

CONTENTS

DIVINE NAMES OF ARUNACHALA	2
EDITORIAL Gossip	3
THE HYMN TO SRI DAKSHINAMURTI PART THREE B.K. Croissant	9
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION Sadhu Om	29
POEM: THE NAMES OF LALITHA Ramesh Menon	33
KEYWORD: DARSHAN John Grimes	35
SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI Swami Sadasivananda	39
THE BHAGAVAD GITA SARAM Swami Shantananda Puri	51
ANXIETY AND ATMA VICHARA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE Michael Highburger	57
HOW TO END SUFFERING Suresh Boddapati	69
POEM: IN YOUR EYES Upahar	72
LUCIA OSBORNE Kitty Osborne	73
SET ASIDE THE EGO AND LIVE HAPPILY PART TWO Lakshmi Sreedhar	81
POEM: LIGHT Suresh Kailash	85
A VISIT TO THE ABODE OF SILENCE Shashi Narasimhan	87
BOOK EXCERPT: LAGHU GURU UPANISHAD Gurprasad	95
MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: KABIR ON PERSONAL & IMPERSONAL ASPECTS OF GOD Nabaji Siddha	105
OZHIVIL ODUKKAM Kannudaiya Vallalar	111
POEM: A MYSTERY Suresh Kailash	119
BOOK REVIEWS	120
ASHRAM BULLETIN	126

Divine Names of Arunachala

10. ॐ स्त्री पुंभाव प्रदायकाय नमः
om strī puṁbhāva pradāyakāya namaḥ
The Lord who grants birth as a man or a woman.

Numerous references are found in the scriptures to reveal the ‘gender equality’ practised by Lord Siva. The concept of ‘Ardhanariswara’ where He shares half of His body with the Divine Mother is an example of the Lord revealing His perfect and absolute gender neutrality. Arunachala Siva is a fusion of Siva and Sakti. In a verse of extraordinary beauty and power, Sri Ramana Maharshi sings, “In the court (of Chidambaram), Siva, though motionless by nature, dances (in rapture) before His Shakti who stands still. Know that in Arunachala He stands in His solemnity and She withdraws there into His Unmoving Self.”¹

Bhagavan Ramana makes His devotees go through birth as male and female in order to remove any trace of gender bias left in His devotees. In another verse from Maharshi in *The Necklet of Nine Gems* Sri Ramana sings, “Annamalai! Delight of my Eyes! Lord who is Consciousness Itself, beyond differences of male, female and neuter!” His devotees only pray that they never forget the Lord and the gender of their future birth is never important to them.”²

¹ *The Necklet of Nine Gems*, verse 1.

² *Ibid.*, verse 4.

Gossip

It is natural that we wish to share what we think or see or experience. It is crucial part of the learning process as a human being. If we did not share we would be confronted with the impossible task of reinventing the wheel with each new generation. There would be no history, no culture and no stable and secure society. Communication is essential to our existence. Any society that restricts the flow of knowledge risks asphyxiation. Knowledge, like blood, is essential to the well-being of any society. Today we face the opposite challenge with the internet. For many people it is no longer separate from their daily activity – it is part of their lives. We are confronted by an avalanche of information, facts and opinions. It is a constant barrage that entices or demands our attention. Unless we exercise some discrimination we will inevitably be swallowed up by noise and though the world out there is at our finger tips we are isolated by the clever machinery we employ. Who has not seen a group, particularly of young people, each utterly absorbed in their own little world of a three inch wide screen? There is a trend that people seem more comfortable sharing through the intermediary of a machine rather than through direct communication. In the so-called advanced world, a growing malaise now is a sense of isolation and consequent loneliness.

How do we arrest this negative development in ourselves? How do we remain open to receiving information and yet are wise enough

to know the difference between a racket of briefly stimulating but largely irrelevant information, and the nourishing insights that contain wholesome food for the head and the heart?

When we genuinely communicate, what we say is important. It affects others, it affects us. What we say or do is a reflection of our state of consciousness. There is a much quoted parable ‘The Tale of Two Wolves’ which is attributed to various American Indian tribes or chiefs but one assumes it is a traditional Indian lore. It is a powerful allegory: “Inside of me there are two wolves. One is mean and evil and the other is good and they fight each other all the time. When asked which one wins, I answer, the one I feed the most.”

One of the great temptations when communicating in our personal lives is gossip. Just like on the global stage with the rise of fake news because it can so easily be placed ‘out there’ for there are those gullible enough to believe it, we too can by gossip deliberately distort, embellish and even improve stories! Gossip is a useful barometer that shows us exactly where we are irrespective of our own inflated estimation however humble or superior we may try to be. It is beneficial to watch how we can be unconsciously sucked in. The titillation of an outrageous piece of gossip makes us pay attention. We are willing to believe the worst and secretly enjoy the discomfort of others for whom we have no particular liking.

Gossip feeds our sense of disbelief, confirms our prejudices and gives us a gratuitous satisfaction that at least we are not such fools. However the joke is on us. We are all subject to gossip, be it innuendo, carping comment or injustice, for gossip never quite tells the true story. It is generally loaded with self-righteous judgements, sanctimonious dismissal and some degree of ignorance of facts. Like much of the information available on the internet, it is worthless and even harmful if we wish to remain centred in silent attention of what is important. It distracts us, it cheapens us.

That being the case, why do we indulge in this twisted gratification? Firstly, we cannot help it for we all are by nature curious to some degree and secondly, it is about someone else and certainly not us, of course, who are entirely blameless. Very few are free of this vice. We all struggle to keep our mouths shut when we are tempted unwisely to share damaging chatter. It is always someone else who is the scapegoat, which

implies that an innocent person can be blamed for the transgressions of others or everyone in general. Why? Because it is convenient.¹

In the *Deepam* issue of 2003 there was a story titled 'Blowing in the Wind' in a section called Afterword. Its content bears repeating.

In a small town in Italy lived a farmer called Antonio. He was a good man who went to church regularly and was always ready to help a friend in trouble. However he had one overriding vice. He was an irrepressible gossip. He knew that what he was doing was wrong, but he thought that it was only a minor sin compared with all the good he did, and anyway he went to confession every Sunday and was absolved of blame. His father-confessor knew him well and sent him on his way with a few prayers to recite for his expiation. One day, Antonio got a surprise when, instead of the usual formula he was asked to go and collect a basket of feathers.

"Feathers, Father? Are you sure?"

"Just go and do it my son," was the reply. "And then you must go for a walk. Go past your farm and past your neighbours. Go through the town and the market, and everywhere you go you must put your hand in the basket of feathers and scatter them along the way. Now go, and come back next week to tell me how you got on."

Antonio broadcast the feathers as he was told, and felt so stupid that he just had to join his friends in the evening for a drink and a gossip. He didn't even realise what he was doing until he was in the middle of a good story about someone he had seen up in the hills. It was too late to stop so he finished the story and went home.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned." He recited at confession that Sunday.

¹ There is an Iranian version of the scapegoat that illustrates the randomness of ascribed guilt. There was a king who heard a blacksmith had committed a crime in the then Persian eastern city of Balkh. The king was impetuous to mete out justice to demonstrate his power and ordered the arrest and beheading of the culprit. But since Balkh was too far away for him to take decisive action, the king declared that any blacksmith would do. Naturally after word got around about the king's decree, his courtiers were unable to find any blacksmiths in nearby towns but they did manage to find a hapless coppersmith in the city of Shushtar, in western Persia. In lieu of anyone better the king demanded the execution of the poor coppersmith for otherwise the crime of the blacksmith of Balkh would go unpunished and the king would be seen as weak.

“And did you gossip again?” he was asked.

“Not much. My words do no harm father, they just blow on the wind.

“Alright my son,” said the priest. “Now I want you to go back along all the places where you walked last week and collect the feathers that have blown in the wind and put them back into the basket.”

One can imagine Antonio’s astonishment and dismay at the realisation of what he had thoughtlessly done.

Whatever the words which come out of our mouth, it is well-nigh impossible to retrieve them. Unfortunately the desire to be the bearer of a juicy bit of ‘news’ often overcomes any sense of the injury that can be done by the gossiping. It is like theft, but harder to put right, particularly when what has been stolen is a person’s good name. Bhagavan was well known for never having a bad word to say about anyone, be that person of bad character or a criminal. When we damage another person we also harm ourselves for we are all connected. The world we inhabit is a giant web of interconnected threads. We are all part of Indra’s Net, which is described as a vast multifaceted jewel with countless aspects. Each part of the ornament is reflected in all of the other facets.

When we tarnish another person, the brightness of the jewels are clouded and whoever did this unknowingly creates distrust in their own heart. For unfounded suspicion inevitably creates confusion and ignorance. Have you ever noticed that a person who is a gossip eventually cannot tell the difference between truth and falsehood? They believe anything because their powers of discrimination are weak.

A useful criterion for discriminating between gossip and worthwhile communication is to ask yourself whether you can say something to a person’s face; if not, then do not say it at all behind their back.

One sure way to put an end to the desire to fritter away one’s energies in wasteful chatter is to dedicate oneself to what is important. Most of us are on some sort of spiritual quest that involves utter and complete concentration on one goal. There is a story from the *Mahabharata* that illustrates this so well.

Drona was the leading weapons guru of his time and he taught the young Kaurava and Pāṇḍava warriors their skills:

“...One day, when their tutelage is complete, Drona wants to test the skills of his disciples, and gathers them together. Before this, he has a wooden bird, a vulture, made and perched on the highest branch of a lofty tree, to be the target.

When the princes stand before him, Drona says crisply, ‘Pick up your bows and aim at the bird in the tree. As soon as I tell you, shoot to cut its head off. You will each have one shot, turn by turn.’

Drona, best among all Angira’s descendants, says first to Yudhishtira, ‘Yudhishtira, you will have the first chance.’ Yudhishtira picks up his bow and aims at the faraway wooden bird. Bharatarishabha, now Drona asks Yudhishtira, ‘Prince, do you see the bird in the treetop?’

Yudhishtira replies to his Guru, ‘I do.’

Drona now asks, ‘What else do you see? Do you see the tree, your brothers, and me?’ Yudhishtira says, ‘I see the tree, yourself, my brothers and the bird.’

Drona repeats his question, and Yudhishtira’s reply is the same. Apparently annoyed, Drona says, ‘Stand back, Yudhishtira; you will not strike the bird.’

Now Drona calls, one by one, the other princes, Duryodhana and his brothers, Bhima and also the princes from other lands who are his disciples. He asks each one the same question, and from each he has the same answer that Yudhishtira gives him: ‘I see the tree, yourself, my fellow sishyas, and the bird.’ Drona does not give any of them a chance to shoot at the wooden bird but reproachfully tells them all to stand down.”

Vaisampayana said, “When all the other princes have failed his test, Drona, with a smile, calls on Arjuna. He says, ‘It seems you are the one to bring the bird down. Raise your bow and aim, my son.’

Arjuna raises his bow, bends it and takes aim. He stands very still, then Drona asks softly, ‘Arjuna, do you see the bird, the tree and me?’

Arjuna replies, ‘I only see the bird, master, not the tree or you.’

Drona seems pleased with Arjuna’s answer. He asks that Pandava Maharatha, ‘If you see only the vulture, describe it to me.’

Arjuna says, ‘I see only the head of the vulture, not its body.’

The hair on Drona’s body stands on end in delight. He says to Partha, ‘Shoot it.’ Arjuna looses his arrow and neatly severs the wooden vulture’s head, bringing it down. Drona clasps Arjuna in his arms...”²

How hard it is to achieve such one-pointed concentration, but how rewarding. ▲

² *The Complete Mahabharata*, Volume One. Adi Parva, Sambhava Parva, Canto CXXXV. Translated by Ramesh Menon. Rupa Publications India, 2010.



Sri Dakshinamurti Statue at Sri Ramana Granthalayam

D. Thiyagarajan

The Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti

Word for Word and Commentary

Part Three

Verses Seven to Ten

B.K. CROISSANT

Verse Seven

बाल्यादिष्वपि जाग्रदादिषु तथा सर्वास्ववस्थास्वपि
व्यावृत्तास्वनुवर्तमानमहमित्यन्तः स्फुरन्तं सदा ।
स्वात्मानं प्रकटीकरोति भजतां यो मुद्रया भद्रया
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

*bālyādi-ṣvapi jāgradā-diṣu tathā sarvāsva-vasthās-vapi
vyāvṛttā-svanu-vartamānam aham ity-antaḥ sphurantam sadā |
svātmānam prakāṭi-karoti bhajatām yo mudrayā bhadrayā
tasmai śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idaṁ śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||*

bālyā ādiṣu: throughout (various stages) like childhood, etc.; *api*: also; *jāgrad ādiṣu*: throughout (various states) like waking, etc.; *tathā*:

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.

similarly; *sarvāsu avasthāsu api vyāvṛttāsu*: in all changing conditions also; *anuvartamānam*: remaining unmovable; *aham iti antaḥ sphurantam*: throbbing within as “I”; *sadā*: constantly; *svātmānam*: the Self; *prakaṭi karoti*: reveals; *bhajatām*: to His devotees; *yaḥ*: who; *mudrayā bhadrāyā*: by the auspicious hand-pose; *tasmai*: to Him; *śrī guru mūrtaye*; the blessed guru; *namaḥ idam*: may this obeisance be; *śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye*: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

To Him, the blessed guru Sri Dakshinamurti, who, by the auspicious hand-pose (of cin mudrā), reveals to His devotees the Self (that is) throbbing constantly within as “I” (while) remaining (absolutely) unmovable throughout (various stages) like childhood, (youth, maturity and old age), also throughout (various states), like waking, (dreaming and dreamless sleep), (and), similarly, in all (other) changing conditions, may this obeisance be.

Commentary

This verse expands and enlarges upon the preceding verse. It is soaring. It pulls from other previous verses and picks up the Vedic *mahāvākya*, visually this time with the *cin mudrā* hand-pose. Mahadevan gives a penetrating paraphrase of its meaning in his commentary.

Here is taught the method of enquiring into the nature of the Self. The method consists in recognizing the Self that is constant and unvarying in the inconstant and varying states in which it is found. Recognition is a process whereby identity is discovered in spite of differences. The usual example given of recognition is ‘This is that Devadatta’. I recognize here that the Devadatta whom I see now and in front of me is the same Devadatta whom I saw on a previous day elsewhere. Setting aside the differences of time and place, I recognize the identity of person. Similarly, the Self is to be realized as the same unchanging reality in the states that keep on changing. As examples of the changing states are given those that pertain to a life-span and those that occur every day. Infancy, adolescence, etc., waking, dream, etc., have their own peculiarities and respective time-periods. The

body in each case changes; so do the mind and the world too. What is taken to be real in one condition is seen to be unreal in another. What dominates one state disappears in the others. But what persists in every state without itself changing is the Self. It neither rises nor sets. It is the eternal, immutable, pure consciousness.

This is the meaning: The states, which are illusory, inert, and of the nature of misery, change and pass away. But the Self persists in all of them as the constant imperishable witness. When, for instance, waking supervenes on dream, one recalls thus, "I who was dreaming am awake now." Similarly, when one grows out of childhood and becomes an adult, one does not lose sight of identity. One recalls: "I who was a child am now a grown up man." And so it is with experiences like seeing and hearing: "It is the same 'I' that saw then that is now hearing." The states of experience change, but the 'I' persists: the stages in one's life change, but the 'I' persists. Likewise, the objects of pleasure and enjoyment change, but the 'I' persists. The 'I' is the witness of all experiences, their basic and unchanging reality. It is existence, consciousness, happiness. It is the inmost being, self-luminous awareness, the seat and centre of supreme bliss. It shines always as the "I" within.

It is this truth which Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti teaches by means of the hand-pose known as the cin-mudrā, the symbol of pure consciousness. In this pose, the thumb and the index finger of the right hand are joined at their tips while the other three fingers stand apart. The significance of this pose is that there is identity in the midst of apparent diversity.¹

Bhagavan speaks of the unbroken state of consciousness veiled by *māyā* with his usual clarity and elegance in *Talks*.

The idea that I am the body or the mind is so deep that one cannot get over it even if convinced otherwise. One experiences a dream and knows it to be unreal on waking. Waking experience is unreal in other states. So each state contradicts the others.

¹ *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, pp.19-20.

They are therefore mere changes taking place in the seer, or phenomena appearing in the Self, which is unbroken and remains unaffected by them. Just as the waking, dream and sleep states are phenomena, so also birth, growth and death are phenomena in the Self, which continues to be unbroken and unaffected. Birth and death are only ideas. They pertain to the body or the mind. The Self exists before the birth of this body and will remain after the death of this body. So it is with the series of bodies taken up in succession. The Self is immortal. The phenomena are changeful and appear mortal. The fear of death is of the body. It is not true of the Self. Such fear is due to ignorance. Realisation means True Knowledge of the Perfection and Immortality of the Self. Mortality is only an idea and cause of misery. You get rid of it by realising the Immortal nature of the Self.²

Sankara uses two particularly powerful words in this verse, ‘*sphurantam*’ and ‘*bhadrāyā*’. The verb ‘*sphur*’, from which ‘*sphurantam*’ is derived, has many meanings, including ‘to tremble, throb, quiver or palpitate’. It can also mean ‘to flash, twinkle or shine’. Here, in the context of the ever-constant, throbbing ‘I-I’, ‘*sphurantam*’ mirrors verse 20 in the *Upadeśa Sāram*. This exalted verse brings to a satisfying climax Bhagavan’s succinct and beautiful description of self-enquiry in one of His great philosophical poems.

ahami nāśabhā jyaham-aham-tayā / sphurati hṛt svayam parama-
pūrṇasat (*This search pursued till ‘I’ has disappeared / There now
vibrates the ‘I-I’ all alone. / The quest is finished, there’s no more to
seek. / For this is really the Infinite Self.*)³

It also mirrors verse 30 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*.

...a-danāl -- mī-muṛaiyē / Nānā rena mana-muḷ nāḍi-yuḷa
naṇṇavē / Nānām avan-talai nāṇa-muṛa – nā-nā-nāt / Tōṇḍru-
mondṛu tānā-gat tōn-ḍṛinu-nān aṇḍru-poruḷ / Pūṇḍra-madu
tānām poruḷ... (*Enquiring ‘Who am I?’ within the mind, and*

² Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk\$487.

³ *The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Rendered into English Verse by Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick), p.16.

*reaching the heart, the 'I' collapses. Instantly the real 'I' appears (as 'I-I'), which, although it manifests itself as 'I' is not the ego, but the true being.)*⁴

It is inspiring to recall the first *śloka* ever written by Bhagavan in Sanskrit, a heart-melting mystical expression of Truth seen from a great *ṛṣi*. Ganapati Muni gave it a place of honour as the second verse in the second chapter of his *Ramaṇa Gītā*. Suri Nagamma presents a translation of it in her *Letters*.

hṛdayakuharamadhye kevalam brahmamātram / hyahamahamiti
sākṣādātmarūpeṇa bhāti / hṛdi viśa manasā svam cinvatā majjatā
vā / pavanacalanarodhādātmaniṣṭho bhava tvam (*Brahman is
glowing lustroously in the middle of the cave of the Heart in the
shape of the Self, always proclaiming 'I am, I am'. Become an
atmanishta, a Self-realized person, either by making the mind
absorbed in the search of the Self or by making the mind drown
itself through control of the breath.*)⁵

The word ‘*bhadrayā*’, which invokes a sense of well-being, happiness, a blessing, and is an attribute of Siva, heightens the impact of the *cin mudrā* in Adi Sankara’s electrifying verse seven. It means ‘auspicious’ and here signifies the *mudrā*’s inherent promise of Liberation and the end of all sorrow.

In Bhagavan’s Tamil translation of this verse, He appropriately, although somewhat surprisingly, adds the image of blazing eyes to the Sanskrit text, forcefully complementing the *cin mudrā*. Kanakammal’s moving paraphrase of verse seven reads as follows:

Kuzhavi-mun nanavu munnāk kūru-pal avattai-yellāñ / Chuzha-
linuñ kalan dirundē cholikku-muḷ agamā nāḷuñ / Kazhal-vizhu
vōrkkār tannaik kāṭṭuvan chiṛ kuṛippāl / Tazhal-vizhik guru-vām
anda dakṣhiṇā mūrṭti pōṭṭiri (*May our obeisance be to that form
of Guru Sri Dakshinamurthy of the eye of the fire of jñāna who
by the handpose of cin mudrā reveals graciously to those who
surrender to Him, the Self that constantly shines within in the*

⁴ *Forty Verses on Reality by Ramana Maharshi*, Translation and Commentary by S.S. Cohen, pp.53-54.

⁵ 19th July, 1947.

form of sphuraṇa of 'I' – that ever remains unchanged though mixed with the constantly alternating stages of life like infancy, etc. and states like waking, dream, pleasure and pain.)⁶

“The eye of the fire of *jñāna*” powerfully invokes Arunachala as the Red Hill of fire. It also echoes verse 24 of the *Gītā Sāram*, assuring us that, by the grace of the *Sadguru*, bestower of knowledge to those who surrender, *karma* is destroyed.

yathaidhāmsi samiddho'gnirbhasmasātkurute'rjuna / jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasātkurute tathā (*As burning fire of fuel ashes makes / So doth the fire of Knowledge, Arjuna, / Reduce all actions unto ashes too.*)⁷

Verse Eight

विश्वं पश्यति कार्यकारणतया स्वस्वामिसम्बन्धतः
शिष्याचार्यतया तथैव पितृपुत्राद्यात्मना भेदतः ।
स्वप्ने जाग्रति वा य एष पुरुषो मायापरिभ्रामितः
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

*viśvaṁ paśyati kārya-kāraṇatayā sva-svāmi-sambandhataḥ
śiṣyācārya-tayā tathaiva pitṛ-putr-ādyātmanā bhedataḥ |
svapne jāgrati vā ya eṣa puruṣo māyā paribhrāmitaḥ
tasmai śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idam śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||*

viśvaṁ: universe; *paśyati*: perceives; *kārya kāraṇatayā*: like cause and effect; *sva-swāmi*: like property and proprietor; *sambandhataḥ*: relations; *śiṣya ācāryatayā*: like disciple and teacher; *tathaiva*: similarly; *pitṛ putra ādi*: like father and son, etc.; *ātmanā bhedataḥ*: differences in the *Ātman*; *svapne jāgrati vā*: when dreaming or awake; *yaḥ eṣa puruṣo*: the Self as this *jīva* who; *māyā paribhrāmitaḥ*: confused by *māyā*; *tasmai*: to Him; *śrī guru mūrtaye*; the blessed guru; *namaḥ idam*: may this obeisance be; *śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye*: (to) Sri Dakshinamurti.

⁶ Commentary on *Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume II, pp. 211-212.

⁷ This translation (from 4-37 in the *Bhagavad Gītā*) was written in draft form by A.W. Chadwick and corrected by Bhagavan in his own handwriting.

To Him, the blessed guru Sri Dakshinamurti, the Self (acting) as jīva, who perceives the universe (of plurality with various relations like cause and effect, property and proprietor, disciple and teacher; also father and son, etc., (and takes them to be) differences in the Ātman, when dreaming or awake confused by māyā, may this obeisance be.

Commentary

In this verse the subject is *jīva* confused by *māyā*. It refers back to the first verse of Sankara's *Hymn to Dakshinamurti* and elaborates on the nature of the plurality of the universe. In her commentary Kanakammal emphasizes the Oneness of *Ātman* and compares delusion to a dream:

When the Lord is spoken of as the cause of the Universe, it should not be understood that the universe exists distinct from the Ātman. Likewise all distinctions based on varied relationships relate to the One vastu only. The Lord assumes Himself, of His own accord, these forms of worshipper, worshipped, master, servant, etc. This is called Leela Kaivalyam (the divine play of the Absolute). If they are not illusions, a father must always remain a father. But he who is a son with reference to this father, becomes a father to his son. One vastu is imagined in various distinctive forms by mere twists of terms. On enquiry into the Supreme Truth, the Light of Awareness alone exists. All notions of differences or distinctions in the One Ātman are mithyā which stand negated with the dawn of Knowledge. Then distinctions like master and disciple, the one instructing the other, disappear like dream objects becoming untrue on waking up. All mundane experiences are due to the play of māyā which stands nullified on waking up to reality.¹

T.M.P. Mahadevan explains how the *Guru*, who is also an illusion, can awaken seekers from the dream of *samsāra*.

How the illusory preceptor, scripture, etc., destroy the illusory world of plurality and lead the soul to release may thus be

¹ Commentary on *Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume II, pp.217-218.

illustrated. A man is having a pleasant dream. He sees beautiful sights, meets intimate friends, comes by fascinating things. All of a sudden a ferocious tiger runs towards him, threatening to eat him up. This wakes him up from his dream. The dream-tiger is no less illusory than the other dream-contents. But it serves as the sublator of the entire dream, including itself. Similarly, the preceptor, scripture, etc., although projections of māyā, serve to remove māyā, by bestowing knowledge. He who has gained knowledge in this way, is deluded no longer. He remains eternally as the non-dual Self.²

The sharp contrast between delusion and Reality, māyā and the Self, is beautifully expressed in a well-known and much beloved metaphor in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*:

Like two golden birds perched on the selfsame tree, / Intimate friends, the ego and the Self / Dwell in the same body. The former eats / the sweet and sour fruits of the tree of life / while the latter looks on in detachment. / As long as we think we are the ego, / We feel attached and fall into sorrow. / But realize that you are the Self, the Lord / Of life, and you will be freed from sorrow. / When you realize that you are the Self, / Supreme source of light, supreme source of love, / You transcend the duality of life / And enter into the unitive state.³

For Bhagavan, the illusion of mankind is like a spell, which He describes in *Talks*.

The people are under an illusion. If the spell is removed they will realize the Truth. They must be told to realize the falsity of the illusion. Then they will try to escape its snares. Vairagya will result. They will enquire into the Truth, i.e., seek the Self. That will make them abide as the Self. Sri Sankara, being the avatar of Siva, was full of compassion for fallen beings. He wanted all of them to realize their blissful Self. He could not reach them all with His Silence. So he composed the Dakshinamurti stotra in

² *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, p.22.

³ *The Upanishads*, Introduced and Translated by Eknath Easwaran, p. 192. The verse quoted is 3.1-3.

*the form of a hymn so that people might read it and understand the Truth. What is the nature of the illusion? All are in the grip of enjoyment, i.e., bhokta, bhogyam, bhoga. This is due to the wrong notion that bhogyā vastu (the objects) are real. The ego, the world and creator are the fundamentals underlying the illusion. If they are known to be not apart from the Self there will be no more illusion.*⁴

Bhagavan chose to close the *Gītā Sāram* with two soul-stirring verses that capture the terrible clutches of *māyā*, on the one hand, and the miraculous grace of the *Sadguru*, through surrender “with all thy heart”, on the other. They summarize the import of the divinely-inspired *Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti*. We are all but Him.

īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hr̥ddeśe’rjuna tiṣṭhati /
 bhrāmayansarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā (*The Lord dwells in the Heart of everyone / Causing by His illusive Power them all / To spin like marionettes upon a wheel.*)
 tameva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarvabhāvena bhārata / tatprasādātparām
 śāntim sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvatam (*To Him for shelter flee with all thy heart, / By His grace peace supreme thou shalt obtain, / Which is the everlasting dwelling-place.*)⁵

Verse Nine

भूरम्भांस्यनलोऽनिलोऽम्बरमहर्नाथो हिमांशुः पुमान्
 इत्याभाति चराचरत्मकमिदं यस्यैव मूर्त्यष्टकम् ।
 नान्यत्किञ्चन विद्यते विमृशतां यस्मात्परस्माद्विभोः
 तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

*bhū-rambhāmsy-analo-'nilo-'mbaram aharnātho himāṁśuḥ pumān
 ityā-bhāti carā-car-ātmakam-idaṁ yasyaiva mūrty-aṣṭakam |
 nānyat kiñcana vidyate vimṛśatām yasmāt-parasmād vibhoḥ
 tasmai śrī guru-mūrtaye nama idaṁ śrī dakṣiṇāmūrtaye ||*

⁴ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, Talk§569.

⁵ These translations of verses 41 and 42 of the *Gītā Sāram* (18-61 and 18-62 in the *Bhagavad Gītā*) were written in draft form by A.W. Chadwick and corrected by Bhagavan in his own handwriting. ‘Marionettes’ was Bhagavan’s word choice.

bhūh: earth; *ambhāmsi*: water; *analaḥ*: fire; *anilaḥ*: air; *ambaram*: ether; *aharnāthaḥ*: sun; *himāmśuḥ*: moon; *pumān*: *jīva*; *iti ābhāti*: thus everywhere shines; *cara acara ātmakam*: manifesting as moving and unmoving objects; *idaṁ*: this (universe of); *yasya*: whose; *eva*: alone; *mūrti aṣṭakam*: eight-fold form; *na anyat kiñcana*: nothing else whatsoever; *vidyate*: exists; *vimṛśatām*: to those who inquire; *yasmāt*: other than; *parasmād vibhoḥ*: the supreme, all-pervading Brahman; *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 eight-fold form alone thus everywhere shines (manifesting as) this (universe of) moving and unmoving objects (that includes) earth, water, fire, air, ether, sun, moon and jīva, may this obeisance be. To those who inquire, other than the supreme, all-pervading Brahman, (absolutely) nothing else whatsoever exists.

Commentary

Swami Chinmayananda, in his commentary on the *Hymn to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti* of *Ādi Śaṅkara*, describes the nature and function of this and the following verse thus:

A poem with eight stanzas is called aṣṭakam. The chant of Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti (aṣṭakam) has concluded and yet, Śaṅkara adds two stanzas to make it a hymn (stuti), giving a few relevant facts on the technique (sādhanā) of Self-realisation. A philosophy without the technique of practice (religion) is a blind elephant with plenty of strength, roaming mad in a thick jungle of things and beings, problems and happenings – where the unwieldy animal can ultimately slip over a precipice to get shattered on the rocks below.¹

T.M.P. Mahadevan reiterates the nature of the last two verses and gives the specifics of a *sādhanā* based on the eight-fold forms of God.

For realising Brahman, the means prescribed for the lower grades of aspirants is the meditation on God in His eight-fold form (aṣṭamūrta). The means for those who are of the top-grade

¹ *Hymn to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti* of *Ādi Śaṅkara*, p.79.



Sri Dakshinamurti on top of Sri Matrubhuteswara Shrine Wall

is inquiry into the purport of Vedanta through hearing, reflection, and contemplation. This is taught in the present verse.

Brahman as endowed with attributes is Īśvara (God). Īśvara is the whole and sole cause of the world. He becomes the cause of the world through his power called māyā. The world of the living and the non-living, the sentient and the insentient, is an illusory manifestation of māyā. The macrocosm and the microcosm are made of the same stuff. What is without is within as well. The number of principles (tattvas) constituting the world-process is different according to different systems of thought. Śaivism enumerates thirty-six principles. Of these, eight are the easily recognizable ones. The five elements, the sun and the moon and the soul form the body of God, as it were. Śiva is aṣṭa-mūrta (of eight-fold form). It is thus that he is immanent in the universe. He is viśva-māyā (of the form of the universe). He is to be worshipped thus.

The worshipper should meditate on the oneness of the individual being and the cosmic form. The individual body is made of the five elements. So is the cosmos. It should be realized that all are one – the five elements, the vital airs, the sun, the moon, etc. Identifying the individual soul endowed with the body made of five elements with the supreme Lord who is of eight-fold form, the worshipper should contemplate the supreme Identity of the form “I am Sadāśiva.”

By the strength of the Identity-contemplation, the aspirant gains oneness with the Lord, becomes endowed with lordly splendour, and finally is released through the knowledge bestowed by divine grace.²

In Bhagavan’s Tamil translation of verse nine, He asserts that apart from God “there is not even an atom as the ‘Other’”. No exceptions, no room or concessions for dualism. It is that position of the Absolute that makes *advaita vedānta* so spellbinding once realized. Here is Kanakammal’s beautiful paraphrase.

² *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, pp. 23-24.

Maṅpunal anal-kāl vāna madi-kadi rōnpu mānum / Eṅṅṟoḷir
charā charaṅ-chēr-idu-yevan eṭṭu mūrttam / Eṅṅuvārk kiṟai
niṟain-dōn evanin anni-yaṅ chaṭṭrin-ḍrām / Taṅṅaruṭ guru-vām
anda dakṣhiṇā mūrtti pōṭṭri. (*The one whose eight-fold form
shines as all this moving and unmoving universe, earth, water,
fire, air, ether, moon, sun, and the jīva (purusha), the one who
remains the Content Beyond pervading everything and apart
from whom there exists naught else (apart from whom, there is
not even an atom as the 'Other') – to that form of compassion
and infinite peace, Sri Dakshinamurthy, may our obeisance be.*)³

The eight-fold form of God appears as a prominent feature in
verse 5 of the *Upadeśa Sāram*. Such profound Truth, so simply
stated:

jagata īśadhī-yukta-sevanam / aṣṭa-mūrtibhṛd-deva-pūjanam
(If we but recognize this Universe / Of eightfold form as form
of God, Himself, / and serve in adoration all the world. / This
is of God most excellent worship.)⁴

In His *Pañcaratnam*, verse 5, He extols the devotee who sees the
whole world with eyes of Love. The poetry, as usual, is remarkably
beautiful, both in the Sanskrit and Tamil versions.

tvayyarpita-manasā tvām paśyan sarvaṁ tavākṛtitaḥ satatam
/ bhajate'nanya prītyā sa jayatyaruṇācala tvayi sukhe magnaḥ;
Unni-ḍattil oppuvitta uḷḷattāl eppoḥu-dum / Unnaik-kaṅ dellā-
mum unnuru-vāi – anni-yamil / Anbu-seyum annōn Aruṇā-chalā
velgum / Inbu-ruvām unnil āzhndē (*He who, with Heart to you
surrendered, / Beholds for ever you alone, / Sees all things as
forms of you / And loves and serves them as none other / Than
the Self, O Aruna Hill, / Triumphs because he is immersed / In
you whose being is pure bliss.*)⁵

³ Commentary on *Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume II, pp.219-220.

⁴ *The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Rendered into English Verse by Sadhu
Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick), p.13.

⁵ *Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Translated
by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p.127.

Verse Ten

सर्वात्मत्वमिति स्फुटीकृतमिदं यस्मादमुष्मिन्स्तवे
तेनास्य श्रवणात्तदर्थमननाद्ध्यानाच्च संकीर्तनात् ।
सर्वात्मत्वमहाविभूतिसहितं स्यादीश्वरत्वं स्वतः
सिद्धयेत्तत्पुनरष्टधा परिणतं चैश्वर्यमव्याहृतम् ॥

*sarvātmavam-iti sphuṭīkṛtam-idam yasmād-amuṣmin stave
tenāsyā śravaṇāt-tadartha-mananād dhyānāc-ca saṅkīrtanāt |
sarvātmavā-mahā vibhūti sahitam syād-iśvaratvam svataḥ
siddhyet-tat-punar-aṣṭadhā pariṇatam caishvāryam-avyāhatam ||*

sarvātmavam: the all-pervasive nature of the *Ātman*; *iti*: thus; *sphuṭīkṛtam*: has been explained; *idam*: now; *yasmāt*: and so; *amuṣmin*: in this; *stave*: hymn; *tena asya*: because of that; *śravaṇāt*: by hearing; *tadartha mananāt*: by reflecting upon its meaning; *dhyānāt*: by meditating; *ca*: and; *saṅkīrtanāt*: by reciting; *sarvātmava*: of all-Selfhood; *mahā vibhūti sahitam*: together with the divine splendour; *syāt*: will come; *iśvaratvam*: Lordliness; *svataḥ*: naturally; *siddhyet tat punaḥ*: those will reach (one) also; *aṣṭadhā pariṇatam*: manifesting as the eight-fold *siddhis*; *caishvāryam*: supernatural powers; *avyāhatam*: on their own.

And so, the all-pervasive nature of the Ātman has thus now been explained in this hymn. Because of that, by hearing (it with faith), by reflecting upon its meaning, by meditating (upon it), and by reciting (it with devotion), Lordliness will come naturally, together with the divine splendour (of) all-Selfhood, and supernatural powers, manifesting as the eight-fold siddhis, those will reach (one) also on their own.

Commentary

The last verse is a conventional conclusion, in the nature of *phala śruti*, that enumerates the benefits of hearing, contemplating and reciting Sankara's *Hymn to Dakshinamurti* in poetry that is uplifting and stirring. In Kanakammal's commentary she gives special attention to *siddhis* and *vibhūti*.

Siddhis like aṇima, mahima and others, held high by ajñānis, also seek and reach him on their own though he seeks them not

like the one who carries a flower enjoys its fragrance willy-nilly. He remains the master of siddhis, they being subservient to him. There is nothing that is not attained by one in whom the truth of being the Self of all holds an unceasing sway. Vibhūti is a manifestation of the glory or wealth of God. The worldlings regard one who owns some possessions as one with wealth. With the dawn of spiritual enlightenment, "I am the Self of everything", all the objects of the universe – in their entirety – become one's own. There cannot be a greater vibhūti than this. This summum bonum of spiritual experience is indeed the summum bonum of all wealth.¹

T.M.P. Mahadevan focuses on how to achieve *sarvātmatva* or All-Self-hood and also comments on *siddhis*.

The fruit of Vedānta is All-Self-hood (sarvātmatva). The meaning of this expression is not that there is an "All" which is pervaded by the Self, but that the Self is All. It is this truth that is taught in the Hymn to Dakṣiṇāmūrti. The way to understand it consists of śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana. One has to study the text, reflect on its meaning, and contemplate the truth taught therein. At the end of this process one realizes the Self. There is no goal which is higher than this. All other ends, including the acquisition of the supernormal powers, are included in it. It is only till the Self is realized that the other objectives seem important and worthwhile. It is only a figure of speech to say, 'Seek ye the Self, and all other things will be added unto you'. For, if the Self is sought and gained, there will be nothing else to be added.²

Bhagavan deepens the meaning of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* in these incisive remarks, which were recorded by Suri Nagamma:

"Śravaṇa and manana mean only those described in Vedānta, don't they?" asked someone. "Yes," Bhagavan replied, "but one thing, not only are there outward śravaṇa

¹ Commentary on *Anuvāda Nānāmālai*, Volume II, p. 224.

² *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, p.25.

*and manana but there are also inward śravaṇa and manana. They must occur to a person as a result of the maturity of his mind. Those that are able to do that antara śravaṇa (hearing inwardly) do not have any doubts.” Whenever any one asked what those antara śravaṇas are, he used to say, “Antara śravaṇa means the knowledge of that Ātma which is in the cave of the heart always illuminated with the feeling ‘aham, aham’ (‘I, I’), and to get that feeling to be in one’s heart is manana, and to remain in one’s self is nididhyāsa.”*³

The Master, out of His compassion for all beings, graciously gave us a method for breaking the deeply-entrenched illusion. In verse 28 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, He describes self-investigation, while clearly referring to His own personal death experience in Madurai.

... – munnar / Ezhum-bum ahan-dai ezhu-miḍattai nīril / Vizhunda poruḷ kāṇa vēṇḍi – muzhugu-dal-pōl / Kūrnda madiyāl pēcchu mūccha-ḍakkik koṇḍuḷḷē / Āzhn-daṛiya vēṇḍum aṛi... *(Just as one would dive [restraining one’s speech and breath] in order to find a thing which has fallen into the water; one should dive within [oneself] restraining speech and breath with a keen mind [that is, with a keen and penetrating attention fixed on the feeling ‘I’], and know [the real Self, which is] the rising-place [or source] of the ego, which rises first. Know thus.)*⁴

Bhagavan gives another description of self-investigation but this time in the context of Arunachala, the Sacred Mountain that is but another form of Siva, as is Sri Dakshinamurti, in the second verse of the *Aṣṭakam*.

Kaṇḍa-van evan-enak karut-tinuḷ ṇāḍak / kaṇḍa-van inḍṛiḍa ninḍṛadu kaṇḍēn / Kaṇḍa-nan eṇḍṛi-ḍak karut-tezha villai / kaṇḍi-lan eṇḍṛi-ḍak karut-tezhu māṛēn / Viṇ-ḍidu viḷak-kiḍu viṛa-luru vōṇār / viṇḍi-lai paṇḍunī viḷak-kinai yen-ḍṛal / Vinḍiḍā dunni-lai viḷak-kiḍa vendṛē / viṇ-ḍalam achalamā viḷaṅ-giḍa

³ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 19 July, 1947, §135.

⁴ *Śrī Ramaṇōpadēsa Nūnmālai*, word by word in English, Meaning by Sri Sadhu Om and Translation by Michael James, p.62.

nindṛāi (*Enquiring within “Who is the seer?” I saw the seer disappearing and That alone which stands for ever. No thought arose to say “I saw”. How then could the thought arise to say “I did not see?” Who has the power to explain all this in words, when even You (as Dakshinamurti) conveyed this of yore in silence only? And in order to reveal by silence. Your state transcendent, now You stand here, a Hill resplendent soaring to the sky.*)⁵

In *Talks*, Bhagavan eloquently extols the significance of silence.

*Silence is the true upadesa. It is the perfect upadesa. It is suited only for the most advanced seeker. The others are unable to draw full inspiration from it. Therefore they require words to explain the Truth. But Truth is beyond words. It does not admit of explanation. All that is possible to do is only to indicate It.*⁶

Suri Nagamma persuaded Bhagavan to write *Five Verses on the Self* in 1947. The silence of Dakshinamurti is the subject of the last verse of the last original composition He ever wrote.

... – tana-dolīyāl / Eppō-dum ulḷadav ēkānma vasttuvē / Appō-dav vasttuvai yādi-Guru – ceppādu / Ceppit teri-yumā ceidanarē levar / Ceppit teri-vippar ceppu-ga... (*The Self alone, the Sole Reality, / Exists for ever, / If of yore the First of Teachers / Revealed it through unbroken silence / Say who can reveal It in spoken words?*)⁷

In conclusion, may we all praise the glory of Sri Ramana Maharshi, a modern-day *avatār* of the formless Siva and Sri Dakshinamurti. May we all realise the truth of these inspiring words by one of Bhagavan’s most passionate early disciples, T.K. Sundaresa Iyer.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi’s greatness needs no recapitulation here. He was a knower (jñāni) by birth, like Suka and Vamadeva. In His teens He woke up to the reality

⁵ *Five Hymns to Arunachala and Other Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p.121.

⁶ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, Talk§569.

⁷ Op.cit., Swaminathan, p.129.

of the Self not apart from the Divine (Brahman) – the Fourth State – turiya; the shock of death brought it about. The Grace of Minakshi and Arunachala were there and showed Him that State. He was drawn to Arunachala, the mountain-magnet attracting souls to It; there He shone as Dakshinamurti, by explanation through Silence proclaiming the Divine Reality; He shone as the One Self that projects from Himself both Maya and the world. In His Presence, peace and the experience of nectar were enjoyed by all beings, including birds and beasts.

For almost forty years His soothing voice, silvery radiance and golden touch were the solace of thousands and thousands of pilgrims from East and West. He shed His physical frame in 1950, but He Himself ever IS – in His transcendental state. Even though we can no longer hear that voice or see that shining face, we find ever more as the long years roll by that He is still with us in our midst, still able to guide His pupils who come to Him from distant places to the Light of true and eternal wisdom. There is nought that is not He. Let us put aside the ego, or surrender it to Him, and He will fill us with His being and sweeten our lives, helping us to be He Himself.⁸

Exercise

Find a photo of Bhagavan that inspires you (it might be one of Bhagavan in Dakshinamurti pose with Arunachala behind Him) and sit in front of it after waking when your mind is full of thoughts. Surrender each thought that comes up to the fire of *jñāna* in His eyes, which no thought can survive. When you surrender deeply enough, the thought will disappear, and you will feel a release that is physical as well as mental. What remains is THAT. When the next thought comes, repeat. Do this patiently every morning without fail for a longer and longer period.

Little by little, the conviction will grow in you that you are not the mind, and you will be able to hold onto the THAT for a longer and longer period of time. If you do not feel the release, you did not surrender deeply enough. Keep trying. This is the effort that is

⁸ Sundaresa Iyer, T.K., *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, p.10.

necessary on your part. Bhagavan will do the rest and will never fail you, ever.

In time, it will be easier and easier to carry on the practice, eyes open, during the day no matter what you are engaged in. In order to become established in the Self, the practice must become continuous. That is the hard part, since the *vāsanās* are so strong. You will succeed, however, with patience and persistence. Bhagavan has assured us of that.

During the day, experiment to see what brings you to THAT most easily. It could be remembering the eyes or saying something like “Who is telling me all this?” “Who am I?” Whatever words you use, however, must bring you to release. Repeating words only is not enough.

In time, thoughts or *samsāra* will interest you less and less. You will stop believing they are real. In fact, thoughts will become painful or just annoying.

All of the above will work for you as long as you have made other changes in your life as well that help purify the mind. Practising vegetarianism, for example. Reading *Talks* on a daily basis, or some other spiritual text related to Bhagavan’s teaching, and thinking deeply about the meaning is essential. For some people, chanting on a daily basis is very helpful. Divinely inspired poetry will affect you physically and mentally and will take you directly to the Self. The more chanting you do, the easier it will be to practise surrender or self-enquiry during the day. Substitute reading spiritual texts and chanting for something else you are currently doing that is not essential and that in fact constitutes a diversion. Seeking the Self should always be your first and only priority.

Especially effective are Bhagavan’s five poems to Arunachala, *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, *Upadeśa Sāram*, *Ānma Viddai* and *Ēkānma Pañchakam*. Make learning them a priority. It is important on a regular basis to go through each poem word by word so that eventually when you chant them, your experience is enhanced by knowing the meaning as well as the sounds. Recordings are helpful, but then make the chanting of each poem your own. *The Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti* is a very powerful tool, and repeating it everyday, with devotion and understanding, will encourage you in your practice and give you great Peace.

MOUNTAIN PATH

In time, by constantly merging the mind into the Heart, you will succeed. There is no doubt about that. We are all already the SELF. It is just a matter of no longer believing you are the body or the mind. When that happens, the veil disappears, the SELF takes over, and It will automatically guide you at every moment and in all states of mind.

Author's Note

When I retired in 2006, I took up Sanskrit thinking that it would bring me closer to the Master. Even at that time the *Hymn to Sri Dakshinamurti* was an obsession, and I attempted my own first translation with what knowledge I had. But there were ambiguities I could not resolve, so the hymn remained unfinished business for many years, although I sang it at *satsang* from time to time and listeners identified me with it.

It wasn't until recently that the doubts got resolved, not so much through commentaries I read as through Bhagavan's direct intervention. Studying His Tamil translation of Sankara's poem was like having Him literally by my side. The clarity that came through affected my meditation so that it went more deeply, and I was inspired to write my own commentary. The commentary for each verse came through me after my morning meditation. When it was all done, I made a few minor alterations in tone but any changes other than that only obscured the text. The verses quoted were verses I have sung to Bhagavan for years.

They have become such a part of me, I hear them in my sleep. Although I live far away from Ramanasramam, I can truly say Bhagavan is never not with me. He is the supreme teacher, my refuge and my all. ▲

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Five

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th September 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in continuation of the discussion in the previous instalment about the *ego being found to be non-existent* if we attend to it keenly enough]: *Vivarta vāda* [the contention that the ego and everything perceived by it is just a false appearance] can hold true only so long as the ego seems to exist, but when we see the reality of the ego, namely our true nature, we will see that no ego has ever existed, so *ajāta* [the fact that nothing has ever been born or come into existence, even as a false appearance] will then shine as the only truth, because since the ego has never existed, nothing else has ever actually existed, since according to *vivarta vāda* everything else depends for its seeming existence upon the seeming existence of the ego.

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.

In some books that record Bhagavan's answers to questions he seems to accept the existence of the causal body in sleep, but in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* he makes it clear that in the absence of the ego there is no body or anything else at all. For example in verse 26 he says that if the ego comes into existence everything comes into existence, and if the ego does not exist nothing exists. Moreover in verse 5 he clarifies that the body is a form of five sheaths, so all five together are included in the term 'body', and that no world exists without such a body. These five sheaths are usually divided into three bodies, the gross, subtle and causal, and a prevalent view in advaita texts is that the body we experience as ourself in the waking state is the gross body, the body we experience as ourself in dream is the subtle body, and what we experience in sleep is the causal body, but Bhagavan has pointed out that this view is not correct.

Firstly he says that there is no actual difference between waking and dream, and that while dreaming we seem to be awake, so the body we experience as ourself in dream seems to be as gross or physical as the body in waking. Therefore whatever body that we experience as ourself, whether in waking or in dream, is a form composed of all the five sheaths.

Secondly he says that sleep is not a state of ignorance but one of pure self-awareness. Only from the perspective of the ego in waking or dream does sleep seem to be a state of darkness or ignorance, but in sleep the ego does not exist, and in its absence what remains is only pure self-awareness. Therefore the causal body is said to exist in sleep only as a concession to the self-ignorant view of the ego.

The ego is the wrong awareness 'I am this body', so it seems to exist only when we are aware of ourself as a body, as we are in waking and dream. Therefore it does not exist in sleep, because we are then aware of ourself only as 'I am' without any adjuncts. As Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, the ego comes into existence, stands and flourishes only by grasping forms, and the first form it grasps is whatever body it currently experiences as 'I', so since no forms seem to exist in sleep, the ego does not exist then.

In the same verse he says that when the ego leaves one form, it grasps another form, and an analogy he sometimes gave for this is a worm, leech or caterpillar, which leaves one hold only after grasping

another one [as recorded, for example, in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5, *Day by Day* 21-11-45 Night, and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§286]. However we should not take this analogy to mean that that the ego leaves one body only after grasping another one, but rather that as soon as it leaves one body it grasps another one, because at any given moment it experiences itself as only one body.

Moreover, by saying this he does not mean that the ego grasps a form even in sleep, firstly because it does not exist then to grasp anything, and secondly because there are therefore no forms in sleep to be grasped, since as he says in the next verse, everything else comes into existence only when the ego comes into existence. Therefore it is only when the ego seems to exist, namely in waking or dream, that whenever it leaves one form it grasps another one. When it subsides in sleep it leaves all forms, and it begins to grasp them again only when it rises from sleep in either waking or dream.

When Bhagavan says in verse 5 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* that the body is a form of five sheaths (*pañca kōśa*), he means that whenever we experience ourself as a body, we are experiencing all five sheaths as ourself. This is because whatever body we experience as ourself is always a living body and always seems to be awake, so it consists not only of the physical form (*annamaya kōśa*) but also of the life that animates it (*prāṇamaya kōśa*), the thinking mind (*manōmaya kōśa*) and the discerning intellect (*vijñānamaya kōśa*), and it seems to be ourself only because of our self-ignorance, which is what is called the *ānandamaya kōśa* or causal body. Therefore we never experience ourself as any of these five sheaths without experiencing ourself as all of them.

The ego itself is not any of these five sheaths, but it cannot come into existence or stand without grasping all five of them as itself. Though they are described as five 'sheaths' or 'coverings' and are compared to the layers of an onion, which if peeled off leave nothing inside, they are not actually five distinct layers, but are closely interwoven and in our experience of them they are inseparable from one another. Just as we peel off all five of them whenever we fall asleep, if we investigate the ego, the 'I' that experiences them as itself, and thereby experience our real nature, we will peel off all of them simultaneously and forever.

The grossest of these five sheaths is the physical body, and each of the other sheaths is progressively more subtle, so since all five of them form one body, we can say that the subtlest form of this body is the darkness of self-ignorance (*ānandamaya kōśa*), and that a grosser form of that darkness is the intellect, a grosser form of the intellect is the mind, a grosser form of the mind is the life or *prāṇa*, and a grosser form of the life is the physical body. This is why Bhagavan says in *Nāṇ Yār?* [eighth paragraph]: ‘The *prāṇa* is said to be the gross form of the mind’.

None of these five sheaths are ‘I’, but that which experiences them all as ‘I’ is the ego, so to investigate what we really are we need to separate ourselves from all of them, including the subtle darkness of self-ignorance, and we can separate ourselves from them only *by attending to nothing other than ‘I’*. Since the ego cannot stand without grasping these five sheaths as itself, when it tries to grasp itself alone, it will subside and disappear. This is why Bhagavan concludes verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* by saying that if one searches for it, the formless phantom-ego will take flight.

The darkness of self-ignorance is called the causal body because none of the other four sheaths can appear without it, so we can permanently separate ourselves from all the five sheaths only by eradicating this fundamental darkness. Just as darkness can be removed only by light, the darkness of self-ignorance can be removed only by the clear light of pure self-awareness (*ātma-jñāna*), and we can see that light only by keenly attending to the ego, the one to whom self-ignorance and the other four sheaths appear.

That is, what is enveloped in the darkness of self-ignorance is only the ego, and since the ego is just a false awareness of ourselves as ‘I am this body’, we can free ourselves from the darkness of self-ignorance only by eradicating the ego, and we can eradicate the ego only by seeing ourselves as we really are. Therefore from whichever angle we may consider the matter, we can eradicate the ego and thereby separate ourselves permanently from all the five sheaths only by keenly attending to ourselves alone.

So long as the ego is in contact with anything other than itself, its real nature is concealed from it, so in order to find its real nature it must attend to itself alone. This is why Bhagavan said: ‘Its true

nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts' and 'The ego in its purity is experienced in the intervals between two states or between two thoughts' (*Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5). Therefore we should withdraw our attention completely from everything else by fixing it firmly on ourself alone, as he implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

“Leaving aside external *viśayas* [phenomena], the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real awareness [or knowledge].”

That is, when we attend to ourself alone, awareness of everything else will recede and disappear, and, in the bright light of pure self-awareness the ego will dissolve and be consumed entirely, as Bhagavan says in verse 193 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

“If the ego-mind, which wanders about attending to other things, begins to attend to its own nature, then [all] other things departing, ‘I’, the limited awareness, will be annihilated by the real awareness of oneself, which shines without limit as the nature of the heart.” ▲

(*To be continued*)

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Pranarupini,
your slow breath is heaven's time,
heaving of eons;
your incarnadine lips sigh,
dribble nebula and void.

Febrile *Prachandaa*,
from fear of you the wind blows,
savage, virulent,
tumultuary mother,
black fury of the ages.

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.



Sri Arunachaleswara Temple, Tiruvannamalai

KEYWORD

Darshan

JOHN GRIMES

Replying to a question from a visitor to Sri Ramanasramam, Bhagavan Ramana said: “To have darshan (being in the presence) of a Sage or a deity is sure to bring good to you. Thousands of people pass by Tiruvannamalai in trains every day, but a few alight here and fewer still visit the Ashrama. About darshan of, and association with, a Sage, the scriptures say that it is a vessel that enables you to cross the vast ocean of birth and death (samsara). What more benefit do you want?”¹

Not only does the word ‘darshan’ means ‘being in the presence’ of a Sage or a deity, but it is also the nearest equivalent Sanskrit word for ‘philosophy’. ‘Darshan’, from the Sanskrit root ‘*dr*’, meaning ‘to see’ implies not only vision (which includes insight, intuition, and vision of the truth), but also the instrument of vision (such as viewpoint, worldview, doctrine, philosophical system). In a word,

¹ Devotees, (Compilation), *Surpassing Love and Grace*, Section ‘Remembering Ramana’. ‘Sri Ramana - The Destroyer of Miseries’ by Chagganlal Yogi, p.78.

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‘darshan’ implies ‘sight’ in all its myriad connotations and the term, like many Sanskrit terms, is multi-significant, multi-valent, it has multiple related meanings.

Thus, besides expressing viewpoints or perspectives, the term also suggests the idea of right vision or divine realisation (*moksha*). The former meaning customarily refers to the six great orthodox Indian philosophical systems (*sadarshana*). Here, it is not so much a search for the truth as it is an exposition, elaboration, clarification, vindication and conceptual fixation of what has been received. The latter meaning, on the other hand, refers to the person experiencing a vision, a revelation, or insight. In this case, it is direct, personal and experiential. In other words, the ‘seeing’ implied by the term *darshan* includes both conceptual knowledge and perceptual observation, critical exposition and intuitional experience, logical enquiry and spiritual insight, concrete and abstract, gross and subtle. The English expression ‘I see’ contains a hint of this multi-valence in that it denotes both a direct vision as well as a correct understanding. When a child is told that one plus one equals two, upon understanding this the child exclaims, ‘I see’ (meaning ‘I understand’).

Darshan, as a systematic elaboration of the truth, encompasses fundamental interpretations of reality more commonly known as the classical philosophical systems. In this technical sense, the term embraces the different streams of philosophical thought running parallel to one another, which were engaged in mutual dialogue, discussion, debate, criticism, and counter-criticism for the past two thousand years in India.

Thus, the word *darshan* is rich with meaning. To study, understand, interpret, and continue the scholarship of the Indian *darshanas* it is imperative that one realises that the term holistically implies both thinking and living, theory and practice, an ancient, continuous, and seamless tradition. It has been able to combine, in an almost unique manner, conformity to tradition with an adventurous, enquiring mind.

Darshan is rather like the term ‘*veda*’ which literally means ‘knowledge/wisdom,’ from the root ‘*vid*’ meaning ‘to know’. *Veda* has three different referents that need not necessarily be exclusive. The *Vedas* themselves declare three levels of scriptural interpretation that happen simultaneously. There is the transcendent or spiritual

(*adhyatmika*), the intrinsic or cosmic (*adhidaivika*), and the extrinsic or physical (*adhibhautika*). The first meaning refers to a direct, inner intuitive wisdom. Sri Ramana said, “The essential aim of the Vedas is to teach us the nature of the imperishable Atman and show us that we are That.”²

Secondly, the word *Veda* may be said to refer to revealed knowledge that is divided into the four collections: *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharva*. Thirdly, the word *Veda* may be interpreted to refer to the entire body of directly revealed wisdom, be it ancient or modern. Thus, it may be said that for the *ajnani* the *Veda* gives or is the means to sight while for the *jnani* the *Veda* is ‘sight’ itself or as the *Veda* itself declares, for the *jnani*, *Veda* is no longer *Veda* – all that is, is the Self.

Ramana said, “You see the objects on forgetting your own Self. If you keep hold of your Self, you will not see the objective world.”³

Perception (*pratyaksha*) is the foundation stone upon which all philosophical knowledge is built. Among all means of knowledge (*pramana*), perception is given pride of place because it is said to be immediate, direct. As well, perception is possible only of things present and capable of being perceived. In regards to external physical sight, sight is only by courtesy declared to be immediate and direct. There is both subject and object involved. However, in regards to *darshan* as a direct immediate revelation of the Self, there is neither subject nor object.

Quoting from *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Sri Ramana said, “Heat will be removed by the cool moon, poverty by the celestial wish-fulfilling tree and sin by the Ganges. But know that all three will be removed merely by having the darshana of incomparable sages.”⁴ Then Ramana goes on to elucidate what darshana truly implies.

“Direct perception is ever-present Experience. God Himself is known as directly perceived. It does not mean that He appears before the devotee with four-arms, etc. Unless the Realisation be eternal it cannot serve any useful purpose. Can the appearance with four hands be eternal realisation? It is phenomenal and illusory. There must be a seer. The seer alone is real and eternal. Let God appear as the light

² Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§30.

³ *Ibid.*, Talk§6.

⁴ *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, verse 4.

of a million suns: Is it *pratyaksa*? To see it, the eyes, the mind, etc., are necessary. It is indirect knowledge, whereas the seer is direct experience. The seer alone is *pratyaksa*. All other perceptions are only secondary knowledge.”⁵

“*Jnana chakshu* [eye] does not mean that it is an organ of perception like the other sense-organs... So long as there is a subject and also an object it is only relative knowledge. *Jnana* lies beyond relative knowledge. It is absolute.

“The Self is the source of subject and object. Now ignorance prevailing, the subject is taken to be the source. The subject is the knower and forms one of the triads whose components cannot exist independent of one another. So the subject or the knower cannot be the ultimate Reality. Reality lies beyond subject and object. When realised there will be no room for doubt.

*Bhidyate hridayagranthih
chhidante sarvasamsayah.*

“The heart knot is snapped; doubts are set at rest. That is called *pratyaksha* and not what you are thinking of. *Avidya nasa* is alone Self-Realisation. Self-Realisation is only *owpacharika*. Self-Realisation is only a euphemism for elimination of ignorance.”⁶

“When scriptures speak of ‘seeing the Self’ and ‘seeing God’, what is the truth they mean? How to see the Self? As the Self is one without a second, it is impossible to see it. How to see God? To see Him is to be consumed by Him.”⁷

Thus we see that what the deep essential meaning of darshan indicates is a direct, immediate experience of the Self, to become consumed by the Self. Lord Ramana has said that the value of darshan of a Sage, Deity, or holy object has its own meritorious effect but that the real darshan, the final word on darshan, is to directly, immediately experience the Self. If a mere physical sight or proximity of a Sage, Deity, or holy object were enough, then all the animals, insects, trees, individuals, etc. in their immediate physical presence would have been *jivanmuktas*. To have physical sight, or a vision is one thing. To be the seer is quite another. ▲

⁵ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§469.

⁶ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§500.

⁷ *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, verse 21.

Swami Shantananda Puri

Lover of God and All Mankind

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

Introduction

Paramapujya Sri Swami Shantananda Puri, born in 1928, was a disciple of Paramapujya Sri Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha, in the Himalayas. Swamiji was a personification of *jnana* and *vairagya*. His extraordinary knowledge of all scriptures and his artless simplicity, piety and dedication, coupled with an ardent desire to guide sincere *sadhaks* as possible, drew to him many a devotees from all over India and abroad too. Some of his books have been translated into Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati and one in French. Swamiji frequently stayed for long periods in Sri Ramanasramam, and while there, was always graciously available to all sincere seekers. He attained *mahanirvana* on 14th October 2014.

Swamiji has written more than 35 books. They are being compiled in suitable volumes. Four such volumes are already published and a

Sri Swami Sadasivananda, a writer on the teachings of saints and sages, had a close association with Swamiji. He first came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1970. Soon after he received direct instruction from Ananda Mayi Ma.

fifth volume is scheduled to be released on 6th May 2018, the 90th Birthday of Swamiji.

This volume comprises mostly commentaries on Bhagavan Ramana's works. They include: *Stories for Inspiration*, *Golden Guidelines to Who am I?*, *Sadhanas from Upadesa Saram*, *Sadhanas from Guru Vachaka Kovai*, *Sadhanas from Devi Kalottara*, *Sadhanas from Tripura Rahasyam*, *Sadhanas from Viveka Choodamani* and a few special articles written by or on Swamiji.

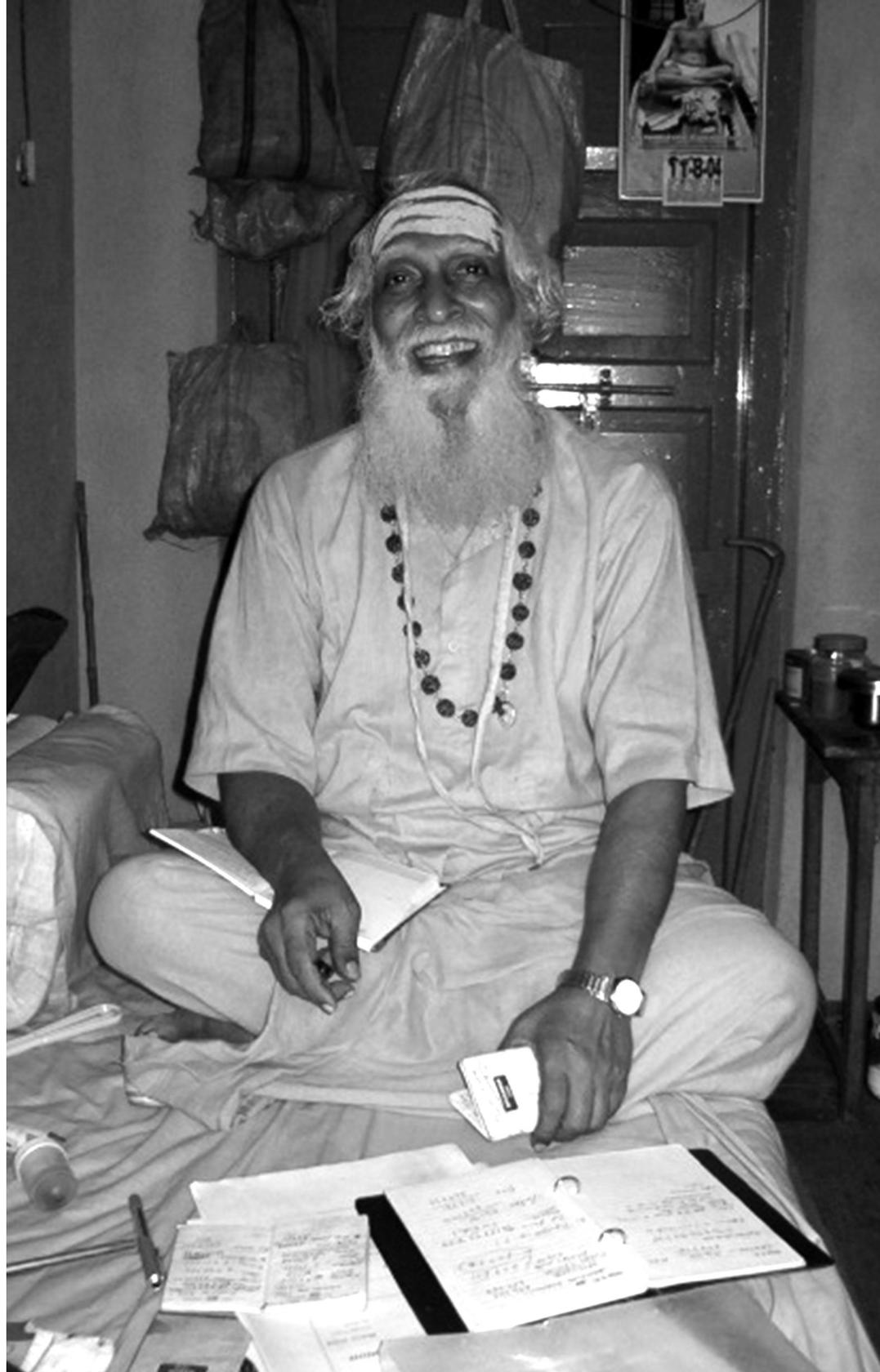
All the books and articles written by Sri Swami Shantananda Puri are available for free download at <http://swamishantanandapurimaharaj.org>

What has been said of the Saints of old, holds true for Swamiji: "He was and is all things to all mankind."

In an effort to demonstrate this truth, at the outset I find that words fail to express the greatness of His being – which simply was an embodiment of love for all, while at the same time showing always diminishing care for his personal well-being in favour of the spiritual benefit of others. His life among us was guided by the sovereign hand of the Divine. As once has been famously uttered by another saint of the Lord, "Where God guides, God provides."

Alas, though words fail to encompass Swamiji's being, I am tasked to try to give a glimpse into this miracle of our Divine Mother. During all the blessed years I spent with him, through many travels and being embraced by the free-flowing *amrit* (nectar) of his care and wisdom, there stands out one event that comes closest to revealing a clear vision of the essence of his being.

This event occurred during one of the prolonged stays of Swamiji at Sri Ramanasramam. As was our custom, I came to his room long before dawn every morning for meditation and instruction. For some days he was steadfast in emphasizing what so many had heard him declare over the years. This was one of his mantras: "Always seek the Giver of gifts, rather than the gift itself." Many have heard with their own ears this often repeated declaration, and today was no different, except for the fact that, from breakfast-time onwards, one group of



devotees after another were recipients of this message. Swamiji was unrelenting, he stressed to all that the goal of life was the highest attainment – God Himself!

We took a break from his shower of golden spiritual advice only for lunch. On the way back to his room, again followed by a group of his longtime devotees, he was without a waver reinforcing this Truth within the hearts of those with him. Being refreshed by Bhagavan's prasada, Swamiji was the embodiment of a Master Weaver, with every strand of his teaching he deepened within all an intense desire to seek God above all else.

However, one of his lady devotees, closely followed by her young daughter, uttered a response to Swamiji's insistence that seemed to shake the very earth we walked upon. She suddenly and boldly proclaimed, with an air of gentle though defiant insistence, that she did not see the need to seek the Manufacturer of Grace (God), when she had the wholesale distributor (that is, Swamiji) right in front of her! To this remark Swamiji simply smiled. I was stunned.

Upon entering Swamiji's room, all took their leave for a brief afternoon rest. Perhaps too brief, for when Swamiji reopened his door there would again be a hungry group seeking from him the sweetest spiritual eatables. I lingered until all had left. Still bewildered by Swamiji's smile in response to what seemed to me to be a direct rebuttal to the guidance Swamiji had spent all morning teaching us about the grace of God, I timidly sought some clarification.

So, my dear friend, what followed encapsulates the unfathomable depth of the heart and soul of this God-man. I said: "Swamiji, can you please explain why such a direct rebuttal to your insistence that God is the Goal was met by you with just a smile?"

Swamiji's response melted my heart, and must have delighted all the Gods. He sweetly responded: "I am helpless to defend myself in the face of such love!"

The Param Guru of his lineage, Sri Ramakrishna, once said: "God is infinite, and infinite are His forms, and infinite are the paths to find Him." Swamiji continued almost at the point of tears: "If a devotee sees in me her God, I become helpless to utter even a word in response, for such grace is the highest embodiment of the Divine – namely, a human heart filled with love for her Guru as God."

Although Swami Shantananda's life and guidance emphasised love of the Divine as the paramount goal, there is a mystical thread woven into every breath of his teaching. This thread leads us onwards along the path to cultivating this Love. It is so often rightly said of Swamiji's published books: "His emphasis was always on practice, practice, practice!" Is there a contradiction here with the paramount goal? How can one practise love, when it comes from the heart rather than the mind?

The answer to this is clearly revealed by Swamiji's Param Guru Sri Ramakrishna. In Chapter 17 of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 'With Devotees at Dakshineswar (II)', the Master declares:

"The Whole thing, in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for *Satchidananda*."

The mystical thread of the 'path' is revealed in a single word: 'develop'. The Master goes on to say:

"One must practice austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Siva."

Swamiji often told me, in-between our hours of predawn meditation, that ultimately we are incapable of developing love to the required ecstatic level by our own effort, which is so often tainted by our reasoning. He would then say, "So, my dear, what to do?" and at this point I thirsted for further guidance.

By his grace, as was his compassionate custom, he answered his own question. Reaching into what seemed to me to be his total remembrance of every word of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, not to mention his unfathomable knowledge of its meaning, he quoted from the same chapter mentioned above:

"A man sees a thing in one way through reasoning and in an altogether different way when God shows it to him."

This profound declaration immediately echoed in my mind the words of Sri Ramana Maharshi:

"Practice is necessary, there is grace."¹

"Grace is always there, it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it."²

Bhagavan continued: "The obstacles that hinder realization are

¹ Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, p.76.

² Osborne, Arthur, *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, p.74.

habits of the mind (*vasanas*),” and the aids to realization are “The teachings of the scriptures and of realized souls.”³

So, once again, Swamiji was guiding us to what he often so affectionately referred to as the ‘Super Bazaar’ where the Lord is freely offered for sale. But though I do emphasise ‘freely’, there is a price! It is not something we acquire through practice; it is something we *shake off* through practice.

Swamiji then concluded by completing the tapestry of the mystical thread woven within our innermost being by declaring, almost at the point of tears:

“Summing up the entire *Srimad Bhagavatam* Sri Krishna reveals the quintessence of His teaching in one statement:

‘Shake free of sloth, and merge your mind within Me’.”⁴

This was not the first time I had heard Swamiji utter this profound truth. While staying with him at his Guru’s Ashram, Vasishtha Guha, early one morning I was ‘trying’ to meditate while the roar of the Ganges River was all-pervasive. As this sound was extinguishing any successful concentration on my part, I opened my eyes to find Swamiji looking at me with one of his notoriously divine smiles. Then out-of-the-blue Swamiji softly reminded me to merge the mind within. This time he added a hint on how to be successful in shaking off distraction.

His advice was not only the quintessence of Sri Krishna’s teaching, it was the quintessence of Swamiji’s teaching:

“Say the prayer that I found to be the best and most truthful prayer, which cannot be ignored by the Mother of All!” whose Divine Presence, as he spoke, was thundering within the rushing Ganga.

My prayer at that moment was a silent plea that although Swamiji had spent years of spiritual struggle to finally be granted the knowledge of such a boon, he would be gracious to one as undeserving as I to reveal this prayer to me. I did not even have the time to open my mouth and plead for this when Swamiji smiled with an even brighter countenance. Beaming like the very Polestar that guides wayfarers to their harbour of safety, he said just three words:

“Shouri Yako Mama!”

³ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§13

⁴ *The Mahabharata, Uddhava Parva*, Book Eleven.

Then he fell silent, as did I. These three words uttered by Swamiji invoked a Divine Presence so intense and enlivening that at once I was overtaken by exactly the same feeling that I had experienced some thirty years earlier as I sat before Sri Anandamayi Ma.

Though I was rendered speechless, by the Grace of That which was now Present with us, Swamiji softly explained that if these three words were be uttered with conviction of mind, heart and soul, then the One to Whom this prayer was directed would take care of ‘all that was needful in life’. His explanation was perfectly simple:

“Shouri Yako Mama (in the Swahili language) meant:
‘Mother, this is all Your problem!’”

This was guidance par excellence, uttered by a true Guru. The definition of a Guru was once given by Sri Ramana Maharshi as ‘the Spirit of Guidance’. Though this definition was perfect in its simplicity, I must confess that although the spirit is willing, to muster the necessary *conviction* seems to be a life’s work.

Swami Shantananda was regarded by many students to have a clear-sighted understanding of this truth, as well as a deep knowledge of all of Bhagavan’s teachings. Yes, to all that had ears to hear, Swamiji would emphasize that guidance was essential.

From the most sincere disciples this response was all too often heard: “We are ready and willing to follow you, but what is to be done when your physical presence is withdrawn?” Sri Ramana Maharshi gave the answer. In addition to his famous declaration when his body was on the point of death: “You say that I am leaving, but where can I go, I am here.”

Bhagavan also said, “Kailas is on the Himalayas: it is the abode of Siva. Whereas this Hill [Arunachala] is Siva Himself.”⁵ Arthur Osborne explained this as follows, “He saw the sacred hill as the form assumed by pure Spirit for the support and guidance of men. Now that the physical body of Bhagavan – the most precious of all supports of Grace – has been withdrawn from us, the Hill emits power and Grace for his devotees even more than before.”⁶

To those who follow the teachings of Bhagavan, Swami Shantananda often reminded Bhagavan’s devotees of this ever-present Form of Guidance.

⁵ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§143.

⁶ Op.cit., Osborne, pp.78-79.

Swami Shantananda possessed a special gift of guidance to those who sought his help. It was in direct concordance with the teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Swamiji emphasised that our love for the Divine developed through the practice of meditation. It is true that Bhagavan Ramana, seeing the inner disposition of a devotee's heart, would sometimes direct souls to other means of attaining the goal of life – realisation of the Self and love for the Divine. Nevertheless, Bhagavan still insisted (to those who had ears to hear) that the mind must be strengthened through meditation. The task at hand has 'a lot of spade work'. Anyone who has ever had to dig their way out of any dilemma, especially of a spiritual nature, knows that it requires persistent practice coupled with a wholehearted effort.

Bhagavan's own words emphasising this truth could not be clearer:

"The means that make one qualified for enquiry are meditation, yoga, etc. One should gain proficiency in these through graded practice, and thus secure a stream of mental modes that is natural and helpful. When the mind, that has in this manner become ripe, listens to the present enquiry, it will at once realize its true nature, which is the Self, and remain in perfect peace, without deviating from that state. To a mind that has not become ripe, immediate realization and peace are hard to gain through listening to enquiry. Yet, if one practises the means for mind-control for some time, peace of mind can be obtained eventually."⁷

Thanks be to God, that though the digging may seem endless and the only promise we are given is that peace can be 'obtained eventually', we are never without help. Yes, now even more than before when Grace was embodied in the form of Bhagavan. It has been declared with assurance:

"Where can Bhagavan go, for he is here. And even more, the Holy Hill Arunachala emits power and Grace for his devotees."

There is another cherished memory of the importance of meditation and the Divine form of Grace in Arunachala which involved another distinctive aspect of Swami Shantananda.

During the year that I was living near the pradakshina road in Tiruvannamalai, about a mile from Arunachala, I was in a vacant compound where I lived in the servant's quarters. It was most

⁷ *Vichara Sangraham* [Self-Enquiry] of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, pp.16-17.

conducive for meditation, as from this vantage point Arunachala loomed above the relatively empty countryside. The Divine radiance was overpowering, I found it was hard to get adequate sleep at night. There was a gazebo in a jasmine garden on the property directly facing the Hill. So, after a while, I slept just for a few hours at a time, and ended up sitting in *padmasana*, usually from midnight onwards, until I went to Swamiji's room at Sri Ramana Ashram around 4 am. Long, long hours of meditation can take the heart upwards, but in time it can also pull the body into a state not really depletion, but rather a special kind of disinterest in maintaining physical stamina. Swamiji would immediately notice this in me, and sternly emphasise the importance of taking care of the physical body while doing intense spiritual practice.

Every time I entered Swamiji's room in those predawn hours, when I received his look and his mischievous and heavenly smile, complete strength would return to me. It was not only nourishment, but a balancing and enlivening that seemed to cause all the spiritual power acquired from the long hours of meditation to be fully digested and absorbed. This was his divine gift to me.

Being eternally inquisitive, I asked Swamiji to explain what his presence had just evoked within me as I knew he did for so many others! In reply he again turned me towards the guidance of Bhagavan Ramana.

Swamiji tenderly said that although our effort in meditation is surely pleasing to God and thus productive, the 'digestive juices' of the Guru are at the onset needed to enable us to be fully receptive to the intended purpose – Dramatic Transformative Change! Once again I was reminded of Bhagavan's words that seemed to effortlessly and freely flow from the fathomless memory of Swami Shantananda:

"Grace is always there, it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it."⁸

"The guru is the Spirit of Guidance. Ultimately this is to be found within oneself. Whatever awakens it is acting as guru. 'The purpose of the outer guru', the Maharshi said, 'is to turn you inwards to the inner guru'. And yet in this regard there is no easy formula, no guarantee against error, for just as the aspirant may be misled by false outer

⁸ Op.cit., Osborne, p.74.

gurus reflecting undesirable qualities in himself, so he may dignify various inner urges with the same name 'guru'. Constant vigilance and intelligent purity are necessary.”⁹

This fact, along with many more, caused me to understand that Swami Shantananda was far less human and far more Divine in the being that he revealed to those who sought his guidance and love.

The next time Swamiji reminded me of the sacred prayer of 'Shouri Yako Mama' to our Divine Mother to whom all the problems in life really belong, happened while we were travelling in Bangalore. This was always a special treat for me, for in addition to spending time with the sincere devotees there, we would always stay within a short walking distance of the Living Presence of that Divine Mother Sri Rajarajeshwari. One morning while we both stood before Her, Swamiji turned to me and declared with tears in his eyes: "Look at Her, She is mine – my Black Beauty!" This statement completely assured me that She was the fount of ever-sustained nourishment, the strength, wisdom and guidance that characterised Swami Shantananda Puri – eternally!

Before we left Her Presence, Swamiji took my arm and turned me to directly face Her piercing countenance and said: "If you have any complaints, tell Her now, for you and all of Her children, always have the right to complain." At such a moment, what is one to do? How could I ever asked for more than She had already done for me? For some 60 years earlier, I was born in what seemed to be a hopeless (but not helpless) life in the USA. Could I really complain, now that I was convinced that She had Her eyes on me even then? Swamiji had often told me that one of Her Divine Names was 'Ocean of Compassion without reason'. Here I stood before Her, in Her Chosen Land of Bharata, with a Saint holding my arm telling me that if I had any complaints, now would be a good time to petition Her. With the belief that I had never given Her any real reason to show mercy on me, how could I claim any legitimacy to petition Her?

I now vividly recall that moment, Feeling supremely blessed and simultaneously scared to the bone, all I could utter inwardly was "MA". Swamiji then slightly squeezed my arm, as if to prod me not to lose such a precious opportunity. From that touch a lightening flash of recollection burst in my mind.

⁹ Op.cit., Osborne, p.62.

That instant I recalled one morning before dawn when we had stood together in the Samadhi Shrine of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Swamiji was standing right in front of the gate of the shrine. As I looked back and forth between Bhagavan and Swamiji, I again was transfixed with blessings and fear, for Swamiji was speaking to his Mother (in the form of the Maharshi) in a hushed tone that was inaudible to me. Such moments are rare, transfixing, and at once life-changing. Nevertheless, I summoned the courage to ask Swamiji a question. He had often told me to never hesitate to question him, but at this moment I had to search for the courage in the depths of my soul to interrupt his discourse with God.

In a halting voice, trying not to stutter, I said: “Swamiji, please forgive me, but what are you saying to Bhagavan?”

I know! What audacity on my part!

Swamiji’s answer embodied the guidance that no doubt I had been yearning to receive for numerous incarnations. It was again perfect spiritual simplicity. Standing here before me, in one of the most sacred places on this earth, was a Saint of God, our Swamiji. He had already achieved the highest spiritual realisation and the true vision of the Divine. His heart belonged to the Divine Mother. She had given him the highest wisdom and blessings. His faith was solid in this knowledge. His breath moved in unison with Her Heartbeat. Although all this was true beyond Truth, he stood there with tears in his eyes and pleaded:

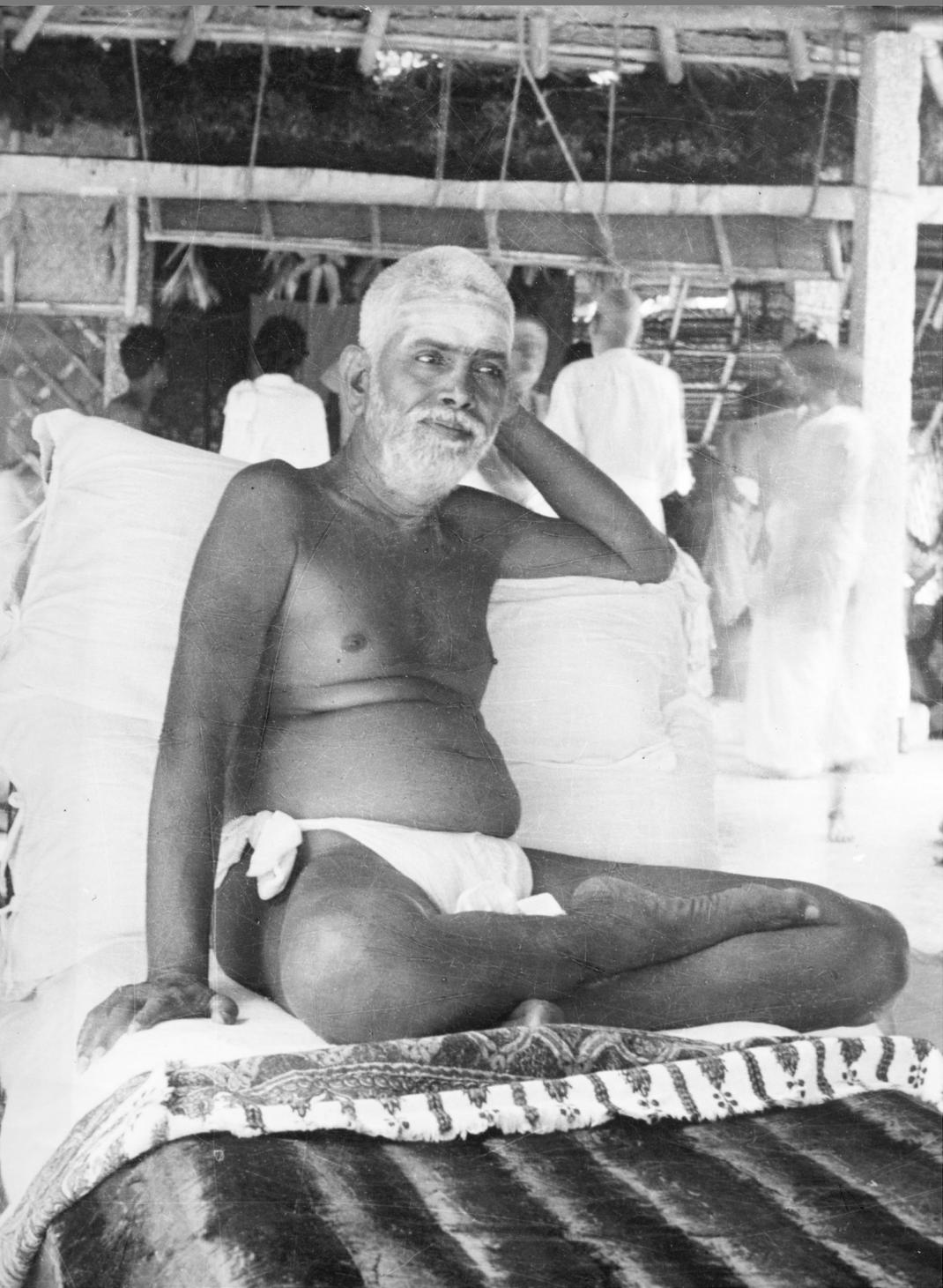
“O Bhagavan, My Mother, somehow make me love you!”

From this moment it was clear to me, as I pray it is also clear to all who read this account, that the very life breath of Swami Shantananda Puri yearned with one overwhelming longing. This yearning was summed up by the divine utterance of his Param Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa:

“Cry to God with a yearning heart and then you will see Him... Extreme yearning is the surest way to God-vision. Through extreme longing the mind remains fixed on the Supreme Being.

One should have faith like that of an innocent child and such longing as a child has when it wants to see its mother.”¹¹ ▲

¹¹ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Chapter III, ‘Visit to Vidyasagar’.



The Bhagavad Gita Saram

The Essence of the Gita

SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

During the year 2006, around the time of Maha Siva Ratri, Swami Shantananda Puri was staying in Gujarat at an ashram on the banks of the sacred Narmada River. After heartfelt requests from Swami Sadasivananda and other devotees, Swamiji gave a series of lectures on the 42 verses from the Bhagavad Gita chosen by Sri Ramana Maharshi. Swami Shantananda spoke for over 60 hours on the 42 verses. His talks were recorded and transcribed.

The following is an excerpt from that voluminous work, and is a commentary on verse twenty eight of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Bhagavad Gita Saram, or The Essence of the Gita.

Yato yato niscarati manascancalam asthiram
Tastastato niyamyaitad atmanyeva vasam nayet

Whenever the unsteady mind, moving here and there, wanders off;
He should subdue and hold it back – direct it to the Self's control;
You should be established always in the *atman*.

Bhagavad Gita 6:26

Yesterday we discussed the 25th verse of chapter six. The 26th verse points out the importance of *nirodha* – stopping the movement of the mind, which goes in various directions. So the

purpose of meditation is to make the mind firm and static at one place. Thus controlling it you will be established always in the *atman*.

This verse is in Chapter Six ('The Yoga of Meditation'), which encompasses Sri Krishna's directions on *sadhana* (practice). Bhagavan's inclusion of this verse, along with two others from this chapter, reflects how important *sadhana* is for those who seek to subject the mind to the 'Self's control'. Bhagavan Ramana repeatedly turned the enquirer to *sadhana* as an essential aspect of ridding the mind of unsteadiness (*calam*). This is best demonstrated by Bhagavan's declaration: "The obstacles that hinder realization are habits of mind (*vasanas*), and the aids to realization are the teachings of the scriptures and of realized souls."¹

So in this verse the Lord is teaching us how to catch and steady the mind. *Manaha*, the mind – what sort of a mind? *Calam* – always moving or wavering and never staying with one object – it goes on. I call it the spaghetti mind because you start with one thing and it moves to many – connected thinking. It is *asthiram* – it is not firm. That mind *yataha yataha niscarati* – wherever it moves – *tata tata* – from those places that it has moved to – *niyama yaitad* – control it and bring it back. Then *atmanyevam vasam nayet* – you should make your mind subordinate to your *atman*, and thus bring it under control. At the moment you are under the control of your mind. By *not cooperating* with your mind you can bring it under your control.

This *sloka* deals with the *atman* and is one hundred percent philosophy and has nothing to do with *bhakti*. There are many paths to the Lord but never confuse one with the other. There is nothing similar in them except at the end. So do not reconcile what you saw in one path, for you cannot compare it with the other. So you have to hear it and take it as it is. There is nothing that is 'simple' or 'complicated', it all depends on your readiness and conditioning – *yogyata*, *adhikara*, *liyakat* – your fitness to understand it. Your fitness depends not on the method but on yourself – the individual.

So here we should know about the mind – its nature – because unless you know about the mind you cannot catch it. Here the Lord has used the word *carati*, i.e., wherever the mind goes and also used

¹ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§13.

the word *calam* – moving. There are two types of movement, for instance, the earth is revolving around its own axis and is also moving around the sun. Likewise the mind has got two types of *calatvam* – movement. One is that it moves out – *chara* – and the other is that although it is not moving out it is going on thinking – *cala*.

Just as when a boy was asked by a man, ‘Son, where does this road go?’ the boy replied, ‘Sir, the road goes nowhere, it is only the buses that the passengers take that go.’ Similarly the mind does not go anywhere. It is where it is. If we understand these things we can easily understand and analyze our mind. So then how do we visualise pictures of Lord Krishna or say, my late husband? The mind has not gone anywhere nor have any objects come and occupied our mind. So the thoughts that come to your mind are events that have happened sometime back, called memory – *vasanas* or some conditionings of the past. It is their reflections that are appearing as images. You think you are seeing this when you have shut your eyes. Ideally when you shut your eyes it should be dark but instead you see these images.

So, there is some light and this light is the knowledge – the awareness. It is in this light that the pictures are coming. Just as a movie is not real but is just light being projected on the screen and we emote to the movie, thinking that the characters are real. So the light is already there and the light is necessary for the picture to exist but the picture is not necessary for the light to exist. The pictures come and go, but the light remains.

There is nothing known as mind or thoughts because thoughts are just memories which are parading there, just like movie pictures on the screen. What remains is knowledge-consciousness and on this cinema screen due to the *vasanas* the past pictures come. They can do nothing to you. So, know that there is nothing else except *jnana*, the knowledge which is in the form of light-awareness or consciousness. There is no ‘I’ apart from this knowledge. That which makes me sentient and a human being is the knowledge which makes me aware that I AM.

This is the nature of the mind and there is nothing called the mind just as there is nothing ‘real’ called a film or a picture. There is just a screen and some light, which creates shadows. The shadows which move are unreal. The light alone is real and is what truly exists. This is the mind. And when once you know that what do you do? When

you know that you are the knowledge through which all the past imaginations are passing, you do not concern yourself with them. Is the light afraid of the terrifying scenes which come on the cinema screen or is it laughing when there is humour on the screen? The light is not affected at all because these scenes never existed and they cannot stain you by giving you sorrow or happiness.

When you know this, this alone is the method and you are at peace. So *atmanyeva vasam nayet* means that you remain as Knowledge, knowing that nothing can stick to you or harm you or give you joy. This light or Knowledge you call the Self. There is nobody called a seer it is the Knowledge which sees and is the seer. So he is the 'I', he is the Self and is the one doing the entire thing.

Yato yato niscarati manascancalam asthiram – just as nobody would go to a movie that showed an image of Shantananda for three hours, the mind does not like to remain still – it is *cala*. Why is it *cancalam*? Because of *raga-dwesa*, a thought came, you got attached, then you remembered your enemy – these are your likes and dislikes – so there is movement. What is the mind *asthiram*? It arises because of the *vasanas* which are the smell of what happened a long time back! *Yato yato niscarati* – this is only an imaginary way of saying that the mind goes, but in actuality it does not 'go' anywhere. It is when you know this that half the battle is won. *Tatastato niyamyā* – It is from there that you control it. How? To be detached is the method of controlling the mind. Then *atmanyeva vasam nayet* – how to take it to *atmanyeva vasam nayet*? Remember constantly that you are the light which cannot be stained. Remain as the *atman*, unperturbed and unagitated.

This is one of the methods of approaching Truth through *jnana*, and it may not be possible for all to get established in it. It won't do to just repeat 'I am the knowledge' or 'I am the light', because you will still be afraid. Here they have not brought in the Lord. So how does one reach the same state through the other method? You go on thinking of the Lord, either Shiva, Krishna or the Mother and pray 'I am unable to give up my desires and win the battle over my senses' and plead to Them for help. In doing so your mind will automatically come away from the desires and it will begin to concentrate on the Lord the more you pray or do *japa* with agony and sorrow – see *Vishada*

Yoga, which is the first chapter in the Gita. Like Arjuna, when you bemoan to the Lord then the instructions come from the Lord. This has happened throughout history, whenever you lament or repeat the Lord's Name either because of your sorrowful experiences or your ignorance. If you weep before the Lord, that becomes a method and you get proper instructions from Him.

Q: What if you want to weep to God and cannot weep because your heart is dry?

A: If you cannot weep, just like in the cinemas or movies they use glycerine to induce tears, do that and one day the weeping will come. Just as a lie repeated a thousand times becomes a truth – that is hypnotism. So imagine, because everything is an imagination, including your becoming a *jiva*. Even when your heart is dry you can pray 'Lord my heart is so dry, please make me weep.' But this is not necessary because we should not dilute our prayers.

Q: Are you saying, then, that *sraddha* (faith) is an imagination?

A: Yes, when your body and mind are imaginations, so is *sraddha*. They are all cosmic imaginations.

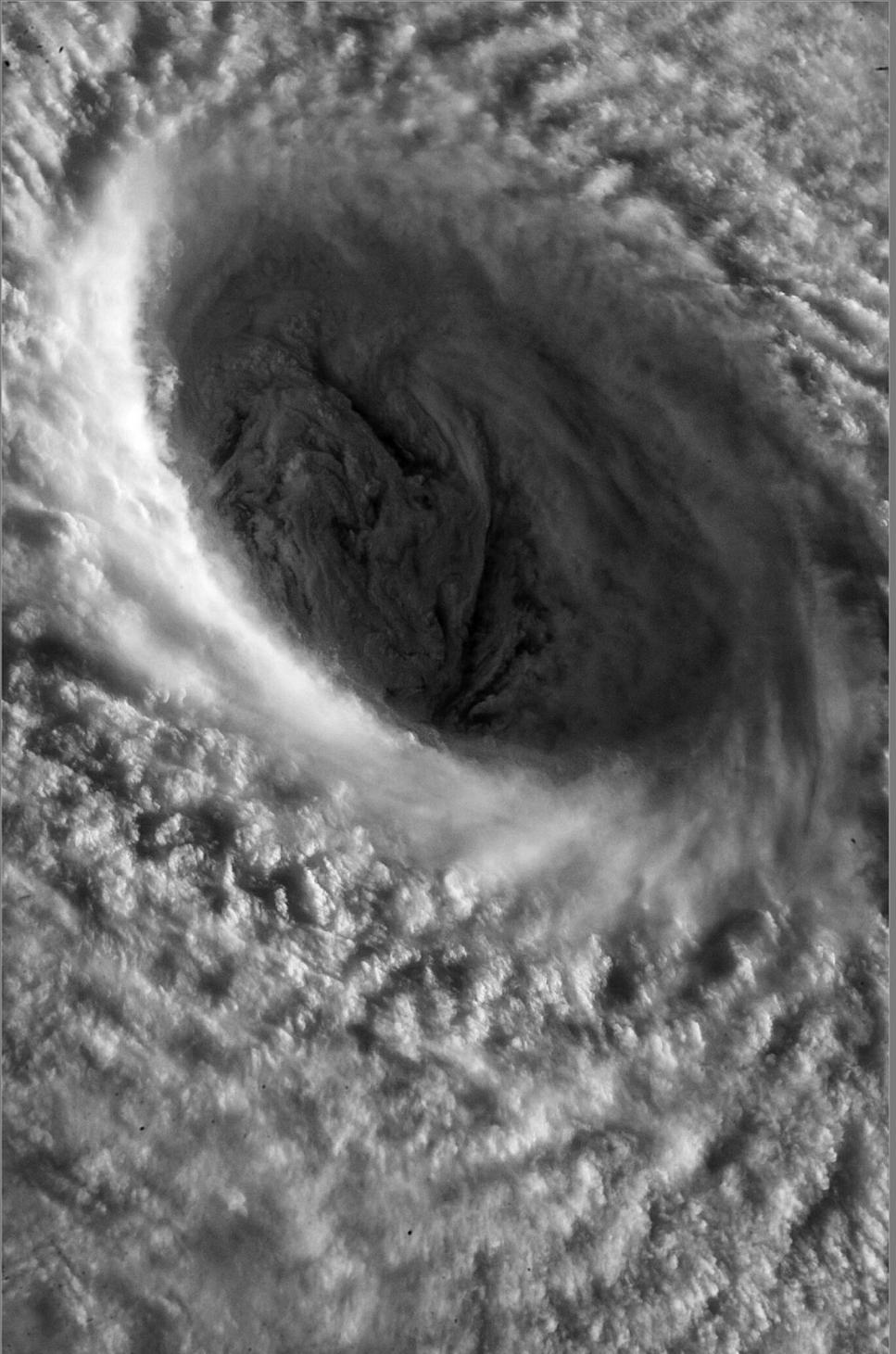
Question: So are we to finally conclude that this is all some sort of dream?

Swamiji answered steadfastly: No! You are to conclude that all this is a damned nightmare. Therefore run like hell for the exit doors!

Question: What are the exit doors?

Swamiji: God, *guru*, *satsang*, *vichara* and *abhyasa* (repeated and protracted spiritual practice)!¹ ▲

¹ "In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one's thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady." Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§91.



The eye of *Typhoon Maysak*, a category 5 super-storm with top winds of 160 mph.
[Photographed from the International Space Station, 31 March 2015]

Anxiety and Atma Vichara in the Anthropocene

MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

This noteworthy article was first published in The Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK Newsletter in Autumn 2017.

We live in an age of fear and trembling and the collective discourse increasingly echoes themes of peril. Refrains of the great challenges facing the planet populate scholarly publications, raising the level of alert. A few years back, Nick Boström, founder of the Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford, told of a recent conference at the University of Oxford where experts on existential risk convened and, among other things, took a poll on the probability of global catastrophe between now and the end of the 21st century. The criterion for determining global catastrophe was mass human death, minimally of 200 million people all the way up to complete extinction of the species. Nineteen percent of the experts polled agreed that humanity would face such a catastrophe before the year 2100.¹

¹ University of Oxford podcasts: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk>: “The Future of Humanity”, Nick Bostrom, 25 Oct 2010.

Please don't think these are doomsayers prognosticating about meteor impacts or supernovae or some other statistically improbable astronomical event. The fact is that paleo-biologists the world over tell us we are already in the midst of a mass extinction larger than any in probably 65 million years, losing about three species per hour² in a human-caused die-off that will likely cost us about half of Earth's species of plant and animal life. Whether humans will be among the species that vanish is an open question.

Similar imminent dangers facing us are discussed in detail by Roy Scranton in his recent book, in which anthropogenic climate change is seen to be reaching a tipping point with the melting of the planet's glaciers and rising sea temperatures. With only a few critical degrees, carbon and methane long frozen in sea-beds and in permafrost will be released into the atmosphere. The author points out that "methane is twenty times more potent than carbon dioxide and thousands of gigatons of it lie locked under the oceans in clathrate hydrates". They are estimated to contain a "quantity of methane roughly equal in magnitude to the sum of all fossil fuel reservoirs on Earth."³ The methane sinkholes in Siberia and the Arctic Ocean may be "signalling the beginning of a massive planetary 'belch' capable of generating catastrophic runaway greenhouse effects". Such an event, the geophysicist David Archer says, would be "comparable to the destructive potential from nuclear winter or from a comet or asteroid impact".⁴

Fifteen years back, biologist Eugene Stoermer and the Nobel-winning chemist Paul Crutzen suggested that we have entered a new era in Earth's geological history and they dubbed the present geological epoch, 'the Anthropocene', because it is "characterised by the advent of the human species as a geological force".⁵

Naming is significant and can help us gain perspective. And while the moniker 'Anthropocene' is meant to designate a new phase in

² Brian Swimme in an interview in 2004 estimated that we are losing 25,000 species per year. This would equal about one species every 20 minutes.

³ Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, quoting oceanographer John Kessler in the chapter called "Introduction: Coming Home".

⁴ Ibid., "Introduction: Coming Home".

⁵ Ibid., "Introduction: Coming Home".

Earth's geological history, it also points up a cultural break with the past and a fresh way of framing the new human historical time period. Indeed, the trials of the Anthropocene are not limited to environmental dangers. Threats born of the advent of the technological age loom. The spectre of synthetic pandemics from bio-weapons or a high-tech third world war worry experts. Artificial Intelligence (AI) specialists argue that HLMI or human-level machine intelligence will be upon us within twenty years after which machine super-intelligence will rapidly ensue, raising concerns about the parity of geopolitical power and tipping the scales towards those with the largest, fastest computers. Already we are seeing efforts by vested interests to shape public opinion through technologically generated truth regimes via weaponised information and data mining, sleeper bots, etc., and manipulating social media for political, strategic and economic advantage. Already we are seeing an intensification across multiple domains, political destabilisation engendered by decentralised high-speed communication, and a breakdown in public discourse in what is beginning to look like a post-truth post-fact age, raising the question of whether democracy can survive the digital IT revolution.

Part of the panic regarding the state of the planet lies in not having an ethical framework within which to make sense of the enormity of change and the brisk pace of transition. In short, the unprecedented tempo has created an ethics and culture lag, as well as an information-overwhelm that seems to preclude proper assimilation. What the Anthropocene demands of us is taking a step back and looking at the big picture. This doesn't necessarily mean adopting a larger time-scale such as the history of planet earth over its 4.6 billion years or the story of our universe since the Big-Bang some 14.5 billion years ago. Panning back means stepping back from the realm of science and history to include philosophical, ethical, theological and humanitarian considerations to better make meaning of the massive revolution that is upon us. Consulting psychology and medical science might help us evaluate the extent to which we are experiencing widespread grief and anxiety born of life in this fraught age. In other words, to what extent is the collective psyche in a state of distress? In the West, anxiety disorders are currently an epidemic, the US reporting about 18% of the population being treated for chronic anxiety.

If cancer support groups offer relief by allowing people to share their fears and worries in facing the prospect of imminent demise, grief work regarding collective anxiety and widespread perceptions that something is wrong on a large scale can help give the internal strength to face frontally the trials before us. The line from James Baldwin, “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but everything that is changed will have been faced”, reminds us that whatever the reality, a sober assessment of it will help in gaining access to the requisite wisdom and care we need to deal with it. Denial is deadly because it blinds and leads to further, deeper suffering, not to mention ineptitude.

Perhaps some of the anxiety and apathy plaguing the Anthropocene is a kind of deferred mourning, a hidden ungrieved grief for what has already been lost, an unconscious despair and growing suspicion that the worst is yet to come. But our apprehension, while usefully serving to galvanise the collective will, has the undesirable consequence of disabling the calm, collected common sense that would enable effective global initiatives. We seem to be suffering blind spots with respect to big-picture thinking and the depth of vision needed to ground the large-scale cooperation that is being called for. While the threats are real enough, one must also wonder if the West’s doom and gloom visions of the planet’s future are in part due to its flagging economic status and the shift of economic and political power elsewhere. The same level of panic is not widespread in India, for example.

Much of the alarmist tenor of Western public discourse is itself disturbing and speaks of the growing apprehension, a trend that may be exacerbated in part by the aging post-war boomer generation where a large percentage of the population is facing issues of mortality. We might ask to what extent the apocalyptic tone of the Anthropocene, i.e. talk of the ‘end of civilisation as we know it’—even planetary death—is related to modern culture’s exiling of death and dying and outright neglect of traditional religious wisdom concerning the impermanent nature of earthly existence. For many, the advent of the Anthropocene is the right time to ask existential questions. It is a time to invoke the wisdom of earlier civilisations in their moments of crisis, to draw upon a larger framework of meaning-making, especially as they relate to themes of loss. While loss is a feature of every generation, it appears more menacing in this age of accelerated transition. Now is the time

to probe into that realm which is not ephemeral, not subject to the law of impermanence—if such a realm exists.

This is the large view that has been the subject of religious inquiry over the millennia, drawing on the vertical dimension that brings into play the understanding that all we see and know as world or cosmos may not be all there is and considers the fact that the world as we know it is passing away before our eyes anyway, and such has always been the case. It is time to consider the possibility that the shadow of our age is not just the harsh realities confronting a common humanity—as enumerated above—but also our failure to appreciate the value of inquiry into the nature and meaning of life and death. What would it be like to consider the possibility of something that doesn't pass away? What would that be? And what would be the means of exploring it?

* * *

In India, tradition talks of the *purushartha*, that is, the four requisites of the good life: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. *Artha* governs wealth, prosperity and the comforts of life; *kama* is love and the sense pleasures; *dharma* is ethical life and moral development; and *moksha* is the transcendent dimension concerned with queries into life beyond this world. In the West, the first three have been developed to a significant degree while the fourth has atrophied in this rationalist age. This trend is starting to take root in India as well.

One of the challenges in the Anthropocene is to moderate the dogmatic positivism that has pervaded the thinking of recent centuries. Sri Ramana Maharshi's *atma vichara* is a simple and concise method for initiating inquiry into the nature of things, which includes human experience and human consciousness. To practice *vichara*, one might start with a healthy scepticism about the possibility of knowing anything independent of the mind. Inquiries in ancient times, for example, in Anaxagoras of the early Greeks, or even earlier, in the Upanishads of classical India, raised questions about the existence of the visible world. When looking out and beholding a world, they observed that we have no way to verify its actual existence since all we know of it comes to us mediated by the (fallible) senses. They saw that all that appears to us is merely phenomena, a perception or appearances on the screen of mind. There may in fact be a world out

there corresponding to our perception of it. But it is only a belief as we have no way of verifying the validity of our perceptions.

If we trace the origins of Western science back to Aristotle, we don't find the same infatuation with the material world as in the science of recent centuries. Aristotle's designation of natural philosophy as investigation into the observable world was intended as a methodological demarcation to distinguish it from other modes of inquiry such as ethics, philosophy and metaphysics. Later it took the name 'science' but by the 17th century, the method had become an ontology, a sort of religious view that claimed to know the ultimate status of the world, which said, in short, *if it cannot be observed, then it does not exist*. Called 'positivism', this basic metaphysical view began to colour scientific undertakings in recent centuries which have generally been divorced, at least formally, from anything that looks like subjective experience.

But it is inarguable that all the known, including every scientific hypothesis, has its origin in human consciousness. Consciousness thus has a kind of epistemological primacy: the positivist may doubt the existence of God or the Self but ultimately cannot deny the existence of his own knowing faculty, namely consciousness, which governs, among other things, the very conceiving of his scientific truths.⁶

Neuroscience's study of the studier (or knower) invariably opens doors to new methodologies which include neurophenomenology, or studying consciousness by and through the (subjective) content of consciousness. The science of mind and exploring human consciousness as a phenomenon of nature is an endeavour which, while having been around for thousands of years in the East and in the world's contemplative traditions, is only now making its appearance in the Western academy and may finally offer the beginnings of a long-sought bridge between science and religion.⁷

⁶ A point made on numerous occasions by the neuroscientist/philosopher Evan Thompson, professor of philosophy at University of British Columbia.

⁷ See the work of Francisco Varela and Richie Davidson. Evan Thompson points to Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences* as a key theoretical source text for this work. Of course, the great mid-twentieth century work that presages this move in science is *The Phenomenon of Man* by the French Jesuit paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

But what does this have to do with anxiety in the Anthropocene? We have come to accept that the external physical world is all there is, that everything seems to depend on it. But if the external world is all there is, what is it that is knowing this? What is the knower of such speculation?

This is part of what Bhagavan Sri Ramana meant by the practice of ‘Who am I?’, which points in the direction of the transcendent, toward that which is not part of the observable world but is the observer itself. It is the simple method of witnessing experience and probing its nature. For every mental phenomenon, even a simple thought, one may ask, ‘To whom has this thought arisen?’ The same applies to other activities. “So long as you think ‘I am walking,’ ‘I am writing,’ inquire who it is that is doing it.”⁸ The intention is not to find additional names and labels for oneself or one’s mental processes but to probe the hidden dimensions of the phenomenon we call our self.

Those for whom ‘Who am I?’ feels hackneyed through overuse may devise alternatives, remembering that Bhagavan Ramana is not attached to any specific formulas but rather, is only interested in imparting the means for unraveling egoic thought structures. Variations on Bhagavan’s *vichara* are questions like ‘who or what is seeing and hearing?’ or ‘where is seeing and hearing taking place?’ These are not technical or anatomical questions but challenge the practitioner to reorient and focus his search on direct experience without reliance on anything second-hand. Received knowledge has a place but in a way, it is not one’s own. Like the accountant tallying up the wealth of his well-to-do employer, though the sum be great, the funds are not his, do not belong to him.

Similarly, much of what passes for knowledge in common parlance is just the names and labels of things, without necessarily knowing them in any intimate way. Received knowledge is basically information—data—but lacking the quality of intimate relationship with the knower, it is *decontextualised* knowledge. ‘Who am I?’ by contrast is investigating first-hand and does not assume that the name our parents gave us or that the legal descriptors the state assigned to us

⁸ Ramana Maharshi, *Who Am I?*, §11, §15, and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* §596.

have anything to do with it. When we search for the seer, we cannot see it; when we look with or through the seer, the whole universe appears. Who or what is this seer?

When experiencing something like apprehension, we ask *who or what is afraid? What in fact is fear?* How liberating to see that a mind-state is just a *state of mind*, rather than something tangible or substantial. From the neurological point of view, *anxiety is an attentional disorder* and results from rapidly shifting attention, a condition aggravated in the Anthropocene by digital high-speed technology. Research shows that one of the most effective treatments for chronic anxiety is training and stabilising attention.⁹ Inquiry works splendidly in this regard as intense questioning helps cultivate steady attention and cuts through the habit force that propels us into unceasing rumination, the root and source of our anxiety.

While such a method may seem awkward at first, the momentum to inquire grows with practise and grounds our mental life. *Vichara* puts into question the questioner herself and all her knowledge. This is the root of intuition. Life in the Anthropocene urges us to balance the compulsion for informational knowledge with intuitive sensing. ‘Who am I?’ is designed to stimulate bewilderment and the *not-knowing-mind* which is the beginning of intuition. Why is that good? Because content knowledge is often context-deficient, abstracted. *The perplexity of not-knowing*, by contrast, is processual and fosters listening, seeking, searching, and observing without judging, concluding or closing off inquiry through the illusion of knowledge. In this way, not-knowing is related to humility. Herein lies the hidden gem of *atma vichara*. Tracing back the radiance – turning the light of consciousness back on itself – allows one to see the workings of the mind from within, in order to gain access to true insight and the awareness of what is taking place around one moment by moment.

Vichara can help to free up the congestion of the densely compacted mind, with all its various images, thought-streams, repressed emotions, and undigested material of memory, jammed and impacted in the mind as it is, layer upon layer. Inquiry’s healing comes by the power of attention. When we begin to see the egoic identity as a tightly bound

⁹ In particular, the work of neuro-psychologist George Bonanos.

bundle of thoughts and mind-states, we can then look beneath each thought or mind-state to discern the hidden intention behind it. Simply identifying the hidden content of the mind has the effect of aiding us in processing and assimilating it.

Through such practises, compulsive thinking reveals itself to be addictive in nature. What is driving the addiction? It is aversion to unpleasant mental states, thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories or self-judgments. The compulsion to think is always a form of escape from some deeper, less conscious negative thought, memory or feeling state. If we can slow the thought process down through *vichara* such as in the intensive meditation setting, we are in a position to glimpse directly the mechanism at work and reduce the compulsion. Hence, dismantling compulsive thinking and with it, anxiety, is arrived at through a sort of *micro-vichara*, probing into each element of the thought-stream to uncover its inner workings.

The bad news, of course, is that as we use *vichara* to probe the inner workings of the mind, we discover that much, if not most, of the motivations underlying our thoughts are narcissistic ones. The good news, on the other hand, is that when we probe into our narcissism and conceit, we find that, at its root, it is fleeting and unsubstantial. When the story of self is dropped, when the mind is made utterly empty and spacious such as in the intensive contemplative retreat setting, conceit falls away, if only for the duration of the mind's stabilised attention. This is a useful experience as it shows undeniably that narcissism is bound up with and inseparable from the compulsive thought stream. What *vichara* and the experience of pure empty awareness reveals is that there is no primordial entity or force within us that can be called conceit. Rather conceit and the egoic mechanism appear to be made up of stories and images which are in themselves absent of any enduring substance and can be rendered powerless under the scrutiny of *vichara*'s penetrating awareness.

Of course this raises the question as to the cause of the narcissistic compulsion in the first place. Freud's answer was that it is made use of as a defense mechanism. Inquiring into the origins of the egoic process through *vichara* helps us to see the psyche's maladaptive coping which is directed toward managing and containing, among other things, the perpetual fear of death. By constructing a self and

MOUNTAIN PATH

propping it up on every side, we would seem to insulate ourselves from the ever-present, though mostly unconscious, fears we have about our inevitable demise. The narcissistic identity shields us from the parallel fear that *who we think we are may not in actuality exist*. The two fears are related and ironically, when through inquiry we glimpse and learn to accept the truth of the latter (that is, the ego is not real), we are freed from the menacing effects of the former (that is, death is not real).

Probing what Bhagavan Ramana calls the ‘void nature of the Self’ reveals that what dies, i.e. the egoic personality, is not real anyway. Letting go of our narcissism which is bound up with compulsive thinking has the effect of simultaneously relieving us of the fear of death because *that which dies is not who we really are*, and that which is truly real is beyond birth and death. Thus, through *vichara*, we find ourselves more accepting of our mortality. More than that, as *vichara* attunes us to the poignancy of life’s impermanence, each moment begins to be known more intimately, begins to be more greatly appreciated, more precious in itself, just as it is. Ordinary things take on a significance previously unknown and a miraculous completeness begins to imbue ordinary things, their highest meaning consisting in nothing more than their simple being-ness. This is real medicine for anxiety, and too, for the existential despair plaguing the Anthropocene.

* * *

So how does all this relate to the logistical challenges of the Anthropocene? In answer, it should be said that it is not through *vichara* that we would solve the logistical problems of the Anthropocene. But logistics is just one piece in the puzzle. The lion’s share of danger facing us in the Anthropocene is skewed perception born of the lack of a healthy grounded perspective. What we are suffering from is a deficit in clear understanding of the world, our place in it and the nature of life and death.

It’s not that *vichara* would cause us to abdicate our responsibilities to the world, nor that we should make light of the perils facing humanity. Rather, we should wholeheartedly advocate for positive change, for cooperative intervention between nations on things like carbon emissions. At the same time, we will want to recall the prayerful

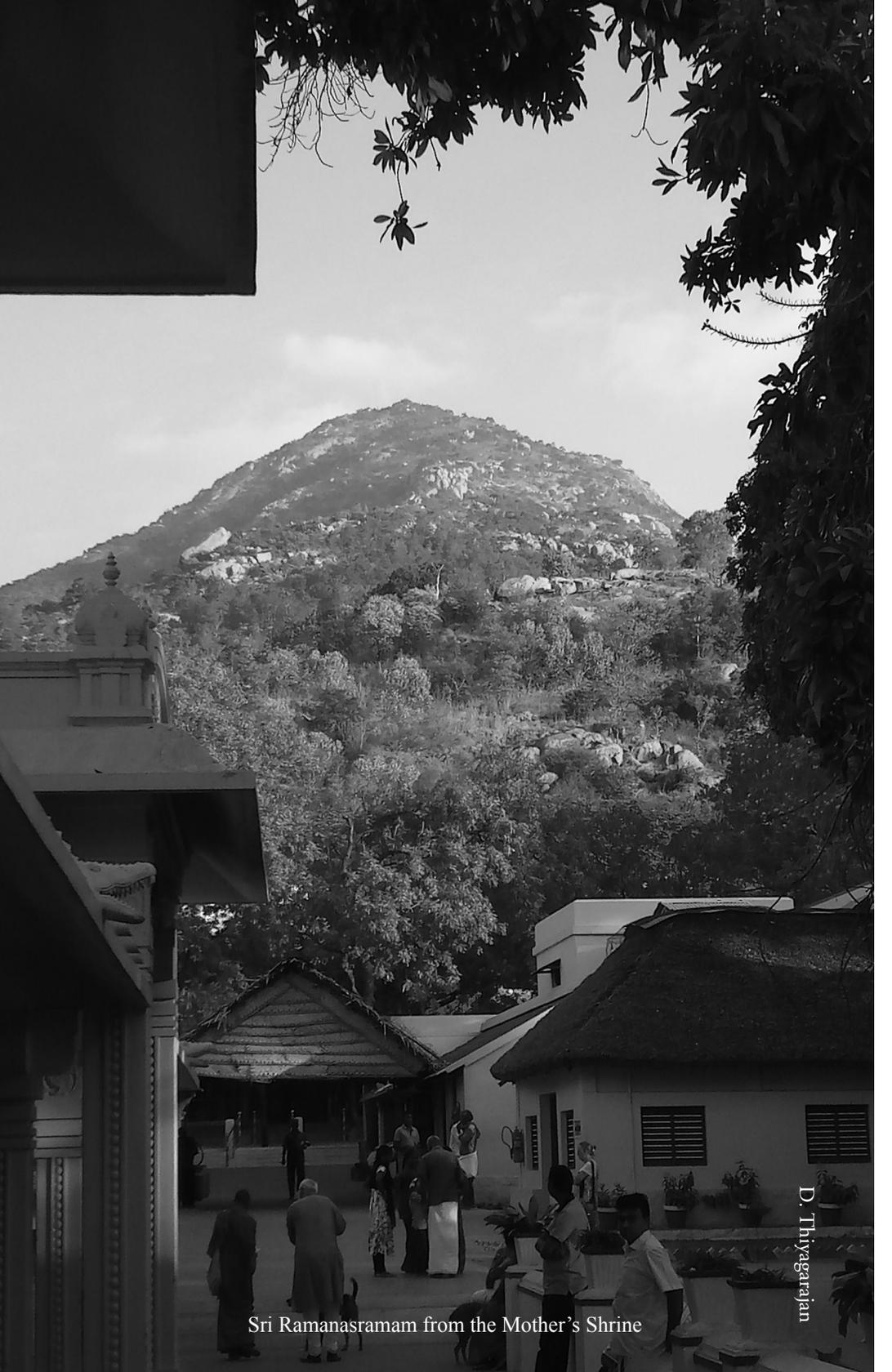
line from Eliot: *Teach us to care and not to care*.¹⁰ In other words, teach us to have heart, to be compassionate and to do the right thing. Teach us to take steps to assure that our children and grandchildren will have a safe and vital planet to inhabit. But let us also remember that even if all goes well and the challenges of global warming, mass extinction, competition for resources and hostility between nations are miraculously overcome, still we will die, this present world order and this historical era will dissolve and, this civilisation will disappear, as will our planet-home. In short, let us recall what great luminaries have perennially repeated — *all created things pass away*.

The lament of the Anthropocene is having lost sight of our calling as human beings which is essentially a spiritual one, namely, finding beauty and meaning in our lives and in our world, and keeping ever-present in our vision the poetic, mythic and dharmic dimensions essential for a full and meaningful life. *Vichara* helps us get our bearings amid the confusion and pain so that we can face the reality of things-as-they-are, and greet them with clarity, courage, wisdom and honesty.

The reader may recall the quote attributed to Martin Luther who, when asked what he would do if he knew the world was to end tomorrow, is reported to have said, “If I knew the world was to end tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today”.¹¹ In other words, I will live in hope to the very end no matter what, for it is in hope, in trusting that things are as they should be, that I will be of any use to this world, in meeting its challenges and in serving life. ▲

¹⁰ From T. S. Eliot’s ‘Ash-Wednesday’

¹¹ Scholars are unable to substantiate this quote attributed to Martin Luther.



Sri Ramanasramam from the Mother's Shrine

D. Thyagarajan

How to End Suffering

SURESH BODDAPATI

Humanity has, for a long time, been searching for ways to avoid suffering. We have pointers from various enlightened souls, from Buddha to Ramana Maharshi, from J. Krishnamurti to Eckhart Tolle, to name a few. The funny thing about pointers is that not every pointer works for everyone. As the Zen saying goes, “The finger that points to the moon is not the moon”. In other words, do not mistake the pointer to be what it is pointing to. Which pointer one chooses is not that important, as long as one uses the pointer to see what it points to and does not get stuck in the pointer itself. To me, to avoid suffering, two pointers seem very appealing: Acceptance and living in the now.

Before we delve into the two pointers, we need to be clear on what contributes to suffering. At the root of it, it seems there are two contributing factors: Resistance to what is, and time. An event happens to us, and we react to that event by passing a judgement on the event. Either the event is “good” or it is “bad”, based on our perspective of what we consider good or bad to be. When we conclude that the event is bad, unfavourable, the mind says “what happened is not how it should be”. It is the mental resistance to accepting things the way they

are that causes suffering. The mind is always creating expectations from life and unfulfilled expectations lead to disappointment, causing suffering. A related factor is resistance to change. The mind is always seeking security, stability, while the reality is that everything is subject to change, everything is impermanent. The stronger our attachment and clinging to security, the stronger the resistance to change. Life renews itself constantly, forms arise and dissolve, new forms take their place and they too dissolve and on and on. The only constant is change.

The other factor is time. If one observes closely, past and future are nothing but creations of the mind. The past is essentially the mind's commentary on some event retrieved from memory. Regretting what was not done, guilt about something that happened, unhappiness that the good times experienced before are not at hand anymore, all these are examples of that commentary. The future is pure imagination, the mind's movie-making. Fear of things going wrong, of losing what we have, of uncertainty of desired outcomes, all these contribute to suffering as well.

Imagine a mind that has no such commentary, that is, a mind that is living in the now. Such a mind will not go through suffering. It is important to note here that we are not talking about not making plans. There is nothing wrong with making plans for a better life; it is the commentary on the possible outcomes, the what ifs, that creates suffering.

It should already be obvious why the two pointers of acceptance and living in the now are helpful. Let's go deeper. What is acceptance? At the outset, acceptance sounds negative, it suggests some sort of resignation, passivity and inaction. In reality, though, acceptance is the prerequisite for right action. When events occur, if we meet those events with complete acceptance, we are not overlaying our expectations on those events.

The event has already happened, there is nothing we can do about it other than to accept that it has happened. We could get tangled up in why it should not have happened, what we could have done to prevent the event from happening, why we are the unfortunate ones to whom this event happened, we could create all this suffering and go through it before we reach acceptance or we could meet the event with acceptance right away. Acceptance is inevitable, we need

to decide how long we want to take to get there. Acceptance is not resignation. Once acceptance sets in, we can always decide how to get to a better situation from where we are; that's when right action arises. We *respond* to the situation instead of *reacting* to the situation.

When it comes to time, once we realize that past and future are only in the mind, it becomes easy to see that all we have is the now. We no longer use the now as a means to an end, some imaginary future. If we can meet the now with full attention, the mind's incessant activity comes to a stop and we really see the now as it is. If we go with "now is not where I want to be, I want to be out there", we are rejecting the now, we are creating suffering. The thing about living in the now is that we have an opportunity every moment to try it out.

Waiting in the line at the store, waiting for a train or plane to arrive, getting stuck in a traffic jam, boredom, all are great opportunities to notice how the mind gets agitated, denies the now and is always trying to get there, away from here and now. If, instead, we welcomed those moments, a whole new world would open up to us, and we would live those moments with great peace. We can easily make acceptance to be an enormous mountain that is hard to climb if we project ourselves trying to be accepting all the way into the distant future. Instead, if we combine acceptance with living in the now, all we have to do is accept in the now, and now, and in every now that arises, only when it arises.

Effort is not going to get us to acceptance and living in the now. If we have to put in effort, there is already a conflict between what is (I am not accepting) and what should be (I must accept). This will only add to the suffering. So what is one to do? This is where J. Krishnamurti has another pointer. Observe the mind's working without any judgement. Concepts are not going to get us to a suffering-free life. Because concepts are just that, a lot of words folded into a neat theory that the mind can tuck away as another form. The act of observation of the mind without judgement *allows one to see one's conditioning*, how one reacts to events, what one really feels. If one watches the mind and allows oneself to fully feel any feeling that arises, without labeling it as good or bad, the very act of that watching ends the drama the mind creates and acceptance sets in. The mind finds this hard because the mind is used to methods, steps to follow and goals to reach, and when the mind hears that there aren't really

MOUNTAIN PATH

any steps and that the only thing to be done is becoming aware of the mind's working, the mind is doubtful.

This is not something to be just taken as the truth just because it is written here or somewhere else; one ought to really find out for oneself how easy it is to get to acceptance and living in the now. And if one gets a glimpse of it, but finds old conditioned patterns kicking in and is unable to stay in awareness of the mind, one does not have to beat oneself up; it's another opportunity to watch non-acceptance in action. One may arrive at a state of complete acceptance instantly or over time – it does not matter, there is no deadline, but once the process has started, it is irreversible. The end to suffering is a byproduct of acceptance; it is not a goal that one can set for oneself and get to with a 5-step plan. So, for those who want the bottom line: Watch the movements of your mind with full attention, get to acceptance, live in the now and end suffering. ▲

In Your Eyes

Upahar

Love is the child, the mystery, the mirror;
the hopeful journey and the dark return.
Love is the ancient land, the drought, the rainstorm,
the breaking seed, the famine and the feast.

Love is the tree, the hanging god, deep thunder,
the flowering crown, the absolute defeat.
Love rolls away the stone, the heart's found empty;
a simple miracle. The angel smiles.

Love's the eternal stranger, the companion;
the caravan of days, a night like this.
The images dissolve, words come to rest now.
Love is the silence dancing in your eyes.

Lucia Osborne

KITTY OSBORNE

My mother, Lucia Osborne, was born Ludka Lipszyc in Poland on 15th February 1904. She came from a large orthodox Jewish family and she met my father, Arthur Osborne, when he was in Warsaw teaching English. At the time she was engaged to a very rich Czech Jewish boy, but from what I gathered over the years, my mother took one long look at my father and made up their minds. She knew what was right for her...and him! They married in 1934, I was born in 1936 and they left for England two years later. Her family were not keen on the marriage, they seriously threatened to disown her, but she was never a pushover...not then nor at any time in the future, so that was that. When Lucia and her husband arrived in Yorkshire and met his family it turned out that they were not keen either. "What, you have married a Jewess! What a disgrace." Etc. etc. I was only two years old at the time so I have no true memories of events, but I picked up a lot of the emotional background through overhearing adult conversation, the way children do, when the grown-ups don't realise they are listening.

Nevertheless, my parents sensed the problems inherent in the political climate at the time, so my father applied for a job as lecturer at the Chulalonghorn University in Thailand, then known as Siam.

They both wrote many letters and tried very hard to get Lucia's family to join them, but the family did not seem to be at all concerned

about Germany and Nazism. Then the shutters came slamming down and no one was allowed out of Poland any more. After the war it came to light that my mother's entire family, except for one sister and one brother out of ten siblings, was murdered in various concentration camps. For the rest of her life, my mother could barely speak about this.

In Bangkok we lived in a large rambling old house surrounded by an overgrown old garden. My brother Adam and my sister Frania were both born there and my memories, although slightly blurred by time, are of a happy and slightly wild childhood. Adam and I both spoke Siamese in preference to English as it is a tonal language and much easier for children to learn.

Although I didn't realise it at the time, my parents were already involved in their search for a guru who could show them a deeper meaning to life. In the 1940s and 50s spiritual ignorance and intolerance was much stronger than it is today and the quest for a more profound way of life was quite unusual. A small set of like-minded seekers formed a group that remained in contact for many years and shared information with each other.

A turning point in my parents' spiritual path came in 1936, the year of my birth. They met Martin Lings, who later was a private secretary of Rene Guenon, a leading thinker in the school of perennial philosophy, which says that there are universal truths and wisdom shared by all major world religions. Inspired by this, my parents went to Switzerland the following year and met Frithjof Schuon who initiated them into the Shadhiliya-Alawiya Sufi order. Lucia was given the Arabic name Shakina. Later, my father translated Guenon's *The Crisis of the Modern World* into English. Around this time, one of their group of seekers heard of Ramana Maharishi¹ and came to Tiruvannamalai to investigate, but he reported back that Ramana was not a guru because, although realised, he did not give initiation.

In 1941 my father came up for his long leave from Bangkok. His university followed a common system for academics abroad at the time – two years working and then six months leave to give them time to get home to their country of origin and return by ship. My parents were not interested in going back to England, so they went to Kashmir

¹ I have always preferred the spelling 'Maharishi' rather than 'Maharshi' as it is how the word is pronounced in Tamil.



Lucia Osborne in 1956

to meet a great Sufi master. While there my father received a telegram telling him that the situation in Bangkok was very precarious and he should not bring his family back until things were more settled. He left to go back alone, promising to send for us as soon as he could. Two days after his return, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. They also marched into Siam and all foreigners – including my father – were interned. Arthur was actually confined in a prisoner of war camp on the University grounds which was under the direct supervision of the Siamese. Later he claimed that was the reason he survived, as many people under direct Japanese control were sent to work on the Burma railway. These people mostly did not survive.

Lucia found herself alone, without funds and with three small children aged five, two and one. One of their group of spiritual seekers, David MacIver, had gone to Tiruvannamalai, met Ramana Maharishi and was so impressed that he bought a bit of land there and built a house. David was based in Bombay working for *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, so he spent very little time in his house and offered it to my mother until she could sort herself out.

That is how we came to Tiruvannamalai and Bhagavan.

As soon as Lucia met Ramana Maharishi she realized that whoever had told them he was not a guru, was completely mistaken. Not only was he a guru, but he was a *Sadt Guru*;² he was the greatest living embodiment of the Divine. She immediately wrote to Arthur and told him, but he did not receive any letters from his family until two years later. We three children accepted immediately that Bhagavan was extraordinary. As far as I remember we never discussed this or wondered about it... we just knew it was so. We would talk to Bhagavan, show him our toys, tell him our stories, and he always responded to us on a level we understood. I remember my mother would speak to him (through an interpreter) – she usually wanted clarification on some metaphysical problem which was of no interest to us. People often said that Bhagavan's answer to one person's query would happen to also resolve the unasked questions of others present. Much of what he said was specific to the person whom he addressed, but also somehow of interest to others. People even enjoyed

² I much prefer the spelling 'sadt' to the usual 'sad' as it closer to the Sanskrit sound and less likely to be mistakenly pronounced like an unhappy guru.

his comments on our dollies and reading books. I showed him my Mother Goose nursery rhyme book and he noticed how tatty it was and gave it to someone to have it rebound for me. Actually I now seem to remember that we showed everything to Bhagavan, letters, newspapers, we shared stories about our friends and families. The old hall was quite a social and friendly place with local chat as well as spiritual questing.

Once we arrived at Tiruvannamalai by train from Madras. I called a *jetka* with a nice robust horse to carry us home. No said my mother, we will take that one with the skinny hopeless looking animal. I said it wasn't suitable but mother insisted. If we don't hire that animal no one else will and it will die of hunger. Actually it fell down dead before we reached the station gates!

Lucia was a formidable woman. She managed to make a home for, feed, clothe and educate her children under the most appallingly difficult circumstances. Eventually the British Government awarded her a pension which was issued as a loan for the duration of the war. This was some help, but it is interesting that her husband, my father, insisted on paying back this pension in small dribs and drabs after the war even though my mother, who dealt with our family's practical financial matters and our hardship, noted slightly begrudgingly that he was possibly the only internee ever to repay this debt.

Lucia became one of the most fervent and wholehearted devotees of Bhagavan. She spent as much time as possible meditating in his presence in the old hall. My brother Adam once went up to Bhagavan and told him that his Daddy was in a concentration camp and would Bhagavan please look after him and keep him safe. Bhagavan smiled and nodded. That was enough for all of us. We knew our daddy would be safe and my mother stopped worrying.

We three children learnt Tamil easily in the way that children do, but for Lucia it was much more difficult. The chief problem is that written Tamil is quite different from spoken Tamil... and there were no books in those days to learn spoken Tamil! So my mother spoke a combination of classical Tamil that she had learned from teachers and real rough yokel Tamil. We children would laugh and tease her. I don't think we realized that she already spoke seven languages anyway, and we probably wouldn't have been impressed even if we had known; languages come so easily to children.

One time we were all in Madras staying with our friends the Sharmas. While there, Lucia received a telegram saying that Arthur Osborne was dead – killed in the war. Her friend Mrs. Sharma at once started to try and console my mother for her loss, but Lucia rejected her comfort. “He is not dead,” she assured her friend. “If he were dead, I would know it. Anyway Bhagavan said he would take care of Arthur. He is not dead.” There then developed a most peculiar scene where Mrs. Sharma was still trying to console my mother and make her face facts, while my mother was consoling Mrs. Sharma, who thought that Lucia had lost her mind with grief. Anyway it was all settled in a couple of days when Lucia received another telegram saying words to the effect of ‘Sorry, wrong Osborne.’ Interestingly, not one of us even doubted for a second that our father/husband was safe. Bhagavan had indicated as much.

Lucia loved to walk around the hill, Arunachala, the very sacred manifestation of Siva on earth. I think she used to go round about once a week. Once she went round praying for my father’s health, as he had been quite ill for some time. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she walked right past the entrance to our lane. Rather than walk backwards around the hill during pradakshana, she carried on and walked round twice in a row! Another time as she walked around it came on to rain and the rain was quite a heavy downpour. Being fairly close to one of the mantapams that stand around the hill, she dashed in and sought refuge. Unfortunately, the mantapam was very old, as they are, and it leaked quite badly. In the end she squeezed into the small shrine built for the deity at the back and settled down to wait out the rain. Some villagers came in after her as they too needed to get out of the wet. My mother usually wore white saris and when she moved a bit in her niche there was immediate panic and people called out ‘pissasu, pissasu’, meaning ‘ghost, ghost.’ The best part was when several people came to our house next day and told my mother to be careful when she walked round the hill as there was a ghost lurking in the mantapam and it might attack her.

As the oldest of the three Osborne children I should have had some inkling of the incredible hardship my mother had to contend with, but I must admit that I didn’t have a clue! Lucia somehow made it so that our lives were free and fun and we ran wild all over the countryside. I don’t remember ever feeling poor or deprived. She also managed to save a bit of money and buy some land, which was admittedly very cheap,

on which she built a little house for us all after my father came back from camp. She once told me that the whole house only cost Rs.5,000. My mother never threw anything away. Ever. She found a use for bits of rusted metal, bits of broken tins... you name it. One time she broke her leg and was completely bed bound. I took advantage of this and attacked the old storeroom. I got rid of heaps of broken, rusty springs and utterly dead electric stoves... in fact we ended up with a huge pile of scrap. I threw all this stuff out into the garden and told Unnamalai to get rid of it. When I came back a few months later the first thing I saw in the garden was the same pile of junk. "Why?" I demanded. "I told you to throw all this rubbish out."

It was explained to me quite clearly that when Amma got better and started walking again, she would definitely want to know what had happened to her pile of junk and no one was prepared to face her anger by telling her that it was chucked out. She would have kept it there forever if I hadn't collected it by hand and disposed of it myself.

Unnamalai, incidentally came to see my mother when she was about 16 and a leper. My mother had a reputation as a homeopathic doctor and Unnamalai was hoping for a cure. Actually there was an excellent Leprosy Hospital not far from us and my mother sent her there. She was completely cured and stayed with us from then on until she retired in her 80s. She and my mother were quite a team!!! My mother gave her hell and Unnamalai gave it right back.

My mother turned saving into an art form, and my childhood memories definitely contain piles of unbelievable junk stuck in unlikely places. An old yellow plastic frisbee became our salad bowl, and other unlikely containers served as equally unlikely bowls or dishes, which all appeared on our table as she constantly entertained visitors. Lucia was irrepressibly welcoming. Nearly everyone who came to the ashram spent some time in our house before going on to find their own place. My mother felt that she was lucky and it was through Bhagavan's grace that she could stay here near him, so she freely offered hospitality to anyone whom she felt needed it.

My father's health had been pretty much wrecked by being interned and more or less starved for the duration of the war. My mother studied homoeopathy in order to care for him herself, which she did for the rest of his life. She saw to his comfort and his wellbeing and every facet of his life. She directed his diet and made him a home he could be

comfortable in. It was a tiny house but we loved it; but on the subject of diet it seems to me through the window of memory that my father's regime mainly consisted of removing from his menu every single thing that he enjoyed – coffee, broad beans, oranges, etc. I used to sneak him bits and pieces that he enjoyed when my mother wasn't looking.

My father had a difficult time finding a job after he came home and there were worrying times. But with Bhagavan's help we managed. Then Arthur founded the ashram magazine, *The Mountain Path*, and he edited it until his death in 1970. Just before he died his last words to his wife, my mother Lucia, were "Thank you."

After my father's death Lucia edited the magazine until Viswanathan came along to take it over. No mean feat for a Polish woman.

My parents were only in their 60s when my father died, although he had become an old man due to his travails during the war. Lucia's health also started to deteriorate and she began to spend more time in England where she had relatives and the climate was kinder. She probably would have found a welcoming home in any country around the world with people who had once stayed with us in Tiruvannamalai and who continued to correspond with her for the rest of her life. Towards the end, she needed open heart surgery, but she was never actually well again. She died in London on the 2nd December 1987. Before she left us she had time to finish the first draft of a book encapsulating her beliefs. Much of it was later published in the *Mountain Path*.

I was with her at the end and after her cremation her ashes were placed in my suitcase in preparation for a trip to India. For three days and nights she nagged me from beyond the grave saying, "I want to go home, take me home." I remember sitting up in bed one night and saying to her: "Look, you are dead and you don't need sleep, I am alive and you have to let me sleep. I promise I will take you home." At last when she was buried next to my father in Tiruvannamalai, then she found peace.

Lucia Osborne was a courageous woman who bore all the vicissitudes of life with infinite trust in Bhagavan. Although she was a tough and at times extremely contentious woman, she was also extraordinarily kind and generous. She acquired a great deal of wisdom and many people loved and respected her. This carries over until today, when I often meet her admirers, people who loved and cherished her then and who continue to do so to this day. ▲

Set Aside the Ego and Live Happily

Part Two

LAKSHMI SREEDHAR

Bhagavan says that you must love all and help all, since only in that way can you help yourself. Selfless service and prayers alone can help reduce the effects of our past karmas to some extent. When you seek to reduce the suffering of any fellow-creature, whether your efforts succeed or not, you are yourself evolving spiritually, especially if the service is rendered without any expectations and without the egoistic feeling '*I am doing this*', but in the spirit of being the instrument of God. You no longer think you are the doer, instead all acts are His. This is inaction in action as enjoined in the Gita. Once Bhagavan was stitching leaves with reed pins to make leaf plates. A devotee who saw it remarked to Bhagavan that it was a waste of time and energy for Bhagavan himself to undertake such a task. Bhagavan said that no work is a waste of time if it serves a good purpose, and,

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if it is done in the right way, one can learn something useful from every job done. These leaves, for instance, become important when they are used to serve food to the hungry. After the food is eaten the leaves are fit only to be thrown away.

In the same way our lives become useful and sacred only when they are used to serve others. The selfish man, who lives all for himself, only wastes his life even if he lives for 100 years. He is no better than animals which also live, eat and grow. If dead leaves serve so much purpose, how much more useful should a human being be who is endowed with so much intelligence and six senses?

Bhagavan says that what we do for others, we are only doing for ourselves, for in reality, there are no others in the world. We alone exist in every form. Therefore we should serve others without expectation: this is *nishkama karma*. Then *punya karmas* will accrue to our account. Doing noble and selfless deeds and fulfilling all our duties perfectly is the best defence against the hard blows of destiny. Only when we have *punya karmas* can we get the Grace to transform and evolve in life.

In *Upadesa Undiyar*, stanza 3, Bhagavan says, “Action performed without any desire for fruits, as an offering to the Lord, will purify the mind and show the way to Liberation.” And in stanza 5, he says, “To consider all the eight-fold forms you see (in the world) as the manifestation of the (one) God, and to serve them (selflessly), is the best way to worship God.”

Bhagavan says that we should do all our ordained duties perfectly without trying to escape. If we try to escape how will the karmas end? They will come back to us later on with greater intensity, that too at a time when we are least prepared or when our health is feeble, as in old age. There are many who try to skip their responsibilities because they are difficult or boring or they are preoccupied with other worldly and social activities. If they realise that no one can escape their *karmas*, they would learn to fulfil them as and when they arise, when they are still young and strong, instead of having to face them in their old age ignorantly. Bhagavan gives an example of how a dog does its duty in the night as a watchdog. It does not go to sleep while on guard. But how many watchmen, in contrast, sleep nicely during their duty? Human beings alone does not perform their allotted duties properly. Then their *karmas* will not end fully. They will not be able to

retire peacefully when they are old. They will be forced to work even when they are old and weak. You will have seen many old people still working hard. If you do not want to join this list, you should learn to do your work without grumbling and finish it off timely.

Bhagavan says that if we do our duties thinking of Him, we will be able to finish them without difficulty by His Grace. How do we do our duties keeping our mind on Him? Bhagavan taught this to a small boy. He gave him a number of *dosas* and asked him to go on eating until he asked him to stop. The boy was asked to always keep his eyes on Bhagavan while eating. This the boy did perfectly while going on eating his *dosas*. Suddenly Bhagavan asked him to stop eating and thus taught him the art of doing his work keeping his mind on Him.¹

Also, when we think of Him our mind gets consciously linked to Him and to His energy. This becomes our *kavacham* (armour). When this *kavacham* is intact, the world cannot enter us and our karmas cannot harm us in any way. This is what Prahalada did to outwit his evil father. His father ordered him to be thrown down from the top of a hill, tried to make a mad elephant trample him, gave him strong poison, put him in fire, drowned him in water... but nothing affected him as he was constantly chanting the name of the Lord with supreme devotion and faith. The strength of Lord Narayana became his, and his father's cruelty could not touch him in anyway. Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* 18:58, "By keeping your mind on Me, you will overcome all obstacles by My Grace. But if you do not listen to me due to ego, it will be a great loss for you."

Bhagavan never advocates renouncing our normal worldly life of action to achieve our spiritual goals. For him it is only the renouncing of ego that is the true renunciation. Even in the *Gita*, Krishna prefers action to inaction. External renunciation is only symbolic. No work is a hindrance on the spiritual path. It is the notion 'I am the doer' that is the real hindrance. If you get rid of that feeling by enquiring who it is that works, then work will go on automatically. Thus all duties in life must be done with detachment. Bhagavan counsels us to deal with worldly affairs in the same way as a bank cashier handles the money coming to his desk. During the course of the day, he receives and

¹ Shantananda, Swami, *Stories for Meditation*. Chapter 40, 'Tiny Anecdotes on Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi', subheading 2 and 3, pp. 131-132.

disburses *lakhs* of rupees. He is neither elated when he receives cash nor is he saddened to give money for your token. Thus we should lead our lives with a spirit of detachment so as not to lose our peace of mind.

Renunciation is not running away from the family to the wilderness, but to live our allotted life in a perfect manner holding onto God at every step. The lotus is used in the scriptures to describe such a life. It is born in the water, lives in the water and dies in it, but throughout its life it keeps its head above the water and the water does not wet its leaves. Thus we should live in the world but remain outside it by not becoming worldly, which means a life of inner detachment.

To the extent one is detached, to that extent will one be able to see through life. When we get caught in the world through sense-attractions, the mind gets externalised and goes away from its source within and experiences pain and pleasure and not happiness which is our true nature. That is why inner detachment is required which comes about only through devotion and enquiry. Inner detachment leads to sense control and enquiry leads to mind control.

Bhagavan says that there is nothing wrong in enjoying what comes your way of its own accord as per *prarabdha* (destiny). If you take what comes without any special attachment and without any desire for more of it or for a repetition of it, it will not harm you by leading to more *vasanas*. But this does not mean that one must 'seek' pleasure. Just as one does not 'seek' pain which comes only through *prarabdha*, one should also not seek pleasure. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kura!* 628, "One who does not seek pleasure and accepts adversity as natural to life, will not be affected by misery."

When the spirit of enquiry is kept alive in us, by the Grace of the Lord, we will be able to tackle the ego when it rises, provided we are alert. In *Aksharamanamalai* stanza 46, Bhagavan says, "O Arunachala, of what use is this birth without the ability to do enquiry? (Pray) come and make me fit (for doing enquiry)." Ego is the seed from which the tree of worldly life grows. Bhagavan says that achieving egolessness is our true goal in life. Whenever the ego rises, strike it down through enquiry and prayer.

Bhagavan gives an example of a fort under siege. As and when a soldier guarding the fort shows his head, if he is killed, the fort will soon be overrun by the enemy. So too, as and when we see the

SET ASIDE THE EGO AND LIVE HAPPILY

ego rising, for which we have to be very alert, we have to cut it off through the sword of enquiry. There is no other direct method to cut off the ego. Enquiry is an all-inclusive tool for one's evolution. It is the short cut to one's transformation in life.

That is why Bhagavan says that *vicharam* is the shortest path to Liberation. He or she who practises *vicharam* and develops devotion will have their life cycle ended in very few *janmas*. But to enquire we need to have Grace and the right knowledge. Grace comes through self-effort, devotion, *purva janma samskaras* and good service done to others during this birth. What is self-effort? To practise Bhagavan's teachings, thinking of Him and looking to Him for help. When there is self-effort and devotion, Grace comes automatically to help us succeed in our efforts. Without self-effort Grace is not possible.

For instance, if a boy or girl studies well for his or her exams and then prays to Bhagavan for help, he will be able to get Grace Marks to pass the exam in case he is short of marks. However, if he does not study properly due to laziness or other distractions, how can mere prayers help him to pass his exams? God helps only those who help themselves. Even Sage Vasishtha has said that failure comes in life only when there is slackness in self-effort. Sage Tiruvalluvar says (*Kural* 620) that even an adverse fate will turn back and run away if one strives relentlessly to achieve success without getting agitated or dejected. ▲

Light

Suresh Kailash

Lighter than a dry leaf
Bobbing in a stream,
Lighter than a feather
Floating in the breeze,
Lighter than a dust mote
Dancing in the sun beam,
Lighter am I, Ramana,
With your light in me.



Ashram Entrance View

D. Thiyagarajan

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

A Visit to the Abode of Silence

SHASHI NARASIMHAN

It was not until just few years ago that I really noticed the name Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi while browsing on the Internet. Although my family is actually traditionally South Indian, I never had a formal religious upbringing or contact with Hindu scriptures or Vedanta.

While staying in Bengaluru, India in 2011, we happened to visit one of my distant relatives in that city. For some now unknown reason, we decided to drop in at their home for a few minutes since it had been a long time perhaps 20 years or so since we saw them last.

The first thing I noticed as soon as we entered their home was a huge smiling picture of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. I came to know that they had been Bhagavan's devotees for a long time and had even had a chance to have seen Sri Ramana. The picture of Bhagavan

Shashi Narasimhan works at a media & communications company in Chicago. He visited Ramanasramam for the first time in recent years with his wife, son and mother, and continues to pursue the path shown by Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi.

had rooted itself so deeply in my memory without my conscious knowledge, that I later realized that this must have been the real, although not overt purpose of my visit. After that first glimpse no other picture, story, person, place or thing even began to approach the way my mind was put at ease just to recall that smiling picture of Bhagavan.

I moved on with life, occasionally coming in contact with Bhagavan Ramana's teachings. Slowly and steadily, I began to read about Bhagavan's birth, childhood and life history and so on. What I noticed so distinctly in myself was a longing to continue reading Vedanta book after book and to know about the multiple schools of Vedanta. If I had the chance to visit a temple, an ashram, a religious discourse, an Acharya or simply being at home or outside doing any kind of activity, I did those activities without hesitation but no longer felt compelled because there was no more that sense of incompleteness but rather a new keenness had started to grow that turned my mind within and asked for whom are all these thoughts produced. Who is the one seeking? Who is this entity that I call myself?

Bhagavan Ramana said two simple yet profound words in Tamil 'summa iru' [Keep still] to anyone who came to him asking for his advice on how to quieten the mind, and the silence that ensued from those words drew me even closer to his teachings. His smiling black and white picture stood as a gateway inviting everyone to pursue an inward journey, irrespective of their background, nationality, religion, race or gender. In the booklet *Who Am I?* Sri Ramana made it succinctly clear that just as the prey cannot escape from a tiger's jaws, so also those who come within the ambit of the Guru's gracious looks are saved and never allowed to go back into samsara.

Bhagavan's infinitely compassionate and graceful eyes mollify even the harshest personalities and prod one to question the questioner, seek the source of the seeker. His eyes seem to ask 'why waste your time running around when all that is needed is to remain as you are, just be'. Paul Brunton in his book *A Search in Secret India* wrote, "One can take inventory of a man's soul from his eyes but before those of Maharshi I hesitate, puzzled and baffled."

Bhagavan Ramana said, 'Doubt the doubter and all doubts will be cleared'. What a direct yet profound way to turn towards the truth! It

is said that he didn't just have compassion for other beings, but rather he was that infinite compassion itself, because in having compassion for others there is duality.

A few years pass by and I find out that Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai allowed visitors to stay at the ashram for a few days, so one could experience the ambience of the place. A thought came to my mind that we needed to visit this sacred site and I convinced my family to pay a brief visit on our next India trip.

I wrote to the ashram outlining our plans to visit and a request for us to stay at the ashram for a couple of days. To my pleasant surprise, a response came back immediately saying our request had been accepted and accommodation had been confirmed. The promptness of the response from the ashram confirmed my conviction that my visit was somehow pre-arranged and everything would work out smoothly. Even though I had visited a few other religious places in India during our previous visits, somehow I had a distinct feeling that the stay at Ramanasramam was to be really a special one.

Once we reached Bengaluru, the very next day we hired a taxi in the morning and make our way towards Tiruvannamalai as the first place to visit. As we travelled towards Tiruvannamalai, a group of monkeys suddenly appeared on the road in play, which slowed down traffic. The road starts to narrow down with huge trees, perhaps many decades old or more, which stand tall on both sides. The thought passed through my mind, 'This is the same land in which so many great souls walked and taught the very essence of existence, declaring not to believe in what is seen but to have faith in that unseen'. It indeed is a blessing to visit a holy place, and the visit is an outward expression of an inward journey. One is beckoned to a holy place by none other than the Master himself, who is at the heart of every being.

As we continue our journey, pictures of Bhagavan flashed in my mind along with the image of the majestic Arunachala mountain. People travelled long distances to see and be with Bhagavan caring neither for distance nor circumstances. Arunachala appears to be a mountain for ordinary eyes but Sri Ramana himself has said the mountain is none other than that supreme Truth in the gross form.

Even to this day – some may visit Arunachala for material and health gains, some for spiritual progress and yet some just allowing

the destiny to play out, not expecting anything – but in the end the goal has always been the same – to be happy and complete.

As we neared Tiruvannamalai, from a distance we saw the sacred Arunachala mountain. It appeared ready to welcome every being with open arms. It is the same Arunachala who drew Sri Ramana to this place, over 100 years ago. If Arunachala is Sri Ramana Maharshi in a pure form, Bhagavan is the human manifestation of Arunachala; both are none other than that essential truth pulsating as ‘I’ in every being.

Bhagavan once said that Mount Kailash is the abode of Siva, whereas Arunachala is Siva himself. Bhagavan taught through silence and anyone attracted to Arunachala is bound to explore that inner silence at some point of his/her lifetime.

We reach Ramanasramam in the early evening and the big green arch at the entrance seemed so familiar to me, having seen it in all the pictures and videos. The first thing I become aware of was the profound silence, which I quickly recognised as the hallmark of the ashram premises. The illupai tree at the centre of the entrance courtyard reminded me of the picture of young Bhagavan standing underneath the tree while his mother Alagammal’s yet to be constructed shrine appeared in the distance. I hear the sounds of monkeys and peacocks, which seemed to be perfectly in accord with the place.

We found our way to the ashram office. A gentleman smiled and welcomed us to the place. He requested us to provide details of our visit and stay. As I picked up the pen and start filling the details in the register, my hands froze and tears flowed uncontrollably, for I knew with an unflinching conviction that I had come to visit the place that is the pinnacle of stillness and harmony. The happiness seemed to be that of a long lost child who finally came into his mother’s arms. It seemed as if that day was the culmination of a very long wait, for years, decades and perhaps lifetimes! Thoughts trickled to a halt and the immense silence pervading Bhagavan’s hermitage became crystal clear.

It is hard to articulate in words about a place that which can only be experienced. It is like explaining to someone who has never tasted a sweet mango how it tastes. The serenity of the place, the surroundings in which thoughts come to a trickle are all the grace of the Guru. I reminded myself of the fine print – ‘The goal of self-enquiry is not to

experience anything (outside) but rather to transcend the experiencer; not to pay attention to the objects (thoughts) but to the subject’.

Ramanasramam had been visited by maharajas, maharanis, peasants, spiritual pontiffs, politicians, the curious, ordinary householders and many more. Here everyone is treated so equally that the word ‘important’ becomes irrelevant. There was no special treatment for anyone then and it is equally true to this day as well. No security or background checks, no name tags, no special visits, seating, meals or entrances, no special archanas or pooja – for whom and why would there be a need for such things, when the very purpose of a visit to the Ashram is to give up the false notion of the visitor himself.

Having given accommodation details to us and the keys to get there, we took our time to slowly venture into the ashram premises and visit – Bhagavan’s mother’s shrine, Bhagavan’s Samadhi (main shrine) and Mahanirvana room (where Bhagavan left his mortal body), Chinnaswami’s samadhi, and the samadhis of Lakshmi the cow, Valli the deer, Jackie the dog and a crow. We come back to Bhagavan’s samadhi shrine and get a chance to sit for few minutes. As I close my eyes, the power of the silence becomes palpable.

For ordinary eyes there is nothing visibly special about the place, but what is extraordinary is the silence that seems to pervade everything at the ashram. No one talks loudly, no worldly discussions, no family matters come to mind. Words can only be an obstruction, a hindrance to remaining as we truly are.

We make our way back to our rooms. They are filled with simplicity and cleanliness – no extravagant wall colours, pictures, sayings, lights etc. A single black and white picture of Bhagavan shines on the wall and that in itself replaces any amount of clutter! The modern amenities that one may find in a typical guest house may not be there but the most convenient setting for one to become that silent witness is certainly present. What else is needed other than an environment which has been blessed and pervaded by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi to stay and pursue the path of enquiry?

As I wake up in the morning, Arunachala mountain appears through the window. In the Skanda Mahapurana it is said, ‘To be born in Tiruvarur; to see Chidambaram; to die in Banaras (Kashi) or merely to think of Arunachala is to be assured of moksha (liberation)’. As I

looked outside, a lone peacock communicated in its own language as it made its way on the compound wall. We get ready and head back to the Ashram, which is a few minutes' walk from our rooms.

Once at the Ashram, we attended the milk offering to Sri Ramanaeswara mahalingam and then went for breakfast. The simple looking hall had a few people already seated and we sat together, and for those who cannot sit on the ground there are benches and long tables. Bhagavan Ramana's photographs adorn the walls and the silence once again becomes obvious. There is no conversation, but everyone sits silently waiting to be served. Our breakfast is traditionally South Indian, idly and chutney – which taste very fresh and filling.

After eating we sit for sometime at Bhagavan's Shrine, where Veda parayanam begins. The vedic chants reverberate in the huge hall with perfect melody. Small children to adult priests – are immersed in chanting and the children and adults alternate chanting in cohesion.

We visited the Ashram goshala (cowshed) just a few steps away from Bhagavan's shrine. Cow Lakshmi was gifted as a calf by someone to the ashram and she was completely devoted to Sri Ramana. She would walk to the Ashram from afar just to be with Bhagavan which was her one desire. Later it was decided to build a goshala where she and other cows could remain closer to Sri Ramana while helping to supply the Ashram with milk and other needs.

On the next stage of our stay we climbed up the hill to Skandasramam and Virupaksha guha (cave). As I started to climb, those images of Bhagavan walking the same path cross my mind. There were clearly not as many plants and trees on the hill during Bhagavan's days, yet Sri Ramana climbed up and down without minding the heat or lack of shade.

Lord Arunachaleswara's temple with those magnificent gopurams (towers) is clearly visible from a vantage point. Some people take pictures while others are sitting with their eyes closed in contemplation.

Skandasramam, where Sri Ramana stayed for six years is so quiet, with just the sound of a gentle breeze blowing through those magnificent trees around the ashram. I hear the occasional chatter of monkeys and chirping of birds. As I enter the ashram veranda, I see straight ahead in the inner room young Ramana's picture with

a small lamp lit next to it. I see some people are immersed in deep contemplation. I slowly sit down ensuring my presence is not causing any disturbance to anyone around.

Adjacent to Sri Ramana's room is another small room, where a picture of his mother, Alagammal, is set and I see a neat little lamp next to the picture. Alagammal left her mortal body here and merged in Arunachala in full presence and attention of her own son. There is something in this place that undoubtedly keeps my thoughts at bay. My mind in its usual habit makes an effort to think on mundane things – where I came from, what I will do after I leave the place, where to go next, what could be happening elsewhere etc., but I realise that none of those thoughts really gain weight perhaps because I am in the cradle of Arunachala himself. Thoughts don't bother one when in the domain of that primordial truth.

I asked a couple of young lads at the gate of Skandasramam to show me the way to Virupaksha guha (cave) and they quickly pointed the way. I proceeded and saw on my way a beautiful stream flowing down. It was amazing that a stream from such a height could flow down continuously. I reach Virupaksha cave, where Sri Ramana Maharshi stayed for around sixteen years before moving up to Skandasramam.

Just a handful of people are at the place and I bent my head, and slowly made my way into the cave. The place was dark with just a lamp lit. One or two people sat there and were barely noticeable. The place is so silent that any thoughts rising in my mind have a deafening effect. Though the mind in its addiction wants to run out of here, the place effortlessly nudges me to look deep within. The only thing that can describe the place is silence, which as Bhagavan indicated is the language of the Self. The silence that personified Sri Ramana Maharshi is in every nook and corner of the place.

To the waker, the drama of events unfold in a dream that has no significance. When we are about to leave Ramanasramam, there is no longer that feeling of going to a faraway place, for as Sri Ramana indicated in one of his talks 'all places are in the mind'.

As Sri Ramana Maharshi once said, "No one goes back empty-handed having come here. The non-believer becomes a believer, the believer becomes a devotee, a devotee become knowledgeable, the knowledgeable becomes a jnani." ▲



Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam

D. Thiyaarajan

BOOK EXCERPT

Laghu Guru Upanishad

GURPRASAD

Laghu Guru Upanishad contains the spiritual teachings of Sri Sivabala Yogi. The book was compiled from Talks with Sri Sivabala Yogi by Gurprasad. The book is published by Partridge India. ISBN: 978-1-4828-6997-2 orders.india@partridgepublishing.com

This is an authoritative book on spiritual knowledge. We published an article on the life of Sri Sivabala Yogi (1935-1994) in April 2017.

Chapter 2 – Instructions in General

Q4. Is control of mind the sole means to be eternally happy? What role do religious practices associated with various sects and creeds have in it?

A4. Control of mind is the only way to attain Self or God Realisation. A person who accomplishes it merges in a fathomless ocean of ineffable bliss and he or she is released from the endless vicious cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Mind is controlled through scientific application of one's intelligence over its vagaries, whims and fancies. Religious dogmas as practised by most people have little relevance to it because mental restraint is exercised through an internal process of introversion. External forms of worship, rituals, rites and other practices are beneficial to some extent when done out

of devotion but are of little value if they are carried out mechanically.

Q15. Why is it essential to have a guru?

A15. It is the normal experience of all jivas that a new subject is learnt from a teacher who has acquired mastery over it. Even Einstein learnt physics from a professor. A spiritual journey takes one into an intangible and unknown territory crisscrossed with many apparently insurmountable and dangerous obstacles. How can an individual without any divine knowledge or power demolish them? The jungle of sensual experience created out of pride, jealousy, attachment, desire, greed, anger and so on is so vast as to be almost endless, besides being impenetrable without special guidance. A guru knows the way to go across it and has the spiritual power to take others with him or her.

Q16. Some modern day preachers of spirituality maintain that a guru is not required to attain Realisation. What merit do such views have?

A16. None whatsoever. It is a case of the blind leading the blind. People who advocate views like the one mentioned in the question have no spiritual experience and are expounding knowledge that they neither understand nor practice. They do so only to make a fast buck and make a name for themselves in the world by acquiring a following. A serious aspirant should not concern himself or herself with them.

Q17. Who is fit to be a guru and what are his or her attributes?

A17. A guru should be able to remove the darkness of ignorance from an aspirant's mind and enlighten it with divine knowledge. A guru must have realised the true nature of his or her own Self or of *Brahman* (the ultimate Reality). A guru is an embodiment of divine qualities like love, discrimination, detachment, contentment, forgiveness, humility, grace, knowledge and so on. He or she must have the compassion to teach others. A guru occupies the foremost place in the hierarchical order of things (i.e. the visible phenomena) created by the Lord.

Q18. Does a guru always appear in physical form? How does a devotee search for him or her?

A18. A guru may come in any form but he or she takes a human birth for most devotees. One may also have his or her vision (*darshan*) in the subtle body, usually in a dream or during prayers or while trying to meditate (without being initiated). A guru appears when an aspirant is ready to partake of divine grace. One who seeks a guru

must have an intense and strong desire (i.e. a constant longing) for spiritual guidance and solace. One must prepare oneself through regular prayer, worship and study (of scriptures) to fructify such a desire. It is not easy to come across a true guru and to do so is often a reward for deeply felt devotion. Those who are destined, due to past karma, to meet a guru do so at the appropriate time, provided they remain steadfast in their desire and devotion.

Q19. Do all Self Realised persons act as gurus?

A19. No. A guru is a special being authorised by God to save struggling souls. A guru must have the spiritual (i.e. *tapas*) power to be able to do so. Divine knowledge by itself is not enough; all Self Realised individuals have it but they do not have the power to grant salvation. Spiritual power of this type is acquired by gurus through the practice of an extremely hard form of yogic discipline called *tapas yoga*. No ordinary aspirant can follow it and it is practised only after attaining Realisation. Mastery over *tapas yoga* is acquired by divine incarnations and some ever free souls only.

Q20. Why does a guru need yogic (or *tapas*) power to guide aspirants?

A20. A *jiva*'s (human being's) individuality (i.e. the 'I'-sense) is a creation of the omnipotent Lord. What power does one have to undo God's play (*leela*; the sensual world)? The Lord alone can reveal its mystery through Its divine grace. A *jiva*'s mind looks outwards (to the world) to gratify its desires through sensual contact with external objects. An individual has been doing so for countless past lives, with the result that mental tendencies of extroversion have become so potent that one is powerless to exercise any meaningful control over one's self (or the mind). Extroversion of the mind is a primary cause of a *jiva* going through a cycle of temporary pain and pleasure. One cannot attain everlasting happiness or bliss until one is able to break the mind's chronic habit of seeking happiness outside of itself. It can be done only if the mind learns to control itself by looking inwards to its point of origin. Guru's spiritual power helps an aspirant to introvert his or her mind, which he or she cannot do on his or her own. The guru gives this power to a devotee who then develops it through self-effort to attain Realisation. This point needs emphasis because a vast majority of people do not appreciate it; it is not mere knowledge, which one

acquires through scriptures, that saves an individual but Realisation is attained only through divine grace (i.e. guru's yogic power).

Q21. How does a guru transfer his or her spiritual power to a seeker?

A21. It is done through initiation (*deeksha*). There are various methods of imparting it; the most common being through physical touch, as, for example, in the space between eyebrows (*brikuti*). It can be transmitted through any of the other senses; for instance, through sight or hearing (i.e. giving a divine name or a mantra to a devotee for repetition). It may also be done in dreams or through a silent initiation in the mind. A guru may adopt any or all of the above ways to initiate a seeker. The power given is usually in seed form that requires self-effort by a devotee to germinate. Each aspirant gets the power according to individual capacity.

Q35. Ignorance is rather a vague concept for most readers to grasp. What, in specific terms, must an aspirant seek in practice?

A35. Non-knowledge of Reality is ignorance and, hence, every form of subjective and objective knowledge falls in this category. The mind itself is a product of ignorance (*maya*) and, hence, to destroy it implies the end of the latter. The mind's functioning is explained in the next chapter but, for the time being, the palpable form of the mind is the bundle of thoughts that arise in it ceaselessly in rapid succession. The root of all of them is the 'I' thought or the feeling of 'I am' or 'I'-ness that everyone is familiar with. This feeling is never absent (not even in sleep) in an individual and is used to refer to oneself all the time. The 'I' is the point of origin of the mind or forms its centre and, hence, is the core of individual ignorance. Thus, to destroy ignorance implies the elimination of the 'I' feeling from the mind. That is the essence of control of mind and one should aspire for it in practice.

Q43. What is grace?

A43. It denotes divine pleasure and blessing. Just as a rich man distributes money when he is happy and pleased (with good fortune), so also does the Lord shower gifts on those It is pleased with for their love, devotion and remembrance. It may take the form of some material benefit but God draws close to Itself those It is most pleased with. This act of giving (by the Lord) and receiving (by a devotee) is known as divine grace. It is all pervasive and available to every object

in equal measure, just as the wind blowing across the ocean is to all sailing boats. But, only those sailors make use of it who set sails on their vessels and the rest stay stranded where they are. Similarly, a worldly person does not seek divine grace for spiritual upliftment but wants only material advancement that accrues as an effect of one's karma more than any other factor. An aspirant, on the other hand, prays for grace to have a vision of the Lord who is then pleased to guide him or her on the right path.

Q47. Out of divine grace and effort, which is more important for spiritual growth?

A47. Divine grace is omnipotent and infinite in nature. There is nothing that it cannot do or undo. Self-effort (by an individual) is finite and capable of accomplishing limited goals only. There is, therefore, *per se* no comparison between the two. But, that is not the point at issue; what a devotee needs to understand is the link between the two and not what each can achieve. The Lord (or the guru) does not favour a person with grace capriciously. Why would the supremely intelligent Being give grace to one and deny it to the other? Grace accrues only when an individual makes the effort to know God. Thus, grace and effort are equally important for self-improvement. The more the effort, greater is the grace and vice versa. The wise ones know that grace is a quality of one's own mind, which manifests only when effort is made (by the mind) to arouse it from its latent state.

Chapter 3 - Reality

Q1. What is the nature of Reality? How is it known?

A1. It is indescribable (in words), unknowable (by the mind) and inexpressible (to another). It is a state of fathomless and absolute Silence that is beyond speech and mental perception. The resultant obtained after the mind is controlled (i.e. destroyed) is Reality. It is the supreme goal that the wise seek. It is known through self-effort and divine grace.

Q2. Why cannot the mind know the Reality? What is Its connection with the former?

A2. The Reality is not an object of mental cognition. The mind can neither conceive of It nor think about It nor remember It nor

concentrate on It (in order to know It). The Reality is totally and utterly beyond the mind and transcends any of the latter's states (i.e. wakefulness, dream and dreamless sleep). What relationship can the mind have with It? As far as the Reality is concerned, It is not even aware that there is an entity known as the mind. Reality and mind are like light and darkness. Whatever connection there is between the two is only a fancy (of the mind). Mind is said to be a superimposition on the substratum of Reality for purposes of teaching only. The point to understand is that superimposition is possible only between two dissimilar things and not similar ones; the latter merge with each other when one is imposed on the other, as for example, water on water. A *jiva* realises the Self-effulgent nature of the Reality on its own if the superimposition of mind on It is removed through its control.

Q4. Notwithstanding the above answers, all scriptures explain the nature of Reality. How have they done it?

A4. Scriptures and sages talk about the non-Reality and not the Reality in the sense discussed above. Reality has two aspects; one, absolute and unconditioned (*nirguna*) and second, relative and conditioned (*saguna*). The latter falls in the ambit of mental knowledge but not the former. Gurus explain the nature of the relative form of Reality and not Its absolute counterpoint. The former (i.e. conditioned Reality) undergoes constant change in time and space and, hence, is regarded as non-reality whereas the latter is immutable since It transcends time and space and is, therefore, considered as Real for purposes of teaching. Conditioned Reality is like the calm ocean in constant turmoil due to its waves. An entity to be known fully must stay the same all the time: otherwise, its knowledge is partial, as in the case of a wave that changes its form all the time.

Q21. The purpose of a spiritual quest is said to be to shed ignorance. What is its tangible form that an aspirant ought to give up to know the Truth?

A21. *Maya* is ignorance in general (i.e. affects the whole of consciousness) as well as in particular (i.e. applicable to a part of consciousness or a *jiva*). To remove the former requires infinite effort done in infinite time by an infinite number of *jivas*, which is clearly an impossibility. Ignorance in general cannot, therefore, be shed from the consciousness in which it exists naturally. A seeker

is required to give up only individual ignorance that affects him or her to attain Realisation. *Maya*'s palpable form for an individual is the mind and the world; the latter is only a projection of the former. Control of mind, therefore, forms the crux of spiritual effort. Mind and its functioning are too tenuous to be tackled directly. The mind's tangible form, manifested by motion inherent in it, is the succession of an endless chain of thoughts. An aspirant should learn to control them, more specially, the 'I' thought, which is the root of them all. To do that, one must detach the mind from external phenomena and fix it on the 'I' thought. The mind is controlled (or made motionless) if the latter is eliminated.

Q22. What is the nature of mind?

A22. The pure (or absolute) and motionless consciousness (i.e. unconditional Reality) that suffers from the effects of *maya* superimposed on it is called the mind. *Maya* makes the consciousness believe (wrongly) that it is in motion and that creates in it a sense of duality. This is reflected in mind's basic nature; that is, it is a subject (i.e. as an entity that perceives things) in which inhere all objects of sensual perception (i.e. world appearance inheres as an idea in the mind but is perceived outside by it as a reflection in *maya*).

The subjective and objective nature of the mind is interlinked through the act of perception. The mind that feels that it sees a cat is its subjective form, which in teaching is known as the 'I am' or 'I' feeling (i.e. 'I see a cat'). The cat is an object that is formed out of its idea that inheres in the mind when it is projected on the mirror like surface of *maya*. The act of seeing the cat connects the subjective mind to its objective counterpart. This phenomenon is expressed as seer–seeing–seen or knower–knowing–known relationship in spiritual instruction.

Another characteristic of the mind is its relativity, which implies that the knowledge it acquires is always dependent on its state determined by time, circumstances and the relationship between a subject and an object. For instance, a man's knowledge of the sun at dawn and midday is not the same. The mind is inherently a principle of intelligence, memory, will power and awareness of its subjective and objective forms. The mind is subject to powers of extroversion and introversion. It means that mind is outward looking if its motion

is not restrained by intelligence but can be made to look inwards (to its point of origin) by controlling the latter (again through the use of intelligence).

The mind has two forms; general and particular. The mind in general refers to the whole of consciousness (i.e. God's mind) and is regarded as its universal or cosmic aspect that pervades all objects in creation. The mind in particular is of individual objects; for example, of a man or a woman. In the mind in general inhere limitless qualities or ideas and in that sense, it connotes the *saguna* (conditioned) Reality or Its relative consciousness. The mind in particular has only a finite number of attributes. A reader should note that the mind in particular is only a limited counterpart of its general form and hence, potentially the same. Their relationship is like that of the sun and its reflection in a pitcher of water.

Q32. What is the nature of individual mind?

A32. Mind is a subtle and intangible entity that gives a jiva subjective and objective awareness (or knowledge). It is just another name for the consciousness that imagines itself to be a particular person (e.g. 'I am Rama'). The palpable form of the mind is the endless chain of thoughts that erupt in it. An average mind is always in turmoil and its restlessness forces it to look outwards (to the world) rather than inwards (to the point of its origin). A normal worldly person has very little control over an extroverted mind; practically, everyone succumbs to its whims and fancies in search of (transitory) pleasure through satisfaction of desires. These are its negative aspects, which are countered by its positive facets.

Amongst the latter is the mind's potential ability to exercise control over itself by looking inwards (to its source) to seek perennial happiness. The mind is capable of introverting (to its point of origin) provided one makes the desired effort to break the bonds of attachment to the external world. That very few people attempt to do so is a sign of mental weakness and not due to any divine scheme.

The central point of the mind is the source of its energy and also forms the genesis of the 'I' sense of an individual. Although everyone uses the 'I' to refer to himself or herself, yet it is not experienced tangibly because it is a latent feeling. The 'I' (or 'I am') feeling is regarded in teaching as the fulcrum (or the centre or point of origin) of

the mind. The latter acts at the 'I's behest and for its pleasure. The mind (or consciousness) functions (for the sake of the 'I') in three modes; as intelligence (*buddhi*), memory (*smriti*) and roving mind (*manas* or *mann*). All the above components (including the 'I') are collectively known as *anthahkarana*, the inner or invisible organ of perception; although a *jiva*, for example, feels that his or her eyes behold an object, yet they (i.e. eyes) are only an extension of the consciousness, which alone is capable of seeing or perceiving an object.

The mind gains objective knowledge to satiate 'I's desires through the roving mind (called so because it keeps jumping from one object or thought to another all the time) when the senses, which are its integral parts, come in contact with external objects. The knowledge gained thus by the roving mind, including senses, is discriminated by intelligence to determine whether a desire of the 'I' has been gratified or not. The 'I' experiences happiness (or pleasure) or unhappiness (or pain) accordingly. The memory's function is to keep a record of all that the roving mind, senses and intelligence do, including whether the 'I' feels happy or unhappy. The above phenomenon is illustrated with an example.

A desire arises in a man's mind (or in his 'I'-consciousness) to read a novel. To fructify it, a thought manifests in the roving mind (it is that part of the consciousness in which thoughts erupt) to pick up the book from a shelf. The man does so by looking for it and then begins reading. Intelligence plays a dual role in the above phenomenon; one, it allows the roving mind including the senses and the hands to search for and collect the book. It could control this desire and disallow any action to take place. Two, as one reads the novel, the intelligence decides if it is a pleasant or an unpleasant experience, which is then actually felt by the 'I'.

All the above acts are imprinted in memory for future reference automatically and without any effort. There are countless such experiences in a day and they are all recorded in memory. These mental impressions are known as *samskaras*. A discerning reader should note the role that intelligence plays in the working of the mind. Along with the discriminative faculty, it has the will power to restrain any activity of the roving mind and senses. This innate ability is used to control the mind during practice (*sadhana*). ▲



Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Eight

Kabir on Personal and Impersonal Aspects of God

NABAJI SIDDHA

The Muslims of the locality gathered at Kabir's house and asked Tamal, "Being Muslims, why do you all wear the insignia of Hindus like Tulsi garland, sandal on the forehead and shout, 'Rama' and 'Narayana' in our area inhabited by Muslims? If you want to continue this way of life, then shift to the Hindu quarters. We cannot put up with your odd practices any more."

Kabir retorted, "Oh.., you are trying to intimidate us! We will have nothing to do with you folks who are ignorant of the fact that Ram and Rahim are one. Personal and Impersonal are one and the same."

A maulvi stepped forward and accosted Kabir, "How can you equate both? One is the son of Dasaratha, an ordinary human and the other is the birthless and deathless impersonal Godhead. What is the use of banging our head against an idiot like you?"

"O maulvi, though apparently learned, you have no real knowledge. It is the Power of the eternal, pure Brahman that manifests as the Personal aspect, creating and sustaining the universe. In order to

destroy the evildoers and protect the righteous, the same Lord incarnated as Rama, the son of Dasaratha and slayed the demon king Ravana. Your narrow vision cannot see the Lord in Rama.”

The maulvi said, “You are piling up lies after lies. In your ignorance, you see the Godhead different from an entity which sustains the world. No wonder you have taken to Hinduism, which has no scripture worth its name. Whatever lies near a bundle of cotton also catches fire; likewise in the company of Hindus, you are also doomed to pantheism and idolatry.”

“O maulvi, undoubtedly the supreme Godhead is the ultimate essence; however, it is the *saguna* aspect i.e. the Lord, that creates names, forms and universes and brings about all the dynamic movements and actions in the world. Therefore, humankind had been worshipping the Lords of Trinity in the form of idols. This was interrupted by the rise of detractors and also by the later scriptures. The words of the Vedas emanated from the ancient Lord, they are not the words of ordinary mortals. You don’t know all the facts, hence you hold partial views.”

“Listen, young boy,” said the annoyed priest, “the scriptural words were revealed to Mohammad by God through the angels. You are too obtuse to recognize the subtlety of scriptural words. The world came into being by the mere thought of the Absolute.”

“Aha..! Now you have come down from your lofty heights and attributed thinking process to the Absolute which implies that It can have a form and action as well.

“How did the words of scriptures descend to the world without the medium of name and form? If there were words, there must have been movement, name and form. Do you ever wonder, how the attributeless and motionless Godhead communicated the scriptures to messengers? It is like saying that a ship sails in space without water and that trees grow in mid-sky. The absolute omnipresent Godhead is unrevealed like butter in the milk or oil in the oilseed.

“Next point is, how could a compassionate God sanction killing in the scriptures? At different periods in history, people created different religions and sects and manipulated the words to suit their intentions and upheld them later as words of God. These inconsistencies have prevented people from holding on to any particular Faith with

steadfastness and created more discord in the place of peace and harmony.

“Living a life of violence and never being penitent, do you hope to be liberated at the end?”

“Why didn’t Vishnu directly destroy the demon instead of incarnating as a man?” asked the maulvi.

Kabir replied, “Because the demon king Ravana had a boon not to be killed by the immortal Gods.”

“It is inconceivable,” countered the maulvi, “that the Lord who is the protector of the world should engage in killing.”

Kabir replied, “Just as it is a king’s duty to punish evil to uphold justice, the Lord destroys evil in the world.”

“O Kabir, is it not foolish to wear insignias made of mud on the body and worship stones?”

“It is only to remind us that the body made of skin and bones is short-lived and will turn to dust one day that the symbols are worn on the forehead. God is in the stone images as well. Why should the all-pervading God withdraw Himself from the stones? Further, worship of a personal deity in idols is to enable the unripe minds to see the Omnipresent with physical eyes in names and forms, i.e. in the stones. This was prescribed for the commoners, while the advanced souls can turn within and behold the Truth through the eye of knowledge.”

“While we hold that Adam is the first man, why do Hindus say that Manu is the first man, who spelt out the code of conduct for humankind?”

Kabir confronted him saying, “On the one hand, you assert that the actionless, attributeless Absolute alone exists and on the other, you assign creation to It, thus failing to see the fallacies of your logic. The creation of Adam, Eve, devil, heaven, hell and infusing a life-force in creation, etc., require a power manifesting as name and form, movement, action, good, evil etc. Let me reiterate that being trapped in the wheel of life and death is hell and escaping from this is liberation.”

Ridiculing his words, the maulvi said, “Now, take the case of rebirth. Can milk removed from the udder be infused back into it or butter be mixed back in the buttermilk or the water drops evaporated from a hot skillet ooze out again? Similarly, can the body and its

constituents, after having merged back into the five elements, at the time of death, come back to life again?"

In response, Kabir dwelt on the theme elaborately, "Listen carefully – there are five kinds of the cycle of creation and dissolution. First is the momentary type, i.e. appearance and disappearance of thoughts which are fleeting and short-lived. Secondly, there is the daily cycle which involves the routine of waking and sleeping. The third relates to the body-oriented cycle of its birth and death. The next cycle relates to the jiva, the individual sense entering and leaving the body. The final cycle is the creation and dissolution of the universes.

"You are mistaking the individual sense, jivahood, for the body. The repeated births and deaths are for the jiva or the individual ego, which is the subtle body and not for the gross body of flesh and bones. The jiva assumes different bodies according to the tendencies, shaped by thoughts and actions at body-mind level in its previous existences."

The maulvi countered, "Each one attains moksha or hell after death according to his karma. Your concept of their returning again and again according to karma sounds very strange."

"O maulvi! You sound even stranger when you imply that those with negative karmas will forever be in hell without any chance of redemption; for according to you, there is no comeback for them."

"Are you poking fun at our sacred scriptures?" demanded the maulvi.

"How can one agree with an illogical system of justice, even if you call the scriptures to your support? A system, in which one who commits a small offence and one who is totally evil deserve the same kind of eternal hell, cannot spring out of a genuine scripture. Once again I repeat, giving up body-mind consciousness is immortality and hanging on to it is death."

"To me, your karma theory and rebirth story are untenable."

"There are some who are born with terrible diseases which are due to bad karma in their past lives. How do you explain it, O maulvi?"

The maulvi expostulated, "It is because of the parents' sins that such children are born to them. If you contest that defective children are also born to good parents, consider such births as God's will. Further, there is also the time factor – auspicious or inauspicious hour of conception."

“O maulvi! God’s will can never be arbitrary.” thundered forth Kabir, “When a king, an ordinary mortal, is unjust, he is condemned. How can then God, who is perfection itself, be capricious in His acts like creating some children normal and some defective without any cause? Human tongues have stained the scriptures that you glorify, they are not the words of Truth. You state the time of conception has a bearing on their - good or bad - destiny. What makes the wife and husband get together at such hours is a mute question! I contend that such hours of conception are also ordained by the karma of the children.

“Please tell me, O maulvi, what about children who die early or undergo much suffering before dying, for they are innocent and can do neither good nor bad deliberately. Where do they go after death?”

The maulvi said, “Children go neither to heaven nor to hell. The sufferings of children are not caused by their karma; being young, they create no karma. Their destiny is the play or will of God.”

“Ha...ha....according to you, God doesn’t see children fit enough to be assigned any place! You are again portraying God as an impulsive or cruel being, when you say their destiny is the will of God.”

Kabir continued emphatically, “Each one is responsible for one’s own deeds. All the children of the same parent do not experience the same destiny – one is wealthy, one is poor; one is an idiot, one is bright; one is healthy, one is sickly. How can the same parents be responsible for their varied destinies of joy and sorrow? What you sow today, you reap tomorrow. This is an infallible truth.

“God is all beneficence. He is neither cruel, nor arbitrary, nor partial. At the beginning, humankind was given the code of conduct by Manu along with the consequences of adherence or deviation. It is a game of cause and effect, governed by certain rules. He who abides by them is liberated and for the detractors, precious human birth will be difficult to come by again.

“Blessed indeed are the few righteous persons who, guided by Manu’s code, look upon this temporal existence as brief, seek the company of sages, practise sense-restraint and endeavour to cross the ocean of worldliness. Attaining the eternal life of bliss, they do not return to this transient world.

“But, many deviants, ensnared by sense-pleasures, strongly pulled by their likes and dislikes, are lost in the ‘I am the body’ idea. They

harm others and lead a self-centred life and, taking birth in lower wombs, revolve endlessly in the wheel of *karma*. They are lost in the darkness of Nescience. The irrefutable truth is, one's destiny is shaped by one's desires, or the Lord grants whatever one desires. If one wallows in sensory life, he takes birth in the womb of an animal to fulfil himself. It is their inclination for worldly enjoyment that causes joys and miseries. The precious opportunity of a rare human birth, which is the gateway to freedom, is abused.

“It is not the Lord who randomly imposes sufferings on men. They have denied themselves the light of His grace by turning their backs on Him. Can the Father, our Lord, allow one child to stumble on a rough path, while carrying the other on His shoulder? He punishes the errant child only to put him on the road to eternal joy. The Lord awards sweet or bitter fruits according to one's karma. If God is biased, then why do we call him Perfection and All-merciful? The One who reveals Himself within as subtle Spirit to the jnanis and the one who appears in His divine form to bhaktas are one and the same God, concealed in one aspect and revealed in another aspect. It will be in your own interest to take to a personal deity and worship the same.”

The maulvi, however, was neither impressed nor convinced by Kabir's lengthy exposition. He remonstrated, “Our Faith condemns idolatory and paganism. Our ancient Father received the truths from God and handed down the same to us. His words are sacrosanct to us. I refuse to listen to your perverted ideas.”

Exasperated by the maulvi's obstinacy, Kabir said, “It is indeed tragic that original teachings are forgotten and dubious texts have replaced them only to misguide people. When chastity is praised before an immoral woman or restraint is commended to the dissolute, they find it bitter. So also these views are unpalatable to you.”

As the crowd became furious with Kabir's arguments and approached him menacingly, he held out the tulsi garland before them. It started blazing high with fierce tongues of flame. The crowd grew apprehensive of this phenomenon and scattered away. Concluding that Kabir was a terrible sorcerer, they kept away from him and his folks. Freed from their interference, Kabir happily spent his time in Ram-mantra and meditation and in cultivating tulsi plants around his house.

(To be continued)



TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN

AND ROBERT BUTLER

Chapter 9

The nature of those in whom attachment [to the life of the householder] has died

Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (*TCS*) notes:— *Since the subject of this chapter is the nature of those who have attained jñāna even whilst living the life of the householder, and are established in the state in which the inherited propensities (vātanai) relating to the household have died, this chapter has been called, ‘The nature of those in whom the [household] vātanai has died.’*

Renunciation without true knowledge is worthless. What good does it do for jungle tribesmen, robbers and the chronically

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sick? What does it matter [to the *jñāni*] what station in life he occupies, or what sense objects he comes into contact with? The loss of his personal self is his true home, which itself is bliss. (232)

Someone who has renounced outwardly but not inwardly has not truly renounced, albeit his behaviour may make it appear so. Otherwise we should say that the harsh existence of jungle tribesmen, the rejection of worldly pleasures by the chronically sick, or the lack of regard for personal safety of a robber are also forms of renunciation, rather than just traits which bear an accidental resemblance to those evinced by the *jñāni*.

What good does it do to give up the life of the householder, which all religions praise? Whatever they give up, what is the good of it? If they attain true understanding, so that worthless discriminating knowledge is removed, and become free of attachment even to Śivam itself, only then will there be an end to birth. (233)

TCS glosses: ‘Whatever else they renounce (deeming it to be consonant with this renunciation), what of it? (Will it be possible to cut off birth through this renunciation?)’

The expression *pullarivu*, here translated as *discriminating knowledge*, commonly means simply *ignorance*, but here it is used in the sense of all discriminating knowledge which pertains to the mind and ego. It therefore means the opposite of *jñāna*, which is *ajñāna*. Sri Ramana Maharshi says in v. 13 of *Uḷḷadu Narpaḍu: nāṇam ām tāṇē mey, nāṇā ām nāṇam aṅṅāṇam ām* – *The Self that is knowledge (jñāna) is real. Knowledge of a multifarious nature is ignorance (ajñāna).*

It is not renunciation simply to give up the life of the householder, when the mind [that is attached to it] has not changed. [Nor is it renunciation to control the mind, since the ego consciousness] that controlled it [still remains]. Even if the ego consciousness is eliminated, the experience of bliss upon uniting with Śivam still remains, and even if that goes, the [thought, ‘I am] the

all-embracing fullness [of Śivam]’ will persist. Who are those who can know the state in which even that thought does not arise? (234)

The words in square brackets are implied by the text. It is first stated that it is not renunciation to give up the life of the householder, because the underlying mind remains. It is then stated that it is not renunciation if the ego, which controls the mind, is destroyed, because the feeling of bliss arises. It therefore completes the logic to introduce an intermediate term, to the effect that it is not renunciation to control the mind, because the ego remains.

Only they have truly renounced who, even though they live like kings amongst worldly pleasures, are quite untouched by them, like a ruby [which imparts its colour to other objects but is not affected by them]. Should they become contaminated by those things, they will return to the body the moment they are freed from it, just as [a new shoot grows up where] a seed falls to the ground. This is *karma*, the one root of all births. (235)

Like a ruby, which does not take on the colours of the things which are close to it, but rather imparts its own lustre to them, the *jñāni*, whilst remaining unaffected by the sense objects with which he comes into contact, in the words of TCS, ‘stands casting the lustre of his *jñāna* over those things’. The verb *tōy*, here translated as *be contaminated* means *to dip, immerse, soak, drench, steep, dye, tinge, stain, imbue*. It is a defining trait of normal discriminating consciousness that it is strongly affected by the mental and sensory phenomena with which it comes into contact, rather as a white piece of cloth is impregnated with, and coloured by a dye. Conversely the consciousness of the *jñāni* is not only not affected by them, but transforms them through its own radiance, a point that is further emphasised in verse 236.

It is our *karma*, our actions committed under the influence of the ego and their fruits, which determine future births. Just as a plant produces seeds, which guarantee its existence after it dies, our actions and their fruits are the seeds from which spring those future births. Another way of looking at *karma* is that it is like the roots of a tree,

which, whilst hidden underground, grow into a tree which ramifies into numerous branches, just as our store of unexhausted *karma* ramifies into innumerable births.

For those who dwell in the world under the authority of a single king, will there be any village in that kingdom that seeks to do them harm? Similarly, if the consciousness of the *jñāni* becomes involved with the mind and senses, what harm can that do? [Will his consciousness be usurped by them] as dust is absorbed by mud? Not at all. It will pass over and leave them, just as the shadow of a kite passes over the ground. (236)

The verse says, literally *oru kuḍai kīl* – *under one umbrella*; the word *kuḍai* – *umbrella, parasol*, being one of the twenty-one symbols of royalty, is often used as a symbol for the rule and authority of kings.

In the previous verse the consciousness of the *jñāni* was compared to a ruby, which affects the things around it rather than being affected by them. In this verse the Self, the transcendent reality, is compared to a king, whose power and authority protect all his subjects, whoever and wherever they are, and the various people and places in his kingdom are compared to the mind and senses. Once the *jñāni* has become the ‘subject’ of the Self, the world, mind and senses will be seen to be of the nature of the Self, and thus be powerless to harm him.

Again here it is clearly implied that the path to realisation lies not in attempting to annihilate the mind but in holding onto the Self. Once the Self, the ‘single king’ in the analogy, is held, then mental activity or absence of it will not be in question, as pointed out in the following dialogue between Sri Ramana and a devotee in *Conscious Immortality*:

Q. But the mind does not sink into *samadhi* even for a second?

A. A strong conviction is necessary that ‘I am the Self’, transcending the mind and the phenomena.

Q. Nevertheless, the mind proves to be like a cork at my attempts to sink it.

A. What does it matter if the mind is active? It is so, after all, on the substratum of the Self. Hold onto the Self even during the mental activities.¹

¹ Brunton, Paul, *Conscious Immortality*, p. 39.

If the Self is realised, then the mind and its related phenomena can no more affect the *jñāni* than the earth can be affected by the shadow of a bird passing over it.

In his life as a householder the *jñāni* can be compared to a dog which has eaten ghee, [and vomits it up, unable to digest it]; he is like the reflection of trees, seen in water, [giving the appearance of being upside-down]; he is like eyes decorated with eye-paint, [looking beautiful to others, but knowing themselves to be blackened]. [The *jñāni* is not masked by the householder life, but shines more brightly because of it], just as darkness makes a precious, pure ruby appear brighter, unlike all other things [which fade into obscurity]. (237)

In this verse four similes illustrating the condition of the householder who has inwardly renounced are given, two relating to the way he perceives himself and two suggesting how he might be perceived by others.

Just as a dog will vomit up food which is too rich for it, the householder *jñāni* will not become attached to, and will automatically reject, all worldly pleasures.

Trees seen across the expanse of water in a lake or tank will appear to be upside-down. Similarly the householder *jñāni* will appear to be fully immersed in worldly activities, whilst in reality he is united with the Self.

Just as eyes decorated with black paint would, if they had awareness of their own, feel dirtied by the black paint that renders them beautiful to others, the householder *jñāni* will be admired by others for the exemplary manner in which he appears to be engaging in family life, whereas, from his own point of view, he will feel defiled by it, and will long for the time when he is free of it, and can devote himself uniquely to the Self.

Most objects will remain dull and be hard to see in the darkness, but a pure gemstone like a ruby will gather in any ambient light and reflect it, even in near-darkness, making it appear even more brilliant than it does in daylight. In the same way, the householder *jñāni* will appear more illustrious when standing

against the dark background of worldly life than he would as a renunciant living in solitude.

The single expedient of patting the thighs is equally useful both for putting a child to sleep and for waking it up. Will darkness affect a ruby as it affects a crystal [filling it with darkness]? Since the *jnāni* is merely playing the role of the householder without any attachment to it, like a thief who joins in with the chase, following his own footprints, why should there be for him any birth henceforth? (239)

Just as patting the thighs can be used to put a baby to sleep or to wake it up, depending on the situation, the presence of a wife, family, children and relations will cause the *jnāni* householder to turn inward, in rejection of those things, but it will have the effect on the *ajnāni* householder of drawing him ever deeper into the world of the sensual pleasures they represent.

Next, as in verse 237, the ruby is again contrasted with the clear crystal, which is incapable of rejecting the darkness which surrounds it, unlike the ruby, which, in picking up what ambient light there is, appears to shine with its own inner brightness.

Finally, just as the best way for a thief to allay suspicion might be to join in the chase for himself, the householder *jñāni*, in his desire to avoid drawing attention to himself, will be like an actor, outwardly sharing the joys and sorrows experienced by his household, but inwardly detached from them.

As it grasps the objects of sense and then lets go of them, the consciousness of the *jñāni* operates like a whirlwind, which draws up dust and later lets go of it. However, also like that whirlwind, which plays about [and finally subsides] without leaving the space of the sky, the consciousness of the one-pointed *jñāni*, [having discarded the objects of sense] subsides [into the expanse of the Self without ever having left it]. What does it matter whether he is a householder or an ascetic?

Just as the whirling wind, even though it is carrying along particles of dust, never leaves the ether, the pure space of the sky, the *jnāni*, though in contact with the objects of sense, never

leaves the space of grace, the space of the Self, and is therefore not contaminated by those things. The point being made is the same as that made in verse 236. (240)

Many are those who have achieved the state of desirelessness through knowledge: there is Sundaramūrti Nāyaṅār, there is the Cēraṅ king, [Cēramāṅ Perumāṅ Nāyaṅār]; there are the Cōḷa kings, [Ceṅkaṅ Cōḷa Nāyaṅār and Pukaḷ Cōḷa Nāyaṅār]; there are petty chieftains [like Meypporuḷ Nāyaṅār and Kaḷaḷ Ciṅka Nāyaṅār]; there are those who have wounded their own body, [like Kaṅṅappa Nāyaṅār], and those who have afflicted the body of their own son, [like Cīru Toṅḍa Nāyaṅār]; there is the eternally illustrious Atipatta Nāyaṅār. Yet for all, [whether householders or ascetics], the achievement is the same, the elimination of discriminating awareness.

All those mentioned in this verse number among the 63 Tamil saints, *nāyanmār*, whose stories are told in a work called the *Periya Purāṅam*, or *Tiru-t-toṅḍar Purāṅam* (*toṅḍar* means *servants, devotees*), composed in the 12th century by Cēkkiḷār, the chief minister of a Cōḷa king called Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṅ. His work is included as the 12th and final section of the *Tirumuṟai*. In each of the stories the devotion of a Saivite devotee, often an ordinary pious householder, is tested by Lord Śiva in a variety of ways, some of them extreme and even gruesome.

Sundaramūrti Nāyaṅār is one of the three major Tamil saints whose works constitute the collection of Tamil hymns called the *Tēvāram*. His hymns constitute the seventh section of the *Tirumuṟai*. See the note to verse 225. Cīru Toṅḍa Nāyaṅār, who is referred to indirectly in line two, had his own son butchered and cooked to satisfy the appetite of a flesh-eating Saivite ascetic, who was in fact Lord Śiva in disguise. Well pleased with his devotee's devotion, he restored the child to life and granted him and his family a place in heaven. Kaṅṅappa Nāyaṅār, referred to in the same line, tore out his own eye to staunch the flow of blood from the eye on a Śiva lingam, and was about to tear out the second, to staunch the flow of blood from the other eye, when Lord Śiva intervened and granted him a place by his side in the heavenly realm.

Chapter 10
The nature of being established [in the state of reality]

People who do not know the way to a certain place will enquire of others and find it out. But later, as they walk along, they will forget that this knowledge originally came from someone else. [So it is with seekers and divine grace]. They are like those who launch themselves into a heavy rainstorm, forgetting they are carrying an umbrella, jumping and leaping about [in a vain attempt to dodge the rain]. (241)

Since the Self is our true nature, the quest to realise it will arise naturally in all beings, sooner or later, whether we call it grace, intuition or whatever. Here it is being pointed out that the danger for the seekers who embark on this journey is that they will begin to feel at some point that their quest is somehow under their conscious control, and that they can realise the Self through an effort of mind or will, rather than surrendering that mind and will to the Self. The second part of the verse illustrates the same point in an entirely different, but equally effective, manner. To attempt to control thoughts is as futile as trying to dodge raindrops. However if we take up the umbrella of grace, those thoughts will be powerless to touch our real nature.

You should dwell in the pure consciousness of grace, so that the states of dark unconsciousness and discriminating consciousness that occupy your awareness are removed. Why instead do you wander about, dying and being reborn, all the time outwardly seeking, in your confused state, the means of avoiding death and rebirth. (242)

In normal consciousness, the *jīva* is either totally without self-awareness, as in deep sleep or unconsciousness; this is the *kevala avasthā*; or it is engaged in contact with the world through the mind, senses and organs of action in the states of waking and dream; this is the *sakala avasthā* (in Sanskrit *sakala* means *possessing parts*, i.e. *multifarious, divisible*); however, whether we are unconscious or totally wrapped up in discriminating consciousness, there is a

state of pure being which underlies these states; this is the *suddha avasthā* – *the pure state*. Those who, with the help of divine grace, have rejected the first two impermanent and mutable states and realised their oneness with this immutable underlying substratum of being are therefore called *aruḷ pōtar* – *those dwelling in the pure consciousness of grace*.

The text says literally *seeking [the means of] not dying and being reborn*. The words [*the means of*] are added in square brackets to give the correct sense, the literal meaning without them, seeking without dying or being reborn is nonsense or at least, quite the wrong sense. TCS glosses: (*Now*) *seeking (the liberation which transcends both birth and death) without (henceforth) dying and being reborn...* ‘Birth and death’ are not just events which occur between bodily incarnations, and between deep sleep and returning to the waking state, they are a process which continues through every moment of each incarnation, as the hapless *jīva* is continually ‘born’ into the state of discriminating awareness, only to ‘die’ once more when that phase of consciousness ends; this is why the state is called one of *tirikai* – *wandering*. To attempt to put an end to this wandering by dint of one’s own mental efforts is futile and self-defeating. TCS continues his gloss as follows: *...as your mind whirls about (inwardly engaging in mental conceptions and so on), you yourself will whirl about, dying (in the kevala avasthā) and being born (in the sakala avasthā). What state is this?* ▲

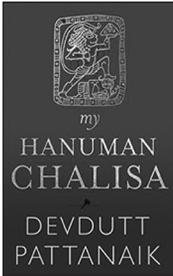
(*To be continued*)

A Mystery

Suresh Kailash

A mystery
to me
is he
My Ramana.
Yet closer
than I am
to me
is he.

BOOK REVIEWS



my HANUMAN CHALISA by Devdutt Pattanaik. Rupa Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi - 110002, 2017, pp.167, ₹295. ISBN-978-81-291-4795-0.

I shall begin this review with an apology to all lovers of Lord Hanuman, to Saint Tulsi Das, author of the incomparable *Ram Charit Manas* and *Hanuman Chalisa*, and to Lord Hanuman himself. For, during the fifteen years I was at Hardwar and Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand I often used to say that the only intellectual book available in those holy towns was *Hanuman Chalisa*. The book under review has shown me how uninformed I was when I made that remark. How right Einstein was when he lamented the human tendency to condemn without investigating.

Whereas Tulsi Das's masterpiece *Ram Charit Manas* is a long poem of Lord Rama's lifestory, *Chalisa* sounds like a longish *bhajan*. The author Devdutt Pattanaik refers to *Ram Charit Manas* as 'magnificent and literary while *Chalisa* looks simplistic and popular.' However, Pattanaik skillfully opens up the vast treasure that lies hidden within the *Chalisa*. He says: "I realized each line allows us to leap into the vast body of Hindu thought, a heritage of over 4000 years ago." That is exactly what Pattanaik so ably does in this gem of a book. He shows, by a masterly annotation of Tulsi Das's words, how God who can manifest as a man can equally do so as a monkey.

In this deceptively slim book, you have history, mythology, ethnology, sociology, anthropology, ethics, Vedanta, Tantra, comparative theology and what you will. Pattanaik will probably say that he has only brought in 170 pages what Tulsi Das had packed in forty lines. It is not easy to put down Pattanaik's book, nor is it easy to finish it for there is so much treasure on each page and one wishes to linger on it savouring the beauty and depth of each word and absorbing the knowledge that he mines from Tulsi's words.

Why has Pattanaik titled the book 'my *Hanuman Chalisa*'? He explains. The book is his own take on the *Chalisa*, it sets out what it

has done to him. He proceeds in the book to tell ‘my truth’ and not ‘the truth’. However, at the end of the book the readers may discover that it turns out to be ‘our *Hanuman Chalisa*’ and that Hanuman, the perfect one, can guide us from ‘our truth’ to ‘the Truth’.

Hanuman’s immense strength comes from his great humility and devotion to Lord Rama. His strength is used to serve everyone through Lord Rama, never to dominate. Only the Dominus [Lord] can dominate. But Rama the Lord never dominated. He always obeyed. Valmiki Ramayana is full of references to Rama going by the words of his father (*pitrvachanaat*), mother, acharya (teacher, guru), Guha the boatsman, the Ocean (*Samudra*), the monkey (*Kapi*, Sugriva) and so on. Hanuman, like his awesomely humble Master, obeyed command and commanded obedience effortlessly when necessary.

The authors, both Tulsi Das and Pattanaik, present Hanuman to us as the Son of the Wind, warrior, servant, scholar, at times a mischievous monkey, guardian of fortunes, a doorkeeper who represents the Lord inside the Temple when the downtrodden cannot enter it, a healer, a problem solver, a guru and so on.

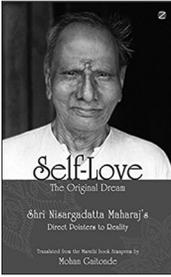
Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit dramatist, says in his *Raghuvamsa* that Hanuman crossed the ocean like a jnani crosses the ocean of samsara. Hanuman crossed both the oceans. He was a sage, a *jnani*. Pattanaik says as much when he points out that Hanuman, like the Sage Yajnavalkya, received Vedic wisdom, which includes the knowledge of the Self, from the Sun God. In fact, the stamp of jnana is found in whatever Hanuman did out of his bhakti to Rama.

There are a few errors in this extremely well-written book. The Hindi word for ‘pollen’ is ‘*raj*’, not ‘*saroj*’ (lotus); Ravana’s father was Visravas, not Vaisravas; Indra, the lord of the gods, has a thousand, not a hundred eyes.

— Titeershu

SELF-LOVE: THE ORIGINAL DREAM. Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s Direct Pointers to Reality. Translated from the Marathi *Atmaprem* by Mohan Gaitonde. Zen Publications, Juhu Supreme Shopping Centre, Gulmohar Cross Road No.9, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai - 400049, India. pp.527, ₹650. ISBN 938590283-0 www.zenpublications.com

After the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (NM) in 1981 there has been a trickle of books containing transcriptions of talks with



him. The volume under review was first published in Marathi titled *Atmaprem*, based on the notes compiled by Sri Dinkar Kshirsagar who attended the satsangs with NM from 1977 to 1981. The notes were recently translated into English by Sri Mohan Gaitonde who was one of the translators at the satsangs, for the benefit of those who did not speak Marathi. In the course of some thirty years of teachings NM delivered

some ten thousand discourses of which only but a thousand were recorded for posterity. In his Translator's Note Gaitonde quoted NM about his discourses: "By reading these words you benefit as per your footing or ground. There is no going anywhere or doing anything. You are already That which you want to realize. There is no becoming but only stabilizing in your true pure being. Your very interest in these talks indicates the rising of Self-knowledge within you."

The transcripts contained in this book have a roughness that is reminiscent of the way NM spoke. I was there for some of the talks which were transcribed and can vouch for the raw directness of NM's speech with its sharp, staccato delivery. In some ways it is truer to the atmosphere of the satsangs than the more polished editing in Jean Dunn's distinguished books or for that matter Maurice Frydman's lucid dialogues in the classic *I Am That*. NM was a tiger who took no prisoners. His aim was to free us from our delusions, not to entertain or deliver erudite sermons.

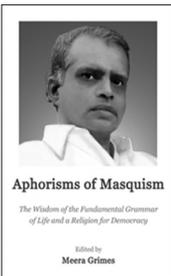
NM's teaching did not come out of no-where. It is firmly based on the Inchagiri sect of the Nav Nath tradition and the tremendous spiritual heritage of the Marathas that included Jnanadev and Sant Ramdas and his seminal *Dasbodh* which is a key scripture in the Inchagiri lineage. *Mantra*, *bhajan* and *bhakti* are an essential part of this tradition, as is the implicit and unswerving faith in the guru and the instructions given. Intellectual understanding is the beginning, not the end of the journey. NM had unshakable faith in his guru and followed his *upadesa* to the hilt.

The central focus of NM's teaching was on the relationship between Consciousness and our body-mind identity. He was not delivering 'interesting' lectures, he was hammering nails into the solid wall of our inveterate ignorance so that it might shatter.

One needs to be careful to understand how NM uses the term Consciousness. At first for beginners he identifies consciousness with *Ishvara*, the highest known principle and then later he strips this away by declaring that our so-called normal consciousness is a fraud. All our suffering starts with the rising of the sense of ‘I am’. The consciousness we spontaneously have of our body-mind complex is limited and time bound. “All that is known will vanish along with the consciousness. Consciousness suddenly becomes the universe and we experience our world. Find out why and how this consciousness is an illusion. Experience of the experiencer vanishes along with the experiencer. With your feeling ‘I am awake’, the world is also seen. Hold onto the consciousness due to which you are conscious.”

For those who hold NM in veneration and read his instructions with faith and for the inspiration they generate, this is an important addition to the literature. It is a valuable book that provokes us to dive deeper. The vehement sincerity of his words have the power to galvanize us.

The last words in this gem of a book are from 13th November, 1980: “Wherever you may be, never miss your meditation on the Sadguru. The Sadguru is your own Self and full of light and knowledge. It will be foolish to forget Him and go after Gods and Goddesses. Never entertain different concepts and damage yourself.” — Christopher Quilkey



APHORISMS OF MASQUISM The Wisdom of the Fundamental Grammar of Life and a Religion for Democracy. ed. Meera Grimes, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017. pp. 200, ₹11,912. ISBN: 978-1-5275-0009-9

Printed beautifully on very good paper and with a very charming hard cover, this attractive, well-edited book is a delight to handle. It is not surprising because it has been printed by Cambridge Scholars Press, England and edited with great devotion by a talented devotee of the author.

As regards the contents, one has mixed feelings. Not that the book is a curate’s egg. It is uniformly well-written and well-edited. The author, Swami R. Vaidyanathan (RV), seems to have been a very versatile, brilliant man. He entered Cambridge University with a

recommendation letter from the formidable, fastidious Sir C.V. Raman, did research in nuclear physics under the guidance of Lord Rutherford, known as the Father of the Nuclear Age and, in the words of Yehudi Menuhin, none less, played concert grade piano. The mixed feelings consist of admiration for the literary style of writing, the author's clear understanding of Vedanta, his catholicity of outlook and a sense of dismay at his naiveté in believing that he was the Holy Ghost, played the role of an avatar (Messiah) though as a *jiva* (individual) and was called upon to alleviate the sufferings of humanity and came up with 'the most important discovery in history'. Editor Meera Grimes admits in her Preface that "In a way the wisdom of Masquism is nothing new. However, there is newness in the emphasis it places on things already known by using new paradigms and language." Then, what is the discovery and the most important discovery at that, that RV is talking about? Truth to tell, wherever RV is elaborating spiritual truths already known, he is at his best, due to his enviable command of language and gift of communication but, alas, wherever he attempts originality, whether in emphasis or otherwise, especially in his bizarre neologisms, he leaves us cold. The more one reads the book the more does one feel that RV is trying to be original for the sake of being original and is at pains to craft what seems to be a labyrinthine, complicated path to the spiritual goal of freedom, whereas great Masters have already offered simple, sure, straight paths.

Swami R. Vaidyanathan, who passed away in 1990 at the age of 77 was a bachelor. A chance hearing of a word triggered a spiritual experience in him and he was 'transported to an existence beyond birth and creation itself'. It could have proved to be an authentic death experience culminating in Self-abidance if RV had held on to that state but he came back to life in and of the world and treated it as real and till the end was imbued with a deep sense of empathy with human suffering and a passion to alleviate it hoping to succeed where he thought others did not.

The Buddha found that to end suffering, one should end one's desire. Jesus showed us the redemptive power of suffering. J.Krishnamurti said that we should let suffering bloom like a flower. It will end and the end of sorrow is the beginning of wisdom. Vedanta has given the *jiva*, individual, a very logical, complete science of Self-Knowledge

to root out suffering and attain total bliss in Selfhood. Making all this much simpler and more immediate, Ramana asked us to find to whom is the suffering. He was ever free from suffering for there was no sufferer. He taught, more by practice than by precept, more in silence than through speech, that the world and its sufferings last only so long as we identify ourselves with our body, the non-Self. However, RV, who admitted that the ending of the ego and realisation of the Self is the goals of life, took the world seriously and felt called upon to find a way to end human suffering. It is true that men like Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave took the world seriously, indeed as *pratyakshabrahman* but they lived happily, amidst great turmoil, by being extremely simple in every way. So did Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus as well as Kabir, Mirabai and other saints.

RV felt called to step in to find a new, fool-proof way to end human conflict and suffering and came up with what he christened the Philosophy of Masquism. He encapsulates it in nine aphorisms and proceeds to explain them elaborately. Masquism is defined as “a philosophy of life that regards the world as God’s Masque.” The individual is God masked. It asks the individual to play his part to further God’s Self-Expression in the Masque. In editor Meera’s words Masquism says, “that God is the Boss of the world factory and Director of History. Every individual should act in every situation pro-historically. The individual is God in an (self-imposed) entranced condition. The goal of life is disenfranchisement. The individual is a divine maskrader (God is Mask Rader) using the body that is God’s mask.”

RV’s neologisms sound very queer: Agentization, Co-rade, Coey, Democrader, Dero, Factorade, Factorass, Himpersonalization, Historade, Historass, Kingrader, Kingerass, Kingrise, Mask RADER, Masque RADER, Maskrader, RADER, Rader, Rassing, Sevarization, Sevy and so on.

Vedanta and Self-enquiry, in a very direct way, seek to unmask the jiva and show him to be the Brahman. They make mincemeat of the human mind and the world it hallucinates. Masquism, however, seems to love the masquerade, the mask, the world and history and to urge the individual to revel in them. Perhaps it is good enough as a ‘Religion for Democracy’ but entirely inadequate as a Science of Self-Knowledge that can end human ignorance and suffering. — Jijnasu

ASHRAM BULLETIN

138th Jayanthi Celebrations

Bhagavan's 138th Jayanti celebrations commenced on 2nd January with *Dhanurmasa Puja* and *Vishnu Sahasranama* followed by *Natarajar Abhishekam* (Aarudra Darsanam) at Mother's Shrine. Preliminary music programmes on 2nd included Ramana Music by Ramananjali led by Dr. Sarada Natarajan and RMCL from 3-4 pm as well as a vocal concert by the renowned Chinmaya Sisters (Ms. Uma & Ms. Radhika) at 8 pm.

The main Jayanti celebrations commenced on 3rd with Nadaswaram by Sri T. R. Pichandi followed by *Dhanurmasa Puja* and a special Tamil *parayana. Puja and abhishekam* to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam culminated in *Deeparadhana* at 10.30am. The afternoon programme included a special *abhishekam and puja* at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine and Ramana Music by Amritavarshini led by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore in the library auditorium at 8pm. Some 10,000 people were given Jayanti day lunch and dinner as Bhagavan's prasada. Ramana Jayanti 2018 celebrations concluded on the night of 4th with vocal music by renowned Sri. Sriram & Smt. Anuradha Sriram.

Pongal

Pongal is a three-day festival that actually begins the day before *Makara Sankranti* with *Bhogi*, the last day of *Margazhi* month when old things in the household are discarded. Pongal means 'overflow' and usually refers to celebration, evoking the feeling of abundance at this harvest time of year. *Makara Sankranti* marks the day when the Sun 'crosses over' (*sankramana*) to the new month of Thai, and the Sun begins his northern journey. At the Ashram, *Uttaraayana puja* to Sun took place in the Mother's Shrine on Sunday 14th January.

Mahasivaratri

Mahasivaratri is an important day in the ashram calendar. It is the great night of Lord Siva and takes place on *krishna paksha chaturdasi*, the fourteenth night of the dark half of the lunar cycle during the Tamil month that falls between mid-February and mid-March. The festival this year took place on the evening of 13th February, the earliest day in the year on which the festival can fall, just as the month of *Phalguna*

began. Each year after the first *kala puja* around sundown, Ashram priests go in procession with the flame from Bhagavan's Shrine to the gosala. There a heap of dried cow dung cakes and dried rice husks are ceremoniously lit with camphor, amidst the chanting of the Vedas. Once ablaze, the fire burns and smoulders for about one week until all the rice husks are consumed by the heat, leaving the cooked cakes which have now been transformed into *vibhuti*. *Vibhuti* is the sacred ash used for the coming year in all the Ashram pujas to be distributed as prasada. An all-night vigil (*jagaran*) of puja, recitation, meditation and pradakshina ensues. Many devotees attended the all night ceremonies while the Vedapatasala students chanted the Sri Rudram through much of the night, rousing and invigorating devotees.

Obituaries

Born on 3rd September 1938 and hailing from Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, **Smt. Veeralakshmi** was deeply attracted to Sri Ramana Maharshi. She first came to the ashram in 1978, and after retiring as a Telugu lecturer she spent most of her time at Tiruvannamalai. In 1984, despite resistance from parents opposed to their unmarried daughter settling faraway, she built a house close to Sri Ramanasramam. Demonstrating her great love for spiritual aspirants, she accommodated three to four sadhus in her house on an ongoing basis, many of whom recount her immense care and sacrifice with deep gratitude. Four years ago she moved to Vishakapatnam because of failing health. At the end she was not able to get up, slept most of the time and was hardly aware of the external world. *Aksharamanamalai* and *Saranagati* – her great favourites – were played throughout. At around 7 pm, she woke up and was repeating the name 'Ramana' clearly and loudly. She breathed her last at 7.30 pm, 18th December 2017. She will be remembered by her family members and spiritual aspirants as a great source of inspiration for her life of affection, sacrifice and devotion.

Sri Bhupathiraju Venkata Lakshmi Narasimharaju known as **Nanna Garu** was born on 23rd September 1934, and hailed from Jinnuru, a village in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. His was a devout family of pious disposition and the boy was blessed to visit holy places from an early age. In 1957, he had a dream of an elderly man with a staff in his hand. The saint raised the young man from his bed and kissed him three times on the cheeks. For the



following six months, he longed to know who the stranger was. One day while reading *The Hindu* in the village Library, he saw the advertisement of a book, *The Great Men of India*. In the book, he saw the photo image of the saint in his dream. It was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He made his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in January 1959 at which point he dedicated his life to Sri Bhagavan's service. His entire life began to turn on

Sri Ramana's teachings and he began to spread the guru's message in his neighbourhood. One morning when in Ramanasramam, between sleeping and waking, Nanna Garu felt his mind 'falling once and for all into his heart'. From then on he was a changed man, now under the direction of something greater than the personality. Those who knew him began to see him as a guru instead of a mere preacher, and his renown spread throughout Andhra Pradesh. He traveled extensively and often visited Ramanasramam with his numerous disciples. At 12 noon on Friday, 29 December 2017, *Vaikuntha Ekadasi*, Sri Nanna Garu was absorbed at the Feet of Holy Arunachala.

Sri S. Ranganathan, one of Arunachala's residents and a strong devotee of Bhagavan attained His Lotus Feet on 8th February. He was strongly influenced by his wife Smt. Sarasawati's devotion to Sri Ramana which caused him settle down in Tiruvannamalai for the past 15 years. His wife grew up in the Ashram, being the sister of present President VS Ramanan.



In 2004 he retired as General Manager (Materials) in TAFE, a leading manufacturer of Tractors, in the Simpson group. Even whilst in service in Chennai, he took keen interest in the activities of Ramanan Kendra and coordinated the Chennai procession of the Ramana Gnana Ratham in 2004.

He was actively involved with the ashram dispensary and managed an important project of the commissioning of the Ashram power generator. He was an active, happy and devout participant at all the Ashram functions, discourses, Narayana Seva and the daily Tamil Parayana. Sri Ranganathan was absorbed in Arunachala at his residence after succumbing to a prolonged battle with liver failure.

