divided consciousness that has split itself into seer and the seen. In this state an internal observer (the subject) is looking at or thinking about objects that are thought or noticed.” and, ‘chastity’ is: “The State of being committed to the Self, not looking for external stimulation from the senses.”
burns through the veils of ignorance we identify with about the world and ourselves. And like a fire it needs fuel to consume and the fuel we throw into its furnace are our thoughts and emotions.

So food works in two directions. We consume sattvic food in whatever form to pursue our quest and we sacrifice the food of our hearts and minds to the fire of knowledge. In the Vedic tradition they speak of the yajña, the sacrifice to the gods. ‘Who am I?’ is a yajña, for the more we throw into the flames the higher the purificatory flame reaches. There is no end to the sacrifice. It does not matter how much we throw into the fire, it is never enough. We should be prepared to offer everything to the fire.

A true story. Neem Karoli Baba was a saint known for his unusual teaching methods. There was a great emphasis on feeding people in his ashrams then as today after his mahāsamādhi. Once he asked his devotees to give him food to eat. Food was prepared and he ate it. He said it was not nearly enough. The devotees then cooked a grand meal that could have satisfied over fifty people. He ate it all in one sitting and turned to his devotees and said they still had not given him enough. Displeased, he got in a car that drove to the ashram at Brindavan of Anandamayi Ma, who happened to be in residence. Here he asked Ma for food. She had food prepared for him and with her own hands fed him a normal amount from a single plate. He declared himself satisfied and slept afterwards like a baby.

It is not the quantity of food; it is not the number of books we have read; it is not the number of gurus we have met; it is not the number of times we have sat in meditation. It is the quality of our hunger, our burning desire for mukti or liberation, which is important. All else follows from this one idea.

We have before us the majesty and power of Arunachala Ramana, who is our hunger, our fire, our yajña.

“[Arunachala] (Thinking of you) as sustenance for myself, I sought you out. The end result is that, becoming food for you instead, I (will be consumed as your very Self) and thus meet my end.”

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The Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti

Word for Word and Commentary

Part Two
Verses Three to Six

B.K. Croissant

Verse Three

yasyaiva sphuranaṁ sadatmakam asat kalparthakaṁ bhāsate
sākṣāt-tat-tvam-asīti veda vacasā yo bodhayaty-āśritān |
yat sākṣāt karaṇād-bhaven-na punar-āvṛttir-bhavāṁ-bho-nidhau
tasmai śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idam śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||

yasya: whose; eva: alone; sphuraṇaṁ: effulgence; sadatmakam:
of the nature of existence; asat kalparthakaṁ: the unreal objective

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006, after 24 years as a senior museum administrator at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. Since then sādhana has been her first priority.
world; bhāsate: shines forth; sākṣāt: enlightenment; tat-tvam-asi iti: thus That Thou art; veda vacasā: with the Vedic statement; yaḥ: who; bodhayati: imparts; āśritān: to those who have surrendered; yat sākṣāt-karaṇāt: after the direct experience of which; na bhavet: never shall; punah: again; āvṛttiḥ: return to; bhavām-bho-nidhau: the ocean of worldly existence; tasmai: to Him; śrī guru mūrtaye: the blessed guru; namaḥ idāṁ: may this obeisance be; śrī dākṣiṇāmūrtaye: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

To Him, the blessed guru Dakshinamurti, whose effulgence, (which is) of the nature of existence, alone shines forth (pervading even) the unreal objective world, who imparts enlightenment to those who have surrendered with the Vedic statement That Thou Art, after the direct experience of which (they) never shall again return to the ocean of worldly existence, may this obeisance be.

Commentary
This verse begins with the assertion that the unreal objective world is not different or apart from the effulgent Self, which is all-pervading. In other words, the reflection is not independent of the object reflected, as stated in Śrī Hastāmalaka Gītā. In the first verse of Uḷḷadu Nārpadu, Bhagavan makes clear that the Self pervades absolutely everything, no exceptions whatsoever.

... – pārvai sēr / Nāmulagaṁ kāṇḍa-lāl nānāvān sakti-yuḷa / Ōrmudalai oppal oru-talaiyē – nāma-vuru / Chittira-mum pār-pānum chērpaḍa-mum āroḷi-yum / Attanai-yun tānām avan... (Because the world is seen, we have to infer a common cause (a Lord) possessing unlimited powers to appear as the diversity. The pictures consisting of names and forms, the seer, the canvas, the light – all these are He Himself.)

Then comes the mahāvākya THAT THOU ART, which is found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. After Shvetaketu studied the Vedas for twelve years and returned home, his father asked him if he knew that

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1 Forty Verses on Reality by Ramana Maharshi, Translation and Commentary by S.S. Cohen, p.8.
spiritual knowledge that enables you to hear the unheard, think the unthought and know the unknown.

“What is that wisdom, Father?” asked the son. Uddalaka said to Shvetaketu: “As by knowing one lump of clay, dear one, we come to know all things made out of clay that they differ only in name and form, while the stuff of which all are made is clay. As by knowing one gold nugget, dear one, we come to know all things made out of gold that they differ only in name and form, while the stuff of which all are made is gold. As by knowing one tool of iron, dear one, we come to know all things made out of iron that they differ only in name and form, while the stuff of which all are made is iron — so through that spiritual wisdom, dear one, we come to know that all of life is one.”

“My teachers must not have known this wisdom,” said Shvetaketu, “for if they had known, how could they have failed to teach it to me? Please instruct me in this wisdom, Father.”

“Yes, dear one, I will,” replied his father. “In the beginning was only Being, One without a second. Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos and entered into everything in it. There is nothing that does not come from him. Of everything he is the inmost Self. He is the truth; he is the Self supreme. You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that.”

Sankaracharya importantly links THAT THOU ART with two major concepts, surrender and direct experience. Surrender is essential to self-transformation and realization of Truth. If not surrender, says Bhagavan, self-enquiry, described by the Master in verse 27 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu is the reverse side of the same coin.

... mudal-pōl – mēvu-minda / Nā-nudiyā duḷḷa-nilai nāmadu-vāi uḷḷa-nilai / Nā-nudik-kum stāna-madai nāḍa-mal – nānudi-yāt / Tannizhap-paic chārva-devan chā-rāmaṛ tānadu-vān / Tan-nilai-yil nirpa-devan chāṭ-ṭrudi... (The non-emergence of the ‘I’ is the state of being THAT. Without seeking and attaining the place whence the ‘I’ emerges, how is one to achieve self-extinction –

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2 The Upanishads, Introduced and Translated by Eknath Easwaran, pp.132-33.
the non-emergence of the ‘I’? Without that achievement, how is one to abide as THAT – one’s true state?)

By direct experience, the second concept, no less than merging into the Self is meant. Extinction of the individual self is Bhagavan’s passionate and heart-wrenching plea in ŚrīArūṇācala Aksāramaṇaṁālai and a soul-stirring theme that consistently appears in all of His hymns to Arunachala. Merging is the culmination of all true sādhana and is beautifully described in verse 8 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟṟpadu.

... – yēṇḍṛa-dām / Yeppe-yariṭ ṭevvuru-vil yēt-tinumār pēr-uruvil / Apporu-ḷaik kāṇ-vazhiya dāyinu-mam – meip-porulin / Uṇmaiįl-tan uṇmai-yinai ōrndo-ṇüşi onḍru-dalē / Uṇmaiįl kāṇal uṇarndiṭuga... (In whatever name and form the nameless and formless is worshipped, therein lies the path of its realization. Realizing one’s truth as the truth of that reality, and merging into it, is true realization.)

Significantly the Master relates the mahāvākya in Sankaracharya’s hymn to the Sacred Hill Arunachala. In Navamaṇimālai, verse 2, He proclaims and asserts an identity between the two. In other words, The Red Mountain is identical to THAT THOU ART.

Sattiya chit-sukam anḍrip para-vuyir sārayik-kam / Artta-vat tatva masi-aruṇap poruḷām achalattu / Arttan gana-madu āguñ-sev vāḍaka āroli-yām / Mukti ninaikka aruḷ-aruṇā chala munnidavē (Not only do A, RU and NA stand for Being, Awareness and Bliss, they also stand for the Self, the soul and their oneness. Hence Aruna means but that thou art. Achala is perfection firm. Invoke the aid of Arunachala of golden brightness beautiful, one thought of Whom brings Final Freedom.)

Verse three of the Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti ends with the assurance that following direct enlightenment, there is no return to saṁsāra. This is also stated in the Bhagavad Gītā in the verses that Bhagavan selected for His Gītā Sāram:

5 Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p.107.
na tadbhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ / yadgatvā na nivartante taddhāma paramaṁ mama
(There the Sun lightens not, nor moon, nor fire; having gone thither they return no more; this is of me the one Abode Supreme.)
avyakto’kṣara ityuktastamāhuḥ paramaṁ gatim / yaṁ prāpya na nivartante taddhāma paramaṁ mama
(And this unmanifested One is called ‘The Indestructible’, the highest State. Those reaching It will never more return, this is of me the one Abode Supreme.)

It is also majestically stated in verse 35 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu.


(To be the Real Self in the Heart by winning the actual Experience of that Self, which is already won, is the real gain; all other gains are like those won in a dream. Does anything gained in a dream remain true upon waking? Would the sage who has cast off falsehood by dwelling in the Real ever again be deluded by these?)

Kanakammal concludes her commentary on verse three with these words:

Once the true nature of this misery-ridden world is realized in the light of Awareness, the bewilderment born of the confusion of mistaking the ephemeral for the eternal does not recur again. Nevertheless, the world will continue to appear but it will not inspire a sense of reality in it, even as the appearance of a mirage will not delude one, who knows it for what it is, into thinking that it will serve to quench one’s thirst.

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6 These translations of verses 11 and 12 of the Gītā Sāram (15.6 and 8.21 in the Bhagavad Gītā) were written in draft form by A. W. Chadwick and corrected by Bhagavan in his own handwriting.


8 Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai, volume II, p.198.
nānā-cchidra-ghaṭodara-sthita mahā dīpa prabhā bhāsvaraṁ jñānam yasya tu cakṣur-ādi-karaṇa dvārā baihī spandate | jānāmi iti tameva bhāntam anubhāty-etat samastaṁ jagat | tasmai śrīguru-mūrtaye nama idaṁ śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||

nānā-cchidra-ghaṭodara-sthita mahā dīpa prabhā bhāsvaraṁ: like the bright light of a great lamp placed in a jar with many holes; jñānam: luminous awareness; yasya: whose; tu: indeed; cakṣur-ādi-karaṇa dvārā: through the eyes and other sense organs; baihī spandate: issues forth; jānāmi iti: as “I know”; tam eva: Him alone; bhāntam: illuminating; anubhāti: shines after; etat: this; samastaṁ: entire; jagat: universe; tasmai: to Him; śrī guru mūrtaye: the blessed guru; namaḥ idaṁ: may this obeisance be; śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

To Him, the blessed guru Sri Dakshinamurti, whose luminous awareness issues forth through the eyes and other sense organs, like the bright light of a great lamp placed in a jar with many holes, to Him who alone illuminates (objects and causes awareness of them) as “I know”, and after (whom) this entire universe shines, may this obeisance be.

Commentary
Kanakammal states the meaning of this verse as follows:

The resplendent lamp of the Ātman appears to be caged inside the pot-like body. The beams of light of a lamp within a many-holed pot stream out through the holes of the pot, take the forms of the objects outside and remove the darkness surrounding them. Likewise the effulgence of Ātman, the form of jñāna, the indweller of the body, floods out through the holes of the pot-like body, namely, the antahkaraṇa or the organs of cognition.
V. Karthik

Sri Dakshinamurti Statue at Sri Matrubhuteswara Shrine
like the eyes, assumes the forms of those objects and removes the ignorance of the knowledge of those objects. That light of Awareness that illumines the objects perceived causes the awareness of the knowledge of them as “I know them.”

If objects could shine by themselves, independent of another light, then all objects would appear and shine to all individuals and at all times. But never do objects announce their existence by themselves. It is the perceiver who establishes them and says “there they are”. In short the ‘I Consciousness’ is responsible for the awareness of ‘this’ or ‘that’.1

In his commentary, T.M.P. Mahadevan points out that the source of consciousness, or the light in the pot, is hidden.

The source of light, both for the individual and the cosmos is the Self. The individual is able to know objects because of the luminosity of the Self. The objective universe can be known because of the light of the Self. In self-consciousness, of the form of ‘I know’, it is the Self that is Awareness. But for the basic Awareness, none can know and nothing can be known. It is true that this awareness is not evident at first. That is because it is hidden in avidyā, nescience, even as a lamp placed within a pot remains unseen. But it is not a hermetically sealed pot that contains the lamp; it has several holes through which the light of the lamp streams forth. Similarly, avidyā is itself made manifest by the Self. There are many chinks in it which give it away. In the body-mind complex which is a product of avidyā, for instance, there are avenues of knowledge. The sense-organs are not themselves the sources of knowledge. It is the Self that functions through them. Similarly, the objects of the world which are inert cannot become manifest by themselves. It is by the reflection of the Self’s luminosity that they become manifest.2

In Śrī Hastāmalaka Gītā Adi Sankara praises and exalts the Source of All, both the sentient and insentient, in uplifting and inspiring language.

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1 Commentary on Anuvāda Nānmalai Volume II, p.200-01.
nimittam manaścakṣurādi pravr̄ttau
nirastākhilopādhirākāśakalpaḥ
ravirlokaceṣṭānimittam yathā yaḥ
sa nityopalabdhisvarūpō’hamātmā

(Just as the sun causes all worldly movements, so do I, the ever present, conscious Self, cause the mind to be active and the senses to function. Again, just as the ether is all-pervading, yet devoid of any specific attributes, so am I free from all attributes.)

yamagnyuṣṇavannityabodhasvarūpāṁ
manaścakṣurādīnyabodhātmakāni
pravartanta āśritya niṣkampamekaṁ
sa nityopalabdhisvarūpō’hamātmā

(I am the conscious Self, ever-present and associated with everything in the same manner as heat is always associated with fire. I am that eternal, undifferentiated, unshaken Consciousness, on account of which the insentient mind and senses function, each in its own manner.)

manaścakṣurāderviyuktāḥ svayaṁ yo
manaścakṣurādermananaścakṣurādiḥ
manaścakṣurāderagamyasvarūpāḥ
sa nityopalabdhisvarūpō’hamātmā

(I am the eternal Consciousness, dissociated from the mind and senses. I am the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and so on. I am not cognizable by the mind and senses.)

Bhagavan speaks to the light within the mind in verse 22 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

... evai-yuṅ – kāṇum / Madik-koḷi tan-dam madik-kuḷ oḷi-rum / Madi-yinai ullē maḍakkip-padi-yil / Padit tiḍu-dal anḍrip padi-yai madi-yāl / Madit-tiḍu-dal eṅṅgan madi-yāi... (The Lord shines within the mind, illuminating it. Unless it turns inward and be fixed in the Lord, it is not possible for the mind to know Him.)

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3 Translation from *Parayana: The Poetic Works of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, verses 3, 4 and 7, pp.244-247.

In His Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam, Arunachala is described repeatedly as shining or as a shining light. “From my knowledgeless early childhood, Arunachala was shining in my mind”. “Only to reveal Your state without speaking, You stood shining as a Hill rising from earth to sky”, “You, the Heart, the light of consciousness, the One Reality, alone exist!” The light of consciousness is the theme of verse 4. It ends on a note of stirring love and devotion. Who but a great rishi could have written that?

Irun-doḷir unai-viḍut taḍut-tidal deivam / iruṭ ṭinai viḷak-keḍut taḍut-tiḍa lēkā / Irun-doḷir unai-yaṛi vuṛut-tiḍark kendṛē / irun-danai madan-doṛum vida-vida vuru-vāi / Irun-doḷir unai-yaṛi gila-renil annōr / iravi-yin aṛi-vaṛu kuru-ḍarē yāvār / Irun-doḷir iran-ḍaṛa enaduḷat toṇd-ṛāi / iṇai-yaṛum aruṇa-mā malai-yenum maṇiye (To search for God ignoring You who stand as Being and shine as Awareness is like looking, lamp in hand, for darkness. In order to reveal Yourself at last as Being and Awareness, You dwell in various forms in all religions. If still there are people who fail to see You whose Being is Awareness, they are no better than the blind who do not know the Sun. O mighty mountain Aruna, peerless Jewel, stand and shine. One without a second, the Self within my heart.)

The much beloved first verse of Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam is exceptionally beautiful and revered by devotees everywhere:

karuṇā-pūrṇa sudhābdhe kabalita-ghanā-visvarūpa kiraṇā’valyā / aruṇācala paramātman-aruṇo bhava citta-kaṇja-suvikāsāya; Aruḷ-ṇiṛai vāna amudak kadālē / Viri-kadi-rāl yāvum vizhuṅ-gum – Aruṇa / Giri-paramān māvē kiḷar-ulappū naṇḍīai / Viri-paridi yāga vilāṅgu (Ocean of Nectar, full of grace, / O Self supreme, O Mount of Light, / Whose spreading rays engulf all things, / Shine as the Sun which makes / The heart-lotus blossom fair:)

The sun also appears in the first verse of the Padikam, a divine mystical poem that flowed from Bhagavan spontaneously rather

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5 Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p.123.
6 Ibid., p.127.
than as a response to requests from devotees. This hymn, like the Aṣṭakam, also composed spontaneously, is charged with profound emotion. Chanting it in the original Tamil simply melts the heart.

Karuṇai-yāl ennai āṇḍanī yenakkun / kāṭchitand aruḷilai yenḍrāl
/Irulṇali ulagil ēṅgiyē padaittiv / uḍal-vidil engati ennām /
Aruṇa-naik kāṇā dallerumō kamalam / aruṇa-nuk karuṇa-nā 
manni / Arul-nani suran-daṅg aruvi-yāyp perugum / aruṇamā 
malai-yenum anbē (You it was, who by your grace claimed me 
as your own. What would be my fate if now, after having done 
this, you would not reveal yourself to me and I, still yearning 
for you, should perish in anguish in the darkness of this world?
Can the lotus blossom unless it sees the sun? And You are the sun 
of suns. Your grace abounding swells and as a river overflows. O Love whose form is the mighty Aruna Hill.)

On the significance of the beacon, Bhagavan wrote:
Ittanuvē nānām enu-madiyai nīttap / Buddhi idayattē porundiyaha nōkkāl / Adduvita māmei ahac-chuḍar-kāṇ gaibhū /
Maddhi-yenum anţā malaic-chuḍar-kāṇ meyyē (To make the 
intellect rid of the sense / ‘I am the body’, and to introspect / By 
fixing it securely in the Heart, / And so perceive the true light of 
the SELF, / The one ‘I-I’, which is the ABSOLUTE, / This the 
significance of witnessing / The Beacon Light of Arunachala, / 
The centre of the earth.)

Verse Five

dehaṁ prāṇam-api indriyāṇy-api calāṁ buddhiṁ ca śūnayā viduḥ 
strī-bāla-andha-jaḍo-pamās-tvah-iti bhrāntā bhṛśam vādināḥ |
māyā-śakti-vilāsa-kalpita mahā-vyāmoha-samhārīne 
tasmaī śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idaṁ śrī daksināmūrtaye

7 Ibid., p.113. 8 Arunachala, Sadhu (Major A.W. Chadwick), The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi, 
Rendered into English Verse, p.9.
dehaṁ: body; prāṇam-api: breath also; indriyāṇy-api: senses also; calāṁ: changing; buddhiṁ: intellect; ca śūnyaṁ: and the void (non-existence); viduḥ: consider; strī bāla andha jāda upamāḥ: women, children, the blind and the dull-witted comparable to; tu: indeed; aham iti: as the Self; bhrāntā: deluded; bhṛśaṁ vādinaḥ: contentious disputants; māyā-śakti-vilāsa-kalpita mahā-vyāmoha-samhāriṇe: (who) destroys the stupendous delusions created by the sport of māyā’s power; tasmai: to Him; śrī guru-mūrtaye; the blessed guru; namaḥ idaṁ: may this obeisance be; śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

Contentious disputants (who) consider the body, breath, senses, changing intellect or the void as the Self (are) deluded indeed and comparable to women, children, the blind, (and) the dull-witted. To Him, the blessed guru Sri Dakshinamurti, (who) destroys the stupendous delusions created by the sport of māyā’s power, may this obeisance be.

Commentary
As in the second verse of Sankara’s *Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti* concerning the creation of the universe, verse five refers to various philosophical disputes. Here, “contentious disputants” are taking positions on the nature of the Self. In his commentary, T.M.P. Mahadevan succinctly describes the pertinent arguments.

Many are the philosophies of the Self. Although they agree that there is the Self, they differ widely over the question, what is the Self. The materialists identify the Self with the physical body. There are some who think that the senses constitute the Self. The vitalists contend that the vital breath is the Self. The subjective idealists resolve the Self into a flux of momentary ideas. The nihilists say that the Self is nothing.

Every one of these views is born of misapprehension, because reflection will reveal that the physical body, etc. cannot be the Self. Whatever is inert, whatever is an object of knowledge, whatever contradicts itself, cannot be the Self which is of the nature of consciousness. Such views, therefore, are engendered by avidyā (nescience). Those who hold such views are compared
to ‘women’, ‘children’, the ‘blind’, and the ‘stupid’. Here the term ‘women’ stands for a type of character which is narrow and possessive – the character that is represented in the Brhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad by Kātyāyanī and not by Maitreyī. It is obvious that such a type of character is to be found among the so-called men too. The word ‘children’ refers to immaturity. The expression ‘blind’ and ‘stupid’ are privative terms. The purpose of the comparison is to teach that the wrong views of the Self are due to delusion.

How is this delusion to be removed? By the grace of the Guru Dakṣiṇāmūrti. It is He that destroys māyā, the power of delusion, which puts up the show-world of plurality, with aspects of which the disputants identify the Self.¹

Regarding “contentious disputants”, Kanakammal points out the depth and severity of their confusion.

Those who contend various things as Ātman are deluded indeed. As true knowledge is eclipsed by delusion in them, they not only assert what they think as right but even proceed to establish it by indulgence in specious arguments as well. Such delusion is hence called “mighty delusion” – māmayakkam. When the delusion of an ordinary jīva itself is hard to overcome, who else can remove the mighty delusion of such learned dissenters?²

The import of this verse clearly recalls the opening two verses of another very beloved hymn by Sankara, namely the Nirvāṇa Ṣaṭkam. Here the refrain is strong and powerful for anyone who chants the verses with conviction and love.

mano-buddhyahaṅkāra-cittāni nāhaṁ / na ca śrottra-jihve
na ca ghrāṇa-netre / na ca vyoma-bhūmir na tejo na vāyuḥ
/ cidānanda-rūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham (I am neither mind, intellect, ego nor field of consciousness; and neither hearing nor taste, and neither smelling nor sight; and neither space nor earth, not light, not air. My nature is the bliss of pure consciousness, I am Siva. I am Śiva.)

¹ Hymns of Sankara, p.16-17.
² Commentary on Anuvāda Nāṁmālai, Volume II, p.205.
na ca prāṇa-sanjño na vai pañca-vāyur / na vā sapta-dhātur
na vā pañca-kośāḥ / na vāk pāṇi-pādaṁ na copasthapāyuḥ /
cidānanda-rūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham (And neither what is called
prāṇa, nor the five vital airs; neither the seven elements, nor
the five sheaths. Not speech, hands or feet, nor the organs of
sex or excretion. My nature is the bliss of pure consciousness.
I am Śiva. I am Siva.)³

This verse also echoes verse 22 of Upadeśa Śāram, so well-known
to devotees everywhere.

vigrahendriya-prāṇa-dhītamaḥ / nāham-ekasat-tajjaḍam hyasat
(As I am pure Existence, I am not / The body nor the senses,
mind nor life, / Nor even ignorance, for all these things / Are
but insentient and so unreal.)⁴

Bhagavan’s attitude towards disputants and endless philosophical
debate in general is stated clearly in verses 3 and 34 in Uḷḷadu
Nārpadu.

... – konnē / Ulagumei-poīt tōṭṭam ulagaṛi-vām anḍrēn-ḍru /
Ulagu-sukam anḍrēn ṭurait-ten – ulagu-viṭṭut / Tannai-yōrn
doṇḍri-raṇḍu tāṇaṭṭra nānaṭṭra / Annilai-yell ārkkum oppām... (Of
what avail to debate whether the world is real or unreal, sentient
or insentient, pleasant or unpleasant? Extinguishing the ego,
transcending the world, realizing the Self – that is the state which
is dear to all, and free from the sense of unity and duality.)

... ōr – ninai vaṟavē / Enḍ-ṛum evark-kum iyai bāi uḷa-poru-ḷai /
Onḍ-ṛum uḷat-tul uṇarndu-nilai – ninḍri-dādu / Uṇḍin ḍurru-
varu-ven ḍron-ḍirai dan-ḍrendre / Chaṇ-ḍai-yiḍal māyaic
chazhak-kozhiga... (Without trying to realize in the heart that
reality which is the true nature of all, and without trying to abide
in it, to engage in disputations as to whether the reality exists
or not, or is real or not, denotes delusion born of ignorance.)⁵

³ Songs of Shiva, a recording with translations by Vyaas Houston, founder of the
American Sanskrit Institute.
⁴ Arunachala, Sadhu (Major A.W. Chadwick), The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi,
Rendered into English Verse, p.16.
⁵ Forty Verses on Reality by Ramana Maharshi, Translation and Commentary by
S.S. Cohen, pp.11 and 60.
And in verse 40 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu*, He again cautions us against wasting time in useless and unproductive arguments, all distractions created by *māyā*. The alliteration in the Tamil verse and its rhythm are quite powerful. Let yourself be carried away by its irresistible pull when chanted.6

...manat-tukku – ottāṅgu / Urvam aruvam uruv-ru-vam mūn-ḍṛām / Uṛu-muṭṭi ennil urai-pañ – uru-vaṁ / Aru-vaṁ uruv-vaṁ-vaṁ āyum ahandai / Uru-vazhidan mukti uṇar... (*It is said that Liberation is with form or without form, or with and without form. Let me tell you that Liberation destroys all the three as well as the ego which distinguishes between them.*)7

Of course, the surrender necessary for dispelling delusion forever is nothing less than bone-melting devotion. Playing the role of the despairing devotee in Śrī *Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇāmālai*, Bhagavan repeatedly pleads to have his illusions permanently removed, especially the deeply-rooted and largely unconscious ‘I am the body idea,’ referred to in verse 75.

Bhau-dika māmuḍal paṭṭraṭ-ṭru nāḷu-mun / Bavisu-kaṇ ḍuṛav-aruḷ Aruṇāchalā (*Let attachment to the physical body end, O Arunachala, and let me see and be forever the splendour of your being.*)8

When the *jīva* loses its identity and merges with the Self, through total and absolute surrender, all illusions are gone. In verse 84, Bhagavan refers to Arunachala’s Grace as magic powder. The range of emotions and the ecstasy of this masterpiece are truly inspiring and absolutely unique in mystical poetry.

Mai-maya nīṭ-taruḷ maiyinā luna-duṇ / Mai-vasa māk-kinai Aruṇāchalā (*Removing the dark blindness of my ignorance, you have with the collyrium of your grace made me truly yours, O Arunachala.*)9

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6 It is also the case in the two invocatory verses of this great poem. In fact, the entire poem, and every verse Bhagavan wrote, is truly divine.
8 *Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p.70.
9 Ibid., p.79.
Verse Six

राहु-ग्रास्तविवाकरेन्द्रुस्तत्तो मायासमाचार्यानात्।
सन्मात्र: करणोपसहरणं योः।भूत्सुपुस: पुमान।।
प्रागाप्वाप्स्मिति प्रावोपसमयं यः प्रत्यभिज्ञायते।
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमुर्तिय नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामुर्तिय।॥

rāhu-grasta divākarendu sadṛśo māyā samācchādanāt
sanmātraḥ karaṇopasaṁ-haranato yo'bhūt-suṣuptaḥ pumān ||
prāg-asvāpsam-iti prabodha-samaye yah pratya-bhijñāyate
tasmai śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idaṁ śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ॥

rāhu-grasta divākara- indu sadrśaḥ: like the sun or moon hidden by Rahu; māyā samācchādanāt: being veiled by māyā; sanmātraḥ: becoming existence alone; karaṇa upasaṁ-haranataḥ: on withdrawing the senses; yah: who; abhūt: enters; suṣuptaḥ: deep sleep; pumān: as jīva; prāg-asvāpsam-iti: “Until now I have slept well”; prabodha-samaye: at the time of awakening; yaḥ: who; pratya-bhijñāyate: recognizes; tasmai: to Him; śrī guru-mūrtaye: the blessed guru; namah idaṁ: may this obeisance be; śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

To Him, the blessed guru Sri Dakshinamurti, as jīva (when the Self is) being veiled by māyā like the sun or moon hidden by Rahu, who enters deep sleep, on withdrawing the senses (and) becoming existence alone, (who declares) at the time of awakening, “Until now I have slept well,” (and) who recognizes (his own true Self), may this obeisance be.

Commentary

T.M.P. Mahadevan’s summary of the philosophical context pertaining to this verse is insightful.

It is not true to say that in deep sleep there is nothing. In that state, the instruments of cognition do not function. Yet, the Self remains as pure existence-consciousness-bliss. It is not proper to build a philosophy, ignoring the evidence provided by only one aspect of experience, viz., waking. Advaita examines experience as a whole in its triple form – waking, dreaming, and
sleep. The evidence of sleep is of special importance, because it reveals a truth which is otherwise unobtainable by us. Sleep is not a state of emptiness. While in waking and dreaming, consciousness is related to a world of objects and images, in sleep it shines as Existence unrelated to anything else. It is also evident that consciousness is not to be regarded as a characteristic of the mind, because in sleep there is no mind, and yet there is consciousness. That there is consciousness in sleep is clear because on waking up we say, ‘I slept happily; I did not know anything.’ Just as consciousness is required for knowing the presence of anything, even so it must be there for knowing the absence of all things. Sleep also shows that the Self which is pure consciousness is not realized as such because of the veil of māyā. This is compared to the solar or lunar eclipse. The comparison with the solar eclipse is particularly significant. Even during the eclipse the sun shines without any change. It is our vision of the sun that is obstructed by the interposition of the moon. So, the Self does not suffer, in truth, by māyā. It is our view that is mutilated and distorted. And it is this mutilated and distorted vision that is removed by the Preceptor Dakshinamurti by His teaching.¹

Bhagavan, using charming metaphors and language that speak to the heart, describes the wonder of deep sleep in Talks.

Just at nightfall the hen clucks and the chicks go and hide themselves under her wings. The hen then goes to roost in the nest with the chicks in her protection. At dawn the chicks come out and so does the hen. The mother here stands for the ego which collects all the thoughts and goes to sleep. At sunrise the rays emerge forth and are collected again at sunset. Similarly, when the ego displays itself, it does so with all its paraphernalia. When it sinks, everything disappears with it.²

He addresses deep sleep in verse 21 of Upadeśa Sāram as well.

¹ Hymns of Sankara, pp.18-19.
² Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk§286.
The Sanskrit word for ‘recognizes’ is ‘pratyā-bhijnayate’. It is charged with meaning here and, in fact, contains the verse’s culmination, which is remembrance of what is, has ever been, and ever will be. Bhagavan illuminates this particular word in Talks:

Pratyabhijnā = Prati + abhijna.

abhijna is direct perception; prati is to be reminded of what was already known.

“This is an elephant” is direct perception.

“This is that elephant” is pratyabhijnā.

In technical works, pratyabhijnā is used for realising the ever-present Reality and recognising it.4

In his dictionary of Indian philosophy, John Grimes gives as one of several possible definitions, “The recognition or awareness that the individual is identical with the Universal.”5

Bhagavan simply yet beautifully states that identity, so profoundly transforming when fully realized, in verse 24 of the Upadeśa Sāram:

īśajīvayor-veṣadhī-bhidā / satsva-bhāvato vastu-kevalam
(In their real nature as Existence both / Creatures and the Creator are the same, / The Unique Principle. In attributes and knowledge only is a difference found.)6

In Verse 23 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟṟpadu He uses the idea of awareness in deep sleep to lead the seeker to self-enquiry. While the bliss of deep sleep is self-evident, the very source of our miseries is not. Earnest and concentrated effort must be made in order to discover the cause, which turns out to be a mere ghost, the ego.

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3 Arunachala, Sadhu (Major A.W. Chadwick), The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Rendered into English Verse, p.15.
5 A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English, p.245.
...madi-yila-dāl / Nā-nenḍṛid dēgam navilā duṛak-kattu / Nā-ninḍṛen ḍāru navil-vadilai – nānonḍṛu - Ezhun-dapin ellām ezhu-minda nāneṅgu / Ezhu-menḍṛu nuṇ-madi-yāl eṇṇa – nazhu-vum (Since it is not sentient, this body does not say ‘I’ [that is, it does not itself have any inherent consciousness of its own existence]. No one says, “In sleep [where the body does not exist] I do not exist.” After an ‘I’ rises [from sleep as ‘I am the body’], everything [all the second and third person objects of the world] rises. When one scrutinizes with a keen mind “Where does this ‘I’ rise?”, it will slip away [being found to be non-existent.])

Some translators of verse six of the Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti add an extra level of meaning by comparing the sleeper waking up from sleep to the seeker waking up from the waking state, a notion Kanakammal drew attention to previously in her paraphrase of the opening verse of the Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti in Tamil. This very moving and heart-felt translation was published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math in Madras.

As the brilliance of the sun or the moon exists even when intercepted by ‘Rahu’ during eclipse, the power of cognition remains suspended from the senses and the mind during sleep. The Purusha or the Self exists as the pure Being unrecognized through Maya’s veiling power. On waking he becomes aware that he himself was asleep earlier. Similarly, the man of realization on waking to the consciousness of the Self (which is pure Being) recognizes it (his previous ignorance) as a past event and an apparent phenomenon. He by whose grace this recognition of the true nature of the Atman comes to me – to that Dakshinamurti, the supreme Being, embodied in the benign and auspicious Guru, I offer my profound salutation.

(To be continued)

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7 Sri Ramanopadesa Noonmalai, Word for Word in English, Meaning by Sadhu Om and Translation by Michael James, pp.52-53.
8 Hymn to Dakshinamurti: Text in Devanagari and Roman scripts, with word for word meaning and English rendering, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1977.
Maha Nirvana Room
The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Four

Sadhu Om
as recorded by Michael James

6th September 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in continuation of the discussion in the previous installment about the ego being only one and not many]: Though it is sometimes said that the ego in dream is different from the ego in waking, what is actually meant is that the body that the ego identifies as itself in each of these two states is a different body. If our body is injured in a dream, when we wake up we find that our waking body is uninjured, but neither of these bodies is ourself, because they are each just a temporary adjunct. However we are what was aware of ourself in dream as ‘I am injured’, and this same we are now aware of ourself as ‘I am not injured’, so though the bodies are different,

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and Guru Vācaka Kōvai. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.
we, the experiencer of both of them, are undoubtedly the same. This experiencing ‘we’ is the ego or mind.

The rising (birth) and subsiding (death) of this ego happens too fast to be cognised by it, and that is why our life in each state of waking or dream seems to be an unbroken series of experiences, just as a movie appearing on a cinema screen seems to be an unbroken series of activities and events because the rate at which each individual picture appears and disappears on the screen is too fast for our eyes to cognise them as separate pictures with a brief gap between each. We can understand this more clearly by considering thus:

Suppose someone were to ask us ‘Do you remember your birth?’ We would reply ‘No’, and then the conversation may continue as follows:

‘Then how do you know you were born at a particular time and in a particular place?’
‘Because my parents told me.’
‘Do you need your parents to tell you that you exist now?’
‘No, I myself know that I am.’
‘Then why must you rely on your parents’ testimony to know that you were born? If the knowledge ‘I was born’ were as clear as the knowledge ‘I am’, would you need anyone else to tell you that you were born?’
‘Though I cannot remember my birth, I know I was born. I need others to tell me when and where I was born, but I don’t need anyone to tell me I was born, because if I wasn’t born I wouldn’t be here now.’
‘How far back in your life can you remember?’
‘My earliest memories may be from my third year or so.’
‘If you were asked the same question in a dream, would you not give the same answer?’
‘Yes, I suppose I would, because when I am dreaming I think I am awake, so I remember the events of my waking life as if they were events that had occurred in that dream life.’
‘So while dreaming you experience yourself as a dream body, and even though you cannot remember the birth of that dream body, you believe that you (that body) were born, don’t you?’
‘Yes, but obviously that was a mistaken belief, because my dream had only lasted for a short while.’
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

‘Now in this present state you say that the dream lasted only a short while, but while dreaming you had memories going back as far as your third year or so, so at that time your dream life seemed to have lasted for so many years. Now you know that your memories in dream deceived you, because what you remembered then about your childhood had never occurred in that dream, yet while dreaming both your memories and all that you experienced in that dream seemed to be true. Based on what you remember your parents telling you, in dream you believed not only that you were born but also that you were born at a particular time and in a particular place, didn’t you? But after leaving that dream you now know that those beliefs were all mistaken, because your dream body was just a mental projection, so how can you be sure that your beliefs about your birth in this state are not equally mistaken? Can you be sure that this body is not likewise just a mental projection? Now you have memories of your childhood and of subsequent years, but can you be sure that any of those events actually happened?’

‘No, I can’t be sure of anything but the present moment.’

This is why Bhagavan wrote in verse 15 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu* that the present is the only one, meaning that the present moment is that only moment that actually exists. The past and the future are just ideas that occur in the present moment, but like all other ideas or thoughts, they can occur only because of the illusion of a continuously passing time. Without such an illusion, nothing would seem to happen, because happenings entail change, and change can seem to occur only in the passing of time.

If time did not seem to pass, nothing could appear or disappear, so what would exist and shine is only what always exists and shines, namely ‘I am’. Everything else appears and disappears, including the ego, so its appearance and disappearance entails the illusion of passing time. In the actual present moment – that is, in the infinitesimally small and ever unchanging space between the moment just past and the immediate future moment – nothing can appear or disappear, so what shines is only ‘I am’, our awareness of our own existence.

Returning to our imaginary conversation, the person questioning us may then ask:
‘Then how can you be sure that you were born or that you will die? In the present moment you exist, so neither your birth nor your death is happening now. Therefore your ideas that you were born and that you will die are both just blind beliefs, are they not?’

‘I cannot deny that they are both beliefs, but it is not clear to me where this is leading.’

‘That will become clear at the end. In the meanwhile, let us consider a bit further about death. You do not remember your birth, but will you at least know your death?’

‘I don’t know, because I haven’t yet died, so I have no experience of dying.’

‘Consider what happens when a dream comes to an end: you leave your dream body, but are you aware of that body’s death? Do you wake up only after it has died? Do you suppose that the people in your dream have now buried or cremated it?’

‘No, of course not. It just disappears and I find myself in this body.’

‘Yes, either you wake up and find yourself in this body or in some other dream body, or you fall asleep and cease to be aware of any body at all. The same will happen when your present dream comes to an end. Either you will fall asleep for a while, or another dream will begin, in which you will find yourself in some other body, from the perspective of which the life of this body will seem to be a dream. You will never be aware of yourself as ‘I am dead’, because all thoughts, including one such as ‘I am dead’, can arise only when you are aware of yourself as a body. In sleep you are not aware of yourself as a body, so you are not aware of any thoughts, whereas in waking and dream you are aware of yourself as a body, and consequently you are aware of thoughts.’

If we consider along these lines, it is clear that we cannot experience either our birth or our death, so why do we fear birth and death? We fear death because we do not want to be separated from this body, since we mistake it to be ourself, but we are separated from it every time we fall asleep, yet we do not fear to fall asleep. We welcome sleep as peaceful respite from all the ceaseless mental activity of waking and dream, and we do not fear it because we believe that we will wake up again as this same body.
Bhagavan often used to say, ‘Do not believe what you do not know’. We believe that we were born and that we will die, but we never experience either our own birth or our own death. All we know for certain is that we exist now, so why should we believe anything else? Birth, death and all other things may seem to exist, but do any of them actually exist? Since the only existence we can be sure of is our own, why should we believe in the existence of anything else? Before we can know whether anything else is real, we must first know the reality of ourself: who am I? Investigating anything else is futile until we have investigated and known what we ourself actually are.

Since we cannot experience either the birth or the death of this body, which is a gross object, how can we experience either the birth (rising or coming into existence) or the death (subsiding or cessation) of this ego or mind, which is the subtle subject?

Until we rise as the ego, we are not aware of anything else, because as Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu*, everything else comes into existence only when the ego comes into existence, and nothing else exists when the ego does not exist. Our real nature is not aware of either the appearance or the disappearance of the ego – in fact it is not aware of the ego at all, because the ego is just a wrong awareness of ourself, whereas our real nature is clear self-awareness undefiled by the appearance of anything else. Therefore what is aware of the ego is only the ego itself.

However, the ego can never be aware of its non-existence, because it must exist in order to be aware of anything. Since it was not aware of itself before it came into existence, it becomes aware of itself only when it comes into existence, but by the time it has become aware of itself it has already come into existence, so it can never be aware of its actually coming into existence. Either it does not exist, in which case it is not aware of itself, or it is aware of itself, in which case it already exists, so it can be aware of the change from being non-existent to being seemingly existent only after that change has taken place. Likewise it can never be aware of its ceasing to exist, because by the time it has ceased to exist it is aware of nothing.

Therefore the ego can never be aware either of its coming into existence or of its ceasing to exist, and this is why we can never
cognise the exact moment when we wake up or the exact moment when we fall asleep. However Bhagavan asks us to try to find out how the ego comes into existence, even though we can never see it actually coming into existence. In order to see when or how it comes into existence, or when or how it ceases to exist, we must attend to it very keenly, and when we look at it carefully enough we will see that no such thing actually exists, because what actually exists is only our own real nature, which is pure self-awareness.

Therefore we should not imagine that if we practise self-attention keenly enough our power of attention will become so sharp and subtle that we will be able to cognise the rising and the subsiding of our ego every fraction of a moment, because if we attend to ourself keenly enough it will not rise at all. That is, if we fix our attention very keenly on ourself, the source from which the ego rises, what will become clear to us is: I alone exist, so no such thing as the ego has ever come into existence.

(To be continued)

This

Upahar

I wish you, love, this night, the simple union;
heart’s ease, and every knot unfolding;
a brimming bowl of sage-light;
the magic staff of stillness in all turnings.

Mother of all, deep darkness, never fear,
nor falling, falling. Love be your abyss,
laughter your glowing wings,
Yourself the only, endless destination.

The crescent moon smiles in obedience;
this unknown moment, time forgets to pass.
An old chant blesses the air.
Now is forever. Love, I wish you This.
Svapna

John Grimes

“We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep.” — W. Shakespeare, The Tempest

Bhagavan Sri Ramana said: “There are different methods of approach to prove the unreality of the universe. The example of the dream (svapna) is one among them.”¹ The world from the perspective of an ordinary human being, acknowledges that there are three states of consciousness or awareness: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Sri Ramana also spoke of a fourth state or pure Consciousness that underlies and permeates these three. “There is only one state, that of consciousness or awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream, and sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will always exist.”²

In the dream state, the following facts are obvious. The individual is there in the dream; the mind is the light of all one perceives; the mind creates the entire experienced dream universe; and whatever one perceives is internal to oneself. As well, a little reflection will reveal that an individual may learn much more from the dream state. The dream state points to the possibility that the waking state may be but a dream. Why? Because while a dream lasts, everything appears real

¹ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk§399.
² Mudaliar, Devaraja, Day by Day with Bhagavan, 11-1-46 Afternoon.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.
enough. But upon waking, one realizes that nothing of the sort really happened even though the dreamer seemingly experienced it as such. A gift of the dreaming state is that it reveals that the world may quite possibly and logically neither be real nor external to oneself and that it just may be the case that nothing ever really happens. The dream state also points to the possibility that the waking state may be but a dream. For instance, last night you may have dreamt that you went to Los Angeles. While the dream lasted, everything seemed real enough. But upon waking, did you really go to Los Angeles? Nothing of the sort really happened even though you experienced it as such. Dreams are taken to be real only so long as the dream lasts.

It is interesting to reflect that in the entire history of philosophy, both East and West, no philosopher has been able to satisfactorily prove that the waking state is ontologically different from the dream state.³ The Chinese sage, Chuang-Tzu, dreamt he was a butterfly and on waking wondered whether he was the man dreaming he was a butterfly, or whether he was a butterfly dreaming it was a man.

So what other things can we learn from the dream state?

Dreams are inscrutable phenomena and dreams can illustrate what the nature of Reality is not: Bhagavan Ramana said, “All that we see is a dream, whether we see it in the dream state or in the waking state. On account of some arbitrary standards about the duration of the experience and so on, we call one experience a dream experience and another waking experience. With reference to Reality, both the experiences are unreal.”⁴

In a dream, note that every dream-object, inert or living, human or demonic, pleasurable or painful, including oneself and anything else in any shape or form, all enjoy exactly the same ontological status. The reality of the most expensive dream diamond is exactly the same as a speck of dream dirt. This aspect of dreams helps to convey some understanding of the state of a Sage. Sri Ramana remarked: “Does a man who sees many individuals in his dream persist in believing

³ In advaita, both the waking state and the dream state are equated ontologically. Both are vyavaharika and neither real nor unreal, maya. As per the waking state no philosopher, east or west has been able to logically prove that one is awake. Logic cannot give certainty, only probability. Proofs belong to the vyavaharika realm and thus can never reach certainty.

them to be real and enquire after them when he wakes up?”5 “When a man dreams, he creates himself (i.e., the ahamkar, the seer) and the surroundings. All of them are later withdrawn into himself.”6 Again Sri Ramana asks if on waking up the dreamer asks if the dream individuals also wakened? “It is ridiculous,” he comments.7

Dreams are said to be a helpful aid to a seeker’s spiritual practices. Sri Ramana remarked, “A dreamer dreams a dream. He sees the dream world with pleasures, pains, etc. But he wakes up and then loses all interest in the dream world. So it is with the waking world also. Just as the dream world, being only a part of yourself and not different from you, ceases to interest you, so also the present world would cease to interest you, if you awake from this waking dream (samsara) and realize that it is a part of yourself and not an objective reality.”8

The dream world is thus very useful but all the dream world can inform us of is that the Reality is ‘not-this’, ‘not-this.’ If the world is but an extended dream, this tells us that it is not real, but it can’t tell us what is Real. We live in this seemingly real world and never doubt its veracity. Even if we learn that this world is a dream, all that this informs us of is that all this is not real. It doesn’t tell us what is real.

The dream analogy has many facets to it. The dream analogy clarifies the rather incredible claim that one is not, as is generally believed, in the universe, but rather the universe is in oneself. Dreams and everything contained within them are within the dreamer. Lord Ramana said: “You dream of finding yourself in another town. Can another town enter your room? Could you have left and gone there?”9 In dreams, the dreamer is the light of that world, the dreamer creates the entire dream universe, experiences various things, and then withdraws them.

The objection that dream objects are not similar to waking objects cannot be supported on the contention that while objects experienced in the waking state are practically efficient, those seen in a dream are not. When confronted with this objection, Bhagavan Ramana replied: “You are not right. There are thirst and hunger in dream also. You might have had your fill and kept over the remaining food for the next

9 Brunton. P., Conscious Immortality, Chapter 13, ‘Avashtatraya’ p.94.
day. Nevertheless you feel hungry in a dream. This food does not help you. Your dream-hunger can be satisfied only by eating dream-food. Dream-wants are satisfied by dream-creations only.”

Objects of the waking state only have efficiency in the waking state. Dream objects are useful in their own way in the dream state. Dream water cannot quench a waking thirst, but it does quench a dream thirst; and it is equally true that waking water cannot quench a dream thirst even though it does quench a waking thirst. Again, listen to Sri Ramana:

“A phenomenon cannot be a reality simply because it serves a purpose or purposes. Take a dream for example. The dream creations are purposeful; they serve the dream-purpose. The dream water quenches dream thirst.”

Thus it cannot be said that waking objects alone are useful, fruitful, or practically efficient. Dream objects work in dreams just as waking objects work in the waking state. Thus, it isn’t the case that an illusory something cannot produce real effects. A dream that causes a nightmare has the effect of waking one up. Thus, the jury is still out on whether the waking state can be proven to be different from the dream state.

Sri Ramana remarked: “Again, consider it from another point of view: You create a dream-body for yourself in the dream and act with that dream-body. The same is falsified in the waking state. At present you think that you are this body and not the dream-body. In your dream this body is falsified by the dream-body. So you see, neither of these bodies is real. Because each of them is true for a time and false at other times. That which is real must be real for ever.”

All activities performed in the dream state are non-volitional. While dreaming, there is no possibility of asking ‘why’ one is dreaming what one is dreaming. Not only is it impossible to ask why there should be dreaming at all, but also why there should be this particular dream. The content of a dream is analyzable only after one ‘wakes’ up. May not this imply the same may hold good for the waking state? Perhaps, both are equally but a play, a sport (lila). There is a Hindu theory that creation is but God’s sport, with neither a reason nor a season.

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A Timeline for Tiruvadavur Adigal Puranam

ROBERT BUTLER

This article is designed to accompany and complement the publication of the Tiruvātavūr Aṭīkaḷ Purāṇam by Kaṭavuḷ Māmuṉivar, an 18th century biography of the Tamil poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar. This edition contains the Tamil text and English translation, accompanied by translations of some of the hymns of the Tiruvācakam in whole or in part. Those who are not familiar with at least the broad outlines of his biography may wish to read a brief summary of the work before reading the article, although this is by no means essential. Such a summary can be found on the Internet at the following link: http://davidgodman.org/tamilt/mkv.shtml.

Most of our readers will be familiar with the Periya Purāṇam, written in the 12th century by Cēkkilār, which gives the histories of 63 Saiva saints, the Nāyaṉmār and, in particular, includes extensive and highly detailed histories of Appar, Sundarar and Jñānasambandhar, giving the biographical background and geographical location for each of their respective compositions. These three constitute three members of the quadrumvirate of great Tamil poet-saints, known simply as the
Nālvar, the Four. However the fourth member of this august company, Māṇikkavācakar, for reasons about which we can only speculate, is not included in Cēkkiḻār’s otherwise rather comprehensive compendium. The direct consequence of this is that, with the notable exception of the hymn Tiruvempāvai which is commonly known to be associated with Tiruvaṉṇāmalai, we lack information both about the circumstances surrounding the composition of Māṇikkavācakar’s hymns and about the geographical location in which they were composed, elements which greatly help in the case of the other three to animate in the reader’s imagination compositions which might otherwise tend to converge to somewhat of a sameness of tone, style and content.

All is not lost, however, as we have in the Tiruvātavūr Aṭikal Purāṇam by Kaṭavuḷ Māmuṉivar, shortly to be published by Sri Ramanasramam, a work which goes a good way to remedying this deficit, providing us with a framework in which to view the hymns of the Tiruvācakam in terms of a spiritual journey rather than as a series of isolated spiritual moments. In the words of G. U. Pope, ‘The Tiruvācakam is a veritable Pilgrim’s Progress, and surely reveals the experience of a devout and godly soul.’ It is doubtful though that Pope would have been able to draw such a parallel, had he not been familiar with the Tiruvātavūr Aṭikal Purāṇam, a detailed synopsis of which he gives in his own edition of the Tiruvācakam. This essay will give a brief account of the saint’s spiritual journey as related in this Purāṇam, showing how that journey is exemplified in the hymns of the Tiruvācakam itself.

Little is known of Māṇikkavācakar’s life other than what is written in the Madurai Sthala Purāṇam, otherwise known as the Tiru Viḷaiyādal Purāṇam, which is an account of the holy exploits, ‘sports’, of Lord Śiva in the Pandiyan Kingdom, written, or possibly translated from a Sanskrit original, in the 15th century by Paraṅjōti Muṉivar. The Tiruvātavūr Aṭikal Purāṇam is an expansion of sections 58-61 of that work, written in the 18th century by Kaṭavuḷ Māmuṉivar, of whom virtually nothing is known. The two works are broadly similar in content but one major difference is that the later work gives a fairly detailed account of the saint’s movements after his initiation, telling us where each hymn was composed and under what circumstances. Whether the author was privy to information that Paraṅjōti Muṉivar
did not possess, or did not choose to communicate, or whether he simply used his creative imagination, based on the numerous biographical clues littered across the 51 hymns, is again a matter for conjecture.

According to the Purāṇam the first hymns were composed after Lord Śiva, in the guise of a Saivite guru, had departed for Mount Kailash, leaving the saint in the company of his disciples, who were actually members of his heavenly retinue in disguise. A number of these hymns are dominated by two principal themes: firstly, a sense of wonder that the burden of egoic existence has been lifted from him and a deep gratitude to the Lord on that account and secondly, a sense of despair and hopelessness now that his guru has abandoned him to a meaningless existence in the world. Pope conjectures that hymn 41 of the Tiruvācakam, arputa-p-pattu – The Miracle Decad, was one of the very first composed by the saint after the departure of his guru. In Pope’s own words:

This poem is his thanksgiving for (what he believes to be) his final deliverance. It will be noted that he dwells with persistent monotony on one theme: he is ‘free’; the time has not yet come for the analysis of his feelings, or for considering his future career. There is here an almost entire absence of mythology – the one idea that he has before him is the loving Guru Whose feet have crowned the suppliant’s head; even Umā, the mother, is not mentioned or alluded to; he utters no invitation to others to join him in praise; his is a gladness with which no stranger can intermeddle.

The following is a translation of verse 3 of this decad:

Strutting vainly upon the worldly stage
many a false part did I play.
But as I wandered raving,
held in the delusive jaws of ‘me and mine’,
and driven thus by mounting former deeds,
that rare Being that e’en the lofty Vedas seek
stood before me, gripped me, a humble devotee,
and morsel after morsel fed to me
the sugar candy of his grace.
Such a miracle as this
I am powerless to contemplate!

In a similar vein, in hymn 34, *uyir uṇṇi-p-pattu – My Soul is Consumed*, he speaks of how the Lord so suffuses his body and soul that he no longer knows his own self, or what is happening to him. Below is a translation of verse two:

Who am I to gain his holy feet?
Entering this fleshly frame
He commingled with my very soul,
never straying from my heart,
as one might place a lowly cur
upon a royal throne.
The Lord whose locks with nectar flow,
who in enduring Peruntuṟai makes his home,
bestowed on me a priceless wealth
which even gods in heaven cannot know.

In sharp contrast a number of the hymns composed at this juncture exemplify the second of these themes, that of abandonment and despair. As the first onrush of delight and ecstasy subsides, the saint begins to despair at the fact that his guru and saviour has departed, leaving him behind. This is the recurring theme of hymn 23, *cettilā-pattu – I did not die!* of which we gave a translation of the first verse:

Melting my soul,
his lotus feet with anklets girt,
entering within, false one as I was,
distilled sweet nectar within my heart.
He’s left me now, but, alas, I did not die,
but here remain, poor wretch,
dead within my heart, eyes open wide.
Master, King, great Sea of grace!
Father whose ruddy form both Māl and Ayan
could not cognise!
Lord Śiva, you who came to dwell
In holy Peruntuṟai’s shrine!
Other examples of verses in this vein are 38, *Tiru vēcaṟavu – Sacred Sadness* and 28, *Vāḻā-p-pattu – No Joy in Life*.

Later, as predicted by his guru, flames appear upon a nearby tank and all the other disciples of the guru plunge into it, resuming their true celestial forms, ‘as The Lord of Tillai appeared in the heavens, riding upon a bull with Parvatī at his side, and surrounded by the heavenly host, who worshipped him and showered down a rain of blossoms.’ Mānikkavācakar however remains behind, having been previously informed in secret by his guru of his destiny to worship Him in his many shrines, to proceed to the Golden Hall in Chidambaram and defeat the Buddhists in debate, and finally to attain divine union with his holy feet. The saint is distraught at first, but then, having perceived a timeless vision of his destiny in a yogic trance, he takes his leave and departs from Peruntuṟai.

The next two hymns we are told that he composed are the *tiru catakam – The Sacred Cento* (composed of ten individual decads), written just before leaving Peruntuṟai, and *nīttal viṇṇappam – Forsake Me Not*, written in Uttara Kōca Maṅkai, both of which are largely characterised by a sense of self-doubt and fear that he has been abandoned by his Lord. Now, as he approaches Cīrkāḻi, the birthplace of Jñānasambandhar, after visiting and worshipping at numerous shrines, we detect a different tone in the hymn he composes there, number 37. *piḍittu pattu – The Decad of the Tenacious Grasp*. We read in verses 372-373 of the *Purāṇam*:

Passing through the entrance gōpuram (tower) of that temple, which rose up proudly like a great mountain, and seeing that it rivalled silver Mount Kailash in its splendour, he bowed down in worship before it. Then, having firmly embraced those holy lotus feet which dance in Tillai’s Golden Hall, he stood in the presence of the Lord, whose glittering locks hang down behind, and graciously sang the decad of the ‘Tenacious Grasp.’ Reflecting to himself, ‘All men, if they worship the Lord in this place, can conquer the implacable hostility of their former actions,’ Vadavurar joyfully remained there for several days.

Anyone who has passed through the towering entrance gōpuram of that temple, which seems to rear up to touch the very heavens,
and entered those truly awe-inspiring precincts, will resonate with these words. In *The Decad of the Tenacious Grasp* we get the clear sense that Māṇikkavācakar sees himself as having merged finally and irrevocably with Śivam, the Self, thus ending the dichotomy between the body-mind and spirit – pure consciousness, which characterises the egoic existence. The transformation of his ‘foul and loathsome fleshly form’ into ‘a lofty, golden shrine,’ spoken of in verse 10 below, is simply a metaphor to illustrate the manner in which his existence has been transformed, revealed as pure consciousness, upon the abolition of the ego, the root of all attachments. In this verse he sings:

My Lord, O flawless gem,  
melting each bone to the core,  
how easily did you make me thine!  
Instilling sweetness in every pore  
of this foul and loathsome fleshly form,  
you made of it a lofty, golden shrine!  
Pure Light that abolished suffering,  
birth and death and all attachments  
that are delusion’s spawn!  
My blissful Lord, I’ve grasped you tight.  
So now in grace departing,  
where is there that you might go?

The final refrain, repeated at the end of every verse, *I’ve grasped you tight. So now in grace departing, where is there that you might go?* can be seen as a powerful evocation of the non-dual state of union with the divine, couched in a playful, almost teasing tone. Who is there to grasp, and whose is there to attempt to evade that grasp, in the non-dual realm of the Self, whose nature is pure consciousness, free of all attributes? Literally there is nowhere for the Lord to go as long as Māṇikkavācakar maintains his ‘grip’, the realisation of his oneness with Him.

His next two compositions, so the *Purāṇam* informs us, were composed in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai: the *Tiruvempāvai – The Maidens’ Song of the Dawning*, inspired by the ritual bathing of the young women of the town in the month of Mārkaḻi, and the *Tiru ammāṉai – the Sacred Game Ammāṉai*, inspired by a game played by women in which, according to one account, they sit in circles, tossing little
balls from one to the other whilst singing a simple song. These two hymns mark a new stage in the saint’s opus, being characterised by a sense of rapture, a pure ecstasy in which the themes of despair, abandonment and self-disparagement that mark many of the earlier hymns are entirely absent.

In *The Decade of the Tenacious Grasp* we feel that his apparent self-doubt and sense of unworthiness have given way to an unshakeable sense of certainty and trust, which blossoms now into a sense of pure joy, which is echoed in a new, more colourful and expansive style of composition. In the *Tiruvempāvai* there are glittering evocations of the girls bathing in the tank and intricate, extended metaphors and similes devoted to Śiva and Parvatī. The *Ammāṉai* has an entire verse devoted to the Puranic story of Siva’s destruction of Dakṣan’s sacrifice and the *Tiruvempāvai*, a verse devoted to one of the Nāyaṉmār, Kāraikāl Ammaiyyār, all delivered in such an easy, flowing style that one might think they were composed in a single breath. We give as an example a translation of one of the *ammāṉai* verses, since the translation of *Tiruvempāvai* is given in full in the book to which this article is an introduction. Here in verse 13 he imagines the girls to be celebrating various aspects of Lord Śiva as they sing and play:

As pendants at our ears sway
as bangles jingle on our arms
as jet-black locks
where beetles hum as nectar flows
tumble down in disarray,
of Him whose form is red,
with holy ash besmeared;
whose home we cannot find or know,
yet who pervades all where’er we go;
who is the Vedas’ Lord,
the true Reality but false
to those who falsely deem him so;
who in Aiyāṟu makes his abode,
we’ll sing, and play *Ammāṉai*.

The *Purāṇam* tells us only of two other locations where hymns were composed prior to the saint’s arrival in Chidambaram. One is
the nīttal viṇṇapam – Forsake Me Not, sung in Uttara Kōca Maṅgai and the other, the tiru-k-kaḷu-kuṇḍra-p-patikam – The Song of the Holy Eagle Mount, sung at the imposing rock-cut hill temple of the same name. Whatever other temples he visited, we must assume that his yāṭrā ended here in Chidambaram, where, we are informed by Kaṭavuḷ Māmuṇivar, the remainder of the hymns were composed.

The more colourful and expansive style mentioned earlier is continued and developed in these hymns. There are more hymns themed on games played by children, such as tiru-t-tōṇōkkam and tiru untiyār; hymns inspired by ritual activites such as pounding gold dust, tiru-porcunṇam, and gathering flowers, tiru-p-pū valli and hymns based on the traditional Akam genre of love poetry, in which the hero, the beloved, is a symbol for Lord Śiva and the young woman who loves him is a symbol for the soul that yearns for Him. These hymns include the tiru-k-kōttumpi – the Holy Dragonfly, tiru-t-tacāṇkam – The Sacred Ten Signs and Aṉṉai-p-pattu – The Mother Decad. Also of this type is hymn 18, kuyiṟ pattu – The Kuyil Decad, which bears the subtitle āttuma irakkam – The Soul’s Yearning. The kuyil is the Indian cuckoo, a glossy, blue-black bird with a crimson iris and which has a distinctive song. Here the heroine (soul), separated from her lover (Śiva) and bereft of any other means to reach him, entreats the kuyil to go to him on her behalf and summon him:

Kuyil of song exceeding sweet,  
should you ask me,  
should you bid me tell  
about our Lord’s twin feet,  
deep they lie  
beyond the seven realms of Hell.  
And should I speak  
about his radiant, jewelled crown,  
its ancient nature dwells  
where words can never reach.  
So summoning the One  
with no beginning, end,  
or attributes at all, I pray you,  
call out to our Lord!
By contrast, hymn 14, the *Tiru Untiyār*, possibly inspired by a girls’ game involving an object like a shuttlecock, which is tossed up into the air to the call of *fly unthii, fly*, is written in a vein of pure joy and exultation, espousing at points a mischievous, even facetious tone. It is subtitled *nāṇa veṟṟi – The Triumph of True Knowledge* and gives a rousing account of some of Lord Śiva’s most famous exploits. The following verses are taken from the account of his destruction, through the agency of the demon Vīrabhadra, of his father-in-law, Dakṣan’s sacrifice, which was designed to subvert his power and in the event also resulted in the suicide of his consort Satī. In verses 7, 9 and 11 the discomfiture of Dakṣan is gleefully portrayed, along with that of Agni, about to consume the sacrificial offering, and Indra, both of whom had unwisely chosen to attend the sacrifice:

Saying, ‘As hot Agni cupped hands to grab it and down it, He lopped them right off, *fly unthii, fly*, the ritual confounded,’ sing *fly unthii, fly*.

Saying, ‘Indra as a kuyil bird twee, flew off and hid up in a tree, *fly unthii, fly*, King of the gods, as he may be!’ *fly unthii, fly*.

Sing how Dakshan’s head with that of a goat He replaced, *fly unthii, fly*, as your bosoms with laughter shake, *fly unthii, fly*.

After some time, the *Puṟāṇam* informs us, Māṇikkavācakar, retired to a place outside the city and made for himself a hut of palm leaves where he remained absorbed in Śiva yoga. Before doing so he composed one last hymn, number 35 in the traditional order, *acca-p-pattu – The Decad of Dread*. Below is a translation of the first verse:

The sleek serpent in anthill found, the false whose words like truth resound, I fear not. But when those I see who – even near the holy feet of Him with trailing matted locks, our Lord whose brow three eyes adorn – do not all save Him abjure,
thinking still some other god
must surely be,
for pity, then, how great
the dread I feel!

The hymn is subtitled āṉantam urutal – The Experience of Bliss, which gives us a clue to what it is exactly that is causing such dread in him. It is not so much fear for the immortal souls of those who have no faith in the Lord, but that his own pure state of transcendental bliss may be contaminated by their contact and that he might lose the beatific state of oneness with the Lord, a fate worse than death itself.

Whilst the saint is thus engaged in yogic contemplation, a Buddhist sage arrives from Sri Lanka, closely followed by the king of his land, intent on refuting in a debate the religion of Lord Śiva and installing the Buddha as the resident deity in the divine Hall of Chidambaram. This tale forms the penultimate chapter of the Purāṇam.

The Brahmins of Chidambaram, fearful of defeat, pray for help to the Lord, who directs them in a dream to enlist the aid of Māṇikkavācakar, who, having previously been advised by the Lord in the form of the guru that such was his destiny, is only too happy to oblige. Arguments are set forth by both parties but the decisive moment arrives when the king of Lanka challenges the saint to validate his claims by restoring speech to his daughter who has been dumb since birth. Māṇikkavācakar proves his point by summoning the girl and having her not only speak but, in doing so, refute all the arguments of the Buddhists in a fluent and a flawless manner. The Purāṇam at this point states, in verse 499:

Like a scholar of great learning and attainment, that young maiden stood her ground and fully answered all the points of debate raised by those Buddhists, who had failed to grasp the nature of worldly attachment. Greatly delighted by this, the true hearted Vādavūrar, taking this discourse as his subject matter, composed the Holy Cāḻal in which the verses are fitted to a lively female game.

The hymn again is modelled on the Akam genre of love poetry. In this the poet imagines that the heroine (the soul) is parrying in the second part of each verse some rather disparaging remark that her
companion or maid is making about the seemingly eccentric and bizarre behaviour of her beloved (Lord Śiva) in the first part. (In terms of the Akam genre the maid’s true motive would probably be to encourage her mistress’s affection by goading her to rush to his defence in this manner.) In the following translation of verse 6, the heroine’s reply is in italics:

Unknowable to Māl and Brahmā both,
He towering up in fiery form did go;
reached down from earth to realms of Hell
and up to touch the universe’s shell.
Why, my friend, should this be so?

*Down from earth to realms of Hell
and up to touch the universe’s shell,
had He not towering gone, behold,
the Two could ne’er evade the hold
of self-conceit that from their anger welled.*

Cāḻalō!

The Cāḻal, as stated in the verse quoted above, is, or was, a girls’ game, in which a member of one group replies to an objection raised by another group. (The word cāḻal is a ritual refrain whose origin and meaning is not known.) As such it would seem to sit better with the series of hymns on a similar theme sung earlier in Chidambaram rather than in the setting of a theological debate. The fact that the author of the Purāṇam does not claim the dialogue to be an actual record of the exchanges between the Buddhists and the king’s daughter, but only a poetical representation of them, lends weight to this idea. At any event the king is convinced by this display of the power of Lord Śiva’s grace and he and his Buddhist retinue all abjure their former religion and embrace the Saivite faith.

At this point we are approaching the final chapter of the saint’s life and our ‘timeline’ for the Tiruvācakam is drawing to a close, with only six hymns remaining to be accounted for. As the reader may have noticed, the traditional ordering of the hymns rarely fits the timeline we have mapped out in this article, but in the case of four of these last six hymns, there seems to be a clear recognition that they constitute some of the last recorded utterances of Māṇikkavācakar, since they occupy
four of the last six positions in that traditional ordering, including the final position, hymn 51.¹

These hymns are, in the order as given in the text, hymn 49, *Tiru-p-pañcayätifice – The Marshalling of the Sacred Host*. hymn 46, *Tiru-p-pañcacél uczci – The Sacred March*, hymn 51, *Accō-p-pañcaükam – The Wonder of Salvation* and hymn 45, *Yāttirai-p-pañcattu – The Pilgrim Song*. As their titles suggest these hymns convey a sense of exhilaration, a sense that victory over the world’s corruption and final union with Lord Śiva are at last finally assured. The following is a translation of verse 4 of *The Pilgrim Song*. The term Bhuyāṅgaṅ (from the Sanskrit *bhujāṅga – serpent*), which occurs in every verse, is an epithet for Lord Śiva as one adorned with serpents:

> You all who are his servants meet
> put aside your worldly sport;
> taking shelter at his perfumed feet,
> cleave closely to that divine thought.
> Banishing far away
> the corrupt body’s thrall,
> Bhuyāṅgaṅ, He with snakes
> and holy ash adorned,
> shall us in Śivaloka’s realm install,
> and keep us safe
> beneath those flowery feet.

*The Marshalling of the Sacred Host* is composed with great élan in a rousing style which reminds us of the old gospel song, *When the Saints Go Marching In*. A translation of verse one is given here:

> Eyes that glimpse his holy feet with joy shall glow,
> shall it not be?
> The lure of life midst maidens’ charms shall end for me,
> shall it not be?

¹ The remaining two hymns are the only ones not mentioned in the *Purāṇam*. They are hymns 43, *tiru vāṛttai – The Sacred Word* and 44, *enna-p-pañcaükam – Devout thoughts*. The former is a paean of praise to Śiva in Peruntuṟai and the latter a lament upon the saint’s separation from his Master and his disciples. It seems appropriate therefore that these two hymns be considered amongst those composed in Peruntuṟai.
The rounds of birth in many a world I’ll cease to know, 

shall it not be?

Twin lotus feet unknown to Māl himself we’ll venerate, 

shall it not be?

To songs, whose tunes delight, it shall be our wont to dancing go, 

shall it not be?

The marshalled hosts of Pāṇḍi’s Lord in song shall we celebrate, 

shall it not be?

A change, delighting gods above, within our lives shall come to pass, 

shall it not be?

When the Fisherman with net divine comes manifest for us to see!

At this point the timeline for the Tīrvācakam ends and, with the saint dwelling in yogic contemplation in his palm leaf hut outside the city walls, the scene is set for Lord Śiva’s final intervention. He has appeared three times previously, as a Saivite guru, an Aryan horse trader and a day labourer. He now makes his final appearance as a venerable Brahmin, who records the saint’s works from his own dictation and thus sets in train the events which lead to Māṇikkavācakar’s final merger with Śivam, the Absolute. When the citizens of Chidambaram beg the saint to reveal to them the true meaning of the Tamil works written down in the hand of the Lord himself, in the words of the Purāṇam, v. 538:

Pointing with his hand even as his body vanished, and saying, ‘He is the Reality, the one who dwells in Tillai, girt by rich fields, and groves of areca trees,’ Vādavūrar disappeared from view. Thus it was that the Lord who wears as an ornament a great serpent with its expanded hood, showed his true love for his devotee, and took him to himself, even as milk mixes with water.
Once when Bhagavan and bhakthas went round the hill, the bhakthas, on seeing a number of gourds [pey peerkkangkai] at a place on the way, asked Bhagavan if they could be eaten. Bhagavan replied, “These should not be cooked and eaten as they are. But if the seeds in them are boiled 7 or 8 times in water, the water thrown out and then sundal [a crunchy dahl] is made out of them and finally fried a little with oil, mustard, chillies, they will be good.” Thereupon 2 or 3 bhakthas collected some of these gourds, brought them to the ashram and prepared sundal that morning. But they boiled the seeds only 2 or 3 times. All of us ate. I sampled it and as I did not like it I took no more. The others ate and began vomiting and purging and lay unconscious. Bhagavan asked me if I ate it and I told him I simply sampled it. Then he went up the hill, brought a few herbs, ground them in a stone mortar and gave a ball of the stuff to each of the patients.

All recovered. Bhagavan remarked, “It was because the seeds were boiled only twice or thrice and not 7 or 8 times this trouble ensued.” Once when I visited Bhagavan, I found he was kept on a diet of rice and pepper water made of green gram and the water used to wash rice, with a few drops of lemon in it in the place of buttermilk, by a bhaktha
The Sarvadhakari mentioned in these episodes is not Niranjanananda Swami who became Sarvadhakari in ca.1933. I saw this man sending away all things brought by bhakthas for Bhagavan, saying Bhagavan was on diet. I had brought with me a few hill plantains for Bhagavan. So I with disappointment in my voice asked Bhagavan, “What am I to do?” He said, “You serve them as usual.” When I served the fruits in the leaf plates to all, that Sarvadhikari rebuked me, “What is this? You have come and spoiled the treatment by special diet?” Thereupon Bhagavan asked, “What is my ailment and what is this special diet for?” A dear follower of Bhagavan from Madras thereupon asked Bhagavan, “For how much money has this man bought you Bhagavan?” Bhagavan replied laughing, “For Rs.5,000.” After a little while Bhagavan added, “A person will be here till what has to be done by him is done. Afterwards he will not be here.” In a week’s time after this that Sarvadhikari left the ashram under the following circumstances. Some bhakthas joined and drove him out. Bhagavan said laughingly, “A person will come to see me. Next day he will stand at a distance from Bhagavan and have darshan. Next day he will draw nearer; nearer still on the succeeding days. Then he will take a stick in his hand and direct the visitors, “You must go this side, not that side,” and then he will call himself Sarvadhikari.”

On one occasion I saw a bhaktha staying with Bhagavan and while he stayed he sang and danced in ecstasy and then departed. After he left, Bhagavan said, “He will come here and do all this, singing and dancing. When he leaves he will take back the bundle (of his cares or sins, etc.) which he laid aside.”

Once a bhaktha came to Bhagavan and after having read Bhagavan’s books for two days, at the meal time when Bhagavan was about to sit for his meals, he ran forward to embrace Bhagavan crying out, “Oh, Subramania!” Those nearby prevented him from going to Bhagavan. Bhagavan stared at these people and the stare seemed to say, ‘You must learn humility.’

One day a bhaktha, after singing Tiruppugazh for a long time before Bhagavan, came and told me that when he came for Bhagavan’s

1 The Sarvadhakari mentioned in these episodes is not Niranjanananda Swami who became Sarvadhakari in ca.1933.
darshan, Bhagavan appeared to him like Palani Andhavar with a spear (vel) in his hand. I said, “Bhagavan is to each devotee the God that devotee worships.”

Once when I went to Bhagavan the following occurred. It seems a Sarvadhikari, a former manager of the Ashram, took some letters of introduction to chettis [chettiars] of Devakottai parts, from an influential gentleman, with the object of collecting funds to raise a temple over Bhagavan’s mother’s Samadhi.

When the Sarvadhikari was taking his food, prior to his departure on this mission, his bag containing among other things, the above letters of introduction, was entrusted to the influential gentleman who gave the letters. In the meantime, this gentleman then received a note from a devotee of Tiruvannamalai that Bhagavan was not in favour of the proposed temple. Thereupon he took back from the bag the letters he had given. When, after his food, the Sarvadhikari came and took his bag and was about to start, he discovered the letters were missing. The gentleman thereupon showed the Sarvadhikari the note he had received and said he took back his letters as he did not like to do anything which Bhagavan did not like, and that he would have no objection to give such letters again provided he was shown a letter from Bhagavan approving the proposed temple.

Thereupon the Sarvadhikari wrote to Bhagavan requesting such a letter. Bhagavan showed me that letter and said, “Some bhakthas have asked me to write such a letter!” Thereupon I replied, “We came here to have some peace, away from the cares of the household in our families. What is this? I find there is no peace even here.”

Bhagavan laughed and told me the following story: “There was a saint called Swaroopanandar. He went to a neighbouring village with his disciples. In the morning, when his disciples went to the river for a bath, they met the Brahmins of the village who had also come there to bathe and boasted before them that their master was one who had the strength of a thousand elephants. Those villagers were naturally amazed at the statement, laughed in contempt and disbelief and, after finishing their bath, accompanied the disciples to have a look at their master. Reaching the place of Swaroopanandar, they sat before him. They continued to sit like that till the evening without even going
for their food or their sandhya worship [evening]. Late in the evening when Swaroopanandar asked them why they were sitting there still, they [woke up and] prostrated before him and said, “We came here to see if it was true, as your disciples said, that you have the strength of a 1000 elephants. We have found that you have the strength of a crore elephants, for you have controlled all our minds!”

Thereupon I said, “Bhagavan is all powerful. There is nothing which he cannot bring about by his mere willing.” To that Bhagavan replied, “Jnanis are of two kinds, Siddha and Suddha. The first will have siddhis or miraculous powers [they use] consciously, i.e. they will be aware of their siddhis. In the case of the second also, siddhis will take place, but they will not be aware of them.”

One day when Bhagavan and I were talking at Skandasramam, Bhagavan asked me, “Do you remember that once, when we were playing as urchins, I made water on the image of Karuppanna Swami and you threatened you would report the same to my father and I requested you not to do so, lest my father beat me.” I replied, “I remember it all very well. You are an Avatar. Karuppanna Swami was surely as pleased as if he was being bathed with Ganges water.”

One day I asked Bhagavan, “How is it that I find your bhakthas, instead of becoming less and less possessed of the ego-sense as the result of their contact with you, seem to be even more full of the ego-sense?” Bhagavan replied, “What is inside must come out. Suppose you put water in a pot on the fire. As the heat increases, the water must bubble, boil over and evaporate.” I gathered [from this] that as we go on visiting Bhagavan the ego comes out and finally disappears.

Once when I came to Bhagavan from Madurai, Bhagavan told me, “Till now I was sitting on the floor. They have sent for a rosewood cot from Madras and they are saying I must sit on it. Why should I not sit like the rest on the floor? I should not be doing anything which others don’t do. I am very happy under the shade of a tree or on a heap of rubbish.” “I am in a jail here with these police without uniform guarding me,” Bhagavan used to say frequently. I told Bhagavan, “We are ........ The manuscript breaks off at this point.
According to quantum theory, the quantum vacuum contains neither matter nor energy, but it does contain fluctuations, transitions between ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ in which potential existence can be transformed into real existence by the addition of energy. (Energy and matter are equivalent, since all matter ultimately consists of packets of energy). Thus, the vacuum’s totally empty space is actually a seething turmoil of creation and annihilation, which to the ordinary world appears calm because the scale of fluctuations in the vacuum is tiny and the fluctuations tend to cancel each other out. Hindu philosophy states, in a similar vein, srṣṭi, sthiti and pralaya are cyclic and metaphorically, time is a curvature, not linear. 

A solid scientific foundation supports the basic insight of quantum field theory that the primary elements of reality are the underlying fields, which permeate all space and time. It is reasonable to assume that all these fields come from a common source. This is indicated in the very first verse of Isavasya Upanishad, which states that all things, moving and non-moving are permeated by the cosmic consciousness.

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine Ramanodhayam, dedicated to Bhagavan.
Recent researches into the isolating of the so-called ‘God-particle’ at the CERN Laboratories are steps in this direction.

The quantum vacuum is different from the classical vacuum because it contains the fluctuations even after you have turned the field down to zero. Quantum theory asserts that a vacuum, even the most perfect vacuum devoid of any matter, is not really empty. Rather the quantum vacuum can be depicted as a sea of continuously appearing and disappearing (pairs of) particles that manifest themselves in an apparent jostling of particles that is quite distinct from their thermal motions. These particles are ‘virtual’, as opposed to real, particles. At any given instant, the vacuum is full of such virtual pairs, which leave their signature behind, by affecting the energy levels of atoms.

The vacuum state or the quantum vacuum is by no means a ‘simple empty space’: it is a mistake to think of an physical vacuum as an absolutely empty void. According to quantum mechanics, the vacuum state is not truly empty but instead contains fleeting electromagnetic waves and particles that pop into and out of existence.

‘Sunya’ is the Indic term that bridges the spiritual Brahman and the materialist universe. Mathematically it was supposedly used by Aryabhata to denote the numerical zero. It is useful to note that Aryabhata never used numerical forms in his works but used words. ‘Sunya’ is something which cannot be defined yet it cannot be denied. It is like Empty Space. Its emptiness cannot be determined and its existence cannot be questioned. It is like Infinite Time. Its finiteness cannot be calculated and its presence cannot be investigated. Together they form ‘Sunya’. Sunya and Quantum Theory are powerful ideas that seek to comprehend the Universe and unravel the mysteries of science and spirituality.

David Bohm described all phenomena in terms of order. A simple example of order is the description of a straight line as an ordered array of short line segments of equal length laid end to end, with all of the successive segments having the same orientation and difference in position. According to John Stewart Bell’s theorem on the quantum field of the universe, the apparently separate parts could ultimately be unified at a deep and fundamental level. Bohm asserts that the most fundamental level is an ‘unbroken wholeness’ which he described
as ‘that which is’. Indian Rishis called it ‘TAT’ and the Buddhists ‘Tathatha’. This is also posited by Gary Zukav in *The Dancing Wu li Masters*, where he states that there already exists an instrument of thought based upon an ‘unbroken wholeness’. There exist a number of sophisticated philosophies distilled from 1000 years of practice and introspection whose whole purpose has been to sharpen the instrument of thought. The movement of self-realisation of the yogis, through this process is similar to a ‘quantum jump’ by the quantum physicists.

Indic scriptures begin with the notion of ‘atman’ and take the approach of quantum physics to comprehend the universe. However, the Indic scriptures boldly postulate that the Ultimate or the Supreme ‘Brahman’ is the Unchanging Reality amidst and beyond the world and that it cannot be exactly defined. Brahman is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘brh’ which means ‘to grow’, and connotes ‘immensity’. Brahman is the indescribable, inexhaustible, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, original, first, eternal, both transcendent and immanent, absolute infinite existence, and the ultimate principle that is without a beginning, without an end, that is hidden in all and that is the cause, source, material and effect of all creation known, unknown and yet to happen in the entire universe, as eloquently described in the Upanishads.

Ancient India’s gift to the world is the concept of zero. This was developed from the ‘sunya’ or ‘nil’. This numeral was used in computation and it was indicated by a dot. The first Indians to evolve the concept of zero appear to be Panini, the great grammarian, and Pingala Brahmagupta who, in his *Brahma-Sphuta Siddhanta*, mentions the operations of zero. The concept of zero in mathematics opened up a new era of negative numbers, a concept unknown to western thinkers at the time. The representation of ‘sunya’ or zero by ‘0’ made the representation of high value numbers with limited characters and calculations very simple. Indian mathematicians, ‘the heroes behind the zero’, had a clear conception of abstract numbers as distinct from the numerical quantity of objects or spatial extension thus taking mathematics to a different plane.

Erwin Schrödinger, the renowned quantum physicist, considered the complex number as an illustration. The concrete aspect is represented in a complex number by a real number and the indeterminate portion of
the complex number ‘z’ is written as \( z = a + ib \) where ‘a’ is the real part and ‘b’ is the imaginary part. ‘Z’ is just one variable but it carries with it two concepts simultaneously, the real ‘a’ and imaginary ‘b’. This is what Schrödinger used to integrate the duality of quantum mechanics. Schrödinger a great admirer of the Upanishads has written in his book Mind and Matter, “The reason why the over-sentient, percipient and thinking ego is met nowhere within our scientific world-picture can easily be indicated in words because it is itself the world picture...... There is obviously only one alternative, namely the unification of mind and consciousness. Their multiplicity is only apparent in truth. This is the doctrine of the Upanishads.”

Consciousness, the window through which we eventually connect scientific knowledge, is an integral part of the universal reality. “The principal argument is that thought process and consciousness are the primary concepts, that our knowledge of our external world is the content of our consciousness and that consciousness, therefore, cannot be denied,” as observed by Eugene Wigner. Again, he says, “It will remain remarkable in whatever way our future concepts may develop – that the very study of the external world led to the conclusion that the content of consciousness is an ultimate reality.”

Roger Penrose adds, “This is only the phenomenon of consciousness that can conjure a putative theoretical universe into actual existence.” Again in his emphatic words, “A world-view which does not profoundly come to terms with the problem of conscious minds, can have no serious pretension of completeness. Consciousness is part of our universe, so any physical theory, which makes no proper place for it, falls fundamentally short of providing a genuine description of the world.”

The ‘nothing’ part of the vacuum state as a theoretical object is that the average value of a series of measurements of the field will be zero. The ‘something’ part of the vacuum state is that the value of any single measurement will in general not be zero. When we cannot

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1 Schrödinger, E., Mind and Matter, see Chapter 4, ‘The Oneness of Mind’.
predict single measurement results and how they will vary over time, we often find that we can predict average values and how the average values will vary over time.

If we take ‘nothing’ to be the same as ‘zero’, ‘something’ to be the same as ‘not-zero’, the vacuum state is both ‘nothing’ and ‘something’.

The famous Atharvana Veda Sukta, “Antha Poornah Bahi Poornah Poornah Kumbha Ivarmbare, Antah Sunyah Bahir Sunyah Sunyah Kumbha Ivambare,” brings to focus the concept that Sunya and Poorna are really identical. The Buddhist philosophy, especially that of the Madhyamika, places great emphasis on the concept of Sunyata. According to Madhyamika Buddhism, there is no reality or non-reality. All is sunya, void, empty and all realities are disclaimed. Thus ‘whatever is’, is not describable by any concept. Being devoid of any phenomenal characteristics ‘void’ or ‘sunya’ is the real nature of things. Here Reality lies in the middle (madhyama) and not in any extremes of realism or idealism. Acharya Nagarjuna rejected the alternative standpoint of ‘Is’ and its conjunction and disjunction. Significantly, the Saivite Upa-agama, Devikalottaram verse 26 describes the efficacy of destroying all assumptions and latencies with the weapon of ‘sunya bhavana’ ‘or contemplation of the ‘void’; verse 42 says that those who are established in the ‘Sarva Sunya Padam’ will escape the cycle of birth and death.

Dr. George Gheverghese Joseph, refers in The Crest of the Peacock; Non-European Roots of Mathematics to the Buddhist doctrine of ‘emptiness’ or ‘sunyata’ that may possibly have given rise to the zero digit. The zero digit is widely believed to have arisen on the subcontinent somewhere between 200 BCE and 500 CE.

Whereas all other signs refer to concrete presence or aspects of duality, zero may be said to act as a tangible reference to the intangible or the non-dual realm. In that sense zero acts as a ‘gateway’ between the dual and non-dual, and may be seen as a ‘vestigial birthmark’ of the ineffable – the raison d’être of India’s Vedic tradition, which eventually gave rise via the versatile ‘sunya/purna’ concept to fruitful applications in various fields including religion, philosophy, literature, art, and eventually mathematics. It is seldom explicitly recognised that the present-day world of science and technology and all it has wrought would simply not have been possible, if, for example, mathematics in
the West had remained hobbled, due to the doctrinal resistance to the introduction of the Hindu numerals. It remained fierce for centuries, based on the deep-seated Greek and later Christian aversion to the concept of ‘emptiness’ – literally seen as the domain of the devil. The unwieldy Roman or Greek numerals were only displaced by the Hindu-Arabic numerals in the Renaissance.

In its empirical study of ‘emptiness’ (i.e. the quantum vacuum), modern physics arrives at a comparable world view to that of the ancients in India, who studied emptiness intuitively. But whereas the West adopted the number zero only functionally, for its practical utility, its deeper meaning has as yet not been fully grasped. For example, the ‘0-based’ philosophy ‘Sunyata,’ or the neologist ‘nonism,’ is therefore still missing in the West, where only monism, dualism and pluralism are considered, consequently trapping quantum physics in an ontological quandary, so that it is unable to comprehend, as its laboratory experiments and indeed quantum theory itself indicates, that subatomic phenomena arise and decay within a vacuum presumed to be empty.

Arthur Eddington emphatically declared, “The Universe is of the nature of a thought or sensation in a Universal Mind… to put the conclusion crudely, the stuff of the world is mind-stuff. As is often the way with the crude statement, I shall have to explain that by ‘Mind’ I do not here exactly mean mind and by ‘Stuff’ I do not at all mean stuff. Still this is about as near as we can get to the idea in a simple phrase. The mind-stuff of the world is, of course something more general than our conscious minds; but we may think of its nature as not altogether foreign to feelings in our consciousness… Having granted this, the mental activity of the part of the world constituting ourselves occasions no surprise.”  

As in Immanuel Kant’s ontology, there is the world of appearances and that of the thing-in-itself. All our understanding is of the appearance of things, not of the real things. Kant called the thing-in-itself noumenon; this denotes mind-like object.

The theory of evolution of the French palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, shares with quantum physics the view that reality is wholeness and that the elements of consciousness are active at all

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levels of reality. He posits that matter and consciousness are not ‘two substances’, not ‘two different modes of existence’, but two aspects of the same cosmic stuff. 7

“Before, on this planet, the physical-chemical conditions allowed the birth of organic life, the universe was either not yet anything in itself, or it had already formed a nebula of consciousness.”8 If the singular point of convergence of matter, biological evolution, has revealed itself as an “expansion of consciousness.”9 And, “Then it can be understood only as that point in which the universe, having reached the limits of centralization, meets another, even more unfathomable centre – a centre that exists out of itself… And it is at this point… that the question of god emerges for the science of evolution. God as a driving force, collection point and guarantor.”10

The development of quantum physics of the relation between the concepts of Sunya and the ‘Self ’or Consciousness, is insufficient to explain comprehensively the ‘mental’ or ‘thought’ processes, which are extensions of ‘consciousness’ that is present in all forms of biological life. It should be possible to overcome the deficiency by the introduction of the cognitive systems in the Vedic traditions. Sunyata as a concept can be explored further to bridge these dialectics and knowledge systems.

In conclusion, we note the words of Professor John Wheeler: “Quantum mechanics has led us to take seriously and explore… [the idea]...that the observer is as essential to the creation of the universe as the universe is to the creation of the observer.”11 This is a beautiful echo of an oft-quoted observation of the renowned Indian teacher, J. Krishnamurti. If awareness is an inseparable aspect of the all-pervading quantum fields or their common source, then awareness should permeate all space and time in the universe. This has to be explored in further research.

10 Ibid, p172.
In December 1989 I traveled for the first time to India. As I was deeply touched by the Advaita teaching of my teacher Alexander Smit and his teacher Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, I was eager to know more about its background. Everything Nisargadatta told about himself and his Guru Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj in *I Am That* felt as a great example. To me, these descriptions were the most beautiful I knew about the teacher-disciple relationship. That’s why I wanted to taste the atmosphere of what is still left of this tradition, this *guru-paramparā*, or guru lineage. ‘Inchageri tradition’¹ it was called, after a small village in northern Karnataka.

¹ In most reports on the Inchageri tradition it is mentioned that this is a *Nav Nath* tradition (‘the Nine Masters’). How important this is in itself, I still have noticed increasingly that this element can distract quickly, and could lead to conclusions that have nothing to do with the Inchageri lineage that is being discussed here. The Nav Nath traditions are so widespread and of such different character that it gave me a feeling of ‘too much’ to go into it. If someone is interested in details (cont.)
Inchageri. That’s where I wanted to go, that became clear to me. After traveling by airplane and train and staying a night in a hotel in Sholapur in southern Maharashtra, I arrived in the town of Bijapur, which is close to Inchageri. Luckily I had received some information about someone in Bijapur who belonged to the tradition and had connections with others in the neighborhood of the town. Through him I first arrived in Kannur, a spot in the middle of no man’s land. Here Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj, another disciple of Siddharameshwar, had founded a math (which in the West is usually called āshram): the Shanti Kuteer. Right on arrival it appeared how extraordinary the āshram looked: it was almost completely covered by mural paintings.

Also inside this turned out to be the case. Several paintings of Siddharameshwar were on the walls. He is the one to whom this āshram is dedicated. He is the Sad-Guru, despite the presence of the living Guru, Ganapatrao. One of the images of Siddharameshwar is flanked by two great Advaita teachers: Ramana Maharshi and Shankara, the eighth-century founder of Advaita Vedanta.

One other painting, reproduced in this article, shows the lineage—the two circles show what it’s all about. The lower circle is radiating from Siddharameshwar (1888-1936), and his spiritual lineage is shown in the circle above. Right above him, painted the same size, is his teacher Bhausaheb Maharaj (1843-1914). Above right is Bhausaheb’s teacher, Nimbari Maharaj (1790-1885), and on the left at the top you can see the supposed appearance of a certain Muppina Muni, who initiated Nimbari. The six figures grouped to the right and left around it were disciples of Bhausaheb Maharaj, so co-disciples about the Nav Nath tradition in Maharashtra, is the Introduction by Shankar Mokashi-Punekar to Shri Purohit Swami’s translation of Avadhoota Gita. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979; p.1-73.

For a photograph of Ganapatrao Maharaj, see Catherine Boucher’s ‘The Navnath Sampradaya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’, Part Five, Mountain Path, October 2015; Vol. 52, No. 4; p. 53.

Bhausaheb was a contemporary of Ramakrishna, 1836-1886, and Shirdi Sai Baba, ± 1835-1918. He was initiated by Nimbari Maharaj in 1857.
(guru-bandhus) of Siddharameshwar. I know the name of only three of them. First, top left Girimalleshwar Maharaj; he is the one who built a temple in Inchageri for his teacher Bhausaheb. Bottom left, only partially visible, is Amburao Maharaj (1856-1933), who played a major role after the death of Bhausaheb in 1914 by continuing the Inchageri tradition when the other co-disciples were young. At the bottom right, unfortunately a bit sketchy because of the mirrored light, you can see one of those co-disciples: Gurudev Ranade (1886-1957), who is also known in the academic West, as Professor R. D. Ranade. He helped the West to become acquainted with the great Marathi teachers and poets such as Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Ramdas.\(^4\)

Let me first say a little bit more about Siddharameshwar’s life. He was born in August 1888, in a village called Pathri (in the Sholapur district of the Bombay Presidency).\(^5\) Around the age of eighteen he marries, and he starts living in Bijapur. In 1906 he is initiated by Bhausaheb Maharaj, who had established his maṭh in Inchageri in 1903 (before that it had been in his hometown Umadi). In 1914 Bhausaheb dies. Touched by the loss of his Guru, Siddharameshwar leaves his work at a cotton company, and wanders around, almost without food.

Around the year 1919 he starts an extreme period of meditating only, which will last nine months. Bhausaheb had transmitted a path that focused solely on nāma mantra, which means constant meditating on the name of God. Siddharameshwar realises at this time that this is not sufficient for him. “Okay! Can one not go beyond that?” he

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\(^5\) Pathri: this is 12 miles west of Sholapur. In those days Maharashtra and Karnataka had not been formed; though the language border between Marathi and Kannada-speaking people was already here in this area, administratively it was all part of the Bombay Presidency of British India. Siddharameshwar spoke both Marathi and Kannada fluently. Before the time of Siddharameshwar the Inchageri tradition was a Kannada-speaking tradition. Due to the fact that he originated from the district of Sholapur, and so often had to stay in Mumbai, the tradition has become Marathi-speaking as well. Moreover, he could teach the many Gujarati-speaking disciples fluently in Gujarati.
asks his brother disciples, who unfortunately cannot sympathise with him in this. In his long, secluded sitting he finds his own way, by realising immediacy – he realises what is beyond (and prior to) meditation. He realises the heart of the matter: Ultimate or Final Reality (Paramārtha – which will later also be called Vijñāna by him, as a term for ‘Beyond Knowledge’).

What he discovers has sometimes been called ‘the way of the bird’, as opposed to ‘the way of the ant’. He discovers within himself the direct path. You can also say that he discovers a ‘holy sequence’. Although his Guru Bhausaheb had stressed that desirelessness (vairāgya) and devotion (bhakti) had to come first, and only then knowledge (jñāna) could emerge, Siddharameshwar stresses that it should be the other way around: first we need knowledge and insight, and then seek desirelessness and devotion. So his teaching is really different from that of his Guru, though he remains totally devoted to him and carries his teacher’s portrait always with him for the rest of his life. This is what in my eyes makes Siddharameshwar so special, even now: the beautiful combination of devotion to your teacher and yet also a kind of ‘piercing’ this – so that a complete confidence in yourself remains with a true ‘own’ way of expression.

Through a co-disciple who works at the civil court in Bagewadi, Siddharameshwar starts at a certain moment working at a solicitor’s office in that place. For his work he visits Bombay in 1920. There he meets the solicitor Vakharia, who becomes his disciple. From the descriptions of the life he leads, it is often unclear what exactly is his work; sometimes the term ‘accountant’ is used. For his work he has to attend court trials and also has to travel – though in his biography it seems that the traveling between the places where he is lecturing, is not for work, but entirely for spiritual instruction. Certainly Vakharia gives him a lot of support, so he is able to travel and to spread his teachings in the whole area.

He always stays one or two months in one of the places (Bombay, Sholapur, Inchageri, Bijapur and Bagewadi) and then he travels to one of the others. In all these places he is teaching and holding devotional

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6 See Preface of Master Key to Self-Realisation, 1994 edition; p.vi.
7 Master of Self without self; For Private Circulation Only © Sadguru Sri Ranjit Maharaj, 2010. p.115-16.
meetings. He also visits Pathri regularly, where his wife and children and his father and mother live. In 1928 he builds a māṭh in Bagewadi.

Fully in line with his tradition, he pays much attention to some classical texts in his lectures, particularly Dasbodh of the seventeenth-century Samarth Ramdas. In 1925 he writes an article which is published in Marathi and translated later into English as ‘Golden Day’. In it, he stresses “that any discovery or invention of physical science would result in humanity going towards death, if it did not have spirituality as the base.”

During a lecture on Yoga Vāsishṭha in 1933 in Bombay, Nisargadatta gets to know Siddharameshwar Maharaj. A few days later Nisargadatta is initiated by him, which makes a very deep impression on him. From that moment Nisargadatta attends Siddharameshwar’s meetings whenever he is in Bombay. He accompanies his Guru repeatedly on his visits to Inchageri and Bagewadi – places he will continue to visit even after the death of his Guru. During the lectures Nisargadatta often “used to stand in a corner with a note book and a pencil and write down whatever fell from the lips of his Guru. He used to say that his Guru’s words were his food and that he used to eat them and not hear them.” So the series of lectures on paper arises, which is later published in English as well, entitled Master of Self-Realization. In the biography it is said that Siddharameshwar in 1935, while summing up the previous ten years of his lectures on knowledge (jñāna), placed on top of that ‘the pinnacle of Vi-jñāna, (that is, how to go beyond knowledge)’. Vijñāna is used by him as a term for Supreme or Absolute Knowledge. Westerners got to know this approach of the transition from Jñāna to Vijñāna later as ‘the specific Nisargadatta approach’ – but in fact this approach turns out to be Siddharameshwar’s pioneering work already.

8 Master of Self without self, p. 67.
10 It is to be found in Master of Self-Realization, from page 247 (which involves a lecture from September 1935). In the biography, Master of Self without self, this is described on page 126. In most classical texts, including Buddhist texts, the word Vijñāna is used just to denote ‘consciousness in its usual or ordinary sense’; sometimes also to denote discrimination or insight, but mostly this concerns a less ‘wide’ (or less ‘deep’) insight or knowledge than jñāna.
Siddharameshwar tells every disciple with absolute certainty: “You are nothing but Reality.”

In the year 1936 a tumor erupts on the back of Siddharameshwar, who is suffering from acute diabetes. Numerous attempts are made to cure him; he stays for a while in a sanatorium and also in an elevated hill station, because of the better climate. It does not help, his health is getting worse by the day. He does not accept surgery; he feels death approaching and wants to be transported to Bombay as soon as possible. There he leaves his mortal body at 9 November 1936. He is cremated the next day; his ashes are then taken to Bagewadi, where a samādhī is being installed.

Back to my stay at the Kannur āshram, in 1989. The Guru of the āshram, Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj, had been initiated by Siddharameshwar in 1923. He is a very friendly man, who speaks English. I have a memory of him as being very calm and gentle (in this quite different from the fiery energy of Nisargadatta). I had a private conversation with him, in which I asked him if he would be willing to say something about his realisation. In those days I still had the idea that it could be pinpointed as some specific experience (I was influenced this way by Alexander Smit, who described realisation as being a breakthrough event at a particular moment), but he said something in the direction of “Aah, gradually, well... you see, atcha... thus it went.” His way of describing his experience was very informative to me, and I can say he completely convinced me – by the whole setting, the power and truthfulness of his words.

On one of the photographs shown here you see him on his usual foldaway seat. The sunglasses he wore almost always due to an eye disease. Here we are all together doing bhajans, which amounts to singing and rhythmic clattering of cymbals, while repeatedly making a rotation with the body. Bhajans (songs) are sung as a tribute to the Guru, in this case to Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

On the big picture on the wall you can see Siddharameshwar, with the small portrait of Bhausaheb painted in it. At the right is the

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11 Master of Self without self; p.126.
12 A samādhī is a temple or tomb built to honour a Guru, wherein the ashes of the Guru are kept.
13 Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj was born in 1909 and died in 2004.
Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj and disciples performing bhajan in Shanti Kuteer Hall
mother of Ganapatrao. The two books packed in cloth at the right are editions of *Dasbodh*.

I have stayed a few days at the āshram; I found it a very pleasant place. The manager, Ratnakar Kulkarni, with whom I had a nice contact, was so kind as to guide me in a taxi to the surrounding villages, and to tell me many details about them.

First of course to Inchageri. I still remember how it felt when we arrived there. It seemed as if the three men that I saw were all that the term ‘Inchageri’ implied. ‘The Inchageri tradition: would this be it?’ flashed through me. It was a very beautiful and peaceful scene. Then I discerned a few small buildings, that were the actual math.

In the photograph on page 74 one can see the right-hand building containing the samādhis of Bhausheb and his Guru Nimbargi, which were placed opposite to each other, at the opposite ends of the room. This is the Inchageri tradition, the origin of the lineage in one room. I spent some time sitting on my own, near the samādhi of Bhausheb (who felt a bit like a great-great-grandfather to me).

In the left hand building, dedicated to Siddharmeshwar, I found a few pictures of him – confronted with one of them I found it hard to suppress a whoop of joy because of its direct effect and beauty (I knew till then only one photo of him, which had never really touched me). When the people who were present felt my love for their great Guru, they offered me the photo, for a small donation. O! That moment was beautiful. I was really touched.

My joy was great again when I later, back in Amsterdam, showed the picture straight away to Alexander: I believe I had never seen him so elated. Years later, a parallel photograph of it became known, by being depicted on the cover of the book *Master of Self-Realization* – a photo without the OM symbol in the foreground.

I also bought a beautiful picture of Bhausheb Maharaj, and I photographed a mural of his Guru Nimbargi Maharaj (Nimbargi’s original name was Narayanrao, and he is also known as Gurulingajangam Maharaj, but mostly he is called after his village

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14 Nimbargi’s ashes are divided between the samādhis in Inchageri and Nimbargi.
Samadhis of Bhausaheb and his Guru Nimbargi
Nimbargi). Afterwards I went along with Ratnakar to Nimbargi village. There we met the very spry great-grandson of Nimbargi Maharaj, with whom we again sang bhajans, around the samādhi of Nimbargi.

Ratnakar and I paid a short visit to Nimbal as well that day, where a math is built near the samādhi of Gurudev Ranade. While there, I was impressed by the harmony between these two different lineages, the Kannur line dedicated to Siddharameshwar, and the Nimbal line dedicated to Ranade (both disciples of Bhausaheb Maharaj). Gurudev Ranade had been a very humble and sincere man. In my opinion he was a living example of a rare phenomenon: that it is really possible to combine an academic career with being a realised Guru.

The next day I went on my own to Bagewadi, just southeast of Bijapur. Here Siddharameshwar lived – it has been more or less his home base; it has been described as the place where he, after a tour of lecturing at several places, could rest. His samadhi is in his house.¹⁶

A few weeks later I returned to Bombay. I visited the room of Nisargadatta that I had heard so much about from Alexander, in 10th Lane, Khetwadi. Nisargadatta’s daughter let me in and showed me the room. The whole interior, with all the pictures of the Gurus, was left in the same state as it was in 1981 when he died. I was allowed to abide there for a while on my own, which I considered extraordinary. It realized how much I owe to Alexander, to Sri Nisargadatta, and also his Guru Sri Siddharameshwar.

I wrote in my book ‘I’ is a Door¹⁷ that for me three teachers of the twentieth century remain as truly great, by which I mean that they are the ones who have influenced all the others, namely, Sri Nisargadatta, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Atmananda. They are the real Sad-Gurus. Increasingly, I have started to feel that there is a fourth: Sri Siddharameshwar. He is, as I said, the one to whom we owe the specific teachings that we usually refer to as ‘typical Nisargadatta’.

¹⁶ Although I did not find this in the biography, but a part of his ashes must have been brought back to Bombay, where at the Banganga Cemetery (exactly at the spot where he had been cremated) a samādhi of him is erected as well. Nisargadatta visited this samādhi regularly.

¹⁷ The book ‘I’ is a Door is recently published by Zen Publications in Mumbai. As a series of four articles it appeared in (The) Mountain Path, in 2004-2007.
Although the transmission of it by Nisargadatta was more attuned to Westerners and is therefore more digestible for us, the true origin of it lies with Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

**Texts of Sri Siddharameshwar**

*Golden Day, or Perfection of Material Science.*
http://www.nisargadatta.co.uk/resources/Golden%20Day%20.pdf


**About Sri Siddharameshwar and his Tradition**


January - March
Here I would like to thank Ratnakar Kulkarni, who handed me all sorts of details verbally and via airmail letters, and to Sri Ranjit Maharaj, who has made efforts to capture the life story of his Guru Siddharameshwar in Master of Self without self.

Philip Renard was born in 1944 at Amsterdam. In the eighties he spent some years in close relationship with Dutch Advaita teacher Alexander Smit (a pupil of Nisargadatta Maharaj and indirectly of Atmananda). In 1999 he compiled and published the Ramana Upanishad, the collected writings of Bhagavan in a Dutch translation. In English he published articles in Mountain Path and Journal of Indian Philosophy. Since 2000 he has a website, www.advaya.nl, to emphasise the universal character of real non-dualism. Recently his book 'I is a Door' has been published by Zen Publications, Mumbai. The article published here, with many photographs in colour, has been posted on his blog: https://volle-cirkel.blogspot.nl/2017/03/siddharameshwar-maharaj-guru-of.html

### Quieten The Mind

Rahul Lama

Can a dog catch its own tail?
Can the mind ever put itself to rest?
Once quietened, the mind wanders again.
As a boy gently put to sleep
wakes up later,
So to, the mind after being quietened
rises up and wanders.

Quieten the mind,
And you may experience peace.
Know yourself,
And the mind will not bother.
Set Aside the Ego and Live Happily

Part One

So many sacred books are there in the world like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Srimad Bhagavatam and Bhagavad Gita which have been taught over the centuries through discourses and so many books have been written on them. But have we been able to put these teachings into practice in our day-to-day life and have we reformed ourselves so that we are on the right path that will take us to our life’s Supreme Goal — Realising the Self and ending our rebirth cycle? What stands in the way of our achieving this Goal?

It is indeed our Ego. It is ego that blocks our path of evolution. Unless we learn to conquer this vicious ego, we cannot progress and be happy in life. It is ego that brings about repeated births and its destruction is the only way of crossing this seemingly never-ending ocean of samsara.

Lakshmi Sreedhar

Lakshmi Sreedhar lives in Hyderabad and is a long-standing devotee of Bhagavan. She first came to the Ashram when she was just a baby in the year 1964. After a long gap, she returned in 2003 and reconnected with Bhagavan. Since then she and her family are frequent visitors to the Ashram. She is also a committee member of the Chinmaya Mission, Hyderabad.
The ego is the false ‘I’ which arises from ignorance. This false ‘I’ completely dominates our personality veiling the Real ‘I’ which remains hidden inside the Heart. It is like ‘the snake in the rope’. Unless the false snake is negated, we cannot see the underlying rope. Similarly, unless we set aside this false ego, we cannot realise our true Self which is the source of all our happiness and knowledge. The ego is the cause for all the agitations and negativities that arise in the mind. It is also the cause for all the frictions that arise in our relationships.

Only when the ego is set aside will the mind be calm; only when the mind is calm can we look within, and only when we look within and meditate on the Self can we walk the Royal Path and reach our Source and become united with the Self. The ego disappears when we become aware of it and start seeking it. That is why Bhagavan asks us to enquire ‘Who am I?’, the ‘I’ here referring to the ego. When we seek the ‘I’ by looking for its source within, the ego disappears and the real Self shines forth of its own accord.

There is a beautiful example given by Bhagavan: preparations are going on for a marriage in a hall. A well-dressed impostor enters the hall and is seen talking closely with the bridegroom’s party. The bride’s party therefore thinks he belongs to the other side and gives him much respect. Soon he gets close to the bride’s party also. For some time, the impostor deceives all. Each party respects him thinking he belongs to the other side. Thus he enjoys good food and respect. Suddenly someone in the bridegroom’s party becomes suspicious about him and goes to the other side to enquire who he is. As the impostor sees both the sides enquiring about him, he quietly disappears from the scene. Bhagavan says the ego is such an impostor. It is a false entity that arises within us between the body and the Self. So long as it is not noticed and questioned, it asserts itself. When enquired into it disappears, like the impostor, without trace. So long as the ego exists, it veils the Truth and the unreal appears to be the Real.

The ego operates as ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ — ‘I’ is the sense of individuality and doership and ‘mine’ in the sense of possessiveness and selfishness. As long as we are the Totality (the Self), the whole universe is Me and Mine. But when we separate as the ego, we become a mere fraction and limit ourselves to this body. This is known as dehatma buddhi. We try to possess all we can grab by hook or crook and claim it as ‘mine’.
See the degeneration from the grand state of being the owner of this whole universe as the Self to being the proud owner of petty things as a fraction! What we fondly claim as ‘mine’ does not stay with us – we have to leave them behind willy-nilly when the conch blows. Even Alexander the Great who set out to conquer the world died with empty hands. We are not this name and form; we are That which exists within this body covered by the pancha kośas and layers of vāsanās like a cabbage covered by several layers. The core in each of us is common; there is unity in the diversity. For example, we go to a beach and collect water in a number of buckets. The water now is separate in each bucket, but it is not the same water, from the same source? So too, we have all forgotten our common origin and our true nature and we think that we are separate individuals, though at the substratum we are one and the same Self.

Just as water takes the shape of the container — pot water, lake water, tank water, etc., — but is still the same water, so too the very same Self takes on various forms and appearances in the world. Thus we have to realise our oneness at the core and end the sense of individuality that has arisen due to our ignorance and delusion. If we are the Self, why are we not aware of it? It is because our minds are externalised and are on material things.

Turn your mind away from the material things which lead to desires. Withdrawing the mind from them and internalising it is the beginning of the spiritual effort called sādhana which will lead you to awareness of the Self. Unless you turn your mind in the direction of the Self, how can you become aware of it? The Self and the world are 180° apart.

How does this ego operate? The ego branches out as emotions or feelings of desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, jealousy, hatred, etc. In addition, the ego can be seen in our day-to-day activities to the extent to which we are able to adjust and accommodate others’ feelings. Let me give a few examples: our elders ask us to wake up early, bathe and go to a temple because it is a festival day. If we listen to them out of love and respect, though we may not like it, our ego will soften further. Instead, if we refuse to listen, thinking ‘Why should I sacrifice my sleep and go to a temple, which is only a waste of time?’, it will only strengthen our ego.
Another example: my mother asks me to go to a shop urgently to get something she requires for her cooking and I refuse saying why should I go out in the hot sun? Here also it is the ego that makes me resist my mother’s call which it is my duty to fulfil. Every time there is a resistance, we should realise that it is the ego that has risen. Another example: my mother-in-law wants me to cook a particular dish which I dislike but I do it for her sake. Here my ego has not risen to refuse her request. The inability to accommodate the feelings of others indicates the extent of our ego. How rigid we are in our views, how much we can accept and submit to others’ views and feelings reflects on the strength of our ego. We can also see how self-centred we are, i.e., how big or small are our ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Does ‘mine’ include only ourselves or our children, grandchildren, relatives, neighbours, friends, etc? The more the mind expands, the more it cares for others and the smaller is the ego. The more there is caring and sharing, the more is there lightness of ego.

In fact, our culture promotes a joint-family system wherein there is expansion of the mind and reduction of the ego. In our joint-family system, we have so many people staying with us in one house — brothers, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. So our mind goes beyond ‘I’ and ‘mine’ to include more people in our circle, causing the mind to adjust and to accommodate the feelings of many people and thus the ego is not allowed to strengthen. Moreover, there is always someone to help and to share our burden as there is much warmth in relationships and there are wise elders in our home to guide us at every step.

In addition, our festivals have been so designed that there is much sharing and caring when we give sweets to our neighbours, friends and relatives or invite them our house for food. Such is the greatness of our Indian culture, designed by our ancient rishis, wherein the ego is not allowed to strengthen but only dissolve.

When the ego rises in our mind, there will be no peace or clarity as the Intellect will take a back seat. All our normal actions are from the Intellect while reactions arise from the ego. When the ego is set aside, the spiritual knowledge we have gained from various sources — scriptures, discourses and listening to the Guru — can be put into practice in a given situation. Then knowledge becomes wisdom and there is evolution.
Knowledge that is not applied in practice is useless and only a burden of memory in the head. Real spirituality consists in applying knowledge through enquiry in every situation that we face in our day-to-day life where emotions or frictions arise in our interactions due to our ego. Ego clashes are an everyday phenomenon in family life. When the ego rises, it will not be possible to smoothly see through every situation as *samabhāvam* (sense of equality) will be lost. Bhagavan says that karmas have to be burnt like camphor without leaving any residue; this is possible only when reactions burn up speedily like the camphor. That is why camphor is used in temples at the time of *arati* to show us that we should cut off our egos quickly and burn them up like camphor. Where there are reactions, karmas will not end fully and there will be residue, like candle burning or an oil-lamp. The longer we are attached to our reaction, the more our mind will become negative. This means the *karma* will leave a large residue like candle wax.

Therefore, we should be very alert to cut off our reactions at the earliest. Conquering all our reactions is the prime goal in life, as we will only then be able to retain peace and evolve in life and attain perfection.

When we can bear every situation patiently and see it through, the *karma* will end fully. ‘Seeing through’ means to face every situation fully, without trying to escape it, with equanimity, without reaction and letting go of it with understanding. This is possible only when there is tremendous patience or forbearance in us. This comes about only through our understanding of *karma siddhanta* that every *karma* has a result and holding onto our Sadguru Bhagavan.

Thinking of Bhagavan will give us mental strength, and enquiry will reveal that ‘this too shall pass away’. What comes to us is only what we have sown in the past due to ignorance. “As you sow, so you shall reap” is the inexorable Law of Nature. Thus we are responsible for every situation arising in our life; we are the architects of our own destiny. There is no one to blame for any situation in life except ourselves so we have to learn to see through insight the causes we create and correct our faults so as not to repeat them in the future, thus not adding to our *karmas*. Every pain or pleasure comes to us as destined and all are only agents or instruments in the hands of nature.
to inflict upon us our quota of misery. But we do have the choice of not becoming the instrument for causing hurt or harm to any living being in the world due to our own spiritual evolution and maturity. When we evolve spiritually, we will attain Wisdom, and Nature cannot use us as the instrument for hurting others.

Thus we have to overcome every adverse situation through patience, prayer and positive thinking and especially by setting aside the ego. As and when the ego rises in the form of our reactions, we have to think of Bhagavan and enquire with an open mind and make our mind positive. Then peace will prevail and the *karma* will end smoothly. It is not enough if we just make our mind positive. We must also understand our mistaken, deluded, habitual reactions for which enquiry is the only way. Only when there is self-understanding, there will be the spiritual evolution. When understanding comes, we become wiser and evolve.

We should never do anything that disturbs our mental peace and if disturbed, we should strive to quickly bring our mind back to equilibrium through enquiry and prayers. Such devotional enquiry elevates us and takes us forward on the path of evolution and helps us to traverse the Royal Path so as to end our rebirth cycle. Thus we see that right understanding and mental strength which give rise to patience are the sine qua non for any spiritual development. Leading such a life of wisdom is the true spiritual path which is not divorced from our day-to-day life in samsara. True spirituality is not something to be practised in isolation but in the midst of our day-to-day life.

(To be continued)

It has come to our attention that the spelling of the name of S.S. Cohen in the article titled ‘Life of S.S. Cohen’ published in the July 2017 edition, pp.39-46, is incorrect. There has been some confusion as to his exact name and several versions of it are to be seen in various publications and in the *Mountain Path*. His correct name according to the Jewish style and how he would have wished it, is:

*Sulman Samuel Cohen*
My Reminiscences of P.B.

S.S. Gopalkrishnan

Though the following article on Paul Brunton is available on the website http://www.paulbrunton.org/about-paul.php for the past two or three years, as far it is known, it was not in print before 1981. We are grateful to Jeff Cox of the Paul Brunton Philosophical Foundation for sharing these reminiscences.

A strange fate once threw me into a peculiar position – a position from which I took note of the chief happenings in the inner lives of a few American and European brothers and sisters who were striving hard to learn and understand the highest truths of Indian Yoga and Eastern philosophy under the excellent, noble and clear guidance of an unusual master, who now and then disowned his mastership and buried himself in the hollow of the Pyramids or hid himself in the remotest villages of the Far East, or again ascended and lost himself in the freezing cold of the peaks of the highest mountain range. I refer to the one who was equally on close friendly relations with the matted-haired yogi, or the Egyptian bushy-bearded Muslim, or the shaven-headed Supreme Lamas in China and the Buddhist countries.

I am not a biographer, and so the reader will have to excuse me if he finds this to be scrappy, disjointed and broken. For my part I will
be quite satisfied if this makes interesting reading and describes a few salient happenings and incidents which help to reveal, though in a poor way, this amazing person. I met him by a strange coincidence. Coincidence indeed, apparently, but really the strong hand of good karma that made me cross his path, when low in spirits, having been the victim of a big bank crash in South India, in which I had invested money and where I was employed as a subordinate officer, and having wife and children to support. Spiritually jaded and exhausted in the maze of conflicting faiths, beliefs, and opinions, I read *A Search in Secret India*; it exerted a peculiar influence over me. Day after day the influence it had on me grew more and more until at last I could no longer resist the temptation of meeting its author. But as that book ended with his return to his native West, I erroneously thought he was still there and regarded such a meeting as impossible.

After the above preface you will not be surprised if you find yourself suddenly transported to a small country town in southwest India. The reddish roads are marked by their dusty quietness. Except for a bullock cart or two, and odd villagers slowly passing occasionally, or the hurrying past of a stray cross-country motor bus, there is nothing to be seen or heard. The gentle breeze rustling through the leaves of coconut palms which line the road on one side at different points adds to the completely rural atmosphere.

There is some sign of activity only in the main bazaar street. Coolies trotting with their baskets poised over their heads, a few villagers looking with open mouths at the display of dirty oil-fried cakes, the masses of yellow mangoes and brown berries both ripe and unripe heaped in groups on the floor of the fruit-stall, clamorous haggling of the booth-keepers, the noise of the harsh music of the gramophone-record through the prehistoric horned instrument, the rattling of the tin pots of the tinker, the sonorous hiss of the hand blow-pipe of the smith, are the common sights and sounds that present themselves to you.

A certain spring day, when I happened to visit this little town for the first time, was, is, and will be the most memorable throughout my life. Looking back now, I find how plainly all events and circumstances and environments joined together to bring this visit about and also how everything that has developed since then, roots in it as the most
blessed day of my life. By a mysterious event, the very same day that the globe-trotter himself came back to India, an unusual force pulled me forcibly and I travelled about 300 miles away from home unconsciously to the same destination. Just as I was getting into a bullock cart to proceed to the railway station, which was a couple of miles away, I heard the cart-driver conversing with another man. The word “Brunton” was mentioned in the conversation. I immediately questioned the driver about it and was astonished to hear that he had the honour that very morning of carrying the famous writer to a house he had engaged on his return to India. I postponed my journey to the station and was driven to his house instead.

I introduced myself to Dr P. Brunton, and simply said that I was pleased with his book, a native of the historic temple-city of Madurai in south India, and that I had had the good fortune of a college education in the missionary college there. I also stated that my grandfather had been one of the great Sanskrit pandits of his day, though I knew but little of that language. No boots, no socks, no coat, no tie or bow, and no hat were found on Brunton’s person, much less a stiff collar and a waistcoat. I mention this because I had always thought white men insisted on wearing these things. He offered me tea and let me talk for awhile. The result was that I was installed – after twenty minutes – as his ‘literary and personal secretary’.

The house was purely an Indian-style small bungalow with a big courtyard in the middle. No carpets covered the naked rough-bricked floor, no wallpapers adorned the ill-plastered walls, no tapestries hung over doors and windows. There was not even one glass-paned window. The rough wood doors, without paint or varnish, creaked on their hinges. Three small tables, two chairs, an easy chair of light wood and canvass and a small one-doored cupboard besides a cot, all of the camp-folding pattern, were the only furniture to be found. We were away from the noise and din of the bazaar in the surroundings most suitable for literary work of a high and concentrated nature.

For the first few days I was unpacking trunks, getting things straight, and carrying books into rooms. I had to fix up Indian maps on walls, arrange the office, knock nails into walls, move suitcases and dressing cases into their proper places, make many bazaar purchases, and do dozens of other little jobs. Then we opened up a packet
containing dozens of unanswered letters from all over the world. They were in different sizes, shapes, colours, and even languages; they were typewritten, pen-written, and penciled. They bore dates stretching back over all the dates in the calendar for more than a year. P.B. was apologetic for this last fact but said his life being what it was, he could not help it.

His cook and personal servant was in some way not unlike his simple-living master. He was a lean chap talking hardly any English. One yard of plain white sheet round his waist and one shirt were all his clothing. This has to be compared to the stylishly dressed butler who usually serve Europeans in India. In spite of his poor appearance he was a cook of no mean kind, for as I came to know later, he had served his master faithfully for nearly six years, and had travelled in many parts of India with him. The secret of his success was that he made the best-tasting soup, the best curried vegetables, and cooked the finest rice. One wondered how such delicious things could come out of that medieval kitchen at the back of the house. If he were not watchful for a single minute, the food – whether raw or cooked – would be stolen away by the innumerable monkeys. In fact, once I saw his master projecting himself from out of his office like a bullet from a gun in hot pursuit of a monkey which had just stolen and was carrying off a typewriter ribbon from his table!

One day P.B. told me abruptly that he had decided to move away from this little town, that his work there had come to an end, and that everything had to be packed and all local matters disposed of within twelve hours; I could never have managed the removal so swiftly before I entered his service, but the training in efficiency, concentration, and initiative which I absorbed from him every day enabled me to do it then. We spent a week in the capital city of Madras, and then a telegram came and we were off again to the interior of the country.

We became guests of the ruling prince of an Indian state. Some officers of the state met us at the station and conducted us, in two fine motor cars on a fast smooth drive by drivers in gorgeous livery, to a fine palatially fitted-up bungalow. P.B. was then a socially busy soul. State dinners, tea parties with rajahs, and private palace conferences were the order of the day. From the village to the town, from the house
MY REMINISCENCES OF P. B.

to the palace, from the bullock cart to the saloon car, from a small looking-glass held between the fingers to gorgeous wall mirrors, what a change! It can only be imagined.

Out flew dinner coats, polished boots, felt hats, walking sticks, white collars, etc. and soon P.B. was completely transformed. Even his conservative secretary with waist-cloths [dhotis] and shirt was moved and got into a pair of trousers and wore a collar and tie. The whiz of the electric fan and the gentle ring of the telephone bell replaced the primitive arrangements of our former home. This sudden change was typical of many which we made in the following years.

I was at first surprised but later accustomed to the ease with which P.B. adapted himself to all kinds of environments and people. He passed from palace to hut or vice versa with perfect smoothness and yet with complete inward indifference. He disliked the formal conventions but submitted to them when necessary. He detested public functions in his honour and never attended them if he could avoid doing so. External appearances never weighed with him nor deceived his sense of spiritual values. He never forgot or lost himself whatever the surroundings. He lived in the world when fate or duty called him but was not of it.

My secretaryship filled my days with an interest I had not known before. Secretaryship indeed! It was like twelve different lives in one. Handling an international correspondence with five continents in one hour, superintending the cook and servants and bazaar purchases the next, keeping away undesired visitors, plunging into meditation at intervals, walking with him each night after dinner for two miles through city, village, or jungle gravely discussing spiritual questions or joking about the daily events, meeting maharajas one day and poor coolies the next, such was my bewildering, unusual life. I repaired our typewriters and fountain pens, invented office equipments from primitive materials, aye, even picked open locks without using keys, as when the keys disappeared to my master’s big steamer trunk in which he placed all his money and important manuscripts, documents, notes, and papers.

To his pleasant surprise I successfully opened the locks without injuring them. Such a curious mixture of abilities am I! I was taken raw and uncouth, just over thirty years old, and he trained me on modern
lines, made me discard my old-fashioned piece of long untailored cloth that did duty for clothes [dhotis], gave me jackets and trousers and neckties, etc., and thus transformed my outer appearance. But the change was equally great in my inner life. The typing of his literary notes, the instructions he conveyed to his students in his letters, the books which he presented to me now and then, as also the personal guidance and advice he imparted to me – all these created a new outlook in my life. Certainly, I now know I have not lived in vain.

Our mornings were usually spent on some kind of writing work. P.B. seldom dictated his literary work but preferred to write the first draft himself, seated alone in his office or, at those times of the day when the sun was less hot, seated on the flat roof of the house where he could be away from everything and everybody. I would then copy this draft neatly on the typewriter and he would rewrite it again at his leisure, after which I would again copy the result.

On his writing desk he always kept a bronze lotus-throned figure of the Buddha, which had been presented to him by the chief Lama of Siam. It was a symbol for him of the teacher of esoteric wisdom, the sage who typified compassion for all creatures. This solemn-looking and deeply-calm Buddha watched with pious interest and perhaps some sympathy the living man who sought in a very humble way to imitate him. But in the case of his mail, speed in handling was so necessary that he called my assistance to take down in shorthand what he had to say to the readers, students, and friends with whom he tried to keep in touch but always in vain, for he was always in great arrears.

He usually retired to the comfort of his bedroom to attend to his mail. There, upon his snug bed, with its coloured counterpane, a large mass of this correspondence spread out on his lap and all over the bed, he squatted with open shirt and cotton trousers, and dictated paragraph after paragraph in reply. I sat in a chair, business-like with a folded turban on my head and squeaking large brown shoes on my feet! My blue fountain pen scribbled rapidly over my notebook. I must not forget the small tray of toast and tea placed at P.B.’s side – that brown nectar which he drank quite often but which was almost harmless because it was quite weak too.

Thus the preliminary chapters of a new book got themselves shaped or, as the metaphysician would put it, were “manifested with name
and form” whilst letters were shaped out for the more fortunate of his numerous international correspondents. A week’s mail went out to every corner of the world. After mornings’ business was over, there followed lunch and a short siesta, then reading newspapers, periodicals, or books, whilst half-resting on the bed in the fierce afternoon heat, next, interviews with visitors, then the formal tea and toast and then P.B. set to further work, usually on research notes or literary material. Records of interviews and the results of his meditations were also scribbled down. He has filled more unpublished notebooks with his discoveries, ideas, reflections, and intuitions than published printed books.

I collected these odd pieces, arranged them under proper headings, and typed them suitably into his leather-bound loose-leaf notebooks ready for future reference. Thus were the religious, mystic, yogic, and philosophic lores of the ancient East brought to light and probed into to their very depths. Thus, too, was P.B.’s keen ever-active intelligence made to yield its fruits, his swift intuitions flashed into words and his profound meditations directed to an amazing variety of matters directly or indirectly connected with humanity’s spiritual life.

After dinner we generally went for a walk to get some exercise. P.B. always carried his walking stick whilst I always carried a pocket electric torch to save us from treading on any possible snakes or scorpions. Sometimes we went into the forest but more often into the lonely roads on the outskirts of the town. Both of us were short figures, but whereas he was slim I was sturdy and prided myself on being able to act as his bodyguard should it ever become necessary.

Lastly, after the day’s activities had ended, but before dinner, there came the real life and secret of the man. He went out on the open upper verandah, squatted on a carpet, and was lost in deep meditation for nearly an hour. Meditation, calm and serene at dusk and under an oriental sky, is a thing which can better be experienced than described. His secretary often joined him, although only in keeping with the old adage that a turkey fowl saw a peacock dancing and thinking himself equally beautiful began to unfold its feathers. Or else we would retire, when the need of greater privacy became heavy, to P.B.’s own room and bolt the door from inside.

He would then place a green crystal Buddha-head which he brought from China at the far end of the room and switch on the tiny electric
bulb which was hidden inside it. The head emanated a phosphorescent greenish light and the eyes appeared mysteriously alive. The whole room had an unearthly subdued light. In its serenity and silence we easily fell into calm, deep, and concentrated meditation.

I wonder how many people realize how absolutely necessary this meditation was for P.B. when such great pressure constantly devolved on his mind in his attempt to encourage, uplift, and enlighten so many individuals as well as the world at large? On occasions, with the magnetic and telepathic influence of P.B. strongly felt, I sometimes forgot all my personal limitations and flew to ethereal heights, leaving my physical moorings in the body and soaring into vast space, with a feeling of oneness with all the universe.

My feeble experience was only an echo or reflection of P.B.’s swift winking into an even deeper state. Such joint meditations destroyed all the worries and miseries of life, and brought great peace to my mind and went a long way to develop me spiritually. And a hundred times more was this so when in the immediate presence and under the guidance of P.B.

Shall I try to describe to the best of my ability and powers of expression and, as far as I can remember, what happened on one of these nights? I shall not add or take away any idea or thought. I will describe it exactly as it appeared and happened to me. It is still fully vivid to me because it is unforgettable. When late engagements or pressure of work made the evening meditation impossible, it was postponed to midnight.

That night at 12 o’clock I went and squatted in the open terrace on a carpet spread on the floor, with P.B. at my side. I began to meditate. When the preliminary portion of slowing down the breath and thoughts was over, I very slowly turned my head to the right, to catch a glimpse of the marble statue-like figure there and inwardly drew some inspiration and strength to carry on in earnest the analysis of the ego or ‘I-thought’. When that was over I slowly turned back to my original position. I often used to feel sleepy on previous occasions owing to the lateness of the hour.

But now I was full of life and energy. With one concentrated thought of all-absorbing force I mentally asked, “Who am I?” Then I felt that I was not the body. I said to myself, “If so, try to forget
the body.” A kind of dizziness grew over me and my body appeared to become rigid. I slowly began to feel no sensation in it. I could not move my limbs. Am I sleeping? I thought, “No.” I was fully awake. My head and mind alone seemed to be present. All the portion below the neck seemed to melt away. I tried to open my closed eyes. I was not aware of anything in front of me. The parapet walls and the climbing plant were not there. I saw nothing but space. My mind was soaring high. “What am I?” This question alone remained.

I felt I was a mere speck floating in space, invisible to the eye, having no weight or shape or size, a mere idea or thought, a mere nothingness, but still distinctly conscious. No name, no body, nor anything belonging to this world. I was in that state for a few minutes. Then I slowly became aware of breathing and again became conscious of my body. I came back to myself by degrees. I opened my eyes-yes I could see everything plainly, slowly, but with some pain I turned my head again and saw P.B. He was still in a fixed position. A few seconds more, I moved and shook my body, and then got up. The time was a half hour past midnight.

Soon after, we retired to sleep but not before I told P.B. that I had had a very good meditation. Once in bed I wanted to get back that state. I wanted to watch at close quarters what happens when one passes from waking to the sleeping state and to study well the transition as P.B. had written in his notebooks about the importance of this moment. I lay awake for some time, but soon after I must have slept. When I became conscious of myself, a peculiar form or force or energy seemed to flow everywhere, and on all sides, filling up all space and making everything lose all solidity and shape. The whole of the massy building, the walls and floors seemed to melt like butter over fire. I was lost in that ocean of energy.

My body, too, seemed to become pliant and flexible, ready to melt away into nothingness. I got frightened. When my heavy body, which had been so solid and real, when 130 pounds of flesh, blood, and bones were vanishing into nothingness, the horror could only be imagined. I was faintly aware that P.B. was sleeping on a bed in the adjacent hall. I called him by name. I heard no response. I tried to get up and did so with difficulty, as the floor under my feet was soft, and I began to sink, as one would sink in thick snow. I called again, but to no purpose.
My voice was leaving me. I went to the switch. I switched on the lights but the whole of the electric installation appeared to have lost its solidity. I fumbled on my table and found my torch. I worked it. It also did not burn. There was no light except a star-like kind. Terror became hundredfold. Had the judgment day come or had the dissolution of the world set in? With one great effort, all the effort I could possibly gather, I waded and moved to where P.B. was sleeping. All the five senses were present in me only in part. Very near his bed at the top of my voice I called his name. He awoke and sat up and said something. I could not hear distinctly for hearing, sight, and feeling were ebbing fast out of me, but I felt he seemed to say, “I am here. Do not be afraid.” Then I forgot consciousness, and slowly the whole thing vanished. I do not know how I got back to my bed.

When I awoke it was dawn and the time was 6 am. My first feeling was to see my body and to feel sure it had not melted away. I ran my hands over my face and chest. I was again myself. I got up. When questioned, P.B. replied that I had come, terrified, to him during the night, about forty minutes after we had retired.

I tried to find out the changes, additions, or alterations to my thoughts because of this experience. First and foremost, to my mind, this occurrence was a real mystic experience, showing a glimpse into the Absolute and revealing the great truth that the whole world is only an idea. I had read such a thing in P.B.’s notebooks. It was now brought home to me as a piece of strange experience – this empty mentalness of the world. This indeed was how P.B. explained it to me the next morning after it happened. I felt then very strongly that my close association with him was partly responsible for it.

His Indian enemies have described him in their public press attacks as a “journalist in yogic pose.” The truth is that I found him to be really a yogi in journalistic pose! He used to smile indulgently at their attacks but thought it beneath his dignity to answer them. I, however, was not always able to keep silent over such gross injustices and misunderstandings.

He never claimed to be anything more than a student of philosophical mysticism. But many incidents showed how humble was this estimate of his own powers. I may mention a little one. One day it struck me that I should present P.B. with my grandfather’s copy
of the book Vishnupuranam translated by H.H. Wilson, a rare edition, one hundred years old and a large volume weighing several pounds. For two days I had not time to talk with P.B. about my wish, but when I did mention it he replied that for the past two days he had felt a great desire to procure that very book. He produced his pocket diary and to my astonishment the entry was found in P.B.’s own handwriting: “Get Vishnupuranam, translated by H.H. Wilson.” He put it down to the fact that he had concentrated on the idea, which went out and found the nearest mind which could be attuned to his. I was overjoyed at his words, and immediately wrote an urgent letter home, got the book through the post, and presented him with it. He was equally glad to accept the same from me as a gift and promised to keep it all his life.

Here is another incident. On the sixth day after I began to work for him, he suddenly predicted that I would stay with him for some years and then go into the employment of a public company which he named, where I would hold a high position. What he foretold was fully realized by later events.

If today I am the well-paid confidential secretary and right-hand man to the managing director of one of India’s large pioneer industrial companies, with a brilliant future in prospect before me, it is fair to say that I have been able to accept and carry on this highly responsible post only because of the confidence, courage, discipline, training, and mental development which the work with P.B. continually gave me. And if I have kept my spiritual life fresh and undimmed amidst such a busy and active environment, it is also fair to say that it was P.B. who showed me how to attain and keep such a difficult balance. Despite the passing of years, my loyal feelings toward him remain unchanged. He is living at a great distance from me now, but not from my mind and heart.
um. Bowing down to Narayana and Nara, foremost of Purushas, and to the Devi Saraswati, I invoke the spirit of Jaya!

Janamejaya said, “Hearing Arjuna’s account of how the Vrishni and the Andhaka vamsa perished through thunderbolts formed of eraka reeds, and of Krishna’s ascension to heaven, what do the Pandavas do?”

Vaisampayana said, “Hearing the particulars of the great slaughter of the Vrishnis, Yudhishtira Dharmaraja sets his heart on leaving the world. He says to Arjuna, ‘O wise one, it is Time that cooks every creature in his cauldron. All we have experienced and witnessed has been because of being bound by the meshes of Kaala. You must also understand this.’ Arjuna, endorsing his wise brother’s view, only
cries, ‘Ah, Time! Kaala!’ Seeing Arjuna’s resolution, Bhimasena and the twins also whole-heartedly concur. The Pandavas, resolute on retiring from the world in quest of punya, fetch Yuyutsu before them. Yudhishtira makes the Kuru kingdom over to the son of Dhritarashtra by his Vaisya wife.

Installing on the throne your father Parikshit, in whose name the faithful Yuyutsu would rule until the young king was of age, the eldest Pandava, full of sorrow, says to Subhadra, ‘This son of your son will be the king of the Kurus. The survivor of the Yadus, Krishna’s grandson Vajra, has also been made a king. Parikshit will rule in Hastinapura and the Yadava prince will rule in Indraprastha. You must protect both of them equally and never set your heart on the path of adharma.’

Saying this, Yudhishtira the Just, along with his brothers offers solemn tarpana to Krishna of the fathomless soul, as well as to Kunti’s brother Vasudeva, to Balrama and all the others. He duly performs the sraddhas of all his departed kinsmen. The king holds a feast to honour the memory of Hari, and naming him repeatedly, plies with every manner of delicacy the Island-born Vyasa, Narada Rishi, Markandeya possessed of the wealth of great tapasya and Yajnavalkya of Bharadvaja’s vamsa.

In honour of Krishna, he also gives away to the Dvijottamas many priceless jewels and gemstones, robes and rich garments, villages, horses and chariots, and female slaves by the multitude. He calls together the people of Hastinapura, appoints the wise Kripa to be the Acharya and Guru to Parikshit, and gives the young prince into his care to be his sishya. When this is formally done, Yudhishtira summons all his subjects, the people of Hastinapura as well as those from the provinces, and tells them that he and his brothers intend to retire from the world.

Hearing this, panic and anxiety sweep through the great crowd. “This should never be!” they remonstrate to him. Yudhishtira, profound knower of the changing ways of time, pays their protests no heed and instead persuades them to accept what he has decided is the best and true course for his brothers and himself.

Yudhishtira and his brothers prepare in earnest to achieve the end upon which they have set their hearts: to leave the world. Dharmaputra Yudhishtira casts off his royal ornaments and robes, and puts on
austere valkala, rough cloth woven from tree-bark. Bhima, Arjuna and the twins and Draupadi also discard their finery, O King, to don the garb of ascetics. They perform the ordained rituals of initiation and those Purushottamas then quench in water the sacred Agnis they have worshipped daily all these years.

When the royal women of the Kuru household and the people of the city see the Pandavas and Draupadi clad in valkala and smeared with ashes, they begin to weep aloud. They are reminded of another day, many years ago, when the five brothers, and Panchali making a sixth, all roughly clad, left Hastinapura after they lost everything at the game of dice.

However, the sons of Pandu themselves are full of anticipation. No other course is possible for them after the extinction of the Yadavas, and when Yudhishtira has set his heart upon relinquishing the worldly life. The five brothers, with Draupadi, set out on their final journey. As they are leaving, a dog joins their small company, forming its seventh member. And so does Yudhishtira Dharmaraja the Magnificent depart the city of the elephant, at the head of a party of seven. The people and the women of the royal household follow them for some distance. But none venture again to persuade the king to change his mind. Finally, the people of Hastinapura and Anarta turn back.

Kripa and some others of importance stand around Yuyutsu, who will now rule. Ulupi, the daughter of the Naga king, returns to her home in the waters of the Ganga, O Kurusottama, and the princess Chitrangada too sets out for her home, the capital of Manipura. The grandmothers and aunts of Parikshit centre themselves around him.

The Pandava Mahatman and their queen Panchali of great fame observe the prescribed fast and set out with their faces towards the east. Setting themselves on the path of Yoga, those noblest ones traverse numerous countries, rivers and seas, resolved to observe the dharma of vairagya, renunciation. Yudhishtira always walks at the head of the company. Behind him walks Bhima; after Bhima, Arjuna; then come the twins in order of birth; and behind them, O Janamejaya Bharatashreshta, comes Draupadi, first among all women, beautiful with her dark skin and eyes like lotus-petals. Following the Pandava company is the dog.

Walking on, those heroes reach the vicinity of the sea of red waters. Dhananjaya has not yet abandoned his celestial bow, the Gandiva, O
king, nor his twin inexhaustible quivers, for he is still compelled by
the attachment men have for the possessions they value most.

There on the shore of the western ocean, the Pandavas behold
Agni Deva, the God of Fire, barring their way like a hill. Standing
before them in his embodied form, the God of seven flames addresses
the sons of Pandu: ‘Heroic sons of Pandu, know me to be the God
of Fire. Yudhishtira Mahabaho, O Bhimasena Parantapa, O Arjuna,
and you indomitable twins, hear me! Kurusottamas, with the might
of Arjuna and of Narayana himself, I am the god who consumed the
Khandava vana. Phalguna can go into the forest only after giving up
the noble Gandiva. He no longer has any need for it. The precious
Chakra belonging to Krishna Mahatman has disappeared from the
world. When the time comes again, it will return into his hands. This
Gandiva, greatest of bows, I obtained from Varuna for Partha. Now
let him make it over to Varuna himself.’

All Arjuna’s brothers urge him to do as the Fire God says.
Dhananjaya casts into the waves both the bow and the two
inexhaustible quivers and Agni Deva, his task accomplished, vanishes
from before their eyes.

Now the sons of Pandu turn their faces to the south and journey
in that direction. Along the coast of the salt sea, those princes of the
Bhaarata vamsa travel to the south-west, arriving where the wondrous
and magnificent city of Dwaravati once stood, now vanished into the
ocean deeps. Turning then to the north, those heroes continue their final
yatra. Observing Yoga all the while, they intend to make a pilgrimage
across the face of the Earth.”

Canto 2
Vaisampayana said, “Immersed in Yoga, their senses restrained, the
sons of Pandu journey north until they see the majestic Himavat.
Crossing the sacred range, they see a vast desert of sand stretch out
before them and, beyond, the fabled peak Meru, the foremost mountain
of the world.

Rapt in dhyana, they begin to climb the mountain. Suddenly,
Draupadi falls away from Yoga, and drops down dead. Bhimasena
of matchless strength turns to his brother Yudhishtira Dharmatma
in anguish and demands, ‘O Parantapa, never during her life did
this princess sin in any way. Tell us why she has now fallen to her death!"

Yudhishtira says, ‘O best of men, though we were all equally her husbands, she always harboured in her heart a partiality for Arjuna. What has happened to her today is the fruit of that bias.’ And without a backward glance Yudhishtira, that taintless man of dharma, continues climbing, his being indrawn, focused in dhyana.

When they have climbed a little further, Sahadeva of great intelligence abruptly falls down, all life extinct. Bhima asks the king, in anguish, ‘Our brother Sahadeva served us all with the utmost humility. Ah, why has Madravati’s son fallen to his death?’ Yudhishtira says, ‘He always felt that none was his equal in intelligence and wisdom. It is for that fault that this Kshatriya has fallen.’ Saying no more, and never so much as glancing back to where his younger brother had fallen, Yudhishtira continues to climb, his surviving brothers and the dog following.

Then the resplendent Nakula, whose love for his kin is immense, himself falls away from dhyana and collapses, lifeless. Bhima turns again to Yudhishtira in despair and cries, ‘Our Nakula was a man of immaculate dharma. He always obeyed us without a murmur or question. No man alive was as handsome as he. And now he has also fallen by the way and is dead. Why, Yudhishtira?’

Yudhishtira says calmly, ‘Nakula was indeed of righteous soul and the best among all men of intelligence. Yet he, too, had a grave flaw, for he believed he was superior to all in physical beauty. It is for his vanity that Nakula has fallen to his death. Know this well, Vrikodara. Whatever has been ordained for a man, O Kshatriya, that he must inexorably endure.’ And Yudhishtira continues his climb.

Next falls Pandu’s son Swetavahana, Arjuna of the white steeds, his heart giving way completely to grief. When that invincible Parantapa, foremost of men, with the energy of Sakra, is on the point of death, Bhima asks Yudhishtira, ‘I do not remember a single lie ever having been spoken by this Mahatman. Not even in jest did he ever utter a falsehood. What, then, is the evil whose consequence this is?’

Yudhishtira replies, ‘Arjuna boasted that he would consume all our enemies in a single day but he did not accomplish what he said. He was proud of his archery and disdained all other masters of the bow.
Hence he has fallen. One who wishes for felicity should not indulge in such hubris.’

Saying this, Yudhishtira continues to climb the mountain. All at once the mighty Bhima too falls down. As he feels life ebbing away, he asks Yudhishtira the Just, ‘O my king, look, I, who was ever your darling, have fallen too. Tell me if you know why.’ Yudhishtira says, ‘You frequently boasted of your strength, and you were gluttonous, never attending to others around you. It is for that, O Bhima, that you have fallen.’

Saying no more, Yudhishtira walks on without looking back. Now he has only one companion, the dog I have often mentioned to you, still following at his heels.”

Canto 3

Vaisampayana said, “When Yudhishtira has gone a little further, earth and sky suddenly resound with a loud noise. Indra descends from his vimana and invites Yudhishtira to climb into it. Yudhishtira Dharmaraja says to the god of a thousand eyes, ‘My brothers have all fallen on the way here. They must go with me. Without them I do not wish to enter Swargaloka, O Lord of all the Devas. The delicate Panchali, who deserves ever comfort, should go with us, O Purandara. It is fitting for you to allow this.’

Indra says, ‘You will see your brothers in Devaloka, for they have got there before you. Verily, you shall see all of them there, with Draupadi. Do not yield to grief, O King of the Bhaaratas. Having cast off their human bodies, they have gone to my realm. As for you, it has been ordained that for your taintless dharma you will enter Swarga in your own body.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘O Lord of Past and Present, this dog is devoted to me. He must come with me, for my heart is full of tenderness for him.’ Indra replies, ‘You have won today the felicity of Swarga, O King — immortality and a condition equal to mine prosperity extending in all directions, and lofty success. Leave behind this dog; there will be no cruelty in that, I assure you.’ Yudhishtira says, ‘O you of a thousand eyes, of righteous conduct, it is difficult for me to abandon dharma. I do not desire that prosperity for which I must forsake one devoted to me.’ Indra says, ‘There is no place in Swarga for people with dogs,
and the Krodhavasas take away all the punya of such people. Reflect on this, O Yudhishtira Dharmaraja, and leave the animal. There is no cruelty in that.’

Yudhishtira says, ‘It has been said that it is infinitely sinful to abandon one who is devoted — equal to the sin of killing a Brahmana. Hence, O great Indra, I shall not abandon this dog today, certainly not from wanting for myself the happiness of Swarga. I have always sworn never to forsake anyone who is devoted to me, who seeks my protection from destitution, anyone in distress, or who is frightened, or weak and helpless, anyone who comes to me to save his life, or, indeed anyone who comes to me for refuge. And I will never break this vow as long as I live.’

Indra says, ‘Whatever gifts are made, or sacrifices spread out, or libations poured on the sacred fire, if they are so much as seen by a dog, are taken by the Krodhavasas. It is imperative for you, therefore, to abandon this dog. By doing so you will attain Devaloka, the realm of the gods. Having abandoned your brothers and Panchali, O Kshatriya, you have acquired a realm of great felicity through your own deeds. Why are you so confused? You have renounced everything; why not, then, this dog?’

Yudhisthira says, ‘It is well known in all the worlds that with the dead there is neither friendship nor enmity. When my brothers and Draupadi died, I could not revive them. Hence it was that I abandoned them. I never forsook them as long as they were alive. To affright one that has sought protection, to kill a woman, to steal what belongs to a Brahmana, and to injure a friend — each of these four, O Sakra, I believe to be equal to forsaking one that is devoted.’

At these words of Yudhishtira the Just, the dog stands transformed and refulgent: it is Dharma Deva himself. The God of Truth says to him in sweet tones of approval, ‘You are well-born indeed, O King of kings, and truly possess the intelligence and uprightness of Pandu. You have compassion for all creatures, O Bhaarata, of which this is a bright example. Once I tested you in Dwaita vana, O son, beside a lake where your brothers of great prowess seemed to lie dead before you. When I offered to revive one of your brothers, you passed over Bhima and Arjuna and asked for Nakula’s life instead, saying that if he lived at least one of Madri’s sons would be preserved.'
But today you have surpassed yourself, Yudhishtira; you have renounced the chariot of the celestials and Swarga itself for the sake of a devoted dog! O king, there is no one in Heaven that is your equal. Hence, O Bhaarata, all the realms of inexhaustible felicity will be yours. You have won them, O Kurusottama, and beyond all doubt yours will be a most divine and transcendent reward.’

Dharma and Indra, the Maruts, and the Aswins, other deities and the Devarishis now make Yudhishtira climb into Indra’s vimana. The Gods and other divine ones can go anywhere in the three realms at will in their own vimanas. Yudhishtira, perpetuator of Kuru’s race, flies to Devaloka in Indra’s chariot in a blaze of splendour.

Now Narada, most eloquent of all Devarishis, of fathomless tapasya, knower of all the worlds, says in that gathering of gods in Swarga, ‘Yudhishtira has surpassed all the Rajarishis of old who are here in Devaloka, even the greatest of them, by his conduct and achievement. He has covered the worlds with his fame and splendour and by his wealth of immaculate dharma, and that is how he alone has attained to Swarga in his human body. None else besides this son of Pandu has ever achieved this.’

Hearing Narada’s praise, the Dharmatma salutes all the Devas and Rajarishis and says simply, ‘Wherever my brothers are, happy or miserable, I have but one wish, my lords, to go straight to them. I have no desire to go anywhere else, O great ones.’

Indra, king of the Devas, says to Yudhishtira, ‘Do you, O King of kings, who live in this blissful place, won through your peerless dharma and noble deeds, why do you still cherish human affections? You have attained to a great reward, the like of which no other man ever has. Your brothers, O delighter of the Kurus, have also won regions of felicity. Yet, human affections and attachments still trammel you. This is Swarga. Behold these celestial Rishis and siddhas who have attained to the world of the Devas.’

Wise Yudhishtira answers the Deva king, saying again, ‘O Conqueror of Daityas, I do not aspire to dwell anywhere separated from my brothers. I want to go where they have gone. I want to go to where that best of women has gone, my statuesque dark Draupadi of great wisdom and virtue.’”

The end of Mahaprasthanika Parva.
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Kabir spent some time at home and his heart overflowed with gratitude for the bounteous grace of the Lord and Guru. He felt happy that his bad karmas had come to an end. However, one night he was suddenly beset with a yearning to be initiated into a mantra by the Guru so that his dense ignorance would be destroyed forever. He wondered about the means of achieving this end. Does perseverance ever fail a person? What cannot be achieved by an earnest aspirant who makes a firm resolve?

Kabir’s mind galloped along these lines, “Let any calamity overtake me. Let the brahmin disciples do me to death! Let the Swami rise like a towering inferno at my sight. Come what may, I am prepared to stake my very life on this quest. Now itself, I will go to the ashram and whatever emanates from his holy lips, I will take as initiation.”

On learning that the Swami would start for his daily bath in the river before dawn, he planned to lay himself down on the steps leading to the water, so that the Swami, while descending the steps, would plant his feet on his head. Then, the Swami would utter something
in surprise, which he would take as his holy initiation. Kabir carried out his plan boldly. He waited on the footsteps of Manikarnika Ghat, a historical landing place on the bank of the river Ganga in the dark hour. As anticipated, Swami Ramananda while coming down the flight of steps, unknowingly put his foot firmly on Kabir’s head and stepped back with a startled cry, “Ram, Ram”. Beset with remorse, the Swami bent down and stroked Kabir’s head gently, uttering, “Ram, Ram”. Then, he walked to the water and after completing his daily routine returned to the ashram.

Kabir’s heart skipped with joy. He thought, “Today is a day of greatest fortune, highest auspiciousness for me! My ancestors have conferred all their merits on me. The Lord has fulfilled my desire. I have received the ultimate, liberating mantra, glorified in the scriptures. This destroys all sins. Those who have faith in this mantra will be redeemed, those without faith will meet their doom. This was imparted by Siva to Parvati and by Narada to Valmiki, Bhardwaj, Parasara, VedaVyasa, and Suka. Many a sage attained the highest state by repeating this mantra. There is nothing, nothing at all superior to this Word.”

Kabir took his bath in the Ganga, reached home in great joy. Prostrating before his parents, he said, “On this holy day, I received the initiation from Swami Ramananda and learnt the way to moksha. On this day, he has put his stamp on my soul. From today, we all shall wear his insignia of tulsi garlands and sandalwood paste mark on our forehead.”

Wearing silk garments, tulsi garland and sandal mark on his forehead and carrying a plate with garlands of fragrant flowers, fruits and other items of worship, chanting all the way, ‘Jai Ram, Sita Ram’, Kabir walked to the ashram. Inside the ashram, he repeatedly prostrated in the direction of Swami Ramananda and his disciples and chanting the Name with japamala joined the groups of devotees in singing.

Observing this from a distance, the disciples wondered, “Ah..! What disaster is going to strike us today? This boy has come wearing all the insignia of our sect. He is sitting boldly amidst us as our equal. Let us find out if he was initiated by our teacher.”

They pointed out Kabir in his strange outfit to the teacher, then rushed to Kabir and said, “You have come with the sole purpose of
disgracing us. Unless you are cut into two pieces, you will not stop harassing us. Sitting in our midst, you are mocking our tradition. Why are you dressed like this?” They started pulling his legs and hands, some knocked him on his head, some kicked him.

Kabir said, “O supreme brahmins! Don’t attack me without cause. In the early hours today, your Guru initiated me on the bank of Ganga. If you have any doubt, go and ask the Swami.”

They took him to the Swami and asked him, “He claims that you gave him initiation this morning. Is it true?”

Speechless with anger, Swami Ramananda threw one of his slippers with great force at Kabir. The slipper hitting his forehead caused profuse bleeding. Instantly Kabir started dancing rapturously. He looked at the Swami and said, “O my beloved Lord! I must have performed countless austerities to merit the touch of your footwear on my forehead! None of these disciples are so fortunate as I am. What love and compassion you bear for this lowly creature! O my Master, Beautiful One, your hands are holy, your padukas are holy. O Holy One! You have enslaved me. I am bonded to you forever now. I adore every inch of your Being. I have no Master other than you. O Lord, please condescend to accept my adorations.”

Touched by his zeal and devotion, the Swami asked in gentle tones, “O devious thief! When did I initiate you?”

“O revered Swami! When you came to Manikarnika Ghat this morning for your bath, didn’t you put your foot on my head while descending the steps? Your Holiness also blessed me with the Ram-mantra.” Kabir could not contain his joy on recalling the scene. He was inspired to render long hymns in praise of the venerable Swami Ramananda.

The Swami’s heart was filled with tenderness and compassion. However, he said, “Oh….it was you, the trickster, on the steps! Though you beguiled me into this act, there is no point in regretting it. Whatever is done is done. O my dear disciples, whatever he says is true, though it took place under strange circumstances. Accept him as one among you and take care of him.”

The enraged followers cried out in unison, “O Master, just because you uttered the usual holy words to him unknowingly, does he become your disciple? Can a highborn accept an outcaste as a disciple? Has
such a thing ever taken place here? We will be disgraced if we accept him. Let us not accommodate him in our sect.”

When they continued to press their point, the Master had to give in. Addressing Kabir, he said, “You got the initiation by a ruse. For this reason, you better stay out of my sight. Never show up in this part of the city hereafter.”

However, after Kabir left the place, he turned to his brahmin disciples and said, “O sadhus, though he is only a young boy, he is imbued with perfect devotion and faith. He is also wise and acquainted with the inner meaning of scriptures. No one so far has borne this much suffering to obtain initiation from me. For some fault in his past life, he has taken birth now in a different Faith. His character is sublime. The great sage Valmiki though lowborn, yet attained an exalted status. This boy’s body language, words and deeds, however strange, indicate that he is an extraordinary incarnation. We have examples of Vibhishana, Prahlada, Mahabali, the supreme among devotees, who were born in the clan of demons. What can we predict of the Lord’s play in this world?” After dwelling on the day’s strange occurrences for a while, he became absorbed in communion with God.  

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

All the suns and moons
of all the galaxies are,
\textit{Vi\'swatomukhi},
your eyes facing everywhere,
seeing all the Night at once.

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.
For those whose form is bliss there is no suffering. To them the cremation ground is as heaven itself. Within themselves also they have discerned heaven and hell. There is no body [and therefore no experiencing of the fruits of their karma] for those experiencing non-dual bliss. It is to those that practise devotion towards them that the fruits of actions will accrue. (221)

cuki, Sanskrit sukhin means one who is enjoying happiness or pleasure, in this case, the bliss of the Self. Once the attachment to the body and ego is ended, there is only the bliss of the Self. Therefore he is said to be of the very form of bliss. Since all worlds are a mental projection, the only hell is to be identified with that world through the

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu, 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.
ego-mind, and the only heaven is to be free of any such identification through merging with the Self, reality.

The final part of the verse relates to the effects of *karma* specifically, therefore the words ‘[and therefore no experiencing of the fruits of their *karma*]’ have been added to make the sense clear. The body exists only for the purpose of the working out of *karma*, therefore in this sense, the words *karma* and body are synonyms. Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) glosses: ‘for those experiencing non-dual bliss there will be no experiencing of fruits from their actions in their current birth.’ In other words the actions of the *jñāni* in the current birth belong to the Self only, and will not give rise to any āgamyā (future) *karma*, nor any further birth in which it must be experienced. However even those non-*jñānis* who practice devotion towards such a one will necessarily incur a karmic debt therefrom.

If we are to speak of the bliss of that renunciant, it would be exact to say that it equals the bliss of Vishnu, Brahma, Indra and the rest of the gods, all combined; or that it equals the bliss of the supreme Lord Siva himself. To take it further, we might say that his bliss has no equal but itself. Even the Vedas cannot know the bliss of those who stand apart [from all things, including bliss].

(222)

In the original Tamil *inpam* – bliss is mentioned only in relation to the *viratttaṉ* – renunciant. However it is to be understood with the three terms of comparison also, i.e. [the bliss of] the gods, [the bliss of] Lord Siva and [the bliss of] himself.

The superior seeker is one who pays homage to an adept of Saiva Siddhanta, a teacher of the four paths beginning with ‘dwelling in the realm of god,’ in order to learn from him the state of Oneness. Can there be any greatness which exceeds that of those who, with melting heart, dedicate their service to his divine essence?

(223)

ciththānti, Sanskrit *siddhāntin*, is one who follows the religion of Saiva Siddhānta. The primary meaning of the word is one who
establishes or proves his arguments logically. Here, in view of the non-sectarian stance of the majority of the verses, the word has been taken to mean a suitably qualified teacher, i.e. a realised sage.

cālokam, Sanskrit sāloka – dwelling in the realm of god is the lowest of the four degrees of spiritual ripeness. See the notes to verse 64 at the start of chapter 2.

Just as life leaves the body when the head is severed, when the personal self is no more, the jnani will be free of the constraints of [auspicious or inauspicious] times, places, directions, actions, bodily attire, religions and the knowledge of their peculiar characteristics, and considerations of proper conduct. Such a one is none other than Lord Siva. (224)

Once the personal self, the ego-consciousness, is eliminated, all concepts relating to exoteric worship, such as auspicious times and places, rituals and appropriate dress and the proper forms of worship to be practised in the various sects and religions, cease to exist, just as life leaves the body the moment the head is severed. Whether or not a jnāni appears to keep up the observance of any such practices after realisation will depend upon his prārabdha, his karma from his current, and final, birth.

The words proper conduct translate cilam, Sanskrit śīla – moral conduct, integrity, morality, piety, virtue. In this case the outward show of socially sanctioned moral conduct and piety is meant.

The true jñānis dwell in the non-dual state, taking the death of the ego as the greatest of penances. If even the Vedas and Āgamas are at a loss to say whether for them there can be chanting of Tēvāram hymns, observance of holy occasions, meditation practices, virtuous and sinful acts and proper and improper behaviour, who else then is qualified to say? (225)

The text simply says cāvu – death, but it is the death of the ego, the personal self, that is meant.

Tēvāram is the name for the corpus of the vernacular hymns composed by the three Tamil saints, Appar, Sundarar and
The love which he bestows upon silent ascetics as he looks upon them with his unblinking gaze; his divine form, which no artist could picture, and which resembles the white moon, [shining with holy ash] – these images come to me unbidden even in dream, like the sun arising before the eight eyes, set in glorious array, in the four heads of the lotus-seated Brahma. (226)

The jñāni’s body is compared to the white moon because it is smeared liberally with white holy ash, vibhūti in Sanskrit, tiru nīṟu in Tamil.

The image of the four heads of Brahmā turning in unison towards the rising sun, so that its light is reflected in their eight eyes, aligned as in an array, is an arresting one. Pathumāṭhaṇaṉ, a proper name derived from the Sanskrit padma-āsana – lotus seat, is a name of Brahmā. He is closely associated with the lotus. In the Hindu creation myth he is said to have emerged from the lotus in Viṣṇu’s navel, and then proceeded to give birth to sons who created the universe and everything in it. He is therefore usually depicted as sitting or standing on the lotus blossom.

The joyous gaze which melts the heart in supreme bliss; the beatific countenance; the radiance of his gentle smile; the holy ashes – these are merely incidental marks of beauty which adorn a body in which the personal consciousness has died. (227)

The idea being conveyed is that the outward characteristics of the true jñāni, beautiful and awe inspiring as they may be, are merely the outward manifestation of his inner state. Far from cultivating them or adopting them consciously, having lost his ego consciousness, he is not even aware of them. TCS glosses: Since his joyous look and so on are not intentional but manifest in him naturally he (the author) says, ‘Merely empty [marks of] beauty.’ As indicated by the gloss, an
exact translation would be *entirely empty [marks of] beauty*. They are *empty, worthless* not for any bad reason, but simply because they are irrelevant or incidental. Hence the translation has been modified in this sense.

Dwelling detached from a body weakened through its effortless rejection of worldly desires; the last residue of spent *karma* lingering about him like the scent of faded flowers; his gaze where ever dwells the joyous bliss which is not dependent upon the objects of sense; his divine countenance – these images shall never leave my heart. (228)

The words *scent of faded flowers* translate the Tamil *vāḍal maṇam*. The verb *vāḍu* means to *wither, fade* as of a plant or flower; *vāḍal* therefore means *withering, fading*, and can also be used alone, as here, as a noun meaning *faded flower(s)*. The phrase as a whole refers to the *jñāni*’s *prārabdha karma*, the *karma* of the present incarnation, which though now inoperative, lingers on until the death of the body in this his final incarnation, just as the scent of flowers, though now dead and withered, may still retain their perfume for a time. See also the notes to verse 220.

The *jñāni* knows only the pure, intrinsic bliss of the Self, *niruvidaya ānantam*, free of contact with the objects of sense, which stands in sharp contrast to *vidaya ānantam*, the temporary bliss which the *ajñāni* derives from contact with the objects of sense.

You shall speak of the one who has cast off the cloak of the thirty-six tattvas, and is clothed in the four directions, by the names of ‘Non-Dual One,’ ‘Solitary One,’ ‘Pure One,’ ‘Blissful One,’ ‘One who dwells in the fourth state [beyond waking, dream and deep sleep],’ ‘Avadhuta,’ ‘Forswearer of the world,’ ‘Siva Yogi,’ ‘Nirvani,’ and ‘Renunciant.’ (229)

Here a number of names used to describe the *jñāni* are given. *tikampari*, Sanskrit *digambari* is one *who is clothed in the four directions*, the sky, empty space. Again the word is used in a metaphorical sense (see verse 202 and note) to suggest his nature as
one who is not touched by the world. ēkānti, Sanskrit ekāntin (ēka – one + anta – limit) means one who is solitary, alone by virtue of the fact that, having merged with the supreme Reality, there is no longer anything other than himself. A turiyaṅ is one who dwells in the fourth state [beyond waking, dream and deep sleep]. The avatūtaṅ is one who has freed himself from the world. This is the Tamil form of Sanskrit avadhuta, which is the past participle of the verb ava-dhu, meaning to shake off, cast off, disregard, refuse and is used of one who has cast off, rejected the taint of the world. niruvāṇi – emancipated one is a personal noun from the word niruvāṇam, Sanskrit nirvāṇa, which literally means put out, blown out, extinguished, calmed, quieted. In Hindu texts it has the sense of perfect calm or repose, happiness, highest bliss, beatitude. It therefore refers to one who is at peace, having eliminated worldly bondage.

Oho! There are those who, feigning to be free of desire, have outwardly renounced all, [and those who have truly renounced all]. Yet can we not distinguish them [one from the other] by the signs of spiritual ripeness, [or the lack of it]? [The former] seek out maths where the best alms may be got; they whisper in corners like a [newly-wed] girl [in her mother in-law’s house]; when people come [with offerings], they stretch out their own hands towards theirs in anticipation of gifts. (230)

TCS notes that the mention of ‘those who only feign total renunciation’ implies the idea of ‘those who are not feigning thus, but have renounced in their true nature’.

Just as a newly married girl might hesitate to voice her wishes openly in her mother-in-law’s house, but rather choose to speak of them to her husband in private in the belief that this is the best way to get what she wants, the false renunciant will target only certain devotees – who are convinced of his spiritual purity – with his selfish requests, whilst maintaining the appearance of a selfless renunciant with others.

Just as the waves will rock a ship when it comes close to the shore, the false personal consciousness will reappear when you
come into contact with the objects of sense. Like a warrior who has taken a vow [to defeat his enemy], or someone who accepts a challenge to jump [over a deep well], you should stand firm in your determination to renounce. Otherwise that which you have renounced will return to grip you once more. (231)

The warrior who has taken a vow to defeat the enemy must do so or die in the attempt, just as the renunciant must stake his life on the defeat of his own enemy, the thirty-six tatvas.

The phrase someone who accepts a challenge to jump [over a deep well] is a translation of the Tamil veṟṟi kuti kutittōṅ – literally one who leaps a leap for victory. TCS glosses: ‘If someone who sets out to jump across a sixty foot well jumps sixty one feet, that is victory; if he fails, victory is lost and he falls into the well. Similarly for someone who sets out to renounce the objects of sense, renunciation is to renounce those objects of sense along with his personal consciousness. If he does not do so, and those objects of sense grip him, he will lose the glory that comes from that renunciation, and fall back again into birth.’

(To be continued)

We wish to bring to the attention of readers an excellent video on the Annamalaiyar Temple and the Karthikai Deepam festival in Tiruvannamalai. The video was created by Philip Lucas who is Professor of Religious Studies at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida. It is available on Youtube.

Part One: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuE7c-dbJ6w&t=1718s
Part Two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_Gqte3Kpg&t=50s
‘I’ IS A DOOR. The essence of Advaita as taught by Ramana Maharshi, Atmanananda and Nisargadatta Maharaj by Philip Renard. Zen Publications, 60 Juhu Supreme Shopping Centre, Gulmohar Cross Road, No.9, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai 400049. 2017. pp.93, Rs.150. www.zenpublications.com

Aside from the academics who make a professional study of Advaita Vedanta and write learned tomes mostly for their colleagues, there are among those who try to live the tenets of Advaita Vedanta, few who actually have some intellectual grasp of the subtlety and complexity of the school. And among those who practice the school fewer still have the capacity to write in a cogent manner about its concepts and implications. Many do not take the trouble to study but rely on catch phrases and jargon as their foundation of understanding. Philip Renard is an exception.

By profession Renard was a Dutch typographic designer, and this shows in his punctilious approach to the teachings under review. He began his spiritual practice with Subud, then followed a period when he read Da Free John. Finally he became associated with Alexander Smit, a Dutch disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj. He has also studied Dzogchen with Tulku Urgyen.

He presents in this slim volume the results of his meticulous research into three modern sages whose central teachings used the idea or concept of ‘I’ as the one sure pointer to self-realisation. It is an ambitious task for all three sages had their own distinctive understanding of ‘I’. The essays were originally published in the Mountain Path. The first section of his book is a brief synopsis of the three modern sages and their core teaching centred on the idea/concept/non-concept of ‘I’, ‘I-I’ and ‘I am’. He regards them as outstanding teachers from whom Westerners have much to learn. The second section concerns ‘The Medicine’. The final section offers brief histories of the three sages.

The challenge which Renard confronts in his exposition is the different levels of meaning for various traditional concepts/words that these sages use. Each sage comes from a dissimilar background...
and gives a distinctive weight to terms such as ‘consciousness’ or ‘awareness’, which can be quite confusing and mis-leading. Fortunately Renard has a precise mind and clarifies key words and their implications.

He has a special affinity with Nisargadatta Maharaj (NM). He quotes NM, “…Maya is so powerful that it gets you completely wrapped up in it. Maya means ‘I am’, ‘I love to be’. It has no identity except love. That knowledge of ‘I am’ is the greatest foe and the greatest friend. Although it might be your greatest enemy, if you propitiate it properly, it will turn around and lead you to the highest state.” For devotees of Ramana Maharshi (RM), we have here in NM a radically different approach to the central question of identity, I am. NM’s approach is quite philosophical and discursive, though he did initiate disciples into mantra dīkṣā. The teachings found in the books Seeds of Consciousness and Prior to Consciousness are yet to be fully appreciated. They are revolutionary.

The central core of RM’s teaching is much more traditional and is concerned solely with practice, that is, with self-enquiry (ātmavicāra) which is the one effective method through which our sense of separateness (our ego) is dissolved. The ego is a false self-awareness; it is a phantom. When we investigate this ego we discover it does not exist and that we are not a transitory phenomenon but pure, indivisible self-awareness. We investigate this by remaining centred on the sense of ‘I’ using the tool of self-enquiry, Who Am I? Questions concerning this ‘I’ and what is pure consciousness was discouraged by RM as useless speculation. He asked us to see for ourselves once we are stabilised in the pure sense of ‘I am’.

This book is dense with well-reasoned arguments and comparisons among the three sages. It is well worth the effort to follow Renard’s appraisal. — Christopher Quilkey


This small but valuable book was compiled from various discourses given by Siddharameshwar Maharaj (SM) and edited from the original
Marathi text by SM’s appointed successor in the lineage, Sadguru Ganapatrao Maharaj (GM). GM transcribed three books in Marathi of SM’s talks: Vachanamrut, Atmajnanachi Gurukilli and Sulabh Vedanta Lahari. John Norwell, a disciple of Ranjit Maharaj was responsible for organising the first translation into English of the present book under review, and it was published 74 years after the mahasamadhi of SM.

The language of the book is clear and simple in its straight approach to self-knowledge. This is a book for those practising sadhana. It is not so much a book of philosophical explanations, though they are intrinsic to understanding, as it is an animated, practical manual for jnana yoga. Judging by the tone of this small book SM’s discourses are no half-hearted affair. They are full of urgency and have the capacity to inspire and deepen one’s appreciation of this advaitic path. Many of the analogies given by SM are so apt and direct that one is reminded of Nisargadatta Maharaj’s passionate exposition of the teaching. SM’s use of homely metaphors makes the book very approachable. For example: “The letters have no support without the paper. Without letters however, the paper can remain in its own unused form. The paper with the letters on it can be read. But when the paper is without letters, the speech is silent. The same way, on the clear paper, the Supreme Self, the letters in the form of the world appear. Endless objects, endless thoughts are the letters on this paper, the Supreme Self. If the letters are erased the paper is not wiped out.”

And, “A rubber band is stretched by stretching. But when stretching is stopped, then the rubber band, by itself, returns to its earlier state. To bring it to its earlier state nothing is required to be done. On the contrary, by doing something its earlier state is altered. In the same way, the state of total non-activity is inherently natural and therefore, nothing is required to be done to come to this state. If one tries to do something in that state then a thought would arise and the natural state would be disturbed.” For those who have read I am That and Master of Self Realization, this is a welcome addition to the literature of the Nav Nath sampradaya. It contains the words of a master and is full of profound insights.

— Christopher Quilkey
BOOK REVIEWS


J.Krishnamurti would at times say ‘Sirs, if you have nothing else to do, you write a commentary on the everlasting Bhagavad Gita.’ He was not being irreverent to the Song Eternal. His good friend Aldous Huxley had the highest praise for the book and the author Hari Haran quotes him. The point that K, a very serious man, was making, was that most of us talk about the Gita or some other perennial favourite work but we stop with talking and writing. K exhorted us to read the Book of Life for ourselves and not be second-hand people. I met a western woman writer in the early 1970s. She had gone through eighty commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and was writing a book on them. A commentary on commentaries? Her favourite was Sri Ramanuja’s commentary.

The book under review is not a commentary on the Gita in the sense that each verse is commented on in serial order chapter by chapter. Hari Haran has dealt with only 260+ out of the total of 700 verses often quoting them at random as the context demands. A dermatologist with an M.D., in this first book of his, he has essayed a commentary on living drawing his inspiration from the timeless Gita, which indeed is a Book of Life, Death and Immortality, and from the insights of very wise men, especially Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda on the Gita’s wisdom. Gita does not make an appearance in the initial forty odd pages and one wonders if the author is a non-starter like the reluctant warrior Arjuna himself. However, when he does get round to dealing with the main subject, he does a simply fantastic job. He has in a great measure what it takes to expound a book which the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt hailed as the greatest book of all time. The Father of the Nation, who lived by every word of the book, but also by the words of the Sermon on the Mount and St. Paul’s Rhapsody on Love said that he put the Gita even above the New Testament. The author has a real talent for storytelling and by interweaving fiction and fact, has spun a highly readable, delightful, wise and riveting book on one of the wisest books ever. He has a very
good command of English, a fresh, original approach, a good sense of humour and his style is simple, lucid, elegant, cliché-free, jargon-free and modern. Above all, he has sraddha (faith, iman) which the Gita assures us, vouches jnana, Self-Knowledge. The author shows the immense relevance of the teachings of the Gita to human beings of all times, climes and kinds. His characterization of his fictional figures is so life-like that they blend perfectly with the main theme of the book, namely the liberating message of the Gita.

The portrayal of the boy Muthu is consummate. The son of very poor parents, he was not meant to complete even elementary education despite his best efforts and the thrashings of his father but when he starts making parathas for a small dhaba, he proves Albert Einstein right, viz., everybody is a genius. He is a culinary genius, a paratha wizard who transformed a sleepy dhaba into a flourishing restaurant. When we see Muthu, all of nine years, standing on a stool to fry parathas, and when, after a few years the owner retires to his village entrusting the dhaba to young Muthu. Muthu voluntarily remits a major portion of the earnings to the owner. We understand Gita's message of Karma Yoga a little better when we read the author's exposition. And when the asthmatic Muthu passes away, his face beaming with joy, peace and love, due to pulmonary complications, days after a grove dear to his heart was destroyed by a resort builder, the author shows us how the Bhagavad Gita is right when it says that there is no death, that we are indeed eternal (nitya, saasvata and sanatana).

Though the fictional part of the book itself can stand alone and often the conteur rises to great heights of excellence, yet here and there his inexperience shows through. However, his exegesis of the great book is impeccable. If the Upanishads are the acme of human spiritual wisdom, the Bhagavad Gita, the author shows, is the human anthology par excellence. He enlivens his narrative with apt quotations from great minds of different lands like Meister Eckhart, Rumi, Hafiz, Lao-tze, Edwin Schroedinger and others.

Though Hari Haran hails Gandhiji’s Ahimsa as a wonderful philosophy and is overwhelmed by the manner in which he involved millions of Indians in his non-violent freedom movement, he doubts its value as a weapon for all times and quotes Sri Aurobindo who says
that the role of war in our world ‘can only be denied by the fanatics of pacifism’. But, Gandhiji was not a pacifist and he denied being one. He was at once a general, a soldier and a warrior extraordinary. Only his weapons were different. The Bhagavad Gita talks about *asanga sastra* (weapon of detachment) and *jnaanaasi* (the sword of Wisdom). Being a highly evolved spiritual being and one who would not do anything which flew in the face of his dear *Gita*, Gandhiji fought his war with the weapon of Truth that is Love. He deemed the *Gita* as a scripture of *ahimsa* (non-violence, love). He never ceased to believe that if he was truly non-violent, the world would be so too and he went on purifying himself. He hailed the non-violence of the brave as the best virtue and weapon and said that violence of the brave was superior to the non-violence of the coward. Muthu would have understood it.

In the 1950s, my favourite gift-book was Lin Yutang’s *The Importance of Living*, later it was Rabindranath Tagore’s *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*. Now I have started giving away the delightful book with the unforgettable Muthu in it.

— Jijnaasu


The famous lyric *Bhaja Govindam* was originally titled *Moha Mudgara*, the hammering of delusion. The present well-written commentary under review was by Swami Gurdasananda who resides at the Sri Janaki Mata Ashram, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, and originally published by the author in 1975. This new edition has been edited by Swami Lakshmidharananda. The verses follow a sequence as per the tradition followed by the Sri Sarada Math, Sringeri.

Shankaracharya sang the first twelve verses which became known as *Dvadasa Manjarika Stotram*, a bouquet of twelve verses with the first verse “Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda, O fool! Rules of grammar will not protect you at the time of death,” to be sung as a chorus at the end of each verse. It is said that the fourteen disciples who accompanied him then, each in turn, added one verse,
which then went under the title *Chaturdasa Manjarika Stotram*, a bouquet of fourteen verses. Shankaracharya then added four more verses and these combined came to be known as *Moha Mudgara*, as listening to the verses relieves the hearer of *moha* (delusion).

The entire *Bhaja Govindam* is an exhortation, a call to dedicate one’s life to a higher calling and not be seduced by worldly attractions nor be caught up in petty philosophical arguments that have little relevance to the prime purpose of our existence, namely to become one with God. It is a stirring composition and a call we should all hear and put into action. — TV Ramamurthy

**SRI SHANKARA STOTRANI (SANSKRIT TEXT),**
You have to give it to Sri Ramakrishna Mutt. They are past masters in bringing out excellent spiritual books, meant for all spiritual aspirants, at reasonable prices. The book under review has a form worthy of its wonderful content, viz., a fine selection of 65 hymns of Adi Sankaracharya. The front and back pages of the hard cover edition have been designed very artistically and devoutly, making the book a thing of beauty and a source of joy and inspiration.

Two hymns in this book, namely, *Sri Dakshinamurti Ashtakam* and *Manisha Panchakam*, under the heading *Gurustotrani* (Hymns on the Guru), are steeped in jnana. The former hymn, viz., *Eight Verses on Lord Dakshinamurti*, distils the complete essence of the Vedantic teaching and the latter is an Advaitic gem. All the other 63 hymns, addressed to the various forms of the Formless Reality and holy places and rivers of India, can melt stones.

When a supreme jnani like Sankara Bhagavadvipa, ever abiding as the Formless Self and seeing the phenomenal world as a dream, a projection of the chimerical mind, spontaneously sings the praise of different forms of the one God and when the jnani is also a perfect devotee and a poetic genius *non pareil*, a timeless treasure-trove of gems of hymns of the purest ray comes into being. The book includes *Sivananda Lahari*, believed to be the greatest of the Acharya’s hymns and *Soundarya Lahari* and *Bhaja Govindam*, two of the most popular
and beloved of his hymns. The seven Bhujangams, addressed to Ganesa, Subrahmanya, Siva and other deities, in the Bhujangaprayaata meter (resonating like the slithering of a serpent) are lilting, captivating and uplifting. Of course, when speaking about Sankara’s hymns, you cannot single out one as the best for each one of them has a unique quality of unsurpassable beauty and depth.

This is a book which is a pleasure to own and a blessing to use muhurmuhu: (again and again) as Swami Gautamananda suggests in his Sanskrit Foreword.

— Didhyaasu

SCRIBBLINGS... on matters spiritual by Mahesh Hangal. ZENPublisherws. A Division of Multi MediaPrivate Limited, 60, Juhu Supreme Shopping Centre, Gulmohar Cross Road No.9, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai-400049, India.pp.153, Rs.280. ISBN 938278812-3 www.zenpublications.com

This is a delightful book to be kept like a vade mecum to be dipped into from time to time for entertainment, edification and, perhaps, why not, enlightenment. The author Mahesh Hangal is a spiritual seeker whose search for ‘the peace that passeth all understanding’ ‘took him to Osho, U.G. Krishnamurti and many many others.’ He is au courant with Zen, Tao, Advaita etc. His search ended when he saw ‘the advaitic sage Shri Ramesh Balsekar’ who himself had drunk deep at the two founts of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. Sparks kept coming from the anvil of Hangal’s quest and experience and, luckily for the readers, he enclosed them in his diary. He has a real flair for utterances which have an aphoristic quality. Some of them may sound banal but many of them are quite original, if not in thought, certainly so in expression. Here are a few bright sparks:

“I am not saying there is nothing wrong with the world. All I am saying is it can’t be any different.”

“What God are you seeking..? The one you have made? or The one who has made you?”

“Fulfilment .. is the end of the one seeking fulfilment.”

“There is no one who wakes up when one finally wakes up!”

— Didhyaasu
Ashram’s Samudram Gosala
The inauguration with puja of the Ashram’s Samudram Gosala took place on 1st October 2017 with devotees in attendance. The Ashram Gosala has grown over the years and now has some 200 milking cows. Due to the increased population there was a need for a place to retire aged cows. Considering that bovine lifespans extend to about age twenty-four and that cows usually only give milk between the ages of three and sixteen, the Ashram’s Samudram Gosala has been developed to serve as a facility for retired cows after their long years of service in the Ashram. The 2.5-acre Samudram Gosala is situated just beyond the Samudram Lake spillway with a spectacular view of the Hill. On one occasion after torrential rain Bhagavan visited this area to see the Samudram dam which had overflowed.

The new facility is manned by gosala workers and provides pasture, fields of fodder and water from a forty five feet deep well. Fifteen elderly cows have been selected to take up residence at the new site bordering the upcoming bypass road.

Navaratri
Ashram celebrations of Navaratri (‘Nine Nights’) this year commenced on the 20th when Goddess Yogambika was ceremoniously taken out in procession and installed in the Mantapam. The festival began on the evening of the 21st with the alankaram of Meenakshi, followed on succeeding nights by the alankarams of Gajalakshmi, Tapas (the Goddess performing penance), Linga Puja (the Goddess worshipping the Siva Linga), Rishabha Vahanam (the Goddess on the Bull Mount), Sesha Sayanam (the Goddess reclining on Serpent Sesha as Lord Ranganatha), Venuganam (the Goddess dressed as Lord Krishna playing the flute), Saraswati (as the Goddess of wisdom and learning), and Mahishasura Mardini (as the destroyer of the demon Mahisha). On Vijayadasami, Saturday the 30th, Goddess Yogambika was taken around in procession and returned to the Grabhagriham.

Samvatsara (Annual) Abhishekm at Pavala Kunru
The Samvatsara (Annual) Abhishekm at Pavala Kunru (Coral Hill) Temple took place on Saturday morning of the 28th
October 2017, the one-year anniversary of the Ashram-supported Mahakumbhabhishekam which was celebrated atop the temple vimanam on 7th November 2016. V.S. Mani was in attendance along with devotees atop the hillock where this beautifully renovated and well-maintained ancient temple is situated, whose magnificent history leads all the way back to the legendary years when Parvati came to Tiruvannamalai to do her penance.

Obituaries

Sri A. Viswanathan, born on 26th December, 1944 came from a great lineage of devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. His mother, Rajalakshmi, spent her childhood in Ramanashram directly benefiting from the teachings of Maharshi. His mother’s grandmother Venu Ammal, the younger sister of Echammal, served Maharshi in early days.

Sri Viswanathan was a mechanical engineer by profession, and worked in reputed foundries in India and in Indonesia. On completion of his professional career, he focused on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, always dear to his heart. He was a regular visitor to Sri Ramanasramam and has written articles in the Ashram magazines.

He spent considerable time with his mother eliciting information from her on her childhood experiences in the Ashram. Through this, he brought to light Sri Bhagavan’s demonstration of care and concern for small children, teaching, guiding and playing with them. He was also instrumental in bringing to knowledge the ‘Sri Chakra’ drawn by Sri Bhagavan with great precision for Venu Ammal.

He was popular with children and took efforts to teach spiritual thoughts in simple language. On 31st October, 2017 in Chennai, he suffered mild heart attack. After an angiogram was taken, the medical team decided on bypass surgery within a week. Throughout his stay in the hospital, he was cheerful chanting “Arunachala”. On 6th November, just a day before his scheduled surgery, he suffered massive cardiac arrest in front of the medical team visiting him on routine call. In spite of their best efforts, with chant of Arunachala on his lips, he reached the feet of Sri Bhagavan at 8-16P.M. on 6th November, 2017.
He is survived by his wife Sumathi and two daughters Radhika and Ramya and their families.

Smt. Rajalakshmi, born on 30th October, 1920 was blessed with the rare opportunity of spending her childhood with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Living as the oldest person associated with Sri Ramanashram of early days she passed away at her residence in Chennai on 11th November, 2017.

Her experiences in early childhood were brought out in the magazine Mountain Path in 2008, issues 2 & 4. She had the good fortune of Sri Bhagavan teaching her slokas in Tamil, Samskrit and Telugu, often writing in his own hand for her to study and memorise. She spent most of her time outside school hours in Sri Ramanasramam Moving amongst all well-known devotees in the ashram as a child she was witness to various incidents of Bhagavan’s interaction with them. In later years, after her marriage to Sri C.S. Arunachalam who served in Army, she visited Sri Ramanasramam regularly with children to receive Sri Bhagavan’s blessings.

Her second son was Sri. A. Viswanathan whose obituary is above, passed away suddenly. Though Rajalakshmi withstood the grief with mental fortitude, age and the body took their toll and she passed away five days later.

Born near Chidambaram in November 1937, Sri Murugesan came to the Ashram in 1992 with a recommendation letter from a Saiva Siddhanta Mutt. After serving for some time in the Ashram dining hall and the Old Hall, he was put in charge of the gosala where he served tirelessly for nearly 25 years—even till the last day of his life. A very hard worker, he was up early each day and reached the gosala by 4am to oversee morning milking. Though healthy till the end and taking his evening meal as usual the night before, on the morning of 29th November 2017, during Brahma Muhurtha (Kaisika Ekadasi) of the 7th day of the Karthikai Deepam festival, Murugesan passed away quietly in his sleep in his Ashram room to merge at the Feet of Holy Arunachala.