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## Divine Names of Arunachala

11. ॐ भक्त विज्ञप्ति संधात्रे नमः  
om bhakta vijñapti saṁdhātre namaḥ  
He who answers the prayers of His devotees.

*Vijñapti* means a request or entreaty; *saṁdhāta* means one who grants, confers and, in this case, completely, due to the prefix *saṁ*.

Once when a devotee asked Bhagavan if our prayers are granted, His response was “Yes they are granted. No thought will go in vain. Every thought will produce its effect some time or other. Thought-force will never go in vain.”<sup>1</sup>

Prayers or requests vary in content and sincerity. Requests for worldly desires are often the first that occur to devotees. There is a higher level of prayer, however, beyond those initial impulses, that can lead us ultimately to the supreme goal. Bhagavan explains, “A person seeks happiness and learns that God alone can make one happy. He prays to God and worships Him. God hears his prayers, and responds by appearing in human shape as a Master in order to speak the language of the devotee and make him understand the Reality. The Master is thus God manifest as human being. He gives out His experience so that the seeker might also gain it. His experience is to abide as the Self. The Self is within.”<sup>2</sup>

We are assured of complete fulfilment for all of our needs, worldly and otherwise in verse 31 of the *Gītā Sāram*. Smt. Kanakammal paraphrased Bhagavan’s Tamil translation as follows:

“Those who always worship Me (the *Ātman*) meditating on Me alone with *Ātmabhāva* to the exclusion of even an iota of any other thought and are ever united with Me (the *Ātman*), to them I vouchsafe to bear on my head their *yoga* (attainment of what they have not) and *kshema* (security in what they have).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 28-6-1946.

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§612.

<sup>3</sup> Smt. T.R. Kanakammal, *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume II.

## EDITORIAL

# Atonement

Inevitably in all our lives there are moments of regret, embarrassment and shame as to what might have been, what should have been had we but paused for a moment and considered what we were about to say or do. There is an inbuilt barometer in each of us that intuitively tells us what is right and wrong. We know without being told what is just and what is unjust. It is called our conscience. Anyone who lacks such an instrument or has denied its existence to the point it no longer speaks with that unmistakably quiet inner voice, that person is no longer human but has succumbed to a greater or lesser degree to the animal instincts. It is clear we judge a Hitler or a Stalin by their enormous deviation from what we consider to be normal standards of behaviour. In the same way hardened criminals have forfeited the power of leniency that a judge may exercise. What of those who from childhood are evil in their intent? It is clear to all who have eyes to see that there is evil in the world and it is not appeased by sweet words. There was a case in England some years ago of two boys who abducted another young boy and deliberately caused his death on a railway track. One of the accused showed remorse while the other looked on during the trial without showing any signs of guilt. He couldn’t because he did not have a conscience. It is a bit like asking a person with one leg to run on it. It is impossible. That boy has been in and out of prison despite the best efforts of social services to show him a

better attitude. And he won't change until he realises the consequences of his actions. Only perhaps then through extreme suffering, he will develop a conscience that says what I do to others, I do to myself.

Then how do we atone for our sins whether small and major? In Christianity the word 'sin' comes from the Greek word *hamartia*, meaning 'error, to miss the mark'. In India, *punya* (from the root *pun*, 'to act piously or dutifully'; virtue; invisible wealth) and *pāpa* (evil, demerit, harm done to others. The original meaning was perhaps 'poor' or 'pitiable' which is still at times in usage) are the terms used to indicate good and bad. In general, we make a *sankalpa*, a resolution, that we will not do it again. In most instances this is sufficient but for our more deeply buried *vāsanās* that have not been resolved, let alone acknowledged, we are a prisoner to their influences. Before we can make any atonement for our actions and be released from their influence we must first recognise that something is wrong, and then set about restitution.

If we have stolen, we freely give in whatever shape or form is appropriate; if we are poisoned by hatred we develop loving compassion; if we are jealous we develop admiration for another's fine qualities. In a way this is a mathematical approach whereby we develop merit to offset our failings. For every negative we develop a positive. It is slow and laborious but nevertheless effective. In this manner we clean our minds and hearts from the obscurations that cloud our discrimination and dispassion, for these two virtues are absolutely essential if we are to progress on the spiritual path. A dirty mind and heart are the major impediments to our success. It does not matter how clever, how rich or how powerful one is, nothing can be done to realise our true nature without a purity of heart and mind.

In recent years an interesting fact came to light about a person, Dr. Anne Spoerry, who was a legendary flying doctor in Kenya and East Africa. "She is revered in her adopted country for bringing healthcare to thousands of people living miles from help. 'She probably saved more lives than any other individual in east Africa – if not the whole continent,' said her friend, the anthropologist Richard Leakey. Dr. Tom Rees, a founder of the Flying Doctors, says, 'she personally eliminated polio from nearly 100 miles of the Kenyan coast.'"<sup>1</sup> From

1948 until her death in 1999 she tirelessly worked to alleviate the suffering of the people.

In the early days of her work she would usually do three different medical tours a month by flying to four different areas, the width and breadth of Kenya. She often saw over a thousand patients a month and would inoculate two thousand children a week. She dealt with ailments as diverse as mental illness, spear wounds, corneal ulcers, leprosy, malaria, and breech birth. Nothing was too much trouble. She was renowned for her compassion and readiness to help others.

It was only after her death that a file came to light in her personal papers. It stated on the cover dated October 25 1947: "Central Registry of War Criminals Consolidated Wanted List. Spoerry, Anne Marie, C.R. File No: 191069 C.C. Ravensbrück (Ger.), Reason wanted: Torture, wanted by FR. (France)."

Anne Spoerry came from a wealthy French family and was attending the Faculté de Médecine, in Paris in 1940 when the Germans occupied the city during World War Two. In 1942 she learned that her brother François had been made chief of a réseau or Résistance cell, and she immediately established her own réseau in Paris. She ran a safe house, secreting British operatives, but it was short-lived and she was betrayed in March 1943. The Gestapo arrested her and eventually she was transferred to Ravensbrück, a women-only concentration camp that held over 100,000. Fewer than 30,000 survived the war.

After being beaten and probably raped, Spoerry was vulnerable and during her internment she became attached to another woman Carmen Mory, who protected her. Unfortunately Mory was truly wicked. As a Gestapo agent she had a long history of disgraceful betrayals of friends and acquaintances, so much so that even the Gestapo decided to send her to Ravensbrück in 1941. She had ingratiated herself with the nasty camp doctor and avoided being placed on the gas chamber lists. Mory managed to do the same for Spoerry.

It is here that the story becomes horrifying. Anne Spoerry claimed after the war that she was 'bewitched' and had no will of her own. In the course of the next year or two in Ravensbrück Spoerry apparently participated in the murder of many inmates by the usage of lethal injections. One survivor stated that Spoerry who now called herself 'Dr. Claude' "... hit the inmates inhumanly

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/c2576500-62e7-11df-b1d1-00144feab49a>

and she's got hundreds of human lives on her conscience with the injections she administered.”

The Allies eventually advanced into Germany and were about to liberate the camp. The Germans meanwhile had relocated Mory to a low-profile camp on the 1st January 1945 and Spoerry never saw her again. Soon after, ‘Dr. Claude’ was transferred to another Block in the camp for typhus and dysentery patients. It was here that she once again became Anne. There were no injections or beatings. One survivor said Spoerry saved her life by hiding her for three months in a sick block and another said that Spoerry opened a rear block window and helped six sick Hungarian Jews escape the gas chamber. It was as if the unthinking person she had become as ‘Dr. Claude’ had regained her true identity and become a compassionate and brave person once again.

After the war she was arrested on charges of torture and murder, and tried both in Switzerland and a military tribunal in Paris. Her father, Henri, was a rich man and gathered a top legal team for the Swiss trial and because there were almost no living witnesses left to the Block 10 murders, the court ruled there was no substance to the charges. Elsewhere, Carmen Mory ‘the benefactress’ was eventually arrested and put on trial. Spoerry refused to testify on her behalf. Mory was sentenced to death in February 1947 by hanging. Two months later, a week before being hanged, she committed suicide with a razor blade.

Spoerry was forced to attend another trial in Paris at a specially convened Free French Forces ‘Court of Honour’ that dealt with French citizens who had betrayed the country during the war and committed crimes. Spoerry denied everything, but then broke down. “She confessed about one injection because it had been ordered by Carmen Mory... She said that ever since she met her she had been spellbound.” Spoerry, according to a witness called Mory ‘a devil’.

The Court of Honour found her guilty of impersonating a doctor (she has not finished her medical training because of her arrest in 1943), being a traitor to the French and bringing shame on France through inhumane behaviour. She was exiled from France for 25 years. In the autumn of 1948 she left Europe and late in 1949 she reached Kenya. She immediately loved the life there and its welcoming attitude, and just as important, not asking questions about one's past.

Initially after the war she resumed her studies and had her tropical medicine diploma, but her medical certificate remained elusive since the French Faculty of Medicine blocked official recognition. Nevertheless after she arrived in Kenya she signed herself ‘Doctor Spoerry’ and began her new life dedicated to helping the poor and afflicted. She did so to the last breath of her life.

The writer John Hemingway who knew her in Kenya and wrote articles about her work, was smitten by her heroism, but when she died he discovered the truth about the war years. He recently published a book titled *Full Flight: A Story of Africa and Atonement*. In an interview with Christiane Amanpour on CNN a month or so ago, he said he had not yet been able to forgive her for what she had done at Ravensbrück.

What are we to make of this compelling yet terrible story? Here is a person who committed murder and yet when free of the evil influence that ‘forced’ her to do heinous acts, she reverted to being a loving brave person who did all she could to save the lives of others. After being identified as a murderer and judged she began a new life, hounded no doubt by her conscience and sought absolution and redemption by good works. The burden being so great she never stopped, probably for fear of the demons which beset her.

There are three salient factors in this special case: the importance of association or *satsaṅga*; the redemptive power of dedication to a higher cause than one's own desires; and ultimately, the power of forgiveness that wipes clean dreadful actions.

Would Spoerry have committed the murders without the direct influence of Mory? It seems not. We all to some extent have been under the spell of another and have said or done things that we later are ashamed of. Each of us has a capacity for ‘personal power’ which attracts or repels others. We should be aware that there are not only physical viruses but also mental and emotional viruses that can affect us. That is why we, given the option, stay away from someone who is obviously bad. But it is not always so easy to distinguish good or bad influences. Evil can assume subtle disguises that leave us compromised when we enter its orbit. We become tainted and once we are aware of it we use various methods to cleanse ourselves. A bath, a prayer, a ritual in the temple or sacred place can wash away

the influence. Speaking to someone who understands diminishes the malign influence.

Spoerry had the courage to face up to her dramatic and ugly fall from grace. She could have sought protection from her wealthy and influential father but she chose another path. She stepped out alone and accepted responsibility for her actions. Her redemption began with that first step into the unknown.

The practice of acquiring merit is a recognised spiritual activity. The notion is particularly strong in Theravada Buddhism and various sects in Hinduism. On a more active level, by physically, emotionally and mentally devoting oneself to the service of others it is an effective instrument to cleanse oneself of sins. For those who cannot give their time and energy due to other responsibilities there is the giving of money in a good cause. In Christianity and Islam there is what is called a tithe. The essential premise in all this is the act of setting aside one's own desires by giving others first place in one's consideration. It is called compassion. It softens our heart and widens our mind to be increasingly inclusive. We are no longer concerned with our own narrow wishes and the walls of our ignorance fade. In other words, it generates discrimination and dispassion.

Can we forgive Anne Spoerry? To do that we first must consider who are we to claim the power to forgive? We all have seen injustice both far and near. On a global scale there is little we can do with the titanic, impersonal forces at work but on a personal scale, let us consider Jesus's answer when asked if a woman who was accused of being a prostitute should be stoned. He replied, "Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone." None of us are entirely beyond reproach. We all have sinned for that is a defining characteristic of being a human being. If we have not why are we on this earth? Is it not to learn from our mistakes?

Bhagavan is peerless in his understanding. But he also has a heart as wide as this world. There is nothing beyond his comprehension. All of us who follow him know in our hearts that once we recognise our mistakes and ask forgiveness Bhagavan is there for us, but we must be prepared to atone for them and that is often the truly hard part. We all have been forgiven time and again and it will be so until we realise finally that the power and presence that is Bhagavan, dwells in our own heart. Of that let there be no doubt. ▲

# An Insight into Surrender

## Part One

N.S.RAMAMOCHAN

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi points to the fact that we are seeking happiness or peace all the time. We do not want suffering. Nonetheless, every one of us must have encountered a situation in life staring at us, demanding our immediate action and we felt helpless to address it so as to calm down our anxiety. Or, on a quiet evening, it might be a thought of future possible occurrence, and so, we were not in a position to act at all, except experiencing the disquiet, anxiety, and misery. The strange thing about such situations is our inability to prevent distressing thoughts and the consequent suffering. The discussion involves the cause of suffering and the solution to it in terms of total surrender, that is to say, surrender of ego to God, Guru or the Self, in essence said to be one, and whatever happens the ego does not raise any questions.

### 1) Freedom from Suffering

When there is an injury or ill health, one may experience physical pain. A severe physical pain may induce suffering and consequent misery.

Nanduri Sri Ramamohan read Sri Bhagavan's biography *Self Realization* and understood that Sri Bhagavan's state, life and teachings were unique. He decided to understand and practice His teachings. He has written *Pointers To Self Realization*, and its translation into Telugu, *Atma Sakshatkara Sutralu* which are published by Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.

One may suffer from psychological pain and misery without physical pain being present. We see in the life of Bhagavan, both these types of situations, one lasting for a relatively short duration and the other extending over months and what followed appears extraordinary.

The first one is the death experience. When intense fear of death arose, he allowed it to 'be', and did not resist it or seek any remedy. He went ahead to find out what it is. His unwavering and unconditional acceptance of 'What is' (the is-ness of that situation), even though he felt that he was going to die, without seeking to remedy it, resulted in realising the source of eternal peace in him. We may note that there was no thought of 'God' or 'surrender' during the entire the occurrence. Here, accepting 'what is' under what appears to be the most unacceptable situation is the implied teaching as the way out of suffering.

The second situation is the eruption of sarcoma on the left arm, not known to be as such in the beginning. Much against his intent, surgery was thrust on him. There was no resistance from him to that. It is said to be very painful. No trace of distress was ever visible in him. Pain was there, but it was not his, it was only the body's reaction to it. The proof was in the form of palpable peace in his presence that was always experienced by all those present. Bhagavan, a living example of surrender, reveals the secret in his explanation of the second stanza of His *Sadvidya*.

## 2) Surrender to God and the 'Fitness' to Surrender

In general, only in a situation of suffering, one recognizes peace transcending pain to be the most valuable state. God, the all-powerful One, alone is believed to be capable of bestowing that peace. In the search to end suffering, one is then willing to surrender whatever one owns as one's most precious possession and look for His mercy. The summary of the second stanza of *Sadvidya* reads thus: "When those who are in dread of death seek refuge at the feet of the Supreme Lord, the conqueror of death, first their notion of 'I' (egoism) perishes with all its attachments. And now, they by nature being immortal, the thought of death arises no more."

Bhagavan says that the above stanza is in praise of God with attributes, and surrender to that Lord of all. It indicates (a) the fit reader; the one who is competent for it, competence consisting in

non-attachment to the world and desire to be liberated, (b) the subject-matter; freedom from misery and gain of Happiness; the highest good to be gained; (c) the relationship between surrender and bliss; Surrender is synonymous with bliss itself; and (d) the fruit; to reflect on the subject-matter and gain Knowledge which is ever-present, here and now. (Talks§567)

He further says in the same section of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, "All know that they must die some time or other; but they do not think deeply of the matter. All have a fear of death: such fear is momentary. Why fear death? Because of the 'I-am-the-body' idea. All are fully aware of the death of the body and its cremation. That the body is lost in death is well-known. Owing to the I-am-the-body notion, death is feared as being the loss of oneself. Birth and death pertain to the body only; but they are superimposed on the Self, giving rise to the delusion that birth and death relate to the Self.

"In the effort to overcome birth and death man looks up to the Supreme Being to save him. Thus are born faith and devotion to the Lord. How to worship Him? The creature is powerless and the Creator is all powerful. How to approach Him? To entrust oneself to His care is the only thing left for him; total surrender is the only way. Therefore he surrenders himself to God. Surrender consists in giving up oneself and one's possessions to the Lord of Mercy. Then what is left over for the man? Nothing – neither himself nor his possessions. The body liable to be born and to die, having been made over to the Lord, the man need no longer worry about it. Then birth and death cannot strike terror. The cause of fear was the body; it is no longer his; why should he fear now? Or where is the identity of the individual to be frightened? Thus the Self is realized and Bliss results." (Talks§567). It may be noted that all fears including fear of disease, the loss of possessions, etc., translate into loss of oneself as pointed above.

Sri Bhagavan says, "Surrender is complete only when you reach the stage 'Thou art all' and 'Thy will be done'. The state is not different from *jñāna*. In surrender, there is advaita. In reality, there is neither dvaita nor advaita, but That which is, is. Surrender appears easy because people imagine that once they say with their lips 'I surrender' and put their burdens on their Lord, they can be free and do what they like. But the fact is, that you can have no likes or dislikes after your

surrender, and that your will should become completely non-existent, then the Lord's Will takes its place. Such death of the ego is nothing different from *jñāna*. So by whatever path you may go, you must come to *jñāna* or oneness.”

### 3) Surrender to the Guru

Bhagavan Ramana explained the magical working of surrender through the story of Janaka, a king who ruled a kingdom known as Mithila and his interaction with the sage Ashtavakra. The sum and substance of the narration is that, when Janaka surrendered his body, mind and wealth unreservedly to the Guru, he became absorbed in his own Self and went into the state of samadhi. Guru means dispeller of darkness or ignorance. Guru is Self-personified, the one who bestows peace by removing the imperfections or obstructions to peace in his disciple. A brief account of the episode is given below so as to bring out the essential features of surrender.

King Janaka happened to read in a scriptural passage that ‘Knowledge of the Brahman can be gained even in such a short time that takes to mount a horse, that is, within the short time that it takes to place one foot in a stirrup and place the second foot in the second stirrup so as to mount a horse’.

That king Janaka was a matured seeker, who very clearly understood that any pleasure he can enjoy being the ruler of a kingdom is incomparable to the bliss of such *jñāna*, becomes obvious when we read the episode. He was willing to give away his body, mind, and everything he owned to realize it. As said by Bhagavan earlier and as the story points to, the longing to realise the truth and non-attachment to anything one owned, are the essential requirements to succeed in the attempt.

Janaka asked the *pandits* (learned men well versed with scriptures) in his court if that statement was correct and if it could be proved. He called for a horse for the purpose of a demonstration. They affirmed that what scriptures say is correct, but expressed their inability to prove it. He sent them all to prison. Sage Ashtavakra happened to come to his kingdom and know the prevailing situation. He went to see the King. As soon as Janaka saw the shining face of the Muni, he felt like worshipping him and immediately prostrated before him,

stretching himself full length on the floor. Sage Ashtavakra told the king that he was happy because the king's desire to realise Brahman was a good one. He asked the king if the scriptures he read stated that a Guru would be necessary to obtain Realisation. He further asked the king if he knew that initiation into realisation cannot be given to one who is not fit for it. The king gave an affirmative reply to both the questions. Then, he told the king that if he wants such an initiation the king must have the fullest confidence in him and accept him as his Guru. Further, he must release all the *pandits* from the prison and go along with the sage to the forest on a horse, so that the sage can judge his fitness to receive upadesa (initiation) before giving it.

Upon reaching the forest, the king's retinue which accompanied them was sent back. When the king got ready to mount the horse by placing one foot in the stirrup, Ashtavakra stopped him and asked about *gurudakṣiṇa* (an offering given to Guru in gratitude). The king at once said that he was placing at the feet of the Guru his body, his mind, his wealth, and everything that he possessed in this world. As soon as Ashtavakra heard these words, he went into a bush close by and hid himself. The king with his one foot in the stirrup remained as he was, without moving. At sunset his minister and others, anxious at his not returning home, went to the forest. They found the king motionless like a statue with one foot in the stirrup. They all stood aghast at the sight. The minister went to the king and asked him the reason for his remaining motionless but received no reply. Also, they could not find Ashtavakra. They took the king back to the palace and put him on a bed. He remained in the same position as he was placed on it, motionless. The king did not utter even a single word in response to their queries, did not eat the food offered, did not even gulp down water put in his mouth, and did not move. Thinking that Ashtavakra played black magic on the king, the minister sent cavalry men to look for the sage.

The king's men found Ashtavakra, informed him of the state of the king and brought him to the palace. They asked the sage as to what happened to their king and if he did something to the king. He directed them to ask the king himself. They replied that the king was unable to speak and had not taken food, nor even water, for the previous two days. As soon as Ashtavakra addressed the king, he at

once responded. Ashtavakra asked him to eat. The king did so and sat motionless again.

The ministers requested Ashtavakra to have mercy and restore the king to his the original condition. The sage promised to do so, sent them all out, and closed the doors behind them. He approached the king and asked him why he was sitting motionless.

The king pointing to his body said that he had no rights whatsoever over the body, and that the legs and hands were not his; the tongue was not his; the eyes, ears and all the senses – none of them were his; the kingdom was not his. He said, that he had surrendered to Ashtavakra, his Guru, his body, his mind and all his possessions. Without the orders of the sage, he said he was not competent to do anything. That was why he was like that.

Hearing these words of great faith and devotion, the sage placed his hand on the head of the king and said that he had to give the king that test to know whether he was fit to be a *mukta* or not, and that he had in Janaka a disciple who was fit for initiation. Ashtavakra then declared that at that very moment he is *Brahma svarūpa* (of the nature of *Brahman*), a realized soul; one who has done successfully all that has to be done; and received all that has to be received. In a further conversation Ashtavakra answered all the queries of Janaka, as to how he who has surrendered to the Guru has attained *Brahma svarūpa*. Thus, when Janaka surrendered his body, mind and possessions (which constitute ‘I and mine’) unreservedly to the Guru, everything that could obstruct the realisation of *Brahman* was removed and he became absorbed in his own Self and went into the state of samadhi. One may see that Janaka’s state after surrender was like the state of Bhagavan during the death experience.

The devotees of Bhagavan are well aware of the episodes of Tinnai Swami, who with one word of Bhagavan ‘*iru*’ (‘Be’, ‘stay’), went into and remained in the state of samadhi, and Sri Muruganar, Mastan Swami, and many other devotees who had Self-realisation by the Grace of Sri Bhagavan. Paul Brunton in a graphic description of the peace he experienced in presence of Bhagavan during his first visit says, “It does not matter whether I solve the problems which have hitherto troubled me. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me; that a great peace is penetrating the inner

reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest.” Countless number of miracles that took place were recorded as in the case of Sri Jagadisa Sastry, who was inflicted with terminal cancer in his 40’s. He made a prayer of surrender to Bhagavan, famously known as *Prapatyāṣṭakam*, recited to this date by troubled devotees. He was cured of cancer and went on to live for over 40 more years.

Bhagavan’s Grace as Guru could be seen to gently cut through the imperfections of His disciples in a subtle but sure way. Suri Nagamma, a devotee of Bhagavan narrated one such event that may appear insignificant. Once, a lady concerned about Bhagavan’s health when He was being treated for sarcoma, wrote a letter to her enquiring about His health. Nagamma did not like the way that lady had conducted herself in the presence of Bhagavan during her past visit and so did not feel like replying. Bhagavan showed His disapproval in a silent, subtle manner to Nagamma’s attitude. After she recognised her folly and wrote to that lady, Bhagavan silently showed his approval. ▲

(To be continued)

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Viviktasthaa*, who  
lives by the tranquil lake on  
the holy mountain;  
in the radiant hearts of the  
quiet sages of discernment.

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.



# Bhagavan Stories: God Serves His Devotees

NEERA KASHYAP

Joan Greenblatt's foreword to her book, *Spiritual Stories as told by Ramana Maharshi* mentions what a master storyteller Bhagavan was; how he picturesquely narrated and enacted incidents from the lives of *bhaktas* and from tales of deep spiritual content. There are accounts of how, during a narration, his eyes shone with devotional fervour, voice broke with stifled sobs and tears flowed freely from his eyes. Often choosing stories that suited a devotee's need, these well-known and oft-repeated stories served to illustrate his teachings with simplicity and directness. The most prominent among themes chosen by Bhagavan was of well-known Siva *bhaktas* — Parvati, Sambandhar and Appar, Karaikal Ammaiyar, Sundaramurti.

As a creative writer, Neera Kashyap's short fiction, poems and essays appear in various literary journals, both online and print. She serves on the Managing body of Delhi's Ramana Kendra and on its journal, Direct Path's editorial board. She feels a deep gratitude to Bhagavan for his teachings and for his presence in her life.

The experience of each of these *bhaktas* is unique. Because Parvati is Siva's own beloved spouse, her *tapas* is long and rent with the pain of separation. Sambandhar is a natural *bhakta*, gifted with the Lord's love and surrender. Yet, he is tested by Iswara for the completeness of his worship – in the wholeness of mind, speech and deed. Even the earthly gifts given to him by deities for his comfort are taken away so he can approach Arunachala without ego! Finally, his consummation is not of the body but in divine light – a complete mergence in the temple of the Heart and Self. Appar, after discomfiting deviations, returns through *vicāra mārga* (symbolised by his sister Tilakavati's assistance) to merge his ego in the Self. Karaikal Ammaiyar surrenders both her husband and her own physical beauty to become a skeleton and to merge in the divine essence of Siva's cosmic dance, offering eternal verses to her Master. Sundaramurti's ego resistance is broken and with this returns his flow of service to the Lord who suggests he worship him as *Pittan*, the madman, so his own joyful madness of surrender can return.

In all these experiences, the devotees are well served by their faith in the Lord who helps their *sādhana* both in unmanifest and manifest ways. Bhagavan felt the depth of their devotion. When Sambandhar, at the age of sixteen vanishes into a blaze of light along with his own marriage party, Bhagavan concluded his narration with the words, "Such was the brief but very eventful life of the sage," and assumed silence, voice trembling with emotion. What could be said of a very young sage who not only merged in the illumination of the Self but carried many others along with him?

There are other stories that Bhagavan told in which God gives proof of his help in various ways: through the power of silence, through blessings for the composition of verses that sing of the Eternal, through the restoration of a *bhakta*'s honour by the occurrence of miracles that prove. There is also one of the simplest and briefest stories of physical help that he narrated: on a given day in the year the God and Goddess are taken out and ritually celebrated in an adjoining field. This is in memory of the day when Sundaramurti Swami entered the temple to find neither God nor Goddess present, as they were busy in a field transplanting seedlings for a devotee, an outcaste! In another story, the simple magical quality of God's participation in a

devotee's work recurs in the story of *bhakta* Ekanath. God appears to him in a dream and asks him to repair the tomb of Jnaneswar. On his arrival there, Ekanath finds a contractor ready to do all the work and take payment at the end. The contractor works systematically — entering expenses, names of workmen and the wages paid. The work is completed, accounts checked and the contractor paid. Then the contractor and his big account book disappear. It is only then that Ekanath sees that God was his contractor and had done the work. Said Bhagavan, "Such things have happened."

How God serves his devotees can be seen in Bhagavan's own powerful words on silence after his narration of the story of the four brothers created by Brahma to carry on the work of creation. The four are reluctant as they seek the path of knowledge, not of action. After searching, they find their doubts and reluctance erased before the perfect silence of Dakshinamurti. Said Bhagavan: "Silence is the true *upadeśa*. It is the perfect *upadeśa*. It is suited only for the most advanced. 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 is to indicate it."<sup>1</sup>

That help is also given through answers, and doubts cleared over a long time is also evident from the other familiar story of the sage Dakshinamurti: four elderly *rishis* are attracted to this youthful sage and ask a series of shrewd and pertinent questions on the nature of Reality and the means of attaining it. The sage provides the answers, overjoyed at their earnestness, maturity and wisdom. But with answers come doubts and further questions, extending over a whole year. Stemming compassion and love, the sage merges into Supreme Silence. Having ripened to full maturity through a year with their *sadguru*, the disciples too merge into Silence. Like Sambandhar's story of his devotees and he merging into light, this story also indicates that the realized sage, at an appropriate time, draws his mature disciples into the light of silence.

While Bhagavan has referred to *mauna* as a state that transcends speech and thought, he has also referred to it as 'ever speaking' and 'the perennial flow of language'. To be in tune with it, one has to

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§569.

surrender, crushing the ego each time it raises its head, thus maturing into the path of surrender. Says Bhagavan, “Surrender is not an easy thing. Killing the ego is not an easy thing. It is only when God Himself by His grace draws the mind inwards that complete surrender can be achieved. But such grace comes only to those who have already, in this or previous lives, gone through all the struggles and *sadhanas* preparatory to the extinction of the mind and killing of the ego.”<sup>2</sup>

That Silence can transform the outlook of an entire group of resistant disbelievers is the sort of miracle that occurs in the presence of a Guru whose silence is proven to have the power to dissolve individual identities. In response to a query on the characteristics of a jnani, Bhagavan related the story of Tattvaraya who composed a *bharani* (a poetic composition in Tamil) in honour of his guru Swarupananda and convened an assembly of learned *pandits* to assess the work’s value. The *pandits* objected to a *bharani* being composed to honour an ascetic when it was traditionally composed to honour great heroes capable of killing a thousand elephants. It was agreed that the matter should be settled by guru Swarupananda himself, who heard them out, then sat silent. Days and nights passed in *mauna*, all thoughts ceased, even the thought of why they had gathered. After some days, the guru stirred his mind and the assembly regained its thought activity. Spontaneously, the assembly declared: “Conquering a thousand elephants is nothing compared to the guru’s power to conquer the rutting elephants of all our egos put together. So certainly he deserves the *bharani* in his honour!”

Bhagavan has often spoken of the Guru’s silence being Grace in its highest form, for when the Guru is silent, peace prevails in all. Further, if the Guru is silent, the seeker’s mind gets purified by itself. In response to a question whether he used occult powers to make others realise the Self or if the mere fact of Bhagavan’s realisation was enough, he said: “Peace can reign only when there is no disturbance, and disturbance is due to thoughts that arise in the mind. When the mind itself is absent, there will be perfect peace. Unless a person has annihilated the mind, he cannot gain peace and be happy. And unless he himself be happy, he cannot bestow happiness on ‘others’. Since

<sup>2</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 27th June, 1946. 2002, p.263.

however there are no ‘others’ for the sage who has no mind, the mere fact of His Self-realisation is itself enough to make the ‘others’ happy.”

There are stories of God blessing devotees with the gift to create divine verses or to bless the creation of the writings themselves. Sambandhar creates joyous verses right from the age of three. When he cannot see his father who immerses himself in a temple tank for a ritual bath, he calls out in fear to the sculptures on the temple tower. He addresses them as ‘Mother! Father!’ Parvati and Siva appear from the sky before the child, and on Siva’s wish, Parvati gives the child milk from her breast in a golden cup, freeing him from sorrow and transforming him into an inspired sage. Later, when Sambandhar’s father is angry with him for accepting milk from strangers and asks for their identity, the boy’s poetic flow continues through life from the very first verse he sings: “The Man with *kundalas*, the Man who rides the sacred bull, the Man who has the white moon on his head, the Man whose body is smeared with the ashes of the burning ghat, the thief who has stolen my heart....”

Both Sambandhar and Appar undertake many pilgrimages together, singing their *padikams* in praise of the Lord at various temples. These verses induce a devotional surrender and perhaps an experience of blissful union with the divine symbolized by the temples of Siva – the arch Yogi of the Gods, himself the master of the dance.

Blessings to create poetry follow an attitude of surrender. But first the Lord must come to claim his own, even at the risk of sounding mad! Sundaramurti, though born to a Saiva priest is raised by a local king in accordance with Brahminical rituals. At his own marriage ceremony, Lord Siva comes to him in the garb of an old Brahmin to claim him as his slave as per a deed executed in his favour by Sundaramurti’s grandfather. The elders are shocked at this madness for this is the first time anyone had heard of one Brahmin serving another. In the long harangue that follows, the old Brahmin clinches every evidence in his own favour, and ironically reveals his name to be *Pittan* (madman) as recorded in the deed. Sundaramurti accepts his fate and follows the old man into his house to be his servant, but the house turns out to be *Tiruvarul Turai*, a Siva temple and the Brahmin, Lord Siva himself!

<sup>3</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, 2002, p.30.

As the Lord himself reveals, Sundaramurti in a previous birth had been one of his chief attendants, had been born again under a curse but had desired to be the lord's servant, wherever he may be. So Siva had come here to make him his servant! His service was to worship him with flowers of verse offered to him as *Pittan*, the madman!

Due to the humility of the enlightened poet, God either validates his creation or brings it to the attention of the world. As court poet Jayadeva's fame both as writer and speaker grew, Lord Jagannatha appears to him in the durbar hall in the guise of a Brahmin to test his humility. After blessing the king, he pronounces himself a *pandit* well versed in the *śāstras* who had yet to find his equal in knowledge and discussion. Acknowledging that he had heard of Jayadeva, he said he wished to meet him to discuss the *śāstras* with him. When Jayadeva is pointed out, he is treated with disdain and deliberately baited to discuss any of the *śāstras* he had studied. Then snatching the book Jayadeva held in his hand, he said, "Oho! This is *Bhagavatam*. So you are a *Paurāṇika* (one who gives discourses on the epics)? Who wrote this?" With fear and devotion, Jayadeva pleads that he was no *pandit* who could compete with him, sought his blessings as an elder and conceded, with reluctant humility, to being the author of the book. Pretending surprise, the Brahmin said, "What! If it is you who wrote it, tell me, how could I have learnt all its contents by heart?" And without opening the book, he rapidly recites its contents, chapter by chapter.

Realising that Lord Jagannatha had himself come to shower His grace on him, Jayadeva requests him before the amazed audience, to reveal himself in his real form as Vishnu. So Lord Jagannatha reveals himself in the very forms in which the writer had invoked him in his *stotras*, blesses him and vanishes.

One of Bhagavan's most moving stories is sited in Chidambaram. Moving from place to place, the poet saint Manikkavachakar comes to Chidambaram. On witnessing Nataraja's dance, he stays on to sing songs that melt the heart. In order to reveal the greatness of Manikkavachakar and to bless people with an excellent collection of hymns, Lord Nataraja comes one night to the house of this devotee in the guise of a brahmin. He tells Manikkavachakar that he is aware of his songs and asks if he can hear them, even though the hour is late. The devotee willingly obliges, sings in ecstasy, unmindful of

the brahmin who sits noting down the songs. In utter devotion to God, Manikkavachakar forgets himself, lapses into silence and the brahmin disappears.

At daybreak, in the temple, the priest finds before the image of Nataraja a palm leaf book. Within are the words *Tiruvācakam* and an explanation that the book was written as dictated by Manikkavachakar. Below the signature, Tiruchitrambalam or Chidambaram, was the stamp of Nataraja! When Manikkavachakar is called and asked to explain the genesis of the hymns, he stands before the image of Nataraja and says, "Sirs, the Lord before us is the only answer to your question." With these words, he merges into the Lord. As Bhagavan narrated the story, his voice choked. Unable to speak any more, he lapsed into ecstatic silence.

Bhagavan has said, "The divine flow of poetry can spring only from a heart which has become still, being completely freed by Self-attention from all attachment towards the five sheaths, starting with the *annamaya* (the body composed of food)." <sup>4</sup>To squander the poetic flow achieved through His Grace in unworthy human praise would be like taking to prostitution, he emphasized.

God also helps by directing the liberation of a devotee of the lowest caste simultaneously restoring the honour of a brahmin, socially shunned. Umapati Sivacharya was a *jñāni* and a *pandit*, but because he did not pay much heed to brahminical practices, the village priests forbade him to visit the temple and even live in the village. So living outside, he was helped and supplied with his needs by Pethan Samban, a man from the lowest caste.

One day, as Pethan carried firewood to Sivacharya's hut, Iswara appeared to him in the guise of the priest in charge of the very temple from which Sivacharya had been debarred, and handed him a verse written on a palmyra leaf to be given to Sivacharya. The verse instructed Sivacharya "to give initiation to this Pethan Samban regardless of caste and to the surprise of all people." The very first line of the verse carried Iswara's signature as "the servant of the devotees, the Lord of Chidambaram." Overwhelmed with devotion,

<sup>4</sup> Murugunar, Sri, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 15/140, Translated by Sadhu Om and Michael James, Ramakrishna-Vedanta Study Circle, Athens, 2004, p.43.

a thrill passed through Sivacharya. He initiated Pethan into *sannyāsa* despite his low caste, and in course of time gave him *nayana dikṣā* (transmission of Power through the eyes) following which Pethan merged into holy light.

Noting the sacrificial offerings used for the initiation, Sivacharya's foes complained to the king that Sivacharya had burnt Pethan to death, possibly for some mistake he had made. When the king appeared in person to enquire into the complaint, Sivacharya showed him the verse of Nataraja instructing him to initiate Pethan Samban, who later merged into divine light. The surprised king asked Sivacharya if he could initiate and give *nayana dikṣā* to a nearby thorn bush. Sivacharya affirmed that he could and the thorn bush too disappeared in pure light! Inclined to think this was black magic, the astonished king suggested that they seek the answer from Lord Nataraja himself. In accompanying the king, Sivacharya's ban on entering the temple automatically lifted, and the two walked into the holy site followed by flocks of intrigued people. In the *ārati* performed to honour the king, on either side of the Lord appeared Pethan and the thorn bush! The *pandits* fell at Sivacharya's feet in fear and remorse, sought his pardon and brought him back to the village with due honour!

In the *Sri Ramanaparavidyopanishad*, the quest for the Self is seen as a path for the valiant and self-surrender to God for the fearful. In these two, all the other paths are included. Pethan Samban's ego sense is destroyed and he vanishes into the light of God's grace. Sivacharya's valour in adhering to the quest of the Self by seeking the root of the ego, the 'I' over all rituals is validated by the restoration of his honour in the society.

Another more complex story of restoring honour is that of Kaduveli Siddhar. This siddhar was famed as a highly austere ascetic who lived off dry fallen leaves. The king of the land wished to see his real worth so offered a reward to one who could prove it. A rich *dāsi* agreed, began to live near the recluse, attracted him very patiently with tempting offerings till they became intimate and a child was born to them. This she reported to the king. In connivance with the king, the *dasi* agreed to disclose her relationship with the ascetic at a public dance performance. Leaving the child at home with the saint, she began her performance. As the dance peaked, the child cried

for its mother, so the father gathered it up and took it to the dance. Though dancing with abandon, the *dāsi* noted their arrival, arranged to approach them, and then kicked loose her anklet. The saint gently lifted her foot and re-tied the anklet. The public laughed and shouted with derision. The saint stood unaffected. In proof of his real nature, he sang a Tamil song: "...If it is true that I sleep day and night quite aware of my Self, may this stone burst into twain and become the wide expanse!" At once, the stone idol burst, leaving the crowd astounded! Thus, the king learnt of the *jñāni's* true worth.

Bhagavan has said, "Although a *jīvanmukta* associated with body may, owing to his *prārabdha* appear to lapse into ignorance or wisdom, yet he is only pure like the ether which is always itself clear, whether covered by dense clouds or cleared of clouds by currents of air.....If he appears indulging in sexual pleasures, he must be taken to enjoy the ever-inherent Bliss of the Self, which, divided Itself into the Individual Self and the Universal Self, delights in their reunion to regain Its original Nature...."<sup>5</sup>

In a note on verse 41 of Murugunar's *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*,<sup>6</sup> the translators' quote two lines from Murugunar's *Kīrti Tiruvagaval* in *Śrī Ramaṇa Sannidi Murai*, summing up God's concern for His devotee in the stillness of the Heart:

"Through his dance of stillness in the Heart of me, his devotee,  
His sounding anklets enquire about my welfare." ▲

<sup>5</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2000, Talk§449.

<sup>6</sup> Murugunar, Sri, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, translated by Dr. T.V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler & David Godman, Avadhuta Foundation, USA, 2008, pp. 465-67.



# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Twenty Six

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

9th September 1978

**S**adhu Om: In verse 803 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* Bhagavan says: The *mey-jñāni* [knower of reality], who, 'I' [the ego] being annihilated, abides firmly in the state of self, which is *jñāna* [knowledge or awareness], giving *ātmānubhava* [direct awareness of self], the power in which the delusion of flesh [the false awareness 'I am this body'] is annihilated, to devotees [those with intense yearning and trust] who, suffering distress [and hence seeking salvation], take refuge [in him], is *jīva-karuṇā* [compassion for and kindness to living beings]. Other [acts of compassion and kindness] are defective.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

The only act of true *jīva-kāruṇya* (kindness to living beings) is to give them self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) and thereby annihilate their ego or sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*), which is the root cause of all suffering. All other acts of kindness, including even giving heavenly pleasures to all living beings or ‘heavenising’ this world, are not real kindness, because they do not solve the root problem, the ego, so they are just burying it deeper in its own ignorance, the delusion of *jīva-bhōda*.

What all living beings actually want is just happiness, but no one can ever be satisfied with partial happiness, so knowingly or unknowingly all are seeking infinite happiness, untainted by even the least sorrow or dissatisfaction. However the finite ego can never enjoy infinite happiness, so it is doomed to perpetual dissatisfaction. Indeed, since the ego or individuality (*jīvatva*) is the cause of all dissatisfaction and consequent misery, it is itself misery, so to bestow *śivatva* (the beneficent state of being *śiva*, the infinite whole) by annihilating *jīvatva* is alone true *jīva-kāruṇya*.

And who can give *śivatva*? Only one who is dissolved in *śiva* as *śiva*, as Bhagavan implies in the previous verse, verse 815 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* (verse 10 of *Upadēśa Tanippākka*):

Only one who is saved can save living beings in the world; whereas anyone else is like a blind person who is [trying to be] a guide to [another] blind person.

### 11th September 1978

Sadhu Om: *Sphurana* is not something that we do not already know, because it is always shining in us as ‘I’. It is the simple awareness ‘I am’, so it is never unknown to us, because even when we attend to other things we do not cease to be aware that I am.

However, because we are so accustomed to attending to other things whenever we are either awake or dreaming, when we try to attend only to the awareness ‘I am’ it seems to shine with a fresh clarity, and this fresh clarity of self-awareness is what is generally called *sphurana*. When we attend to other things the awareness ‘I am’ is mixed up and confused with awareness of a body and other such adjuncts, so instead of shining just as ‘I am’ it shines as ‘I am this body’, but when we try to attend only to our basic self-awareness,

‘I am’, the adjuncts recede into the background and self-awareness begins to shine more clearly and prominently. The more keenly we attend to ‘I am’, the more awareness of all other things fade away, until eventually we remain shining as ‘I am’ alone.

Whenever we attend to anything other than ‘I’ we seem to be a body, but when we try to attend only to ‘I’ we begin to recognise that ‘I’ is actually something quite distinct from whatever body I seem to be. We can make this more clear by considering an example. Suppose we hear that a close friend of ours has just died. We go to his house and see his corpse lying there. Yesterday we were talking with him, but today we see his body lying lifeless. What is the difference between this lifeless body and the person we were talking with yesterday? Surely that person who was talking and laughing with us was something other than just this body, which is now a corpse. So who was it who was talking to us through the medium of this body? Who was seeing us and hearing our jokes? Who was recollecting the good times we had together in the past? Since the one who was talking, seeing, hearing and remembering is something other than this corpse, who am I who now talks, sees, hears and remembers through this corpse-like body that now seems to be myself?

To know this ‘I’ as it really is we must attend only to the awareness that always shines as ‘I’, thereby ignoring all other things, including the corpse-like body that we now mistake to be ‘I’. This is why in the *kalivenbā* version of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* Bhagavan extended verse 29 by adding before it the clause ‘*uḍalam piṇam pōl tīrndu*’, which means ‘leaving the body like a corpse’, so with this clause the first sentence of that verse means: ‘Leaving the body like a corpse, not saying ‘I’ by mouth, investigating by an inward sinking mind where one rises as ‘I’ alone is the path of knowledge’.

Likewise in the first sub-section of section 1 of *Vicāra Saṅgraham* he says:

If one asks how to investigate [this impure self-awareness that rises as ‘I am this body’], [the reply is:] can this body, which is *jaḍa* [non-conscious] like a block of wood, shine and behave as ‘I’? It cannot. Therefore, setting down the corpse-body as a corpse, and remaining without uttering ‘I’ even by [physical or mental] voice, if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as ‘I’, then in [one’s] heart a

kind of *spurippu* [a fresh clarity] alone will itself appear to itself [or to oneself] without sound as ‘I am I’. Without leaving that [fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate *ahaṅkāra-rūpa jīva-bhōda* [the sense of individuality in the form of ego], which is called [that is, which experiences itself as] ‘body is I’, and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished. This itself is said by sages and sacred texts to be *mōkṣa* [liberation].

The term *spurippu*, which means shining or clarity, is a Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit term *sphuraṇa*, and they are both verbal nouns derived from the Sanskrit verb *sphur* (*spuri* or *puri* in Tamil), which means to shine, be clear, shine forth, appear clearly or make itself known; so when Bhagavan says, ‘if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as I, then in the heart a kind of *spurippu* alone will itself appear to itself without sound as I am I’, what he means by *spurippu* is a fresh clarity of self-awareness. That is, if we keenly attend to ‘I’, a fresh clarity of self-awareness will shine forth within us.

So long as we attend to anything other than ‘I’, we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, and this adjunct-mixed self-awareness is what is called ego (*ahaṅkāra*) or the sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*). However, if we attend to ‘I’ keenly enough, we will thereby separate ourself from all adjuncts, and hence instead of shining as ‘I am this body’ our self-awareness will shine clearly as ‘I am just I’.

If we cling fast to this fresh clarity of self-awareness, without leaving or letting go of it, that steady state of unwavering self-attention is what is called ‘just being’ (*summā iruppadu*), because it is the state in which the ego does not rise to attend to anything else, and hence it is the state of absolute silence, stillness or inactivity. By remaining unswervingly in this state of just being, in which we do not let go of self-attention even to the slightest extent, the last remaining traces of the ego will be consumed by the clarity of self-awareness, and then the freshness of that clarity will subside, after which pure self-awareness will shine forever as our natural, eternal and immutable state.

This is what Bhagavan refers to when he says: ‘Without leaving that [*spurippu* or fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate the sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*) in the form of ego (*ahaṅkāra*), which is called [that is, which experiences

itself as] ‘body is I’, and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished’. What is extinguished when the ego is annihilated is not the clarity of self-awareness but only the freshness of it, because it will then be experienced as the real nature of oneself (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is eternal and immutable.

However, unless we have all-consuming love to attend to ourself alone, and unless our *viśaya-vāsanās* or outward-going tendencies are consequently greatly diminished, we will not be able to cling to the fresh clarity of self-awareness without ever leaving it, so during the course of our practice this fresh clarity (*spurippu* or *sphuraṇa*) will fade whenever we attend to other things and will shine again only when we renew our effort to attend only to ourself. That is, to the extent that we attend to other things, our self-awareness will again become clouded by being mixed with adjuncts, and to the extent that we attend only to ourself, the adjuncts will fade and self-awareness will shine clearly. In other words, the more keenly we attend to ourself, the more the appearance of adjuncts will subside, and consequently the more clearly the *sphuraṇa* will shine, until finally the ego and all its adjuncts will be dissolved forever in the absolute clarity of pure self-awareness.

Therefore once we have ignited the *sphuraṇa* or fresh clarity of self-awareness by trying to attend only to ourself, we should then try to cling as firmly as possible to this *sphuraṇa* until it consumes our ego entirely like a flame that catches and consumes a piece of camphor.

(To be continued) ▲



S. Gopalakrishnan

## KEYWORD

# Ganesha

JOHN GRIMES

Soon after Bhagavan Ramana arrived in Tiruvannamalai and had shifted to Gurumurtam, Palaniswami joined him as the permanent attendant. For 17 years he was the instrument of the divine for protecting Lord Ramana's body. Most of this time Sri Ramana was without any body consciousness, lost in the inner bliss of the Self. During this period Palaniswami begged for alms and cooked for him, ever protecting him. Before meeting Sri Ramana, Palaniswami daily worshipped an image of Ganesha. After becoming the full-time attendant who looked after Bhagavan's body, Palaniswami felt that it was Ganesha that led him to Sri Ramana and blessed him to follow and serve him like his shadow. Some see this as Ganesha fulfilling his traditional role of providing an auspicious beginning. Bhagavan remarked, "Ishta Devata and Guru are aids – very powerful aids on this path."<sup>1</sup>

Ganesha, Lord of the multitudes (*gana*:multitudes; *īśa/pati*:Lord;) is the Formless taking form. The Nameless taking many names. Sri

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§28.

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

Ramana said, “True, the images of gods are described in great detail. Such descriptions point only to the final Reality. Otherwise why is the special significance of each detail also given? Think. The image is only a symbol. Only that which lies beyond name and form is Reality.<sup>2</sup> Bhagavan was asked, “Are the Gods and their sacred regions real?” He replied, “As real as you are in this body.” Question: “Where do they exist?” Ramana: “In you.”<sup>3</sup>

Regarding Ganesha, there are a number of birth-stories described in the *smṛti* literature. One declares he was never born as he is the eternal One. Another says he is *svayambhū* (self-born). Another declares he was born from Parvati alone. Another declares he was born from Siva alone. Another declares he was born from Siva and Parvati. Another has him born from his aunt Ganga. Yet another sees him as born from the *Pranava, Om*. Each story has its purpose and use. All are true and useful from a certain perspective while the final statement is that no one has ever been born nor died.

It is impossible to trace with precision the history of Ganesha. The Upanishads say, “The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know It to be such and such. It is surely different from the known and again It is above the unknown.<sup>4</sup> When asked by a devotee, “Why are there so many Gods mentioned?” Sri Ramana replied, “The body is only one. Still, how many functions are performed by it? The source of all the functions is only one. It is in the same way with the Gods also.”<sup>5</sup> “A change of outlook is all that is necessary. See what such a change did for Arjuna. He had the vision, of the Cosmic Self. Sri Krishna said: ‘Gods and saints are eager to see my Cosmic Form. I have not fulfilled their desire. Yet I endow divine sight by which you can see that Form.’ Well, having said so, does He show what He is? No. He asks Arjuna to see in Him all that he desires to see. If that were His real form it must be changeless and known for what it is worth. Instead, Arjuna is commanded to see whatever he desires. So where is the Cosmic Form? It must be in Arjuna. Furthermore, Arjuna finds Gods and saints in that form and they are praising the Lord. If the

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Talk§132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Talk§30.

<sup>4</sup> *Kena Upanishad*, I.2-5.

<sup>5</sup> Op cit., Talk§371.

form be withheld from the Gods and saints as said by Krishna, who are they but of Arjuna’s vision? They must be in his imagination.”<sup>6</sup>

A God is worshipped in particular forms, at particular times, in particular places, for particular purposes, addressed by particular names. The One Self may appear in many forms. Different aspects of this one great Reality are personified as deities, each with its own significant legends and symbols. Myriad are the ways in which Ganesha has been, and may be, conceived. There are those who refer to him as the Absolute; as the first deity invoked; as the Divine Child; as the Lord of beginnings; as the Lord of the mind; as the Lord of the multitudes; as the Lord of obstacles as well as the remover of obstacles; as a *mūrti* (image, icon); as seated in the *mūladhāra cakra* as a physical embodiment of *tat tvam asi*; as three-eyed. Ganesha is your own Self. Verily, Ganesha is your own Self.

As the elephant-faced one, surely Ganesha must be the easiest God to recognise since time began and space rolled out. He is the great God to be invoked before every act, and especially worshipped and prayed to when changes occur in one’s life. Every beginning finds him present. Many say that he was the instrument leading Palaniswami to Lord Ramana’s feet.

Who is Ganesha? What is Ganesha? Where is Ganesha? Why is Ganesha? Obstacles are found at the boundaries of space and time – temporally at the beginning and spatially at the threshold. These are the points of entry – the loci of highest risk and possibility. As mythmakers, we gather the scattered leaves of the book of the universe. By employing the texts, the stories, the mythology at our disposal, we gain a fixed point of reference.

A friendly, slightly chubby, elephant-headed deity is an enigma disclosing space and time’s mask. What are space and time but disclosures/appearances of the Divine. Ganesha is the Lord of appearances. The Rig Veda says, “We call upon you, upon the multitudes, the leader of the multitudes.”<sup>7</sup> He is also known as *omkāra svarūpa*, the embodiment of the primordial sound, *Om*. *Om* is all this, the entire universe. His proboscis is said to resemble the letter Om (*Pranavasvarūpa vakratuṇḍa*).

<sup>6</sup> Op.cit., Talk§473.

<sup>7</sup> *Rig Veda* 2.23.1.

In the Atharva Veda occurs the *Ganapati Atharvashirsha*, one of the earliest recorded hymns to Ganesha. It is considered to be the most important Sanskrit text that we have regarding Ganesha. This text identifies Ganesha as the embodiment of the all-pervading, ultimate principle, Brahman and celebrates his powers to overcome all obstacles. The word *tharva* means ‘weak, vacillating, wavering’. *A-tharva* means the absence of these qualities. *Shirshsha* means ‘intellect’, an intellect directed toward liberation (*mokṣa*). Thus the *Atharvashirshsha* suggests firmness or single pointedness of the intellect as directed toward one’s realization of the Divine. As well, the *Atharvashirsha* contains the Ganesha *gāyatrī*: *Ekadantāya vidmahe, vakratuṅḍāya dhīmahi, tanno danti pracodayāt* (May we know the single-tusked one, may we meditate on the one with the curved trunk, may that tusked one inspire that knowledge and meditation of ours).

After the salutation to the *Atharvashīrśa* comes the great Upanishadic *mahāvākya, tat tvam asi*. Ganesha is declared to be the embodiment of this *mahāvākya*. He combines, in one form, the two seemingly incongruous parts, an elephant’s head and a human body. Thus, like the *mahāvākya* that unifies the two seemingly incongruous part, *Tat* (That) and *Tvam* (thou), so does Ganesha. He is a physical embodiment of the infinite and the finite, of the immortal and the mortal, of the large and the small, of the manifest and the unmanifest.

The elephant head represents the macrocosm of the Divine while the human body represents the microcosm or the physical. The spiritual is above and the physical is below. Even etymologically, the GA (*gaja*) stands for the elephant and NA (*nara*) stands for the human being.

The Divine has both personal and impersonal aspects. Symbols of the personal aspect enable one to draw nearer to the inexpressible grandeur of the Divine. Any and every description is a limitation and approximation of That which ultimately cannot be described. This does not make symbols false; they merely provide portions or aspects of That. Bhagavan said, “*Atman* alone is to be realized. Its realization holds all else in its compass. Sakti, Ganapati, etc. are included in it.”<sup>8</sup>

Who is Ganesha? He is the Self; he is the Absolute. There is nothing that is not Ganesha. When there is only One without a second, what is not he? He is not only in temples, in *mūrtis*, or residing in the

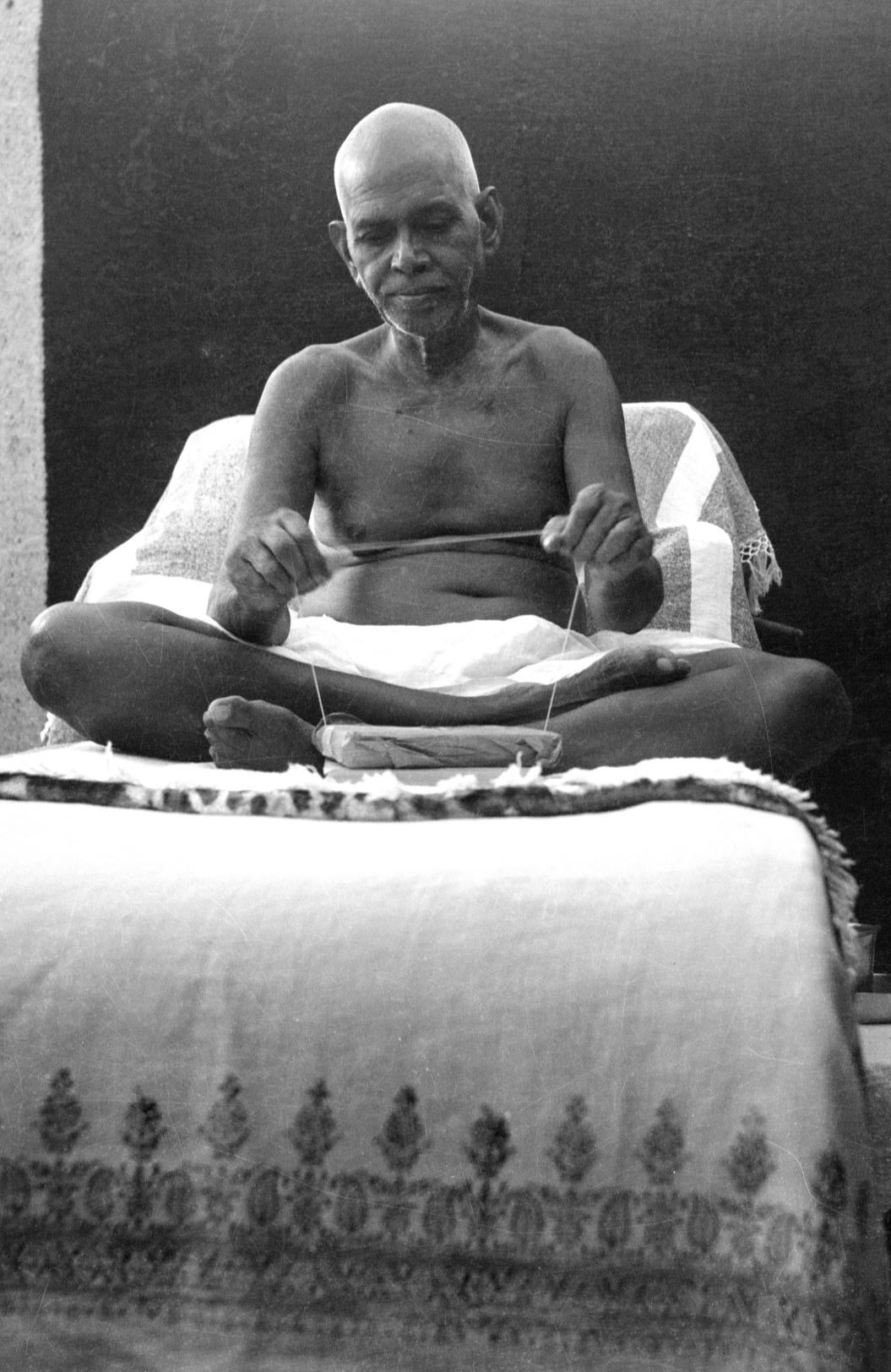
*mūladhāra cakra*. Why look for Ganesha only in the outside world or just in the form of an elephant-headed plump deity? Not only is he the door to the Self, he is the Self itself. See him there and you will see Bhagavan Ramana. ▲

## Sandhya

Marye Tonnaire

Muffled lamps hold vigil  
Like glow-worms by the path,  
And streaks of sunset linger,  
As day fades into dusk;  
The moon, a shining sliver,  
Emerges from a cloud,  
Balancing on the hilltop  
Like a mischievous smile;  
When shadows start to deepen,  
A face seems to appear,  
With markings drawn upon the brow,  
And eyes in downward gaze;  
The crescent moon is tilted  
And hinged on matted hair,  
Here Ganga has been caught and calmed  
To flow down unimpaired;  
When all the thoughts are gathered,  
Like flowers on a thread,  
Then cautiously slip through the crack,  
Into another realm;  
The red Mountain, revealed,  
Rises to majestic height,  
Drawing all around Himself,  
And yet completely still  
In that blazing Presence  
You stand alone in awe,  
As all the clamour of the world,  
Melts away into  
Deep Silence.

<sup>8</sup> Op.cit., Talk§57.



# Practising in the Presence

## Awakening to Nondual Awareness in the Spiritual Presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

KENNETH ROSE

I have long been a devotee of Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi – or simply Bhagavan to those who devote themselves to his teachings and to his ongoing spiritual presence – and, after many years of practice, I see his teaching as the capstone of all of my yoga and meditation practices. This teaching permeates all my thoughts, and I would express it like this: *let the mind become still and awaken to your own innermost truth, which is the nondual consciousness that all of us always are.* Bhagavan himself expressed this teaching as clearly as possible in one of his instructive books:

“Wherever particular objects are known it is the Self which has known itself in the form of those objects. For what is known as

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knowledge or awareness is only the potency of the Self (*ātma śakti*). The Self is the only sentient object. There is nothing apart from the Self”.<sup>1</sup>

For many of us now, long after Bhagavan’s *mahāsamādhi* in 1950, he seems at first to be a guru accessible by us only through his words in books, which are now available everywhere at all times on the Internet. Besides this, and perhaps more powerfully for many of us, is his presence as mediated by the luminous photos and videos that are also easily viewed online. And here we arrive at a truth about Bhagavan that slowly becomes evident to all of those who devote themselves to his written teachings or to his radiant image: *Bhagavan remains present to all who think about him, who call upon him for guidance, and who try to put his teaching into action.*

For some of us, we may first become conscious of the quietly guiding presence of Bhagavan while on pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam and Arunachala. Perhaps we become aware of his subtle presence as we sit in the Old Hall, while circumambulating his *samādhi*, while walking barefoot on the trails of Arunachala, or while walking the Giri Pradakshina route. Even if we have not consciously felt this subtle presence before our first visit to Tiruvannamalai, initiation into Bhagavan’s subtle presence is an almost certain experience when we go on pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam, which stands in the shadow of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai.

On my last visit to the ashram, early in 2007, I had an experience that I recounted in an essay published in *Mountain Path* in 2014.<sup>2</sup> As I sat on the steps leading into the bookstore, I fell into conversation with a devotee visiting from elsewhere in India. During our conversation, I said that, after a few days at the ashram, I had begun to feel a gentle cloud of silence settling over my mind and stilling my thoughts. This made it easier to practice discerning the *ātman*, or Self, that always remains undisturbed behind the web of thoughts, feelings, and desires that we ordinarily take to be ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Instruction*, 2.6, (Visvanathan translation).

<sup>2</sup> ‘At the Gate of Ramana’s Ashram’, *Mountain Path*, Aradhana, July-September 2014, pp. 13-14.

As a longtime practitioner of Bhagavan’s direct path of *ātma-vicāra*, or ‘self-inquiry’, this devotee let me in on the inside information that pilgrims to Arunachala and Sri Ramanasramam naturally enter into *savitarkā-samādhi*, which is lower level of meditative concentration in which the mind is focused and blissful, although it is not completely stilled, as in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. As if to confirm this teaching – and one of the great benefits of dedicating one’s mind to Bhagavan is the stream of guidance that arises within one’s awareness – I read in the issue of *Mountain Path* that arrived in the bookstore a few days later a line that described this priceless sense of stillness and receptivity that I was experiencing at the ashram as entrance into “the stream of low-key, spacious awareness we associate with Bhagavan.”<sup>3</sup>

After leaving Arunachala, I noticed that this newfound awareness of Bhagavan’s spiritual presence remained with me, stronger at times, no doubt, and sometimes forgotten for periods of time. Yet, in the intervening years, I have found that his ongoing presence is always available, no matter where I am, and that it is accessible merely by turning my thoughts to Bhagavan, whether by thinking about him or by reading his teachings and stories about him.

Based on this experience, I can affirm that when devotees begin to associate mentally with Bhagavan by putting his teaching into practice and by thinking about him, they will soon experience his inner presence as a sense of peace. This peacefulness soon becomes a bright knowing that opens an inner door into the nondual insight that there is only one immortal, blissful, and conscious reality – the Self or *Brahman* – and that all of us are that one reality simultaneously and forever. It turns out, then, that we can obtain the grace and guidance of Bhagavan – who is our innermost Self – not only through his writings and on visits to his ashram, but also by thinking about him and by putting his teachings into practice whenever we think about them during the day.

Whether we are part of a group dedicated to practising Bhagavan’s presence or we practise on our own, remote from such a group or centres associated with Sri Ramanasramam, we can always take up –

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Question of Identity’, Editorial, Christopher Quilkey. *Mountain Path*, *Jayanti*, January March 2009. p.7.

or begin again! – the happy yogic activity of getting acquainted with the teachings of Bhagavan and with his ongoing spiritual presence. And, if we do this with regularity, we will find that, over time, we will begin to awaken – or deepen our awakening – to his presence. We will begin to verify in our own experience the truth of Bhagavan’s teaching as he himself expressed it in what I take to be his most compact and sublime summary of his highest verbal teaching:

हृदयकुहरमध्ये केवलं ब्रह्ममात्रं  
ह्यहमहमिति साक्षादात्मरूपेण भाति ।  
हृदि विश मनसा स्वं चिन्वता मज्जता वा  
पवनचलनरोधादात्मनिष्ठो भव त्वम् ॥

hṛdayakuharamadhye kevalam brahmamātram  
hyahamahamiti sākṣādātmarūpeṇa bhāti ।  
hṛdi viśa manasā svaṃ cinvatā majjatā vā  
pavanacalanarodhādātmaniṣṭho bhava tvam । 2 ।

“In the centre of the Heart-Cave there shines alone the one Brahman as the ‘I-I’, the Atman. Reach the Heart by diving deep in quest of the Self, or by controlling the mind with breath, and stay established in the Atman.”<sup>4</sup>

Bhagavan is no teacher of a merely verbal Advaita Vedānta, and the many streams of Hindu spiritual teaching over the millennia converge in this teaching, which is identical with the nondual teachings of Yājñavalkya and Śaṅkarācārya. Bhagavan points out the austere and most direct path of the nondual portions of the Upaniṣads when he reveals Brahman shining in the cave of our heart. For the most mature, most ardent, or most dedicated student, this teaching is all they will need to immediately resume and remain in their never-lost but temporarily obscured identity with the one universal Self. For those of us more prone to forgetting who we are, clouded as we often are by the fog of *māyā*, Bhagavan gives the gentle instruction to enter deeply into the inner cave of *Brahman*. Even if we forget a thousand times a day that we are the Self, we can always resume our

<sup>4</sup> *Reality in Forty Verses: Supplement 8*, K. Swaminathan translation. This verse is also included in *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, 2.2.

primordial identity by consciously remembering that we are the one Self present in all beings. We will then find that it is natural and easy to let the many distractions that call us away from our true identity to subside in the golden radiance of Bhagavan’s pure, deathless spiritual presence. And then, for a minute or an hour, we once again abide as the deathless, fearless, and sorrowless Self.

But if this resumption of conscious awareness of our true identity still seems more like a hope or a promise than present experience, Bhagavan recommends other classical Hindu ways of reaching the immortal awareness in the cave of the Heart. Because most of us do not experience full and final awakening when we first encounter nondual teachings and teachers, the Hindu tradition has worked out over many millennia multiple graded systems of *sādhanas*. In this Bhagavan was true to his religious tradition, since he adapted his teaching to the capacities of his students and hearers in accordance with these traditional practices. Because we are always the Self, which must be accessed directly beyond the pointing capacity of language, silence was Bhagavan’s highest nondual teaching. Yet he also offered more dualistic teachings as a way to move toward the permanent and unchanging recognition of our true nature as *Brahman*, which is the substance of *jñāna*.

Central to Advaita Vedānta is the distinction between *saguṇa Brahman* and *nirguṇa Brahman*. The first view of *Brahman* names the aspect of the divine reality as experienced by beings with bodies and minds, and it is necessarily expressed in dualistic terms. The second view of *Brahman* indicates the divine reality as it is in itself, which defies all attempts at description, while remaining the source of names and forms. Because *Brahman* in itself is nondual, even our subtlest experiences of *Brahman* retain traces of duality. When we attain the ultimate state of *nirguṇa Brahman* – of *Brahman* beyond *Brahman* – all dualistic teachings and experiences will fade away into pure nonduality.

The greatest sage live nondually from that standpoint, and, from that highest perspective, all *sādhanas* are deviations from the *nirguṇa* standpoint (or non-standpoint). But until we can remain in the *nirguṇa* standpoint permanently, we need to cultivate a *sādhana* of some kind – even if it is the subtly dualistic practice of simply remaining as the

Self. Or, if we are unable to maintain that standpoint, and our minds keep re-arising and pulling us back to the world of experience, we can adopt the somewhat more dualistic practice of focusing on Bhagavan's images, words, or spiritual presence until we begin to experience him as our innermost nondual Self. As this practice matures, it becomes the virtually nondual practice of abiding in the radiance of being, which is the doorway into the nondual reality of *nirguṇa Brahman*, or the deathless and utterly transcendent reality that underlies the world of experience, or *saguṇa Brahman*.

But if neither of these practices gives us the full and unvarying conviction that we are always and forever the unborn, undying, and blissful Self, then we can take up the slightly more dualistic practice of *ātma-vicāra*, or the process of interrogating each thought, intention, feeling, and sensation as it arises in our mind to see if it is capable of surviving the acids of dissatisfaction and impermanence. This can be a long-term and laborious process, and we may find ourselves frustrated as we go on, seemingly forever, in this self-questioning process. The demands of the body and the mind, and the duties and attractions of the conventional world are so strong that this simple but demanding practice of self-inquiry may seem puny and pointless against the apparently immovable reality of *samsāra*.

And yet, when our zeal has slackened, it is our deepest Self that calls us, ever and again, to take up once more this practice of self-questioning. And the reward of this ever-renewed practice are those golden moments when we glimpse that there is an immaterial and chartless dimension of reality that lies just beyond the mind that is sturdier and that is more satisfying than fame, wealth, comfort, and pleasure.

These are advanced practices, and not everyone can practise them without preparation, nor will everyone attracted to Bhagavan be attracted in the beginning to these practices. One sign that we are not quite ready to take up these practices is that we find them unclear or remote from our experience, with the result that we soon give up on them or forget to practise them. As a deeper acquaintance with the vast body literature by and about Bhagavan makes clear, Bhagavan was a versatile teacher who effortlessly crafted his teaching to fit the needs of his questioners and disciples. In various places in his writings, he suggested an itinerary of *sādhana*s, or spiritual practices, that we can

follow to bring ourselves gradually to the point where we can resume our natural identity as the unborn and undying Self.

Taking passages in *Spiritual Instruction* (2.2-3) and *Upadesa Saram* (2-20) as my guide, I would structure growth in the spiritual life as a step-by-step process with the following stages: karma yoga as a preparatory practice that purifies an active and outgoing mind by diverting attention away from selfish to universal aims; bhakti yoga as an inducement for the wavering senses and mind to find a singular transcendent focus in devotion to a deity or supreme ideal; *dhyāna-yoga* (or *rāja-yoga*) as a way of stilling the mind and replacing *samsāra* with the divine reality, and *jñāna-yoga* as a way of dissolving the mind in the nondual radiance of *Brahman*. Because the traditions standing behind each of these yogic practices are so diverse in Hinduism, we can, alongside Bhagavan's writings, call upon the vast resources of Hindu spiritual literature and practices to equip ourselves for the supreme spiritual act of entering into and remaining as the nondual *Brahman* in the center of the cave of the Heart.

Some readers might think these *sādhana*s are unnecessary because we already are the Self. In their view, we only need to recognize who we are and give up all spiritual practices as deviations from our nondual nature. Devotion to the presence of a guru whose physical form has passed from the scene but who remains as a living inner presence can seem alien at worst and pointless at best to these spiritual seekers.

There is, as a result, a stream of nondual spirituality current on the global yoga and meditation scene today that rejects the practices of traditional Hinduism, such as yoga, meditation, *pūjā*, and devotion to *devatās*, saints, and gurus as distractions from just being who we really are. For many such aspirants, this rejection of traditional religious and spiritual practices may derive from the long revolt in the modern West against traditional religion. No doubt, this revolt freed the West from exclusivistic religious views and set free the energies of humanism and science, but it also sponsored a relentless secularism that has resulted in the pervasive materialism of the modern West and, now, of our global society.

This contemporary approach to nonduality can trace itself, in part at least, to nondual teachings in the Upaniṣads and other Hindu

scriptures. Yet, what is often forgotten when reading these writings is that their authors were fully realized *siddhas* speaking from the standpoint of direct, full, and unbroken realization of *ātman* and *Brahman*, which they attained after many years – and many lifetimes – of devotion, self-purification, meditation, and the practice of the *sattvic* virtues. It is thus unrealistic and even unhelpful to think that just reading and repeating the nondual formulas taught in these writings qualifies the reader as fully awakened to nonduality. In the rare and real cases where this awakening is immediate upon first contact with nondual teachings, this is the result of background preparation in this and former lives or through the grace of a *siddha*.

I applaud and appreciate anyone who has so awakened, but if we know that – or we have come to see – that we have still some distance to go before the presence in the cave of the Heart is the reality from which we live without a break, then we can take up one or more of the many kinds of spiritual practices available to us. These practices will gradually purify our mind to the point where, for devotees of Bhagavan, it finally dissolves in his spiritual presence. ▲

### At Your Feet

Suresh Kailash

How does it matter,  
If I am awake,  
I dream or sleep,  
starve, fast or feast,  
exult in victory,  
or despair in defeat?

How does it matter, Ramana,  
with you in my heart,  
and my head at your feet!

# Motiveless Action

## A Prerequisite For Spiritual Progress

VISHALAKSHI VISVESVARAYA

The very nature of human beings is to do actions – physically, mentally, and emotionally. All voluntary actions are done with some motive. But, if one has to progress spiritually, one has to make deliberate attempts to ensure that all actions are done without motive. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi says in *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*:

viṣayebhya parāvṛtya vṛttīḥ prayatnataḥ |  
vimarśī kevalam tiṣṭhedacale nirūpādhiḥ || III. 5

“Turning away with effort all the activities from the sensory objects, one should take his stance in absolute deliberation unchanging, (without any motive) whatsoever.”

One should not think that this state can be achieved by doing no action. In fact, this aspect has been clearly dealt with in the *Bhagavad Gītā* where the Lord says:

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niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmanāḥ |  
śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmanāḥ || 3-8

Do thou perform obligatory action; for action is superior to inaction; and even the bare maintenance of the body would not be possible if thou art inactive.

If one has to reach the level of spiritual progress stated above by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, one has to acquire the required mental maturity. One can reach this mental maturity only by ensuring that all activities and actions one does are dharmic based on correct understanding and knowledge of our shastras.

As we know from the *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna was having a conflict whether to fight the battle against Kauravas or not. This was because by fighting the war he would be transgressing the *dharma* of *ahimsā*. Added to this, the fact that the enemies were not some kings or chiefs belonging to adversary countries, but his own cousins, elders, relatives and teachers. It was at this juncture that Lord Krishna gave the advice:

svadharmamapi cāvekṣya na vikampitumarhasi |  
dharmyāddhi yuddhācchreyo'nyatkṣatriyasya na vidyate || 2-31

Looking at thine own *dharma* also, thou oughtest not to waver, for there is nothing higher for a *kṣatriya* than a righteous war.

Thus, though fighting a war involves killing of people, the Lord says, if it is for a just cause and against cruel people it becomes a *dharmic* war. The consequence of such a *dharmic* war for the king or ruler is peace or good and prosperity of the country. Thus, the *dharma* of a *kṣatriya* is to fight war for a just cause. By doing so, Arjuna would have followed '*svadharmā*' i.e. the *dharma* ordained for a *kṣatriya*.

There is *dharma* pertaining to individuals, society and the country. Therefore, in making decision regarding any action, one takes into account the status, circumstances and context to follow one's *dharma*.

If actions are done with desire for fruits of action, what the consequence is is expressed succinctly by Sankara in his commentary:

yadā hī karmaphalaprakṛtaḥ karmāṇi pravartate |  
tadā karmaphalasya eva janmate hetuḥ bhavet ||

Whenever one engages in *karmā* with a desire for the result thereof,

i.e. a motivated action, then it becomes the cause of birth. To avoid this to happen the ideal way to do (actions) *karmās* is to relinquish the desire for fruits of action.

Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to follow his example in doing actions.

na mām karmāṇi limpanti na me karmaphale spṛhā |

Actions do not taint Me, nor have I any thirst for the result of action.

Therefore, for spiritual progress even actions of *svadharmā* ought to be performed with an attitude of detachment to the fruits thereof. One can have an attitude of detachment only if one has control over the senses, mind and intellect. The Lord mentions three enemies which obstruct in the performance of righteous actions. They are *kāma*, *krodha* and *moha* (desire, anger and delusion). Sankara in his commentary expresses this idea thus:

svadharmā pravṛttānāmapi teṣāṁ vāṅgamanāḥ kāyādi tām svadharme |  
pravṛtti phalābhisaṅdhāpūrvikā eva sahakāra ca bhavati ||

Even though engaged in duties ordained for them, the bent of their speech, mind and body happen to be associated with the desire for fruits of action.

The solution for getting over this problem is to do actions without the sense of doership (without motive). By doing so, a person gets freed from bondage. Sri Krishna gives the illustration of how even the most heinous act is freed from blame.

yasya nāhankṛto bhāvo buddhīryasya na lipyate |  
hatvā'pi sa imānllokāṇa hanti na nibadhyate || 18.17

He who is free from the notions of egoism, whose intelligence is not affected (by good or evil) though he kills those people, he kills not, nor is he bound (by the action).

Another important aspect of actions that has to be considered is that the fruits they produce, (results) accumulate to form the destiny of a person. One has no control over one's destiny and one has to live through it helplessly. In the *Bhagavatham* there is the example of king Bharatha who gave up his kingdom, his family and all else to lead an ascetic's life, but this *rājāṛṣi* Bharatha became very attached to a deer and even breathed his last only thinking of the deer. He then had

to take the ‘*janma*’ of a deer to fulfil the destiny. However man can get out of such a quandary by performing actions with an attitude of detachment and motivelessness. That means he has to be indifferent to what the results of his actions will be. Man can develop detachment when he does action without the feeling of doership i.e. *ahambhāva*. This idea is clearly expressed in *Saddarshanam* of Ramana Maharshi.

karomi karmeti naro vijānana  
bādhyo bhavet karma-phalaṁ ca bhoktumra |  
vicāra-dhūtā hṛdi kartutā cet  
karmatrayaṁ naśyati saiva muktiḥ || 40

When he thinks ‘I do work’, a man becomes bound to enjoy the fruits of action also. If the doership is washed away by inquiry, the results of the triad of actions perish. That alone is liberation. But, to give up the fruits of actions one should first give up the very plan that one makes and resolves to do actions with a view to reaping maximum benefit. That is,

yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasaṅkalpavarjitāḥ |  
jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇaṁ tamāhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ || 4.19

Whose undertakings are all devoid of plan and desire for results and whose actions are burnt by the fire of knowledge, him, the sages call wise.

Or attaining liberation, one becomes free from all the three types of karma which go to form destiny.

The three types are: *saṁcita karmā*, *prārabdha karmā* and *āgāmī karmā*.

For one whose undertakings are all devoid of plan and desire for results (at least) ‘*āgāmī karmā phala*’ will not accumulate. It can be mentioned here that a *sannyāsi* as well as a karma yogi relinquish the fruits of action; but there is a difference ; Dr. Radhakrishnan explains this: a *sannyāsi* gives up the fruits of action by not thinking of them. Whereas the karma yogi wills them away (indicating certain effort).

Further actions should be performed with a sense of sacrifice and as an offering to the Lord. Not only that, one should also think of him and do the action in a prayerful attitude. As said in the ensuing verse:

tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca |  
mayyarpita manobuddhir mām evaiṣyasya asaṁsayah || 8.7

Therefore, at all times, constantly remember Me and fight with mind and intellect absorbed in Me, thou shall doubtless come to Me.

In addition to doing right actions with a prayerful attitude one has also to take refuge in the Lord. Then by His grace one can reach the eternal state of bliss. This is stated herein:

sarvakarmāṅyapi sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayah |  
matprasādād avāpnoti śāśvataṁ padamavyayam || 18.56

Even doing all actions always, taking refuge in Me – by My grace he attains the eternal immutable state.

Thus at all times, while doing actions one has to keep in mind the various points which have been considered above to reach the pinnacle of spiritual evolution. ▲

## Who Chooses?

Martin Wolff

Those who exclaim ‘I choose’  
Reveal only their arrogance;

Those who say ‘I do not have choice’  
Deny their vow of conscious participation;  
So, what then?

Admit ‘Grace has chosen me to evolve,  
But sometimes I forget  
And think I am going somewhere.

Admit, ‘Grace flows uninterrupted  
— It has chosen me’.  
But, sometimes I forget  
And think it is I who is going somewhere.



## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# The Journey Homeward

LAKSHMI NANDYALA

Ever since I became aware of the world around, I noticed that there are two basic aspects in a person's life. One is materialistic and the other spiritual. And a typical life meant balancing between the two. Man tries to get a good education, attempts to make a better living, enjoys the delightful events in life and laments over failures. He goes about his business every day and once in a while calls on God. This seems to be an unwritten standard set by the society to be considered as 'normal'. Any deviation from this well-trodden path or any strong inclination towards one particular field lessens that individual's acceptability rate.

Even as a child, though I seemed to enjoy everything that came my way, life and its special attractions failed to genuinely fascinate me. A strange indifference towards life in general inhabited my mind — not that I had any problem. I had a pretty decent childhood and my parents never gave me a reason to feel despondent or unloved. My mother was and is still my best friend. She is a friend, philosopher, guide and a loving and caring mother. I never felt the need to seek friendship outside of my home. My father was my first super-hero.

He still is to me. I saw him as a strong courageous man who was there to protect our family from every possible danger my little mind could think of. And I had so much fun growing up with my younger brother who sometimes acted as an accomplice and at other times turned into an informant when he didn't receive (what he thought) his share of sweetmeats.

Coming back to the story, in my younger years, I somehow felt that the purpose of this existence is to attain God. But owing to a predominant notion of God's so-called abode, I imagined reaching a beautiful heavenly place high above where I (with the same physical frame) would be living blissfully. However, I really did not try or think of ways to accomplish that. I simply believed that it would happen sometime in the future.

Slowly as my awareness of the grim realities of human existence increased, certain thoughts began to shape up. My definition of death was freedom from this awful world. When death embraces man, nothing whatsoever disturbs his peace thereafter. He is relieved of the weighty concerns of life and of the demanding job of maintaining the body that draws his attention every now and then with some ailment. Fear of death was never an issue for me but fear of pain was. As the loss of someone you love is unbearable and the living relatives are still bound to this earth, I felt sorry for them instead. Isn't that so? Well, it is, as far as I was concerned. The very few times I vocalized such thoughts, I came across as a pessimist. So, that put an end to my disclosing such feelings to others.

All the same, the ultimate goal still seemed to be reaching God's abode. Later, movies and stories that I have seen or heard depicted determined seekers performing severe penance not minding heat and cold and as a reward obtaining the vision of God who granted boons. The notion that such kind of penance was the only way to obtain the vision of God dampened my spirits as it was downright impossible for me to leave everything and withdraw to a forest. So the whole idea was dismissed as impractical and unrealistic.

As years rolled by in an exciting world of ups and downs, I became a 'normal' person with occasional symptoms of devotion. The bittersweet experiences of life, the unhappiness that envelops one's mind when reading about atrocious crimes in the news, the

heart-wrenching tales of the victims of a natural catastrophe, and every doleful moment, big or small, now and again prodded the heart to seek something to rid myself of this misery once and for all. I felt that happiness that we feel when things go well in our life isn't complete and true. That's because at that point, we are ignoring the unfortunate events that are occurring around us or in others' lives. A cursory look at today's newspaper is enough to arouse displeasure, vexation and despondency in one's heart. We cannot be happy even for a single moment if we were to think of the millions suffering this very second. Then, what is the solution? When will I be happy? Will I ever be truly happy? What is the way out?

I started reading and listening to several spiritual discourses, like *Bhagavatam* and other *Puranas*. Quintessence of them was that devotion, unswerving faith in the Lord and at times severe austerities help in attaining the highest goal. How am I to have such kind of intense devotion, *Bhakti*, which appeared to be an innate quality of such great devotees? Notwithstanding, this time the fear factor was introduced by those stories. The concept of punishment for wrong doing, more and more rules and regulations even for performing one's daily duties, and the introduction of the negative impact (*pratyavayu*) of a spiritual task left unfinished or improperly done, all these only generated fear in the vulnerable mind.

Earlier, I used to chant *slokas* during my morning worship with complete absorption. However, after I was made aware of the negative effects of mispronunciation or some inadvertent mistake made while worshipping, doubts started creeping in and I thought it better not to chant than get into trouble for a slip-up. As a result, my attention got rooted on the words on the page and on meticulously following the procedure as prescribed rather on the deity. I found myself trapped in the labyrinth of dos and don'ts.

Nevertheless, fortunately, during one such discourse, I heard the speaker mention the name Ramana Maharshi. He briefly spoke about the saintly nature of Bhagavan and the peace that still pervades the ashram surroundings. Sometime later one of our acquaintances brought a DVD from Ramanashram. We then saw a short piece of film of the ashram shot in 1946. It showed Bhagavan affectionately caressing the cows in the cowshed and His routine morning walks.

During this time, something directed me to read about various saints of India. I was truly fascinated by the life and teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Also, the devotion of Tukaram and Mirabai, their absolute surrender and the beautiful tales from the life of Namdev and Jnandev held me spell bound.

As luck would have it, we set out on a pilgrimage in November 2009. I vividly remember my first visit to Ramanashram. After visiting Tirupati, Sri Kalahasthi and Kanchi, we drove to Tiruvannamalai and reached the Ashram one evening. Pleasantly welcomed by a thin drizzle, we alighted from the car while feasting our eyes on the serene surroundings of the ashram with the charming mighty red hill as its backdrop.

I remembered the video clip of Bhagavan, and now the very thought that I was treading on the same ground which was trodden by a holy man was enough to arouse poignant feelings in me. Every inch of it, every nook and corner seemed holy. I suddenly felt excited and there was a sense of familiarity. It might have been the effect of the recollection of the video. Nonetheless, it was profound. It could be compared to an individual who suddenly remembers his previous birth and visits the places associated with his past life. That's the closest analogy I can give to describe how overwhelmed I was with emotion.

We spoke to the ashram officials that evening and as per our prior arrangement, we were given the keys to one of the guest rooms in close vicinity managed by Ramanashram. The guest room was reasonably furnished and had an attached bathroom. The room was immaculately clean and a nice pair of broom and dustpan silently stood at the corner of it. Their presence meant to remind the visitor of his duty at the end of his visit and show his courtesy to the next visitor by keeping the room the way it was handed over to him.

After we unpacked some of our luggage and made ourselves comfortable in the room, we started for Ramanashram for the evening worship. Captivated by the sweet chanting of Tamil verses by some men and women, we sat in the large hall, unaware of time, facing the *adhithanam* of Ramana Maharshi. Only years later did I learn that it was *Aksharamanamalai* that cast the spell on me on that day. As I write this, I feel as if I am transported back to that holy place. Oh, it's such a nice feeling!

Early next morning, my husband and I set out for *giripradakshina*. It was five in the morning when we reached the Arunachaleswara temple which, we were told, marks the beginning of pradakshina or girivalam. At first, devotion reigned supreme. The twilight with moderately cold weather and the pristine glory with which the Shiva *lingams* shone in the temples on the way encouraged us and we marched with devout fervour along the silent roads of Tiruvannamalai.

Unaware of its spiritual significance, ignorant of its numerous stories, we continued our *pradakshinam* silently gazing at the magnificent hill. Nonetheless, the emotion that surfaced the day before and manifested to a heightened degree was still intact within my heart of hearts. Slowly the sun emerged above the eastern horizon and accompanied us. His arrival brought about beautiful changes around. We found women decorating their little front yards, which often extended to the edge of the road, with *kolams* so skilfully drawn. And then there were young boys and girls in their uniforms walking to their schools. We took obvious delight in watching the village life in the morning. Slowly and steadily fatigue started overpowering us, and the buses and lorries that gave us company now amplified the affect. That's when we realised that we were in the heart of the town. The honking of the motor vehicles, the overcrowded streets, the oppressing heat and the physical exhaustion dried even the last ounce of devotion we so laboriously held on to. It took almost 3 hours to complete the circumambulation (about 13 km). Needless to say, ibuprofen was administered as a preventive measure.

Unaccustomed to such long walks, my feet refused to budge for some time. One of them accepted its fate and moved on but the other was stubborn and swelled with pride. As a result, I trudged along like a lame person. However, as soon as we entered the gates of the ashram, we were greeted by the peacocks with their spectacular feathers and the squirrels running up and down the trees. It reminds one of the rishi-muni ashrams of ancient days which were havens of peace with flowering plants, fruit-laden trees, peacocks, deer and other benign creatures. That beautiful sight was so refreshing that it rejuvenated our spirits just as a cool breeze would in the afternoon sun.

We sought an audience with the President of the Ashram, V.S.Ramananji, an elderly gentleman who also happens to be the son

of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's nephew. He charmed us with his sweet smile and his humble and unpretentious manner. When asked about his personal experience with Ramana Maharshi, he recounted an incident from his childhood. When Bhagavan was diagnosed with malignant cancer in His arm, several doctors treated Him to the best of their ability but their efforts were to no avail. Yet, Bhagavan's placid face did not lose its serenity and He remained unfazed by the suffering of the body. This piqued the curiosity of little Ramanan. He approached Bhagavan and asked Him if He felt any pain in the arm. As an answer to this question, Bhagavan said that the pain associated with His arm was akin to the sting of a thousand scorpions all at once.

With so much to absorb and assimilate and awed by the anecdotes, I did not notice how the hours flitted by. Sudden remembrance of our impending return journey brought me to my senses and I rushed to the bookstore. However, I was at a loss to know what to pick from the myriad books systematically shelved. Luckily, someone there understood my plight and recommended a few books.

With a feeling that defied expression, we returned from our first memorable trip, and were occasionally reminded of the untellable splendour of the majestic hill. For reasons known only to Him, the fervour that surged in the heart on the first day of our trip lay dormant for the next couple of years.

On one cold winter morning of January 2012, I found myself engrossed in the book, *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton. I was enchanted by his expressive style and effective language but what delighted me most was the topic he chose as his subject. I particularly liked the account of his meeting with His Holiness Chandrashekhara Paramacharya and the description of how He foresees Brunton's unplanned second visit to Ramanashram. Brunton also explains in detail his mystical experience at the Ashram. This of course was enough to set in motion the next course of events in my life.

I pored over as many books about Ramana Maharshi as I could lay my hands on. I finally found what I was seeking all my life; the key to Self or God-realisation. At long last I was shown the way out. He bestowed His abundant Grace on me. His simple method of self-enquiry when practiced persistently establishes one in the Self, the Supreme Truth, ending all duality and thereby annihilating all misery.

Bhagavan first demolished all my delusions and mistaken theories. Then, after He had cleared the ground, He laid the proper foundation stone. Now everything made sense. He helped me grasp the true meaning of surrender. Later, when I remembered the teachings of various saints, I realised that they all indeed spoke the same language. I was finally able to comprehend the significance of the statement that Sri Ramakrishna was a true *jñāni* and Ramana Bhagavan a great *bhakta*.

Books by Bhagavan's devotees like Kunju Swami, Balarama Reddy, G.V. Subbaramayya, Cohen and others serve as a gateway to bliss. Along with the silent instructions that they have received sitting at Bhagavan's feet, they hand us over the peace and happiness they have experienced in His august presence. The one thing that I enjoyed most when I first embarked on this journey was reading the letters of Suri Nagamma and Devaraja Mudaliar's *Day by Day* at the same time. The time period in Nagamma's book stretches from 1945 to 1950. On the other hand, Mudaliar describes the events and dialogues with the Maharshi that took place in 1945 and 46. Therefore, some of the incidents were described by both the devotees. I relished reading about the same event from two different standpoints and relived the moment. These books transport us back to the Old Hall and give us an opportunity to bask in the warmth of Bhagavan's presence.

As a result, Bhagavan's devotees became a part of my family. My next trip to the Ashram was like a visit to meet my own kith and kin. The pictures of Bhagavan and His devotees, taken at various times, hanging on the walls of the Ashram Dining Hall come alive upon my arrival and I once again hear them conversing with Bhagavan. In the kitchen, my eyes searched for Shantammal, Sampurnammal and Natesa Iyer. The sacred Old Hall, what a beautiful place to be in! It's the place where the Absolute Truth, the Lord of the Universe, out of compassion, appeared in a human form, sat and talked with His devotees and so graciously bestowed His abundant Grace on everyone.

I walked all around the Ashram and paid my respects at the samadhi of His devotees. Muruganar, the great Tamil scholar and one of the true devotees of Bhagavan whose surrender was complete and unconditional, reminded me of an incident connected with Bhagavan. Many are familiar with this anecdote. It was the Saraswati Puja day

when devotees worshipped some books placing flowers on them. The sight of the garlanded books kept next to Bhagavan's seat amused Muruganar who entered the Old Hall later. Upon enquiry, he said, "Bhagavan! To have offered puja to the sacred books in your presence amuses me. Imagine that a bunch of the best variety of sugarcane was squeezed; crystal sugar of the purest quality made out of the juice and a human form was made with it. Now, picture the superb human form made of this best sugar on one hand and the sugarcane-waste on the other! Bhagavan, you are the essence of Truth. These books, however sacred they may be, are just like the sugarcane-waste. They have offered puja to the juiceless canes while the most beautiful sugar-form, YOU, are seated just here!" Saying this, Muruganar laughed. Bhagavan too had a hearty laugh.<sup>1</sup>

There are so many accounts associated with these devotees who have moved with the Lord. How fortunate were they to be in His divine presence! How wonderful was their devotion! They never cease to amaze me.

Remembering the words of Bhagavan, who often stated that many Siddhas (perfected beings) live on this sacred hill, we ascended it with much reverence, drinking in the beauty of the Mother Nature on our way to Skandashram and Virupaksha cave. Though it was rewarding, the difficulty of ascension was hard to overcome. Gasping for breath, coupled with physical weariness we trudged along with solemn persistence. That's when it struck me how several elderly women like Mudaliar Patti and Echammal, during Bhagavan's stay at Skandashram and Virupaksha cave, climbed all the way up to this place unmindful of the scorching heat, offered the cooked food and ate only after they returned home. Some even visited him twice during the day. That shows their level of devotion and their unconditional surrender at His feet.

Later, we visited Guhai Namashivaya, Mango tree cave and also the places associated with Bhagavan in His early years like Guru Moortam, Pavala Kunru and Patala lingam. The significance of these places is known to many and hence it is needless to mention why I was so overwhelmed at the sight of Patala lingam.

<sup>1</sup> *Arunachala Ramana, Ocean of Grace, Vol II, p.104.*

What can I say about His Grace! With motherly love He held my hand and showed the way on this uncharted land. With visions and dreams He strengthened my faith and gave assurance. I cannot but feel His presence every moment.

We made the *giripradikshna* and this time it was completely a different experience. Ah! What is it that we are seeing here? They say it's Shiva Himself. It's the home of the Siddhas. Many saints and sages have been drawn to this. Some lived on this hill. What to speak of its glory and the efficacy of going round it. In *Arunachala Mahatmyam*, Shiva says to Brahma and Vishnu, "Let this sacred Arunachala which has been blessed by me for your sake become a place where men can attain liberation. I ordain that those who live within a distance of three *yojanas* (about thirty miles) of this place shall become one with me even without initiation or spiritual practices. Those lowly creatures which move about and those that are stationary will also get liberated by simply living here. Those who see me or even remember me irrespective of where they may live, will realize the essence of Vedanta, otherwise very difficult to acquire. My effulgent form will shine here forever as eternal immutable Arunachala."<sup>2</sup> This magnificent Arunachala hill stands as a fountainhead of spirituality. But at times it veils the human mind and reveals not its true identity just as  $E=mc^2$  appears simply as a random arrangement of alphanumeric characters to the uninformed. Only when the seeker is sincere and earnest, will It reveal Itself.

We have been visiting Ramanashram regularly ever since. My mother accompanied us on one of our trips. Like one who had close personal acquaintance with the devotees of Bhagavan, I introduced them by showing her their pictures, their resting places and recounted anecdotes associated with each of them. The whole episode would have amused the ashramites if they had watched me go about in this fashion like a super enthusiastic school girl.

Bhagavan has been guiding me at every step and believe me this is a true statement. Even the times when I was not aware of this human form of His, He, call Him Rama, Shiva, Sai Baba or whatever, was at the helm of my life-ship and by looking at how things turned out,

<sup>2</sup> *The Glory of Arunachala, p.128.*

He only made His presence conspicuous enough for me to realize that. And I know He will continue to do so until I open the door to liberation, the key to which He so generously placed in the palm of my hand.

With all that said, the soul-filling sight of Arunachala, the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the Ashram, laden with great spiritual energy, verily have a stirring effect on the aspirant. In the book, *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, Major Chadwick expresses his view about the power that continues to emanate from the *adhithanam* of Ramana Maharshi.<sup>3</sup> A simple circumambulation done with complete devotion raises one to great spiritual heights. ▲

<sup>3</sup> *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, p.105.

## Roses

Upahar

So quiet now, as if some magic hand  
is weaving spells of silence on all things;  
thoughts glow and fade, the wild birds in flight  
leave no reflection in the soul's still lake.

At dusk, I light a flame and place before You  
these stray white roses gathered from the wind,  
drink slowly of this generous wine, aloneness,  
utter a prayer, and break the bread of longing.

Before this world was ever dreamt, I see You,  
know You, am You, immeasurable, entire,  
and seal with You, in every passing heartbeat,  
deeper than time, this covenant of love.

# Verse Twenty Five of Ulladu Narpadu

## A Word for Word Explanation of the Original Tamil Verse

ROBERT BUTLER

Whilst a lack of knowledge of the Tamil language is no barrier to understanding the works of Bhagavan, the simple and direct style of which lends itself easily to translation into other languages, yet there is much to be said for reading at least some of his writings in the original, to discover in some measure how significantly the language, style and composition of the original adds to the power and impact of the message being conveyed. To illustrate this point we will take a detailed look at verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, analysing it first word by word, before proceeding to see how the overall structure of the verse form contributes to its effect. Some hints on pronunciation will be given, but the reader is advised to listen to a recording of the verse as an accompaniment to this study. Here is the text and a translation of the verse:

uruparri uṇḍām uruparri niṛkum  
uruparri uṇḍumiga oṅgum – uruviṭ(u)  
uruparrum tēḍiṇāl oṭṭam piḍikkum  
uruvarra pēyakantai oṛ

Grasping a form it arises. Grasping a form it endures.  
 Grasping and consuming forms, it waxes ever greater.  
 Letting go of one form, it will grasp another.  
 If you seek it out, it will take flight.  
 Know that it is the ghostlike ego, devoid of any form,

As we will discover, verse 25 consists of a series of five simple statements; four to describe the nature and functioning of the ego and a fifth to indicate the means by which we may be rid of it. The subject of all five is given, to great dramatic effect, in the last line after all five statements have been made. However, for the purposes of the grammatical explanation, we will deal with it first. That subject, making up the penultimate metrical foot of the verse, is:

**pēy akantai** – *the ghostlike ego*. [**pay agantay** – ‘pay’ rhymes with ‘day’ and ‘tay’ rhymes with ‘my’].

Dictionaries give the meanings of **pēy** as *devil, goblin, fiend* but we know that Bhagavan intends here to convey the sense of *ghost*, an entity which seems to appear briefly in consciousness but when sought, is found not to exist. The word **pēy** is placed directly before **akantai** to qualify it in an adjectival sense, as indeed we do in English. Compare ‘ghost ship’, for example.

**akantai** – *the ego* is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word **aḥamtā**, literally ‘I-ness’; its usual meanings in Tamil are *pride, arrogance, self-conceit*, but it is used here by Bhagavan in the sense of ego. There is no word for ‘the’ as the sense of the definite and indefinite articles ‘the, a’ etc. is inherent in Tamil nouns. As Bhagavan points out in the previous verse 24, the ego is synonymous with the mind, being nothing other than the ‘I’ in a state of fixation upon an object.

The ghostly *or* ghostlike ego...

**uru arra** – *which is without form*. [pronounced **ooroo atrra. oo** is like the first **u** in **guru**; **rr** represents a **t** sound followed by a quite strongly trilled **r** sound, as a Scot will pronounce ‘Patrick’].

This is an adjectival or relative clause, further describing this ghostly ego.

**uru**, Sanskrit **rūpa**, means *form*. Anything that is perceived objectively through the mind and senses is meant. Thus the word

‘form’ signifies the entire phenomenal world that is perceived by the ego-mind. It is the direct object of the following participle:

**arra** means *which is without, which is devoid of*. **arra** is the relative or adjectival participle of the verb **aru** – *to be detached, parted, separated*, in this case, *to be devoid of*. Tamil does not possess the relative pronouns *who, which* etc. Instead it uses a special form of participle, called the adjectival participle, which is placed before the noun it qualifies along with its own dependent elements. It is as if we were to say in English ‘the *which-is-without-form* ghostly ego.’

which is without form...

Now we return to the start of the verse to discover what exactly it is that this ghostlike ego does, bearing in mind that in terms of the structure of the verse it will remain a mysterious ‘it’ until its identity is finally revealed at the end of the verse:

**uṇḍām** – *comes into existence, rises into being*. [The symbols **ṇ** and **ḍ** represent retroflex consonants, present in most Indian languages. Say the words *pen* and *bed* and notice how the tongue touches the base of the upper teeth to make the **n** and **d** sounds. Now curl the tongue back so that its tip touches the roof of the mouth towards the centre and repeat those words. The sounds you will make will be those of the retroflex **ṇ** and **ḍ**].

**uṇḍām** – *comes into existence* ( a contraction of **uṇḍākum**) is the neuter third person singular of the verb **uṇḍā** which, as well as those given, has such meanings as *to form, be formed, be conceived, thrive, grow, be productive*. The tense is non-past, meaning that it can refer to either the present or the future. All nouns in Tamil, except those denoting men, women, gods and goddesses, belong to the neuter, irrational, gender. Hence the word **akantai** is followed by a verb with the neuter ending –**um**.

comes into existence...

**uru parri** – [*by*] *grasping a form*. [pronounced **ooroo pattri**].

**parri** – [*by*] *grasping* is a participle of the verb **parru** – *to grasp, equivalent in meaning to the English participial forms grasping or having grasped*. Here the former sense is taken, since Bhagavan teaches that ‘the world and the mind arise and subside together’ (cf. *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 7.). This adverbial participle, as it is called,

often enters into an implicitly causal relationship with the main verb it qualifies and could here therefore justifiably be translated as *by grasping...*

by grasping a form.

We now have the first part of our translation, containing the subject and the first statement:

uruvarra pēy akantai uru parri uṇḍām.

The ghost ego, which has no form, comes into existence by grasping a form.

The second statement is:

**uru parri nirkum** – *grasping a form [it] endures*. [The **r** sound of **nirkum** is sharply clipped, sounding almost like a **t**, as **nitkum**].

**uru parri** – [*by*] *grasping a form* is repeated exactly as in the first statement.

**nirkum** – [*it*] *endures* is again the neuter third person singular, this time of the verb **nil** – *to stand, endure, remain*. This time the non-past ending is **kum**, which causes the preceding **l** sound to change to **r**. Here Bhagavan is emphasising the idea that the one and only means for the ego or mind to persist and endure is by virtue of its grasping a form, remaining in conjunction with a form. Again there is no need for the pronoun ‘it’ to be explicitly expressed.

uru parri nirkum.

Grasping a form, it endures.

The third statement is:

**uru parri uṇḍu miga ḍṅum** – *grasping forms [and] consuming [them], [it] waxes greater*. [**ḍṅum** is pronounced **wṅum**. Initial **o** in Tamil, whether long or short, is sometimes preceded in pronunciation by a **w** sound, called a glide. The actual sound is actually somewhere between **v** and **w**. **ṅ** is the sound **ng** in the English word **sing**].

Here we have **uru parri** occurring for a third time, thus underlining the key theme that this whole process of the mind’s arising and operation depends entirely upon the ego grasping forms. This is the strategy whereby it *endures, persists, perpetuates itself*. Here we change the translation of **uru** to *forms* in the plural, because the process Bhagavan now begins to elaborate is one of the ego-mind grasping



D. Thiyagarajan

Rukmani (Rukku), Sri Arunachaleswara Temple Elephant

a series of forms, one after the other to prolong and strengthen its existence. Neuter nouns employed without a plural ending can be either singular or plural, according to the context.

**uṇḍu** – *consuming* is the adverbial participle of the verb **uṇ** – *to eat, drink, consume*. The verb is particularly appropriate here as it also carries the meanings of *experience, suffer, enjoy, experience the fruits of one's actions*. The inevitable consequence of the ego's insatiable gorging of itself on the objects of experience is that it grows ever bigger and stronger.

**miga oṅgum** – [*it*] *waxes greater* is the neuter third person singular, with the non-past ending – **um**, from the verb **oṅgu**, a very expressive verb, conveying the sense of something *shooting up with great energy, rising high like a flame, soaring* etc. **miga** is the infinitive of the verb **migu** – *to exceed, surpass, become superior* and is used here in the adverbial sense of very much, abundantly, greatly. Tamil has no discrete comparative form but the context here implies a comparative sense and we translate *waxes [ever] greater*. Here Bhagavan points out another feature of the ego and that is its insatiable hunger and the ever-present danger that if we allow it to gorge itself in this way it will grow ever stronger.

uru parri uṇṭu miga oṅgum.

Thus grasping and consuming forms, it waxes ever greater.

The fourth statement is:

**uru viṭṭu uru parrum** – *letting go of [one] form [it] will grasp [another] form*. [**ṭ** is another retroflex consonant like **ṇ** and **ḍ**. For its pronunciation see the note on **uṇḍām** above. Unlike in English, the doubling of the consonant in **viṭṭu** is reflected in pronunciation: **viṭ-ṭu** as for example someone with an Indian accent might say in English flat **ṭop**].

**viṭṭu** – *letting go of* is the adverbial participle of the verb **viḍu** – **to leave, abandon, release**. The ego-mind will only release the form it is grasping in order to latch onto another one, since that is what its existence depends upon. The image conjured up here might suggest the manner in which a monkey swings through the trees, letting go of one branch even as it grasps the next, in order to avoid plummeting to the ground. But the ego is not only extremely agile, it is a master

of deception, presenting itself in whatever guise will best serve the interests of its own survival. Even when we get weary of the ego's incessant vagaries and decide we must be rid of it, it will quite happily oblige and present us with a series of thoughts relating to strategies for its own destruction and so lead us ever onward through its Daedalian maze. It will always come up with a strategy for grasping another form.

The verb **parru** – *to grasp* has occurred three times previously in its participial form **parri** – *grasping*. Now it appears in the neuter third person singular form **parrum** – [*it*] *grasps, will grasp*. Again the tense is non-past with the ending –**um**.

uru viṭṭu uru parrum.

Letting go of [one] form, it will grasp [another] form.

There is only one valid strategy to bring about its destruction and that is what Bhagavan presents to us in the fifth proposition:

**tēḍināl oṭṭam piḍikkum** – *if [one] seeks it out, [it] will take flight*. [**tēḍināl** is pronounced **thayḍinaal**. **ē** sounds like the **ay** in **pay**, but without the **y** element. (**w**)**oṭṭam** is spoken with the **w** glide, as **wōṅgum**].

**tēḍināl** *if [one] seeks [it] out* is a conditional form of the verb **tēḍu** – *to seek, search for, enquire after*. It consists of the ending **āl** suffixed to the past stem of the verb: root **tēḍ(u)** + past marker **in**. Where no pronoun is present we translate according to the context, which is general and unspecific. We can therefore say for example *one* or *you* or employ a passive construction, e.g. *if it is sought*.

**oṭṭam piḍikkum** – [*it*] *will take flight*. **oṭṭam** – *flight* is a noun from the verb **oṭu** – *to run, run away, flee*. **piḍikkum** – [*it*] *will take* is once more the neuter third person singular of the non-past tense, from the verb **piḍi** – *to take, grasp, seize*. Thus the construction exactly mirrors the English expression *to take flight*. Here Bhagavan presents us with the rather comical image of the ego, which until now has been lording it over us, stuffing itself with mental and sensory impressions and growing fat at our expense, suddenly finding our attention turned upon itself. Realising that the game is up, it scampers away in confusion. Paradoxically it is the ego itself that must instigate the search for itself and thereby bring about its own demise. 'It is through the enquiry *Who am I?* that the mind will subside. The thought 'Who

am I?’ will destroy all other thoughts and then, like the stick used to stir the funeral pyre, will itself be destroyed,’ Bhagavan tells us in the essay, ‘Who am I?’. In *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan now proceeds to outline in the following verses 26-29 the manner in which the enquiry is to be conducted.

[**uru ar̥ra pēyakantai**] **ōr** – *understand*, [that it is the ghostly ego]. [**ōr** sounds like the **or** sound in **ōring**.]

**ōr** is an imperative, identical in form to the verb from which it is derived **ōr** – *to understand, consider, examine, investigate*. A feature of the *veṅḅa* verse form is that the final line has only three feet, of which the final one consists of only one metrical unit, instead of two or three like all the other feet. Being thus short at the very end it is often used to some dramatic effect by the author. Here Bhagavan exhorts the reader to ponder deeply on what has gone before. The dramatic effect is enhanced by the fact that the other two feet of the line contain the name and description of what has been the unspoken subject of the verse throughout **uru ar̥ra pēyakantai** – *the ghostlike ego, which is without form*. It is almost as if Bhagavan is saying, ‘See, this is what I’m talking about, the formless ghostlike ego! Examine it well!’

Finally we will examine the structure of the verse itself to see how, as suggested earlier, that structure may enhance its impact. Just as a lump of unwrought gold will not have the impact of the same piece of gold when shaped into a finely moulded gold ornament, a plain prose rendering cannot match the impact of a highly polished verse form. The verse form here bears the imposing title of *iru kuṛaḷ nēricai veṅḅā*. It is basically two *kuṛaḷ veṅḅās* (the verse form used by Tiruvalluvar in the *Tiru-k-kuṛaḷ*), stitched together with an extra foot, called a *taṇi col*, appended with a dash at the end of the second line, in this case – **uruvit̥ṭ(u)**.

If this foot is removed, the first two lines should scan perfectly as a *kuṛaḷ veṅḅā* and be complete as to their meaning, which is the case here, except of course that we do not discover the subject of the three statements contained in the first *kuṛaḷ veṅḅā* till near the end of the verse. Thus the verse is neatly divided into two sections, the first explaining how a certain entity arises, persists and thrives and the second, how it behaves, how it may be got rid of and what its name and attributes are.

In a *nēricai veṅḅā*, the *taṇi col* must have the same rhyme or assonance as the first two lines (or all four if the verse is based on a single rhyme, as here.) This assonance is on the word **uru** – *form*, which is consequently repeated at the four key points in the first three lines. It is of course repeated for a fifth time in the fourth line but with one key difference, which gives the verse its impact and impresses it upon the memory.

The difference is that in each of the first four instances the entity being spoken of (whatever it may be) is described as if it has a very real existence, grasping forms and so on, but in the fifth instance it is revealed to be **uruvār̥ra pēy akantai** – *the formless ghost ego*. At this point the whole edifice constructed over the first three lines collapses like a house of cards, since something which has no form effectively has no real existence nor do the forms that it purports to grasp. When we examine the ego, all its activities are revealed as an illusion based upon our inattention in failing to question it, to enquire into its nature and source. The world and the mind arise together and are the two sides of the same coin, sharing the illusory nature of their co-dependent arising. Neither has any real existence in itself, arising and subsiding within the Self like waves on an ocean.

There are other features too, such as alliteration and the distribution of long and short metrical feet, along with the long and short syllabic units which compose them, all of which together impart to each verse its own individual jewel-like lustre. Rather than explain these euphonic elements in detail, we invite the reader to read and listen to the verse a number of times, observing how the message of the verse is enhanced by the patterns of sound and the distribution of long and short vowels. All the verses of *Ulladu Narpadu* are on the same theme but each is also perfectly self-contained in presenting a peculiarly individual facet of that theme. The verses are thus perfectly designed to help us focus our awareness as we engage in the project of calm reflection and enquiry that Bhagavan prescribes for us. ▲



## BOOK EXCERPT

# Death Must Die

## Atmananda's Encounter with Bhagavan in May of 1942

RAM ALEXANDER

*Death Must Die: Based on the Diaries of Atmananda (A Western Woman's Life-long Quest in India with Shree Anandamayee Ma) by Ram Alexander. Indica Books, 2006. pp.570, Rs695 (HB) Rs550 (PB) ISBN: 8186569324. In a few months a new edition will be available at Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Archive. Email: [matrilaarchive@gmail.com](mailto:matrilaarchive@gmail.com) Website: [www.smaa.org](http://www.smaa.org)*

Swami Atmananda, also known as Blanca Schlam, was one of the principal devotees of Shree Anandamayee Ma. She was responsible for most of the English translations as well as publications of Ma's words until her death in 1985. She was born in Vienna in 1904 and became an ardent Theosophist as a young girl, attending the legendary Theosophical convention in Madras in 1925. Upon her return she became a prominent member of the substantial Theosophical community in Huizen, Holland and an intense follower of J. Krishnamurti. In 1935 she returned to India at Krishnamurti's

Ram Alexander lived in India with Shree Anandamayee Ma for 10 years, much of that time as a monastic member of her ashram in Kankhal (Hardwar). He currently divides his time between his private retreat near Assisi, Italy and India, where he is closely connected with the Shree Ma Anandamayee International Center .

invitation to teach at his newly formed Rajghat school in Benares. Her entire life was a passionate spiritual quest as is recounted in the book *Death Must Die* which is closely based on her diaries, spanning the period from 1925 -1963. Although the bulk of the book deals with her all-consuming guru/disciple relationship with Anandamayee Ma, it also relates her inspiring spiritual encounters with other great sages before coming to Ma's feet in 1945. Most important for her of these meetings with great spiritual beings before taking refuge with Ma was that with Sri Ramana in the summer of 1942 (excerpts of which are reproduced here for this article, taken from chapter II of *Death Must Die*). She tells of her overwhelming *darshan* of Bhagavan (was there any other kind!) and also records her original dialogues with him as well as giving a candid vignette of her impressions of the ashram. Atmananda was a close lifelong friend of several intimate devotees of Bhagavan, including S.S. Cohen, Ethel Merston, and the remarkable French woman, Sujata Sen.

After coming under Bhagavan's divine influence it was Atmananda's great desire to move from Benares to Tiruvannamalai in order to be close to him, but wartime restrictions made this impossible. She had every intention of doing so as soon as the war was over, but her spiritual destiny, as she came to realise, lay elsewhere. Later on in her diaries she mentions how crucial the meeting with and help she received from Ramana were, and how it served as a life-saving bridge between her obsessive attachment to Krishnamurti (which seemed to be for her somehow a great spiritual impediment) and her ultimate surrender to Ma as Guru.

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“When we next meet up with Blanca, almost thirteen years have gone by. She is now a mature woman of thirty-seven and has been living and teaching for the last seven years at Krishnamurti's school on the outskirts of Benares, at Rajghat, situated in a beautiful pastoral spot on the Ganges. The school, which was influenced by Maria Montessori (who also came to India in connection with Theosophy), was originally intended to be a sort of experimental community where students and teachers lived together according to Krishnamurti's philosophy. Blanca had also established herself as a successful classical pianist, frequently performing on All India Radio which was to offer her the job of director of European Music, a considerable position at that time.

In early 1930 she had returned to Vienna from Huizen, Krishnamurti having shaken to the roots her faith in Theosophy and its Masters. Her once wealthy father had been ruined in the great depression of 1929, like so many others, and in general the city was on the verge of anarchy. It must have been hard for her to find work as a piano teacher and performer and the next five years would be a difficult and depressing time for Blanca. Nazism and anti-Semitism were on the rise, and she no doubt jumped at the chance offered her in 1935 to return to India as a teacher at the recently opened Rajghat school. But it was a very sad farewell that she bid her father, grandmother, relatives and friends, most of whom would be betrayed into Hitler's gas chambers. But, of course, such a thing was utterly inconceivable when she left.

Through following Krishnamurti, Blanca was wrenched from the religious structure and spiritual community of Theosophy (although as the Theosophical avatar Krishnamurti could never really escape the continued adulation of many in that movement). But 'J.K.' (as she generally refers to him from here on) had shown her clearly that this was at best a comforting illusion. She found his ideas irresistible and inspiring, and she heroically tried to give her life to his teachings just as she had to Theosophy. But ultimately, although she was extremely devoted to him, she found Krishnamurti's way impossible to follow.

As she acquired a deeper understanding of the ancient culture of her adopted homeland, she could not help but note the apparent hypocrisy of his scorn of the great Indian spiritual tradition of which he himself was essentially a product (but about which he professed to know practically nothing), and this was particularly upsetting to Blanca later on when she felt that it was his arrogance in this regard that blinded him to the profundity of the great Hindu masters with whom she was to have close contact.

Thus, in 1942, she made a daring break with the highly westernised, insulated world of Theosophy and Krishnamurti, and sought guidance from the great South Indian Sage, Ramana Maharshi, at his ashram on the slopes of Arunachala, the sacred mountain of Shiva, about 160 kilometres south east of Madras. This was a leap into the unknown — the real India!

Although, like Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi maintained that the ultimate Reality could only be known when the mind was utterly still and one's innermost being stood revealed, he had none of the cynical rejection of devotional and yogic approaches to meditation which characterised Krishnamurti and which Blanca found disturbing. In this he was solidly within the mainstream of modern Hinduism, particularly the ancient tradition of *jñāna* (wisdom), of which he was such a shining exemplar.

### **Ramanashram, Tiruvannamalai, 17th May, 1942**

I left Benares on the 10th May. As the train approached Tiruvannamalai, I suddenly felt blissfully happy, thinking: "Now all struggle is over, there will be only peace. The prodigal son has returned to his father's house." After some time this passed.

Upon arriving, my first reaction was to run away. The ashramites and the prostrations and adoration of the Guru seem all mad to me.

I wrote a letter to Ramana Maharshi asking him to straighten the twists in me. In his presence there is a deep peace, the same that I have felt ever since I decided to come here. But I am still saturated with Theosophy and J.K. and that conditions my attitude. Whatever happens I am influenced by what J.K. says. I have no freedom – that is my standard. I criticise others, considering myself far above them. I am terribly important. Isn't that part of the twist?

One thing seems sure, one can't get things suddenly or quickly, but only through patience, through experimenting and daring to risk one's happiness. Nobody can help one to attain Realisation otherwise.

### **26th May, 1942**

Yesterday afternoon while sitting in the hall, the question of sex arose in my mind totally uninvited. At first this disturbed me but then I felt like meditating to get to the root of it and shut my eyes. It suddenly came to me to direct the energy from the sacrum up the spinal cord and let it stream out through the head in adoration. I did this and it relieved the strain at once. I went on doing it at intervals and before going to sleep.

At about 12.30 a.m. I woke up and had a strange experience, which I cannot put into words. It was not imagination and seemed beyond



the mind altogether, but I was wide awake. I realised a fiery ‘being’ of terrific power without form of any kind and I understood what it is that one worships and why people prostrate in front of the Maharshi. It has nothing to do with him as I see him daily, but it seemed to be simultaneously him, God and also myself. What I usually call myself was ridiculous at that moment, so petty and insignificant – as was also the body of the Maharshi. I could not imagine that I would ever be the same hereafter. This state was very real. I was wide awake for hours and it persisted for some time. The song: “Holy Lord, God Almighty... Casting down their golden crowns” – but I can’t remember the whole anymore – came into my mind and I was consumed in adoration. I felt like writing down what I had perceived, or like reading Tolstoy’s Gospel [Like many of her generation Tolstoy’s more spiritual writings were a great inspiration for her from early adolescence on]. I felt that now I shall understand. But I was too lazy. In the morning I could not recall or reproduce the experience. I only remembered what I had thought about it.

Later however I thought: “What is the value of such an experience if it does not carry over into my relationship with other people?” I am used to judging everything by that. This experience seems to have nothing to do with my ordinary self. How strange.

### 30th May, 1942

Last night I walked round the hill of Arunachala in the full moon with a sadhu, Premanand Saraswati, who I discovered had been an active Theosophist for 14 years. The hill has such a powerful magical presence. I’m told it has been worshipped as an emanation of the God Shiva for thousands of years. The traditional form of receiving its blessing is to walk around it, which took us nearly four hours. What a wonderful experience! The day before this I had the darshan of a sadhu living near Annamalai Tank, where Parvati [Shiva’s consort] is supposed to have been immersed in penance for 1000 years.

It seems to me that I must put myself wholeheartedly into this atmosphere while I am here. So far I have mostly resisted and compared. I am all the time frightened to go away from J.K. and get caught here. But it is so silly. Whenever I read only a little of his talks I get upset.

### 3rd June, 1942

Today I asked Sri Ramana:

“In one of the books of your dialogues you say that such thoughts as: ‘Is this a good thing to do or is that’, should not be allowed. How can one live and decide without such considerations?”

He replied: “If you surrender to the Supreme Will, there will be no question of decision or choice.”

Question: But I don’t know the Supreme Will. I do not know to whom to surrender. How do I know the Supreme? I may deceive myself.

Answer: It is the mind that deceives itself. At least you must admit that you exist. Either you accept the Supreme or at least you inquire as to the true nature of your Self. Who are you? Knowing or not knowing belongs to the mind and therefore all your so-called ‘knowledge’ is really ignorance. You identify yourself with the mind and that is the cause of the confusion. Enquire more deeply into the true nature of your individuality (i.e. Who is it that possesses a mind?). If you perceive that in fact, the mind does not exist at all, then it will vanish along with the confusion, and what truly is will stand revealed. When you look at your reflection in the water and believe it to be an accurate representation of yourself, then you are troubled when the movement of the water disturbs the reflection. But when you realise that this has no reality to it, then your worries cease. You cannot get rid of your shadow, but you need not believe that it is who you really are.

Question: I feel as if I were two and not one.

Answer: No, there is only the Self, there cannot be two. But if you focus only on the form of the bangle, you may forget that it is made of gold. Yet the form of the bangle is dependent on the gold. It cannot exist without it and ceases to exist when the gold is melted down; but the gold itself remains constant. By deluding yourself into identifying solely with the mind, you deny your true Self. This is worse than suicide, because there you only kill the body; but here you are murdering the Self. Seek the Self and the ego will vanish.

By solving one mind-created problem you only create new ones.

When you cut off one leaf, four new ones sprout out. Only by killing the root of the tree, can you prevent the leaves from growing.

Later:

There is nothing for me but Krishnaji. He is my prison. Not understanding him and having thrown away everything else, I have made him into my God and my chains.

Bhagavan helps me to understand J.K. but his way cannot satisfy me. Shall I ignore my dilemma by simply looking the other way? No, face the devil and he cannot bear your gaze. For me there is only one thing: love – and till it comes? Perhaps gazing at the Self.

### **6th June, 1942**

Faith is not beyond reason. If I reason it out, the only thing I know for sure is that ‘I’ am alive, I exist, and this ‘I’ is something that is ultimately beyond the limitations of the body, mind, time and space. That is faith. If I am truly alive, then everything else must be also. We forget this all the time. One must remind oneself of it constantly. That is surrender. Let the mind dwell on this fact and it will get enlightened and lose its pride.

My life is only love. But romantic entanglements, no matter how well intentioned, invariably degenerate into self-love – identification with body and mind. Forgetting that ‘I’ am truly alive, and being centred in the mind and body only, keeps me in a state of separation and ignorance. The moment I realise the cause of the confusion and drop what prevents me from truly loving, i.e. this false identification, then the mind created separation will go and with it the problem.

This is what I have to thrash out here through and through and then I shall know how to live. This was the purpose of my journey to Arunachala.

### **9th June, 1942**

My mistake was that I wanted to understand J.K.’s teaching, rather than J.K., and was trying to do this with my mind. This is exactly the wrong way round. On top of that, I identify myself with the mind. I love myself, i.e. the mind, and therefore get more and more imprisoned in mental constructs and become self-centered, so that I can’t really

love others. By living in His presence continually, the mind is bound to become clarified.

If one lives completely in the present, one cannot hold any theories, opinions. So you can only live in the present where all these concepts which constitute the mind are destroyed.

### **10th June, 1942**

The mind itself is not the illusion, but rather the mind that sees itself as separate. Culture is being sensitive to the awareness of who one is and who others are.

This evening Mrs. Sujata Sen took Miss M. and me to see ‘Shiva-Shiva’ Sadhu. He lives in the woods near Durga Seva Ashram in a tiny house of stone near a pond. He has not spoken a word for twelve years. He looks like God. What eyes, what a smile, what a face! Body tall and thin. I went into ecstasy straightaway. I remember the Theosophical saying about the Master K.H.: “In his holy Presence every wish fades away except the one to be like him”. I could sit and look at his face for all eternity. That is bliss.

### **14th June, 1942**

That sadhu lived in a small cave for seven years and came out only once a month. He is so beautiful. I am always afraid to let go of the world and yet the beauty I seek is only an expression of the Supreme Reality that is not of this world. I play the piano, not for the sound in itself, which can even be ugly on a piano that is out of tune, but for the hidden something that I contact through it. Yet I cling to the world. Again the confusion of the mind that will not give up its ‘knowledge’ which is actually ignorance.

### **15th June, 1942**

‘I’ don’t really see anything, it is habit that sees. I don’t know anything for myself and until I do everything is dead. What a strange thing to discover! How exciting life becomes when one begins to think for oneself, to question everything, to try and find out about everything that one has taken for granted – like a child, coming to everything new. Who would still want to go to the cinema or to any amusement when he has got this eternal amusement within himself all the time?

**16th June, 1942**

Meditation on Hitler. Who is Hitler? I hold Hitler in my heart and keep still. Hitler must not be killed. He must be turned round and made to see. Hitler is creative power turned downward. His God is Race. Why does he want to kill the Jews?

Our whole civilisation is based on the fallacy of looking at the world from the wrong end – from the outside material standpoint and not from the spiritual centre. Hitler's function is to destroy this. He is the match that lights the funeral pyre and burns itself up in the process.

**17th June, 1942**

I asked the Maharshi: When I asked you how to solve the problems of life, you said 'self-surrender'. How can one surrender without danger until Self-Realisation has been achieved, as the mind may create its own God to surrender to? The most cruel things in the world are done in the name of God.

Maharshi: The mind and all of its creations come from the same source. Self-inquiry and self-surrender are the same. As you proceed in Self-inquiry you automatically surrender (as you come nearer to the Divine Source). The person that surrenders to a mind-created God will have to bear the consequences of his actions and suffer for them. But even the thought of God, however false, will take you to the Supreme Truth of the Self ultimately. The man who has realised knows that the thought of a separate God is utterly false. But until then one cannot help it. When you are totally still, you are the Self. When we think, we are forgetting God. Self-inquiry leads back to Him (who is none other than the Self).

Question: Ultimately, but it may take a long time!

Maharshi: There is no time; you may have it even now.

Someone else's question: If the Self is one, why is it necessary to approach a Guru?

Maharshi: In reality it is not necessary, but because we are dreaming on the physical plane, the presence of the realised man is necessary to wake us up – to remind us of ourselves.

When the proud elephant dreams that a lion comes, he gets a shock and wakes up suddenly. As we are all dreaming, the help

of the Guru, within this dream, is necessary in order to force us to wake up. The eyes of the Guru disperse the dream.

Question: The physical eyes?

Maharshi: There are only 'eyes', not physical or otherwise.

Miss Merston's question: From where does the 'resolve' come to start the Self-inquiry?

Maharshi: From the mind, like all other thoughts. But by having only one single thought, this thought finally also gets absorbed. You need not follow your thoughts, the more you think the more thoughts there will be. But rather take each thought back to its source; that is surrender and enquiry at the same time.

It is not Theosophy that twisted me, or J.K. that broke me by tearing me away from it. The twist in my mind, which has caused this powerful false identification with the physical rather than with the True Self, began much earlier – either in my childhood or else I was born with it. But Theosophy did nothing, or nothing fundamental, to clear this error. The centre was merely shifted from one thing to the other within the dream of life. The shock which J.K. gave me was so great that I was knocked out completely for these 14 years; but what does it matter.

Maharshi told how he tried to get away from the Ashram and food and so went into the woods for a day, but he met so many devotees and was offered so much food that he was worse off than before.

Questioner: Why are you unable to refuse when others prevail on you for this or that? Are you not free of karma and therefore able to do as you like?

Maharshi: There are 3 types of *karma*: 1. Made by one's own actions and desires; 2. Inevitable *karma* like Government (world circumstances beyond your personal control); and 3. The *karma* of others taken on himself by the man who is free of his own karma.

Questioner: Is it like Christ, who suffers for the sins of others?

Maharshi: Yes. There is no freedom, it is merely a word.

**18th June, 1942**

We went to see Shiva-Shiva Sadhu again. I asked him whether he knew *Kallahali Mudra* [an esoteric yogic kriya], being a Malayali.

He declined disgustedly. Then he drew a circle on the ground with a dot at the centre and rays coming out from it like the spokes of a wheel, and said: "All the rays represent different ways, but I remain in the centre. All letters are derived from 'OM' only. Dwell in that."

All knowledge is in his eyes, eyes that have gazed only within for years, not seeing the sun except once a month. That is the whole secret. And we fools think air, sun, freedom of movement etc., are necessary for health and mental development when in reality it is only God that we need and nothing else.

### 20th June, 1942

Walked round Arunachala by myself. Wherever we may go, whatever we may do, as long as we move within the mind, what is the use? What we need is a "shock" to push us out of that vicious circle. A shock of beauty, a shock of pain, any shock. J.K. gives the greatest shocks. Even nature seems merely an escape that gives me only a momentary satisfaction. The longer I am here, the smaller I get. When shall I stop existing altogether? Wish I could burn up soon.

### 21st June, 1942

The mind forgets its own nature in activity.

This evening I went to see Skandashram, Virupaksha cave and some other caves where the Maharshi lived. What an atmosphere at Skandashram. I was very deeply moved on entering these caves where such great beings have received illumination. They are awesome. The yogis and mahatmas live here without air, sun, water, food, books, art, nature, clothes; and we make millions of people sweat to provide the 'necessities' of life. And then we complain that there are Hitlers and misery and war. In a glimpse I saw the whole madness of our lives. And then we have the cheek to talk about God, profundity and to criticise the Maharshi and others who know, when we haven't even done with the mere surface of life. We think ourselves superior in our sophisticated nescience and look down on the simple coolie, who has at least the sense to be humble and prostrate himself before such a sublime being.

### 22nd June, 1942

A sadhu came today and sang hymns to Subramania. He is one of the oldest devotees of the Maharshi and famous for his songs. He looks

ridiculously like the statues of Ganesh [the elephant-headed son of Shiva], beard tied in a knot and tummy enormous. Most uncanny. He brought his whole family with babies to act as the chorus. It was like a fairytale, Arabian nights.

### 24th June, 1942

On the 22nd evening Sujata took us to a strange temple in the wild jungle. I had decided to climb up on Arunachala the next day, but had no one to go with. Pathak turned up in the evening unexpectedly with a local boy, so we went together the next morning – then on to Skandashram for two hours; after that we visited Shiva-Shiva Sadhu who taught us how to coordinate our breath in conjunction with meditation on Om. In the evening Merston read me a letter from Gerald Heard [noted British philosopher and author] to Sorrenson [The Danish *sadhu* better known as Sunya Baba] where he mentions that writing is his trade, but his central activity is six hours of meditation daily. He is writing a book *Man, the Master*. He also says that Aldous Huxley and Krishnaji like each other very much, but J.K. still will not have anything to do with methods and Huxley leans more toward Heard. Heard envies Sorrenson his Himalayan retreat and says J.K. would also prefer India and silence, but has chosen the U.S.A. and words instead.

### 25th June, 1942

Yesterday my old agony of restlessness returned, and with it my fear of being caught here and of losing J.K. (is he my possession?!). I had backache, headache and tummyache and utter misery. It all came from reading a few lines by J.K. and also seeing Shiva-Shiva Sadhu and feeling frightened that the Ashram might find out and not approve. This in turn made me resentful at feeling somewhat bound. But this morning I suddenly got back my peace after deciding to talk to Bhagavan and to ask him why I can't get rid of my egotistical resistance. As I asked him the question tears came. The answer was: "Take the resistance into your heart and keep it there".

I have to do everything from the heart. Let the heart see, hear, think, speak, eat, sleep – everything – and not do anything else. Though I do not know the Lord of my Heart, whoever He is, I must surrender to him and leave all else. It is very difficult to do in practice. I am

still not clear about J.K. and until I am I won't have any peace. I shall take him into my heart and will clear this problem by the time I leave. That is the real reason for my visit.

### 26th June, 1942

Krishnaji (JK), as I know him, is my own creation. I have not understood him with my heart. I did what I thought he had asked me to do, but he himself refuted it. Then what am I afraid to lose? What I have never had? And perhaps when my imaginary image of him is lost, the reality might take its place.

### 27th June, 1942

Upon reading King Janaka's story in the *Ashtavakra Gita* about how the Rishi Ashtavakra taught him Self-realisation after Janaka had accepted him as his Guru and surrendered completely to him, a sudden surrender to the Maharshi arose in me spontaneously and his outer form vanished.

I feel more and more that Madras (which is so much closer to Ramana) will be better for me to live in than Delhi. The company of the Wise, whilst we are yet ignorant, is the most precious thing to seek.

### Rajghat, 3rd July, 1942

On the 28th – last day at Tiruvannamalai – I wanted to know how I should live after leaving there. The answer came in the form of an experience in which the Maharshi's head suddenly seemed to go inside me and he said: "You, ego, get out. I am now dictator here and whatever I tell you, you have to do. Not a breath without my order. I am your Self until you have realised It." To my own surprise I loved the dictator. That is what I have always wanted. I am going to cling to him every moment and I shan't rest till he has absorbed the last atom of me. Then I shall again be where I want to be – with J.K! That's the great mystery.

In the train my thoughts stayed in Tiruvannamalai. When the train crossed the bridge [at Varanasi], Mother Ganges told me a secret: You will not always be with the Maharshi. ▲

# Lives in Movement and Stillness

## Sankara and Bhagavan

JONATHAN BADER

A new edition of the life story of Sankaracharya, *Sankara Digvijaya* by Madhava-Vidyaranya has recently been published by the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai. This 2nd edition is enhanced with photos of places associated with the story of Sankara's conquest of the four quarters (*dig vijaya*), an index and a hard cover. The appearance of the updated edition presents a good opportunity to reflect on the life of Sankara. There are three moments of reflection here. The first considers some of the questions surrounding the writing of Sankara's life story. The second concerns the impact Sankara has had in shaping traditional culture. And finally we look at the light the Sankara story shines on the life of Bhagavan.

Jonathan first visited Ramanana ashram in 1980. He has written two books on Adi Sankara, *Meditation in Sankara's Vedanta* (1990) and *Conquest of the Four Quarters: Traditional Accounts of the Life of Sankara* (2000) both published by Aditya Prakashan in New Delhi. He has taught at Melbourne University and the Australian National University and is currently at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia.

In his lengthy, authoritative and judicious introduction to the *Sankara Dig Vijaya*, Swami Tapasyananda mentions three other Sanskrit 'philosophical poems' on the life of Sankara, all of which the Swami acknowledges contain mythological elements and encounters with people who lived at various different times. For this reason it might be better to think of these works as hagiographies, accounts of the sacred, rather than biographies, where historical accuracy is of paramount concern. Nevertheless Swami Tapasyananda responds at great length in his introduction to criticisms of the text and challenges about its authorship.

The issues about the validity and authority of the different accounts of Sankara's life stem from disputes between the Sankara monastic centres (*matha*-s). These disputes may ultimately be about more than just prestige. To cite one example: a case was brought to the High Court in Bombay in 1908 challenging a lower court ruling which upheld the exclusive right of the Dwaraka Matha to collect funds in the name of Sankaracharya in that part of India. Ironically it was a British judge who presided over the case. Chief Justice Scott set aside the lower court ruling, on the grounds that it was not the role of the civil court to settle disputes between religious leaders.

Swami Tapasyananda used the Anandashrama Sanskrit edition of the *Sankara Dig Vijaya* to make the English translation. He accepts the judgement of the editor of the Sanskrit text in altering the title and changing the name of the author. Each of the 16 chapters in the original Sanskrit manuscripts concludes with a statement naming the work as the '*Samksepa Sankara Jaya*' by Madhava. The original title, which can be translated as '*The Essential Sankara Vijaya*', is certainly instructive of the author's intentions. But the alteration raises no real issue, if we understand the renamed work to be *The Sankara Dig Vijaya*. This text, probably composed sometime between 1740 and 1798, is actually the last of eight available Sanskrit accounts of Sankara's life. It skillfully brings together the contents of the earlier works, often by directly incorporating large swathes of their verses. The author has created what is probably the last word in the Sankara hagiographies by including more episodes, and greater elaboration of these often mythological events than is seen in the earlier works.



Swami Tapasyananda proposes two reasons why we should assume that the author of the *Sankara Dig Vijaya*, who calls himself simply Madhava, is actually Madhava-Vidyaranya. The first justification is that Madhava is the pre-monastic name of the great Vidyaranya, author of the Advaita classic, *Panchadasi*, who led the Sringeri Sankara Math in the latter part of the 14th century. The second assumption is that the Vidyatirtha to whom Madhava makes salutations is one and the same as the guru of Vidyaranya. There are some compelling reasons why Vidyaranya is very unlikely to have been the author. If there was such a work by this outstanding figure in the Sringeri lineage it would certainly have been known when Laksmana Sastri was asked to compose a chronicle of the Sringeri Matha and life of Adi (i.e., the first) Sankara. This request was made by Saccidananda Bharati, who headed the Math from 1705-1740. Yet the resulting work, the *Guru Vamsa Kavya*, differs on a number of key points from the *Sankara Dig Vijaya*. One of the most striking is the conflicting account of the end of Sankara's life journey. The *Guru Vamsa Kavya* says he ended his days at the ashram of Dattatreya, while Madhava writes Sankara disappeared at Kedarnath.

Reinterpreting the authorship of the Sankara hagiographies may well have been done to enhance the authority of a Sankara Math. We see this in the case of Anantanandagiri's *Sri Sankaravijaya*. This work is sometimes claimed to have been written by Anandagiri, a renowned commentator on Sankara's major works. Just as disputed claims by the Maths regarding their authority were brought to the jurisdiction of colonial courts, so to claims of the authenticity of the texts were presented to British scholars. In order to compile his magisterial *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899), Monier-Williams relied on the scholarly knowledge of numerous *pandits*. Presumably on the basis of this advice, he writes that Anantanandagiri is also known as Anandagiri, author of a "biography of Sankaracarya, recording his controversial victories as a Vedantin over numerous heretics." While, according to Monier-Williams, *The Sankara Dig Vijaya* is a "fanciful account of the controversial exploits of Sankaracarya said to be by Madhavacarya, also called *Samksepa Sankara Vijaya*."

It is true that Anantanandagiri's *Sankaravijaya* does pay more attention to Sankara's debates than any of the other hagiographies.

However, the level of the debates and the philosophical understanding they reveal of Sankara's opponents could hardly have been written by that great commentator on Sankara's work, Anandagiri (ca. 13th c). Indeed the focus in this *Sankara Vijaya* remains more on the opponents' dress and behaviour than on the content of the debates, which stands out most strongly in the extremely vague accounts of the doctrines of Sankara's Buddhist opponents. This is in stark contrast to the commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, where Sankara and his sub-commentator Anandagiri show they are very knowledgeable about Buddhist views. However, when it comes to the content of the most important debate in Sankara's life story, the contest with Mandana Mishra, it is the *Sankara Dig Vijaya* which provides the more detailed and informed account.

Given that Anantanandagiri's *Sankaravijaya* makes Kanchipuram the central focus of the life story, it is likely that Anantanandagiri had close association with that *matha*. According to this account, after setting up a *matha* in Sringeri, Sankara then established a seat of learning in Kanchipuram. There is a detailed account of the glories of that city, which is, according to Anantanandagiri, where Sankara ended his days. It is not surprising, then, that adherents of the Kanchipuram Sankara Math were keen for this work to be seen as the most authoritative. The *Sankara Dig Vijaya* does say that Sankara established a temple in Kanchipuram, but about monastic centres it states only that he installed his disciples in Sringeri and other places (16.93).

Clearly, when Madhava composed the *Sankara Dig Vijaya*, the idea that there were centres in each of the four quarters of India (Badrinath in the north, Puri in the east, Dwaraka in the west and Sringeri in the south) must not have been well established. Once the idea of the four main monastic centres became widespread, it may have become necessary for the Kanchipuram Math to justify its place in the Sankara tradition. It is ironic that at a time when the disputes about the standing of the Kanchipuram Math and the authority of the Sankara hagiographies were raging, the incumbent Kanchi Sankaracharya was one of the most respected religious leaders in south India: H.H. Jagadguru Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, who served as the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram from 1907-1994.

Like Adi Sankara, he was initiated as a boy into *sannyasa*. He also followed in Adi Sankara's footsteps by travelling twice (on foot) from Rameshwaram to Varanasi. Revered as 'Periyavar' and an ideal *sannyasi*, it was he who directed Paul Brunton to Bhagavan, but more on this later.

I would suggest that there is little gain in arguing which account of Sankara's life is more accurate, or more authoritative. After all, the eight Sanskrit hagiographies were written some hundreds of years after Sankara's life. Instead it is in their capacity to inspire us and to reveal something of the beauty of the Advaita tradition that the real value of these texts lies.

### **The Shift in Spiritual Authority from Householder to Ascetic**

Although there is no real need to see the Sankara hagiographies as historical records, the life stories do reveal some of the profound effects Sankara has had on traditional culture. His story is framed as a conquest of the four quarters (*dig vijaya*). Sankara's achievement consists in more than just defeating rival sects in debate – it is a demonstration of the authority of Advaita Vedanta and the primacy of the ascetic. This plays out in the most prominent of the many debates described in the Sankara hagiographies: his contest with Mandana Mishra.

Mandana is portrayed as the foremost expert on Vedic ritual practice. His knowledge is accompanied by great wealth and power, reflected by his majestic home and the 500 disciples who attend on him. Mandana's prestige is further demonstrated by the presence of Vyasa and Jaimini as the guests of honour at the *shraddha* ceremony he is conducting when Sankara arrives at his compound. Finding the gates of Mandana's compound closed, Sankara uses his power to fly into the residence. This makes Mandana furious. The arrival of an intruder, lacking the customary brahmin signs of the sacred thread along with the tuft of hair, and a *sannyasi* to boot, is the most inauspicious event imaginable for his ritual practice. A series of insulting puns are traded between the two. But eventually a formal debate is agreed on, with the arbiter to be Mandana's wife, who is believed to be an incarnation of Saraswati. The terms of the debate are remarkable: the loser must embrace the way of life (*asrama*)

of the victor. This is ultimately a contest to determine whether the householder-ritual sacrificer or the ascetic following the path of knowledge will serve as the more authoritative interpreter of the Vedic tradition.

Thanks to Swami Tapasyananda we have a translation of the proceedings of the debate in the *Sankara Dig Vijaya*. Much of the account in the text centres on Sankara's demonstration of the scriptural authority for a non-dualistic understanding of Vedanta. In particular, he shows how misguided Mandana is in trying to argue that statements such as *tat tvam asi* are meaningless because they don't provide instructions on carrying out ritual activity. But as none of the other seven Sanskrit hagiographies of Sankara are available in English, I will include here a translation of one of these other works. These are the highlights of the concise account of the debate provided in Cidvilasa's *Sankara Vijayavilasa*:

Beginning with the Vedas, the first of the sciences, the learned Mandana Mishra and the spiritual teacher Sri Sankara engaged in a debate. Mandana Mishra said, "Renunciation is not possible in the Kali-yuga, how is it that you have accepted it? Listen to the authorities on this matter which are proclaimed in the *sruti* and *smriti*....In all four stages of life those who are without sacrifice and study of the Vedas are excluded from brahminhood, even if they are undertaking severe tapas (in *sannyasa*, the fourth stage of life). For all brahmins the sacred thread is the means of liberation...."

"By means of ritual action heaven is attained, as is empire and sons, oh ascetic. That is why the best of brahmins, who are knowers of the Vedas, carry out ritual action. The wise say that he who knows the proper time for ritual action, and carries it out at the proper time, is indeed a man of knowledge. But renunciation is prohibited on account of statements such as 'in the Kali-yuga they know a man is wise and full of devotion who is intent on good works'. How is it that you have undertaken the very thing which is prohibited (renunciation) and, what is more when you were in the first stage of life as a student?"

Sankara said, "As long as the Vedas continue to exist, the paths of renunciation and the sacrificial fire will continue in the Kali-yuga, whether one is in the first, second or third stage of life. When the

mind becomes dispassionate, one should resort to the final stage of life. As for the faults which arise from one's family or one's *karma*, renunciation will burn them all up as a fire of grain husks purifies gold. Even in the very first stage of life, if he is dispassionate towards the ocean of worldly existence, a brahmin who desires liberation should abandon his attachments and go forth as a renouncer....

“Let one abandon the outer sacred thread and cut it off as well as the tuft of hair. *Brahman* is the thread on which the world is strung and that is what the wise should wear.... Those who understand the meaning of the thread as such are invested with the sacred thread of knowledge and it is knowledge which is the tuft of hair for men of knowledge.... Therefore the renunciation of the sacred thread is carried out in conjunction with the renouncing of ritual action.... just as the sacred spoon is discarded at the conclusion of the soma rites. In this way, yogis seek to abandon the sacred thread. They should keep only a couple of loincloths and a ragged cloth for warding off the cold, along with a rosary and bamboo staff. The ascetic should behave as a bee, collecting alms from place to place....”

As the revered teacher, Sankaracharya, spoke in this way, stringing together the statements of the *sruti*, *smriti* and *puranas*, Mandana Mishra was abashed. Perplexed and confused within, he was unable to make a reply. Witnessing this from within the house, Mandana's wife came forth. Up until this day she had been regularly summoning the ascetic to come for his alms and then calling her husband to come for his meal. But on the eighteenth day of the debate, that wise woman, realising her husband was defeated by the foremost of teachers, immediately summoned both of them to come for alms. Then Mandana Mishra arose and with great devotion circumambulated Sankara thrice and bowed to him a thousand times.

This account underscores the way in which Vedic authority has shifted away from the ritual specialist, who is necessarily a householder, in pursuit of the fruits of sacrificial rites. The importance of the *karma-kanda*, the ritual component of the Vedas, has become subordinate to the *jñāna-kanda*, the wisdom section, or Vedanta (literally, coming at the end of the Vedas). Ritual practice takes its new place as a preliminary discipline of purification, preparing the ground for the awakening of knowledge. And it is the ascetic to whom we look for guidance in the way of knowledge.

### Sankara and Bhagavan

Reflecting on the Sankara story can serve to highlight some of the unique features of Bhagavan's life. As Sankara argued in his debate with Mandana, one can renounce worldly life even in the student stage, if dispassion arises. This is certainly what we see in the case of Bhagavan, who disposes of his sacred thread when he reaches his true home at Arunachala. But Bhagavan does not stop at the fourth stage (*asrama*) of life, *sannyasa*. He leaves this too, and lives as an *atyasrami*, one who is beyond the traditional stages of life, absorbed only in the Self.

Just before Sankara's initiation at the age of five, his father died. Not long after, the boy resolved to leave home to seek realisation. His mother was understandably upset by his decision, but Sankara promised her that if she was in distress, he would immediately return to her. When Sankara sensed his mother was gravely ill during his *dig vijaya*, he quickly proceeded to his native town of Kaladi in Kerala. He was with her in the last days of her life and evoked the divine presence of Narayana to ensure her liberation. Sankara asked the family and neighbours for assistance in organising her cremation. But they were repulsed by the idea of a sannyasi conducting funerary rites, in contradiction to the *dharma* of one who has renounced name and family. They refused point blank to help in any way. Ignoring the very negative response of the townspeople, Sankara managed to gather the necessary materials and conducted the cremation by himself.

Very soon after Bhagavan had his spontaneous full awakening at the age of 16, he abandoned his family home. In doing so he too left his widowed mother. But eventually she was also drawn to Arunachala and became a *sannyasini*. We are all familiar with the beautiful story of how Bhagavan sat with her as her life came to an end, ensuring that she would be fully liberated. The temple that was constructed to honour the mother's samadhi drew criticism from some orthodox quarters, as not all agreed that a woman could be formally initiated into *sannyasa* and for that reason they saw the temple simply as a polluted burial place, not a shrine. But for an *atyasrami* these kinds of concerns had no relevance and Bhagavan's mother received the full respect due to her.

The successors of Sankara who head the monastic centres established in his name all bear the title Sankaracharya. They are also honoured as world-teachers, (*Jagadgurus*). Sankara travelled the length and breadth of India, defeating leading exponents of rival philosophical schools and establishing temples. In this way he became one of the earliest people to have a truly national profile and was, for that reason, an inspiration to many who led the nationalist struggle for Indian independence. Coincidentally, nineteenth century British and European scholars such as Max Müller (1823-1900) helped spread the teachings of Sankara outside of India. Similarly Swami Vivekananda (whom Müller had also met) did much to propagate Vedanta during his travels in America, the UK and Europe at the end of the 19th century. This has made Sankara a *Jagadguru* in the very literal sense of the word.

Unlike Sankara, most of whose 32 years were spent in continual movement, Bhagavan's life story is one of stillness. He did not travel at all after coming to Arunachala in 1896. Nor did he defeat any rivals in debate. Yet so great was the power of his presence that people from all over the world have been drawn to Bhagavan. And that attraction has not diminished in the 68 years since his *mahasamadhi*. The Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, H. H. Jagadguru Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, who saw Bhagavan as one of the rare beings who lived his life in the state of liberation, was clearly an instrument in ensuring Bhagavan would also become a world teacher. When Paul Brunton went to the Sankaracharya seeking his teaching in 1931, the *Periyavar*, directed him to go to Bhagavan instead. Paul Brunton was certainly not the first westerner to go to Bhagavan, but the publication of *Search in Secret India* in 1934, led Major Chadwick and many others to Ramanasramam.

The work of Sankara has been very widely studied by scholars outside of India. But many have been puzzled as to how Sankara, the foremost exponent of Advaita can have composed numerous devotional hymns. After all, adherence to nonduality appears to be contradictory to the worship of external forms of God. For this reason, researchers from Germany, Japan and America, have conducted lexical and stylometric analyses of the hymns attributed to Sankara which have lead them to believe these devotional works are more likely to

have been composed by later Sankaracharyas. But Bhagavan's life shows us that *bhakti* is not necessarily incompatible with Advaita. In a conversation, Bhagavan revealed that despite his initial reluctance he was 'compelled' to compose a devotional work:

"The opening words of the *Arunachala Padikam* (Eleven Verses) suddenly came to me one morning, and even if I tried to suppress them, saying: "What have I to do with these words?", they would not be suppressed until I had composed a song beginning with them, and all the words flowed easily without any effort. In the same way the second stanza was composed the next day and the succeeding ones the following days, one each day...."

Of all the devotional works attributed to Sankara, one holds a very special place for Bhagavan: *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotra*. Bhagavan rendered this hymn into Tamil and an English translation of this is included in the *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Bhagavan composed a beautiful invocation to the hymn, which reveals his identification with the primal guru, Sri Dakshinamurti and with Adi Sankara:

That Sankara who appeared as Dakshinamurti to grant peace to the great ascetics (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata), who revealed his real state of silence, and who has expressed the nature of the Self in this hymn, abides in me.

What better way to close this piece than to join with Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni in praising the lineage of Advaita sages:

dakṣiṇāmūrti sārambhām  
śaṅkarāchārya madhyamām  
ramaṇācārya paryantām  
vande guruparamparām

"I worship the lineage of sages beginning with Dakshinamurti, which has Sankaracharya in the middle, and ends with Sri Ramana."



# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter Nine

### Kabir Vanquishes Yogi Gorakhnath

NABAJI SIDDHA

**K**abir spent most of his time in japa and contemplation, yet his heart was yearning to perform some service for his teacher, Swami Ramananda. During this period, Gorakhnath, a great Siddha and a disciple of the famous Yogi Matsyendranath, was camping in Varanasi. He was foremost among the nine yogis of Nath sect. He was a person of erudition and logic. His fame shone brilliantly like the sun surrounded by stars, which fade away before such brilliance. Gorakhnath was a master of the eight-fold *siddhis*. With all this strength of knowledge, it was a pastime for him to travel around, challenging men of high learning, defeat them effortlessly and humiliate them, thus savouring the taste of victory. It was a game he enjoyed immensely with great pride.

When he reached Varanasi, he heard about the greatness of Swami Ramananda. On paying a visit to the ashram, he was surprised at the spaciousness of the ashram and vibrant Vedic chants and sweet praises of the Lord emanating from there. Planting his trident in front of the gate, spreading his upper cloth on its tip, he took his seat on

the cloth and shouted a challenge, “Hey Ramananda, you are posing as a great teacher, surrounding yourself with naïve *brahmins*, just as a one-eyed man rules a country of blind people. Come out and prove your might. Let me test your learning and extent of your austerities. Let me assess your worth that you seem to have earned with your japa and discipline. If you refuse to meet my test, I will reduce you and your followers to ashes in a trice with my yogic power.”

When the followers of Swami Ramananda heard this ruckus outside, they emerged from the building. Striding like lions, looking fierce like tigers, they came out to confront the trouble-maker, roaring insults, “Who is this rascal addressing our Guru disrespectfully by his name? We will dispatch him to the realm of death forthwith.”

To their consternation, they found Gorakhnath seated arrogantly on his upper cloth spread in mid air. Terrified at the display of his impressive supernatural power, they crouched in fear. In the humblest tone, one of them enquired, “O Swami, may we know who you are?”

Gorakh replied, “O stupid *brahmins*, don’t you know that I am the mighty Gorakh, who routs pretentious *sadhus* in debate and locks them up in prison? Know that I am the terrible death itself to you. I have come to swallow up your life, name, fame and honour. Where is that pseudo-*sadhu* Ramananda hiding? Bring him to me.”

Hearing his voice, resounding like the trumpet of an elephant, they were petrified as if confronting a tiger. They took one leap backwards and reaching the Swami reported, “There is verily a demon by the name of Gorakh outside. A terrible calamity has overtaken us. How do we escape from this?”

The Swami frightened at the news, said in a trembling voice, “Oh, it is Gorakh... he is merciless. Ah..., aha..., there is no way to save my honour. O *brahmins*, please find a way out of this crisis.”

The disciples said in an aggrieved voice, “O revered teacher! You have lost your wits, instead of bolstering our faith and confidence. We are not brave enough to face the tiger. The best answer is to flee through the back door.”

“O performers of worship, reciters of Vedas! This is the appropriate time to make public your profound scholarship and beat the formidable opponent with the power of your learning. Don’t miss this chance to

prove your expertise in scriptures. Why don’t you put to death the fame of vainglorious Gorakh with your erudition?” said the Swami

Annoyed at this reply, the disciples said, “It is not becoming of a teacher to betray his students before a powerful enemy. All these years, you acted as if you were an incomparable teacher. Now, at this hour of trial, you are backing away, keeping us in the front to protect yourself. You are like Uttarakumar who spoke vain words of heroism in front of the women of the palace, only to take to his heels when faced with the huge army of Kauravas.”

“Don’t try to run away. You had been extolling me, worshipping me all these years as the supreme Guru, pledging your all to me. When I ask you to prove your faith and surrender, you reject the opportunity. You have brought shame upon yourselves. It is better to die heroically on the battlefield than to run away in cowardice. Don’t be like a man who becomes a *sannyasi* out of despair while facing a crisis in life.”

“O Swami, we are not going to throw in our lot with you. The time of destruction is fast approaching. Gorakh is going to reduce the whole ashram to ashes with his fury. We don’t want to tarry here even for a moment.” They made their escape through the backyard.

The ashram wore a deserted look. Swami Ramananda, sitting alone, turned over the events of the day and the behaviour of the disciples and mused, “Oh, what is the use of a son or friend who deserts at the hour of need or a wife who lacks understanding? Even friends turn inimical in times of crisis. Now, how to handle Gorakh?”

Meanwhile, Kabir heard about the happenings and hastened to the ashram with the ball of yarn, he was spinning, in his hand. Reaching the Swami, he prostrated before him and said, “O Master, why this apprehension about Gorakh? Whoever – be they the mightiest of men, celestial gods or even the Trinity – causes you least anxiety, I will make them bite the dust. While so, this Gorakh is a mere fool, whom I will crush effortlessly. Please give up this despondency, place your holy hands on my head and confer your benediction. By your grace, I will send him fleeing for his life.” Shining like the radiant sun, Kabir prostrated at the Teacher’s feet and begged his blessings.

The Master wearied of Kabir’s attendance on him, said, “Why do you come and pester me at this time, reeling out heroic words? What can you do against the terrible Gorakh, like a cat before the elephant

or an elephant before the lion? Can a worm kill a tiger? When a great calamity befalls one, one should calmly search for a way out of it. Wise men should wear the jewel of patience under all circumstances. What peaceful means can achieve, defiance cannot. Those who seek peace will never meet failure. Why do you jump up and down like a monkey? What can you do against the eight-fold *siddhis* of Gorakh? Never pick up a fight with those whose strength is to be revered. You are a small fry, your stakes are small, you have little to lose by such a militant attitude even if he harms you. An ant is not hurt by a fall, as is an elephant. If you provoke him, he will unleash his fury on the ashram. I will lose my honour as well as the ashram. Don't invite trouble on me."

"O beloved Master", said Kabir, "while you have me as your disciple, why do you think much of this Gorakh who is a non-entity? The city of Varanasi will soon see him humbled, stripped of all honours, divested of all powers, scorned by public, turning his bones into powder. At the very sound of your name, his pride will be shattered and scholars will be freed of the fear of humiliation. No harm will come to you. Believe my words and give me permission to engage in the debate."

The pleas of Kabir made no impact on the Swami. First he spoke harsh words to Kabir, then he joined both palms and addressed him, "I prostrate at your feet. Don't be stubborn. Gorakh is not an ordinary person. He made his appearance in the world in an unusual way. He is the foremost among the *nava-siddhas*. He has stupendous occult powers. Don't be childish and cross his path."

However, Kabir paid his respects to the Swami and left the scene assuring him of annihilation of Gorakh's supremacy. Pushing through the crowd, he approached Gorakhnath and spoke sternly, "Your cheap jugglery cannot move my Guru Ramananda. The very sight of the lion dispatches the elephant to the world of death. You must have set out at an inauspicious time today! Have you come to show off your worthless occult powers? What you have collected is mere rubbish. On what strength have you come here?"

Startled by the audacity of the young boy, Gorakhnath glared at him and asked, "Do you know to whom you are talking? I am the king of ascetics and the magnitude of my penance is beyond compare. Have you come here to be cursed by me?"



“O Gorakh, I am Kabir; know me as the disciple of Swami Ramananda. You are puffed with conceit. I am here to wipe out your arrogance and give relief to *sadhus* and scholars whom you have been harassing. Soon the world will know you for less than a maggot.”

Like a blazing fire, Gorakhnath emitted vile abuses and fierce threats that he would burn down the city along with its citizens. The frightened crowd turned to Kabir in anger and shouted, “O miscreant, like a monkey that plunders the forest in which it resides, you have brought destruction upon your own city.” Pelting him with stones, beating him, dragging him by hand, they brought Kabir right in front of Gorakh and said, “Here is the impudent scoundrel! Do with him as you wish and kindly spare us all.”

Turning his fierce eyes on the boy, he barked, “Oh, you are so haughty! I will make mince meat of you. You, a measly straw, easily crushed like an ant, light as a speck of dust, fragile and young like jasmine bud, you are banging your head against steel, ha..ha..!”

“O wicked Gorakh”, dared Kabir, “you do not know the extent of your misfortune. Even the all-beneficent saints care not to give you a cursory glance, the merciful *sadhus* do not accept you in their company, your ignorance will not leave you, your egotism will stick to you for ages. How did you ever become an ascetic, indulging in ominous penance? How dare you defy our Guru? I am representing my master. Don’t flaunt your contemptible tricks before me. You cannot escape the curse of Swami Ramananda.”

On hearing this, the Swami exclaimed in alarm, “You liar, when did I curse Gorakh? Now, you are infuriating him and causing his wrath upon us. You, exhibiting your ignorance, are waving your arms like a clown before him. Let me prostrate to Gorakh and appease him.”

Knowing his intent, Kabir acted fast by pushing down the trident on which Gorakh was sitting. In the same breath, fixing one end of the spool of yarn he was carrying on the ground, he threw his ball of yarn up in the air. The yarn bundle unwinding itself to the whole length, stayed straight unsupported in mid space, like a long creeper.

Offering praises to his Guru, Kabir climbed up the thread and sitting on the upper tip in the sky challenged Gorakh, “Hey, what are you doing down there? Whom are you abusing? Which pitiable *sadhu* is being tortured by you? You are already cornered by me. If you have

any guts left in you, come up, sit face to face with me and try all your mean tricks on me. Come on, test my prowess. Don’t intimidate simple people. Don’t waste my time. I will put an end to your conceit and offer your head at the feet of my master. The power of my Guru’s grace will be revealed to four corners of the world. Before it is too late, kneel down before my Swami and seek his refuge. There is no one else to come to your aid. Others are waiting to pounce on you.”

Though he himself was a master of yogic powers, Gorakhnath was put to shame by the astonishing feat of young Kabir. Yet, goaded by egoism, he said, “You are delivering grand lectures in the sky to nobody and hoping to gain applause. Climb down from your high pedestal and demonstrate your cleverness.”

“You speak these words to save your face. Alright, I will come down.” On reaching the ground, Kabir prostrated to Swami Ramananda.

By the time, Gorakh conjured himself into the form of Swami Ramananda. People gasped at the sight of double Swamis. Unnerved by this exhibition and the probable dire consequences on the city and its inhabitants, Swami Ramananda prayed to the Lord to grant enough power to Kabir to face the situation and save the city and its people from disaster.

Kabir imbued with great strength and poise, stood before the impostor and assumed the form of his Guru Matsyendranath.

Gorakh became speechless for a moment. Then recovering himself from the shock, he spoke with added fury, “How dare you? Now I will transform myself into the form of Lord Vishnu whom you worship and cut you and your Guru into pieces with *Sudarshan Chakra*.”

Kabir instantly turning himself into the form of Lord Siva, said, “Now I will dispatch you with my bow, *Pasupathasthra*.”

In retaliation, Gorakhnath assuming the form of a big conflagration, started scorching everyone with his rays.

Kabir turning himself into a huge cloud in the shape of a trunk of a massive elephant quenched the fire with torrents of rains.

Kabir shining like the brilliance of a million suns, turned his blaze on Gorakhnath. Unable to bear the heat, he ran to Swami Ramananda seeking refuge. The Swami and onlookers begged Kabir to stop this match of strengths lest the whole city be burnt.

Kabir, resuming his own form, hailing the Swami's glories, humbly bowed to him. The Guru lovingly embraced Kabir and said, "How am I going to repay you for this great act of saving me and the holy city from great catastrophe? I was ignorant of your greatness and doubted your ability. May all auspiciousness accompany you always! May you attain all blessedness in life."

"O Beloved Swami, is there anything impossible for one who has faith in his Guru? Please allow me to wipe out this pest Gorakh once for all."

However, Swami Ramananda desired only peace and harmony and he therefore advised them to test each other's power in intellectual debate.

With an intent to subdue Kabir in one way or other, Gorakh asked, "O young boy, what is your age?"

"O ascetic! I have seen the birth and death of countless gods and witnessed the passage of many eons. Can you even comprehend my age, leave alone labeling it with numericals?"

"O impudent boy, my appearance in the world is beyond anyone's imagination. My penance is mighty. What about you, where have you come from?"

"O yogi, when you do not know your own origin and are immersed in forgetfulness of the Self, what can you understand of my origin? I am the Supreme, of the nature of Truth-Bliss. Without knowing the sublime secret of life, you are deluded with this body and you have wasted much of your time and penance in gathering bogus knowledge and occult powers to acquire a long span of life for your perishable body."

Gorakhnath snapped at him, "What do you know of *kaya-kalpa*? The knowledge of prolonged existence for the body is *Brahmavidya* indeed! All other forms of knowledge are trash. Do you know for how long, how many hundreds of years, I have been preserving this body? This is not a trivial affair. It involves years and years of hardship and rigorous penance to acquire the appropriate siddhis to keep off death."

Laughing loudly, Kabir answered, "Only for those who are born, there is death. For me who is birthless, there is no death. He who learns this secret of immortal life, is the true knower of *Brahman*. Others cannot realize this."

"Preserving the body from perishing is a rare knowledge, so don't belittle it. You are talking nonsense when you say that you, whom we see tangibly with our eyes, were never born."

"Knowledge of eternal Spirit, *Brahman* alone is true Knowledge; all else – including longevity of the body – is ignorance. For a knower of *Brahman*, there is no death in all the three periods of past, present and future. The ignorant cannot understand this."

Gorakhnath argued, "Unless one obtains complete mastery over the body i.e. *kaya-siddhi* through yogic discipline, it is not easy to realize *Brahman*. What can one achieve with a perishable and short-lived body? By uttering with the lips, 'I am *Brahman*', does one reach the exalted state? Do the knowers of *Brahman* possess occult powers required for controlling the material body?"

Kabir said, "The body is perishable whereas *Brahman* is eternal. At any point of time, body is not one's true self. All your penance to render your body immortal will accomplish nothing more than prolonging the span of your bodily existence. Your statement that the body is indestructible is untenable.

On the contrary, the Self abides in eternity and immortality. Identifying oneself with the body is delusion. Recognising one's true Self is unceasing bliss, *Brahmanandam*. If even short-visioned yogis can attain the psychic powers, can these be beyond the ken of *Brahmajnanis*? But, they don't care to use them. Having effaced the sense of doership, they show only disdain for such powers, about which yogis make much ado. Their focus is always turned within, reveling in bliss, yet these powers lie at their feet and manifest themselves without their own volition."

Gorakhnath asserted that *Brahman* could be rarely realised without yogic discipline.

Kabir replied, "It is only by Guru's grace, the ultimate state is reached. There is no other way."

"You mean that merely by hearing from the Guru that one is *Brahman*, it is attained by the disciple?" derided Gorakhnath.

Kabir said, "Even before coming to the presence of the Guru, one is verily that *Brahman*. After initiation also, one is *Brahman*. Whereas this body, even while breathing is a corpse, as it is after the breath departs from it. I will give you a simile. The space remains the same before and after the pit is dug. Can you say that space is created only when mud is removed to make a pit? Similarly, pot remains clay while in the form of a pot as well as when broken. Do you need a scholar

to teach you this? Guru's grace lies in making you recognize that you are not this body, you are *Brahman*. Directly experiencing this reality is Knowledge of *Brahman*. This is the infallible truth."

"Is it of any profit to experience oneself as *Brahman*?" demanded Gorakh.

Kabir replied, "With this knowledge of the Self, you are freed from fear of death, rebirth, tortures of hell, miseries of worldly existence and egotism of supernatural powers and all other lacks and afflictions like honour-dishonour, lust, greed, pride and hunger. You abide in eternal joy and immortality.

"Keeping this body alive even for eons is not going to ensure freedom of this kind to you. The whole retinue of demigods and Trinity too have a fixed life span. Do you imagine that your powers will keep your body from turning into dust? Yoga without *jñāna* is fruitless."

"You are vilifying yoga, young fellow. Through yogic discipline, one can see the radiant light in the crown, listen to the nectarine melody in the heart, and be immersed in great joy. One can bring the nature, *Prakriti*, under one's power and perform amazing feats like transmigrating from one body to another."

"O Gorakhnath, the foremost among the sages Agasthya had to debate for twelve years to convince the greatest occultist of his time, of the pre-eminence of *Brahmavidya*. The illusory power did not spare even Brahma, the creator who once became blind with pride of his long lifespan! So I should not feel disheartened that I am not able to make you, steeped in dense ignorance, see the light."

Pierced by these words, Gorakhnath snapped at him, "You are unaware of the extent of my yogic knowledge and powers. I have its countless branches at my beck and call and immense power has accrued to me from yoga. Just as a foolish chick makes fun of the sky, you, a fledgling dare to throw a challenge at me."

"Gorakh, don't be mad with pride that you have mastered the sixty-four types of supernatural powers. There are nine million *siddhas* in the world who excel in all branches of learning. There are also rishis who challenge even Brahma's creation with their own creation. You must be aware how Viswamitra's arrogance brought him many trials. When Brahma lost one of his heads, he could not create a new head for himself in spite of being the creator. The Lord of the universe

does not spare even gods, like Brahma for serious misdemeanour. Beware of your fate. Those who conduct themselves with humility and propriety have nothing to fear. Blinded with arrogance, you have been insulting sages of great merit and austerities. As penitence, I bid you to serve my Master for a period of twelve years."

Touching Kabir's shoulders, Swami Ramananda said gently, "My child, a hint is enough for a decent person. It burns him like fire. So, don't utter such harsh things to elders."

Seizing upon the kind words of Swami Ramananda, Gorakh resolving to tackle Kabir later, disappeared from the scene by his mystical powers and started a fierce penance to avenge Kabir.

Swami Ramananda wondered at his good fortune at having Kabir as his disciple who could trounce a colossus like Gorakhnath. Moved by great affection, he embraced Kabir and said in a choked voice, "My dearest, I have wronged you in the past. You alone could defend my honour. Please forgive my pettiness."

Kabir fell flat at the lotus feet of the noble teacher and said, "O *Sadguru*, Truth-incarnate, it is only by your power that this mediocre disciple could face Gorakhnath. Oblivious of your own greatness, you are praising me and giving me all the credit! Please accept me in your fold and bless me."

Soaked in the showers of bliss, the Swami summoned Kabir's parents and learnt about Kabir's appearance in the Ganges etc. He recognized Kabir as an incarnation of a divine being.

He said to Tamal, "Do you realize, what an immense blessing has been bestowed on you? We are all blessed to have him in our midst and listen to his sweet words of great truths. What is a whole litter of piglets before a single baby elephant? The brilliance of countless stars fades away before the radiance of a single moon. What profit is gained, begetting dozens of children; all auspiciousness is attained by one such child." This teacher of high fame cherished the memory of such a precious disciple in his heart forever.

O *Siddhas*, this was the glory of Kabir whom the teacher himself adored in his heart. ▲

(To be continued)



Jayanthi/Anna Patterson

## TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
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‘Will the disciple himself be able to ward off the onslaught of the states of unconsciousness and discriminating consciousness? It is we who will bring you to a fit condition, dispense to you your deeds and their fruits, and lull you to sleep, [so that your ego consciousness will disappear], like the flame of a lamp in full daylight, or like the colours in a prism when the sun is at the zenith. You should abandon any attempt at union with Ourselves.’ Thus did [Jñānasambandhar] graciously decree. (243)

The words dispensing [your] *karma* [to you] translate the Tamil – *ūl ūṭṭi*. *ūl* has the basic meaning of *antiquity*, *oldness*, and comes to have the meaning, as here, of *destiny*, *karma*, both in terms of the deeds and their fruits of the actions performed by the *jīva* in former

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lives. For the verb *ūṭṭu* see the notes to verse 220. The point here is that the *jīva* is powerless to avoid the *karma* which has been meted out to it by divine grace for its own salvation. Its only valid option is to remain still in the grace of the Self and accept that *karma* without attachment. Thus it will be able to evade the *onslaught – tākku* of that karma, and avoid the creation of any further karmic debt. All mental striving, even the search for the Self, must in the end be abandoned. Hence Jñānasambandhar's instruction to his disciple Vaḷḷalār ends with the terse expression, *nammul kalappu nāṭṭam oli – Abandon any attempt at union with Ourselves!*

Those who in the waking state transmute all the agitation of discriminating consciousness, treating it as a dream, will come to possess the pure consciousness of grace. They will become *parai yōgis*, who transcend [even that grace]; pure ones; ones who are experiencing the bliss which is pure enjoyment; ones who have gone beyond even bliss to dwell in the fourth state [of union with Śivam]. (244)

The state of *parai yōkam* was first mentioned in verse 41. The author views it as a state which is experienced when the discriminating consciousness has been almost eliminated, but before the final stages of bliss and union with Śivam. See also the notes to verse 193, in which it is suggested that this state may correspond to the *ātma sphurāṇa*, which Sri Ramana himself has described as *the foretaste of realisation*.

In this verse the stages of progress in the disciple's spiritual development are reprised as stated previously: grace manifests in the ripe devotee, by which he is able to realise the false nature of his worldly consciousness; he then enters a stage in which the work of grace is complete, and the hold of this consciousness has been almost entirely broken, the state of *parai yōkam*; this is followed by the state of bliss, which precedes the final state of union with Śivam. It is only this final state that is regarded as liberation.

Once the thirty-six *tattvas* and the state of unconsciousness [in which one remains unaware of them] have gone, the ego [which knows those states] subsides. When the grace [which

arises thereafter] falls away, one remains in the pure state of readiness for Lord Śiva's grace (*parai yōkam*). Then when [the last vestige of] individual consciousness has gone, and the work of Lord Śiva's grace (*para sakti*) has come to an end, one is annihilated in the One, other than which nothing is, (the non-dual reality). This is the [supreme] state beyond bliss. (245)

The words *one's independent awareness having gone* translate the words *taṅ cutantaram pōy*. It was stated earlier in the verse that upon the arising of grace, the ego, the personal consciousness, subsides along with the world of the *tattvas*, (which is perceived in the waking and dream states, and masked in the state of unconsciousness). Therefore *taṅ cutantaram* (from Sanskrit *svatantra – self-dependence, independence, self-will*), presumably refers to the last vestige of consciousness which we call *the witness*, which is the state in which the world is simply witnessed without any form of discrimination, the seer and the thing seen being merged in the single act of seeing. Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) glosses: 'The independent awareness in which one perceives oneself as the seer and the thing seen.' See also the notes to verse 244 regarding the state of *parai yōkam*.

The words *oṅru ākā oṅru*, here translated as *the One, other than which nothing is, might also be translated as the One that is not, or does not become, One or the One in which nothing is, or comes to be*. The Self is neither one nor many; it contains and transcends both. 'One' and 'many' are merely mental concepts, which arise within the Self, therefore neither can describe it. When we examine elements of the apparent external reality, each, on analysis, resolves *ad infinitum* into ever smaller component parts, as we seek the final 'irreducible' sub-atomic particles, which, in the course of time, will, having been named and classified, inevitably be found to divide yet further in an infinite regression. The external world is seen therefore to consist entirely of names and forms at each level of analysis, without any actual substance, other than the consciousness within which they manifest. The only 'substance', if we can call it that, is this consciousness which enables the mind, along with its object, the world, to manifest. It is this idea which is conveyed by the term 'non-dual'.

As it rides in state through the avenues of the five senses, mounted upon the steed of the ego, consciousness is like a whirling rocket, [as it engages with the objects of sense]. But if the steed is consciousness and its rider grace, supreme bliss will arise, in which nothing is gained or lost. Know this, my disciple! (246)

The activity of the mind was compared to a rocket in an earlier verse; see v.105 and note. A rocket, once ignited, will be impossible to control, flying off in random directions, shooting out fire and sparks. Similarly the mind, once ignited by the desire for the objects of sense, will rush off towards them along the paths of five senses.

Any attempt on the part of consciousness to control the ego and use it as its vehicle is doomed to failure, as it will only be carried further and further into involvement with the mind and senses. However, if consciousness abandons itself to divine grace, becoming its vehicle, the ego will not arise, and the bliss of the Self will be gained.

Disciple, [know that] true renunciation is the ending of all conflict upon the elimination of the activity of the discriminating consciousness, [in which you are deluded], as you investigate [the objects of sense], examining them inwardly and outwardly [through the mind and senses], knowing them, [grasping and] becoming immersed in them before forgetting them again, and mistaking them for yourself, so that you are wracked by pleasure and pain, as [by turns] you [gain and] lose them. (247)

TCS notes that between knowing the objects of sense through the senses and being immersed in them through the mental faculties, the intermediate stage of grasping them through the organs of action is also implied.

All that occurs [and is known through the physical, sensory and mental faculties] is yourself (your own consciousness) only. But if you think, therefore, that to remain in the state where all those faculties are eliminated is Śivam, [you should know that] when [those faculties] subside, the [defilement of *āṇava malam*] will

delude and overwhelm you. The state of union with Śivam will only occur through grace, in which the *māyā* [of the faculties] and the forgetfulness [of *āṇavam*] do not arise. (248)

In this verse it is stated that the mere ending of *cakalam* – the waking state, in which the *jīva* is immersed in *māyai* – the world appearance, will not result in liberation. It will only be replaced by the state of total forgetfulness *kēvalam*, as in deep sleep, here equated with *āṇavam*, the impurity which obscures the *jīva*. It is further stated that only the intervention of divine grace can bring about the ending of these alternating states.

The state of grace and the actionless state beyond grace are like the sun and moon. The place in which the day of the former and the night of the latter are no more, is the state of supreme bliss. The pure state which arises on the elimination of the experience of that bliss, which is of the nature of being-consciousness-bliss, is the state in which you are not. (249)

The active state, in which the *jīva* becomes aware of the power of grace and surrenders to it, is compared to daylight and the fiery sun, and the passive state, in which the *jīva*, having become established in grace, transcends it and awaits the final union with Śivam is compared to night and the cool moon.

In this verse it is made clear that the states which precede this *cutta nilai* – state of purity, however subtle they may be, all contain some trace of the personal consciousness, some sense of separation from Śivam. It is only in the final state, which is beyond even bliss, that the final trace of egoity is finally expunged.

Know this, O disciple! One should offer oneself up to be consumed by Śivam, just as food is consumed to support the body; then having transmuted one's experience of the world through the medium of grace, one should become established in the state of *parai*, [in which grace is eclipsed]; then as one's own self is annihilated, the aggregation of the five defilements will be destroyed. [If this is not possible, this state may be gained]

if one pays homage to the devotees of Lord Śiva, worshipping through the agency of the five holy syllables. (250)

This verse begins by describing the process of seeing all experience as the workings of grace, so that all that one experiences becomes a part of the divine process, the will of the divine, which leads to union with itself. The verse then goes on to state that this process culminates in the state of *parai*, in which the entire experience of one's being in, and experiencing the world is subsumed in divine grace so that one becomes established entirely in the field of grace. In this state the individual consciousness, which experiences that grace, is entirely eclipsed, as the light of the stars is eclipsed in the light of day. This is the state in which the subject-object nexus is transcended, the state of pure witnessing, which we have earlier tentatively identified with the *ātma sphurana* as described by Sri Ramana.

TCS lists the *pañca mala kottu* – the aggregate of the five defilements as *ānavam*, *māyai*, *kāmiyam*, *tirōtai*, and *māmāyai*. *tirōtai* is the particular energy of Śivam that binds the first three *malams* to the *jīva*, and *māmāyai* is the pure *māyā* of Śiva, in which the five divine operations take place.

Meditating on and repeating the five holy syllables *si-vā-ya-na-ma* whilst submitting oneself to the authority of a guru is recommended as an alternative for those unable to immediately grasp the higher truths. In the five syllable mantra *si-vā-ya-na-ma*, *si* represents Śivam; *vā* represents *his energy of grace – aruḥ shakti*; *ya* represents the *jīva*; *na* represents *māyā* or *tirōtham*, the energetic whirl of impurity in itself, and *ma* represents *ānavam*, that impurity as operating within the *jīva*. The symbolism of the mantra is described in the Siddhānta text *Tiru Aruḥ Payaṇ* – *The Fruit of Divine Grace* by Umāpati Sivācāriyār, a guru in the lineage of Mēykaṇṭa Tēvar:

*See on one side, the dance of defilement,  
on the other the dance of true knowledge,  
and oneself (the jīva) in the middle.  
As 'ma' and 'na' unfold, uniting with the consciousness (of the jīva)  
they do not permit it to return (to the Lord).  
If its powerful deeds are cancelled out, it will succeed in returning.*  
Tiru Aruḥ Payaṇ vv. 83-84.

Thus the *jīva* comes into its limited being and suffers when it is associated with impurity, but merges with Śivam when it frees itself and realises its true identity.

When your faculties were in operation, we revealed to you the nature of the states of *cakalam* (waking consciousness) and *kēvalam* (unconsciousness). Then when grace arose [as a consequence of that], we placed you in the states [of grace and *parai yōkam*], in the same way [that we had previously shown you the states of *cakalam* and *kēvalam*]. And now it is our responsibility to establish you in the condition of purity, which is untouched by the day and night [of those aforementioned states], [just as it is your duty] not to bring into play [your personal consciousness]. (251)

The *jīva* is endowed with the powers of the mind and senses and immersed in the world of the *tattvas*, in order that it can, through experience, come to realise the illusory nature of the existence which plays out in the states of waking, dream and sleep.

When the *jīva*, through its experience of the states of *cakalam* and *kēvalam*, reaches a certain point of ripeness in its spiritual growth, the veiling power of Śivam, turns to one of bestowing *aruḥ* – *grace*. Then, as mentioned previously (see verse 250 and note), when the *jīva* becomes entirely immersed in grace, the individual consciousness which experiences that grace is entirely eclipsed, and this state is called *parai*, or *parai yōkam*. It is implied in this verse that, just as the *cakalam* world of the *tattvas* is entirely blotted out in the state of *kēvalam*, *aruḥ* – *grace*, in entirely overwhelming the discriminating consciousness, is entirely eclipsed in the state of *parai*.

[Grace] will establish [the ripe devotee in the state of liberation], like sugar appearing fortuitously in the mouths of those who go about biting the bare ground of a sugarcane field [in the hope of finding sweetness]. If, like those of low intelligence [who think they can achieve anything they want without help], you claim that [the gaining of liberation] is due to your own excellence, you will be in the state where the greatness of your true Self is lost. (252)

The text simply says *irutti vidum* – *will cause to be, place, establish*. The author leaves us to infer from the content and tenor of the preceding verses that what is doing the establishing is grace, the persons being established in it are the mature devotees mentioned in the following note, and what they are being established in is the state of liberation.

Those who practice the lower paths, *cariyai* and so on, are fancifully compared to those who bite the earth of a sugarcane field in the hope of finding sweetness. When they attain a degree of spiritual maturity, they will give up their futile quest and abandon themselves to divine grace, which will come to them fortuitously, as sugar might be imagined to appear fortuitously in the mouths of those who bite the earth of a sugarcane field looking for sweetness.

As I pay homage to him, my unspoken words offer praises to the one who suddenly turned his gaze upon me, like a painted picture which had come to life revealing to me the truth, ‘You are reality itself, [which is merged with you] just as the radiance of the heavens is merged with the pupil of the eye!’ (253)

Since the realised guru is free of any trace of a personal consciousness, and is permanently merged with the Self, he simply becomes a part of that ephemeral, dream-like image that is projected, as it were, upon the screen of that Self. The sound of his voice, therefore, would seem to emanate mysteriously from the image of the guru, which would be as if painted on that screen like a painted portrait.

Just as the eye can only function using the light that emanates from the sun, and is otherwise inert, the *jīva* can only function using the consciousness that emanates from the Self. Also, just as the eye can only function in the reflected light of the sun, and is incapable of seeing anything if it looks directly at the sun’s disc, the *jīva* is only able to function in the reflected consciousness of the world of the tattvas. If it turns to look at the Self, it will be entirely effaced, merging and becoming one with that Self. ▲

(Concluded)

## BOOK REVIEWS



**BALANCING THE MIND.** A Tibetan Buddhist Approach to Refining Attention by B. Alan Wallace. Snow Lion, Boston & London. pp.336, \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-55939-230-3. [www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com)

Alan Wallace is a notable Buddhist scholar, practitioner, translator for many senior Tibetan masters, lecturer and teacher in the Gelupa Tibetan Buddhist tradition. He was ordained in the early 1970s and initially trained under Geshe Rabten (1921-1986) in Switzerland. He was a monk for 14 years and traveled to various countries for teachings including Sri Lanka. He then returned to academic life and graduated *summa cum laude* from Amherst College, where he studied physics and the philosophy of science. He next earned a Ph.D. in religious studies at Stanford University. In later years he was guided by a senior lama of the Nyingma school, the Atiyoga teacher Gyatrul Rinpoche (b.1925). He is the author of more than forty books on Tibetan teachings and texts. This book has a foreword by H.H. the Dalai Lama, which indicates the approval at the highest levels in the Tibetan tradition.

This book in question is divided into three parts: i.) An introduction to Tsongkhapa’s vision of reality; ii.) An excerpted translation of a Tibetan text *Small Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Tsongkhapa (the chapter in the book is titled ‘The Cultivation of Quiescence’); and iii.) Finally, an analysis of quiescence.

Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) was the founder of the Gelupa sect in Tibetan Buddhism of which H.H. the Dalai Lama is the present head. Tsongkhapa is one of the truly great luminaries not just in Buddhism but in the world of spirituality. He created within the Gelupa sect the study of logic, encouraged formal debates on *Dharma* as a preliminary second to experiential practices. His extraordinary mental acumen was such he was able to give clear summaries of all the principal Buddhist traditions and lead those who followed him to the highest teachings on consciousness through meditation techniques based solidly on tradition starting with the Theravada roots. He did not just teach, but he also practised and imparted the Vajrayana. Tsongkhapa taught the *prasangika* interpretation of the Madhyamaka teachings on

*sunyata* (emptiness), which is based on the tradition first enunciated by Nagarjuna. The school's primary aim was to establish the ultimate truth of emptiness beyond all conceptual elaboration.

Wallace in his dense but lucid introduction explains the procedures and experiential results of Tibetan practitioners and helps us with discussions of the western scientific approach to the investigations of consciousness. The main purpose of Wallace's book is to give us an overview of how Tibetan Buddhism developed profound levels of attention and clarity. This is a book for those who wish not just to practice meditation but also want an intellectually satisfying analysis which can deepen their understanding.

It is impossible to summarise Wallace's masterful introduction, commentary on Tsongkhapa's text and analysis of the topic, namely quiescence. I will instead focus on the meaning of quiescence and its corollary, the cessation of suffering in all its forms and causes. Wisdom can only arise in meditation when the mind is established in a state of mental equipoise, that is, *samatha* or quiescence. It is indispensable for gaining meditative insight (*vipasyana*) into the nature of mundane phenomena and its relationship with ultimate reality.

By attaining the state of *samatha* or quiescence, which "refers to a wide range of highly developed states of concentration," a person can transcend the realm of the physical sense and the desires which dominate this level of consciousness. With practise one enters the form realm, *rupadhatu*, but even here one's consciousness is still structured by, albeit, subtle concepts. This is still within the realm of samsara and as such has to be transcended. Tsongkhapa states that as soon as quiescence is achieved, the entire focus and flow of one's attention should be trained inwards and one gradually divests oneself of all ideas and repetitive thoughts and emotions that impede the continuum of quiescence.

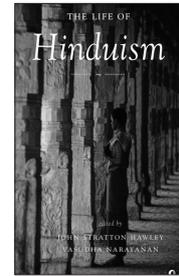
Wallace makes the argument that *samatha* has been overlooked particularly by modern Theravada Buddhists in favour of insight practice by stating that *samatha* will automatically be accomplished along with the cultivation of insight. However they fail to understand that *samatha* is not the same as 'stable, non-conceptual mindfulness'. This assertion is rejected by Tsongkhapa and also by the revered Theravada master Buddhaghosa, whose book *Visuddhimagga* 'Path of Purification' is one of the foundational texts of Buddhist meditation.

Without the solid base of *samatha* any further development is suspect and may mislead and thus, to be counter-productive.

We see a similar problem with the practice of Advaita Vedanta. Until we are cleansed of our *vasanas*, laziness, misconceptions it is impossible to understand let alone 'grasp' the subtle teachings Bhagavan Ramana gives us. The mind has to be purified for us to see clearly. Just as we cannot see clearly a specimen through the dirty lens of a microscope, our mind must be clean for us to see directly and truly.

This book may not be for everyone because of the intellectual demands made, particularly with the translation and commentary of the middle section, that is, Tsongkhapa's detailed classifications in the text of how *samatha* is developed, but the first and third chapters with Wallace's dexterous exposition is worth the effort.

— Christopher Quilkey



THE LIFE OF HINDUISM. Edited by John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan. Aleph Book Company promoted by Rupa Publications, Delhi. 2017. 324pp, Rs.799. (HB) ISBN: 979-93-86021-08-3 [www.alephbookcompany.com](http://www.alephbookcompany.com)

This is a distinguished collection of essays first published in 2007 by the University of California and is only available for sale in India and neighbouring countries. The articles, some quite recent, others from the 1970s and updated, are meant to cover the richness and diversity of Hinduism and its relevance to those who follow the *sanatana dharma* today in modern India home and abroad, with its new range of challenges. The book sections are: Worship, The Life Cycle, Festival, Performance, Gurus, Caste, Diaspora, and Identity. Many of the articles have been published before but because of their excellence they have been gathered together to present a picture with a view to inform.

The broad sweep of the information, insights and intelligence of the collection makes for generally relaxed reading. The editors obviously wanted their book to reach the maximum readership without compromising the scholarship. This is a book for NRIs who wish their children to be more informed about their 'religion' and for those within India who want a comprehensive overview of what it means to be a Hindu.

It would also be a good introduction for those who are born in another faith, and want to know more about the sensible aspects of Hinduism.

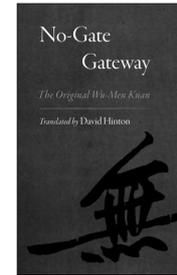
In the section on Gurus there are interesting articles on Ananda Mayi Ma by Lisa Hallstrom and on Charan Singh, the then guru of the Radhasoami movement who was active in the 1980s when the article was published. This latter essay is by the ever percipient Sudhir Kakar, whose sharp, fresh observations are a pleasure to read.

Though many of the articles are written from a scholarly point of view, there is a level of respect, thoughtfulness and intelligence which is appealing. There is none of the nationalistic rants or apologetics of some publications that seem to think Hinduism needs to be defended. Hinduism gets along very nicely because of the profound, eternal truths which underlie its expression in a seemingly endless range of variations. The genius of Hinduism is its inclusiveness. Judging by this book Hinduism fears nothing for its continued existence and ability to fulfil the aspirations of those who follow the *dharma*.

The article on one of the earliest temples built in the USA in Pittsburgh is fascinating for the ability of the *dharma* to find root at that time, in a quite alien environment. The pioneering way in which the Sri Venkateswara temple was built in Penn Hill, Pennsylvania, is a lesson in adaptability. For, the Srivaisnava rites could have inhibited those of another persuasion in Hinduism but the community outreach was such that many Hindus in the US contributed to the purchase of the land and the construction of the temple according to the strict rules of *Vastu*. And though the temple adhered to the *Srivaisnava* rites, the schedule was flexible enough to make it easier for devotees to come and worship. For example, the *Maha Brahmotsavam* celebrations were adjusted to the US 4th July celebrations so that people could come and participate.

Another article of note is on the phenomenon of the Ramayana created by Ramananda Sagar for TV in the 1980s which united the nation in a mass viewing. Roughly over 100 million stopped each Sunday morning during the screening to watch the saga of Lord Rama. The series created an unprecedented response in people and showed the depth of feeling, both overt and covert in India, despite the so-called modernisation of the country and the swing towards a materialistic lifestyle. Scratch an Indian and underneath you may find Lord Rama or Lord Krishna alive and pulsating.

Each of the twenty articles gives pause for thought. The editors of this volume are to be commended for their sense of discrimination and love of Hindu religion and culture. — Christopher Quilkey



NO-GATE GATEWAY: THE ORIGINAL WU-MEN KUAN. Trans. David Hinton. Shambala Publications, Inc., 4720 Walnut St., Boulder, CO. 80301, www.shambala.com. US\$ 16.95. ISBN: 978-1-61180-437-9.

Koan study has been central to a number of Zen and Ch'an lineages for hundreds of years now, and modern students unfamiliar with the Chinese and Japanese languages know how sensitive koan cases and verses are to the subtlety of translation. Contemporary Zen practitioners working with koan collections often consult more than one translation. Hence Western students cannot but be happy to have another rendition of this great work to contemplate some of the most renowned cases in Ch'an's 1,500-year history.

David Hinton in his *No-Gate Gateway: The Original Wu-Men Kuan* offers a fresh take on the Mumonkan—the Sung Dynasty collection of Zen Master Wu-men Hui-kai (1183-1260) or Mumon Ekai in Japanese—that is often studied first at centres and monasteries where the koan curriculum is offered. By tradition it is thought that non-duality cannot be grasped with the discursive thinking mind and thus, koan collections are needed to upturn habitual logical modes of inquiry and bring intuition to bear on the nuances of non-dual teaching. The *Wu-Men Kuan*, here translated as *No-Gate Gateway*, is one such collection. Arguably, it is not just Zen students who are reading about koans, nevertheless, it is only by a sustained interest that one will be able to penetrate their ineffable language and thus get a grasp of what is being talked about in these puzzling stories.

Hinton's interpretation is original though readers familiar with other translations are sure to complain about a number of his translation decisions, not least of all, to substitute the Chinese and Japanese names of the masters and their interlocutors with etymological monikers. This is an unusual move especially considering that Nansen (Nan-chuan) and the other masters who appear in the collection have become household names among Zen practitioners. In the present volume,

Nansen has been rendered “Master Wellspring-South Mountain” and One-finger Gutei, the master of the famous fourth case, has been rendered “Master Million-Million” (which presumably means trillion??). It is not clear that we are the wiser for calling the great Joshu “Master Visitation-Land” though it is commonly known that Joshu (Chou-cho) took his name from the area of the renowned bridge adjacent to which he built his monastery. While some additional information is conveyed in the new nomenclature, it may not outweigh the literary advantage of upholding familiar designations. While most readers of Shakespeare, for example, don’t know that Juliet means ‘Jove’s child’ or that Romeo means, ‘a pilgrim to Rome’, such clarifications are not key to the story and have no place in the main body of the text. (Thus we happily avoid renderings such as, O pilgrim to Rome, pilgrim to Rome! Wherefore art thou pilgrim to Rome?) It should be added that No-Gate Gateway’s author chose not to give etymological renditions of Indian names, so the names for Bodhidharma and Mahakasyapa remain unchanged.

Another peculiar translation decision is rendering the Chinese *wu* (*mu*, in Japanese) as ‘absence’. The famous first case of the collection which (when translated from the Japanese) normally reads, A monk once asked Master Joshu, “Does a dog have Buddha Nature or not?” Joshu said, “*Mu!*” is rendered in Hinton’s translation as, A monk asked Master Visitation-Land: “A dog too has Buddha-nature, no?” “Absence,” Land replied.

For these and other reasons, *No-Gate Gateway* will not likely make it into the canon for koan study among Western Zen students. Nevertheless, the book is well-worth a read. The translator proves his value in the accompanying verses to each case, and the book’s introduction – especially the section on presence and absence – gives food for thought.

— Michael Highburger

IN SEARCH OF SHIVAA Novel by Mukunda Rao, Pub: Dronequill Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore. 2010. (PB) pp220, Rs.250, ISBN 978-81-89276-13-3.

This book seeks to give a slightly fictionalized account of the lives and messages of three outstanding religious revolutionaries of Karnataka of the 12th century A.D. Basavanna, the gentle, soft-spoken, humble Brahmin quietly, peacefully and silently went on to pull down the

walls of caste dividing people. Boatmen, washermen, watermen, tanners, cobblers, tailors, barbers, cooks, shepherds, laborers, basket weavers, fishermen, toddy sellers and peasants rose above their castes, got together, ate together, prayed together to Lord Shiva and were in the vanguard of this non-violent egalitarian movement. Basavanna wrote: “If you are brave/Why do you need an arrow?”

Mahadevi, everyone’s Akka, elder sister, young and beautiful, with unusually long and thick tresses, literally stood in utter nakedness of the spirit, married to the one and only Purusha, Chenna Mallikarjuna, Lord Shiva. In a *vachana*, a poetic saying, she urges women to marry deathless Chenna Mallikarjuna and throw the decaying, dying human husbands to the kitchen fire. If Basavanna and Mahadevi transcended world’s barriers, Allama Prabhu was ultra-transcendental. If Basavanna’s *vachanas* can melt stones and Akka Mahadevi’s electrify the listener, Prabhu’s are deep, mysterious, enigmatic, iconoclastic and illuminating. His radical utterances are reminiscent of the verses of the Saiva Agama *Devikalottara* rendered in exquisite Tamil verses centuries later by Bhagavan Ramana and he anticipates J.Krishnamurti and even more another Krishnamurti when he seems to negate everything. Yet there is a unique, nameless quality to the life of Prabhu.

Mukunda Rao’s portrayal of Anna, Akka and Allama cannot be bettered. His etchings of other characters like Guru Siddharamaiah, Chenna Basava, Kings Bijala and Kaushika, the wise storytellers Bahurupi and others also reveal consummate skill. Rao has a perfect command of English, his writing is word-perfect and his limpid prose often effortlessly turns poetic when he describes nature, setting it as an apt silhouette to men and their emotions, thoughts, actions and relationships.

The tempo of narration increases with every page coming to a thrilling head in the chapter *Challenge to Allama* and to a nail-biting finish in *Mahadevi’s Trial* where the sky-clad Mahadevi, slip of a girl, puts the awesome Allama, vast and empty like the sky, coolly and courteously in his place, earning his whole-hearted applause and the acclamation of the large audience..

This eminently readable book deserves to be widely read, especially by the followers of Basavanna so as to be reminded that Basavanna was not just one of the foremost but the foremost among those who ceaselessly strove to create a casteless society.

— Nididhyaasu

# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## Sri Chakra Puja

The Sri Chakra Puja which is performed every Friday evening and on special occasions such as Poornima, was first initiated in March 1953 by Major Chadwick. The Sri Chakra Puja, the weekly Devi puja is conducted at the Mother's Shrine. One year after the regular Sri Chakra Puja was established, an elaborate day-long fire-ceremony was performed to commemorate the event and to rededicate the inner sanctum of the Mother's Shrine. Since then the Sri Vidya Havan has been an annual event. This year's Sri Vidya Havan was performed on Friday, 16th March, with various recitations including *Devi Mahatmyam*, *Lalita Sahasranamam* and *Trisathi* as *homa* flames glowed brightly. Divine Mother in young girls and *sumangalis* (married ladies) were worshiped. *Poornahuti* was performed at 3pm, followed by procession and *abhishekam*.

The Sri Chakra Puja and the Sri Vidya Havan are important rituals for sustaining the ashram and its activities for the propagation the teachings of Bhagavan.

## Sri Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana

Sri Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana commemoration began in the early morning hours of the 13th May. Right in the heart of Agni nakshatra, Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall was decorated with natural vetiver (*khus*) fibres which gave a cool fragrance on a warm summer day. Devotees arrived at 5.30 am for Tamil Parayana as *purohits* gathered in the Mother's Shrine for *Mahanyasa* recitation. *Abhishekam* followed at 8.30 am and final *arati* at 10.30 am when the Hall brimmed with fervour. In the evening, the New Granthalaya auditorium hosted Ramana music by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar. On the following day, 14th May, Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning offered the annual *Ramana Pada Pancharatnam*, with verses of Sivaprakasam Pillai selected by Sulocana Natarajan set to the five *ghana ragas* of the great Karnatic composer, Saint Thyagaraja.

## Sri Bhagavan's Aradhana at the Mahanirvana Room

On the morning of 14th April, 2018, devotees celebrated the Tamil New Year with the reading of the *panchangam* ('almanac') in Bhagavan's Shrine in the early afternoon. *Kramaparayana* began at 4.30pm in observance of monthly *Sivaratri* which was celebrated with special puja at 6pm. Sri Chakra Puja was scheduled early in order for all to gather at Bhagavan's Nirvana Room at 8.15 pm to sing *Aksharamanamalai* in heartfelt remembrance of Bhagavan's earthly departure at 8.47 pm on 14th April, 1950.

## Mahanandi Tirtham Renovation

Nandi, Lord Siva's bull-devotee, is forever seated before the Lord. He was the son of the Sage Shilada. Nandi was born after Shilada took up extreme penance to have the boon of an immortal child devoted to the Lord. Nandi received the divine knowledge of Agamic and Tantric wisdom from Parvati who was taught by Lord Shiva Himself. According to Shaiva tradition, he is considered as the chief Guru of eight disciples of Nandinatha Sampradhaya. (Nandi [Skt.] means 'happiness' or 'joy'; [Tam.] 'to grow' or 'flourish').

Adjacent to the Mahanandi Shrine just west of Yama Linga on the girivalam road is Mahanandi Tirtha, constructed in the Pandya period. When the highway department recently undertook renovation of the Chengam Road drains just west of the Ashram, they reconstructed the defunct drainage culverts that fed Mahanandi Tirtham. This means that the ancient sacred tank should now get ample water supply from the Hill slopes when the monsoon arrives. But after decades of neglect, the tank is in need of repairs. Sri Ramanasramam offered its assistance and the *bhumi puja* for the renovation project took place on Sunday morning 20th May with Ashram devotees in attendance. (See photograph on page 98)

## Archives Building

The Ashram Archives is recovering in the aftermath of a freak storm that brought down numerous large trees in the Ashram on 8th May. The slight rain that accompanied the high winds was a welcome reprieve from the May summer heat. But one almond tree fell on the Archives entrance portal damaging roof and woodwork. Trees are now being trimmed to prevent a recurrence.

## Obituary

The Arunachaleswarar Temple elephant Rukmani passed away in the early hours of Thursday morning, the 22nd March. All *pujas* in the temple that day were postponed in honour of the cow elephant who had served in the temple, blessing its many adherents each day for close to 27 years. Rukku, as she was affectionately called, sustained a head injury when out for her regular walk on a Wednesday around 9pm. Spooked by a barking dog, in her panicked flight, the elephant inadvertently collided with a barricade. Rukmani passed away just two weeks before her 30th birthday and was laid to rest in a large grave near Anjaneya Temple on Vada Othavadai Street near Ammani Ammal Gopuram. On hearing the news, hundreds of devotees and residents from across Tiruvannamalai thronged to the temple to pay their last respect to this lovable elephant. (See photograph of Rukku on page 67). ▲

### MOUNTAIN PATH

Statement about ownership and other particulars about Mountain Path (according to Form IV, Rule 8, Circular of the Registrar of Newspapers for India).

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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. 31/03/2018