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Divine Names of Arunachala

15.ॐ मृदाय नमः:

om mr̥dāya namah

Prostration to the Gracious One.

‘*Mr̥dāya*’ is from the verbal root ‘*mr̥d*’ which means to be gracious or favourable; to forgive or pardon; to make happy; to be delighted or happy. Like the names Siva, Sankara and Sambhu, *Mr̥da* is indicative also of happiness, auspiciousness, blissfulness. Parvati is Mṛdāni. ‘*Mr̥dāya mām*’ means protect me. So *Mr̥da* can also mean the Protector.

In the first *anuvaka* of the Sri Rudram, verbal forms of the root ‘*mr̥d*’ are used to describe a quality of Rudra as the mountain-dweller or ‘*giriśamīta*’. Despite his warlike character, he delights his devotees with compassion. A Vedic storm god, he is quick to anger but also quick to forgive. The second verse reads:

“O Rudra, your arrows are the most auspicious, and your bow is auspicious too. Your quiver holds auspicious things. Please be gracious to us!”¹

In his five hymns to Arunachala, Bhagavan frequently exalts the overwhelming graciousness of Arunachala. He in turn showed extraordinary graciousness to devotees, such as Arthur Osborne, who in this instance experienced miraculous and inexpressible wonder.

“Once Arthur Osborne, who was working in Madras at the time, came to the Ashram unexpectedly after one of Sri Bhagavan’s operations. Bhagavan, who was usually discreet in showing outward signs of Grace, was taken by surprise as he perceived Arthur on the steps leading to the Ashram. Sri Bhagavan’s face lit up with indescribable tenderness and Grace. He continued to look directly at Arthur; others who were there found their hair standing on end just watching it. Arthur stood there like a child, his face transformed. “Who could ever deserve such Grace?” was all he could say.”² — BKC

¹ Translated by Marcia Solomon.

² *Bhagavan Sri Ramana: A Pictorial Biography*, Second Edition, April 1985, p. 97.

EDITORIAL

Stories

Someone said to Bahaudin Naqshband:

“You relate stories, but you do not tell us how to understand them.”

He said: “How would you like it if the man from whom you bought fruit consumed it before your eyes, leaving you only the skin?”¹

We all love stories. Who has not attended a talk on spirituality and earnestly tried to follow the more subtle points of the discourse until the speaker breaks the tension with a story? Who has not broken out in a smile of relief when this happens? The fact is that a very good speaker knows when to relax the audience. A dull speaker drones on and on not noticing the heads drooping in boredom.

The Old Hall was Bhagavan’s residence, it was not a cathedral. Though there were profound moments of inner silence particularly when the Vedas were chanted, the Old Hall was where devotees chatted with Bhagavan who was responsive to genuine enquiries about spirituality, but also conversed with devotees about their families, their job prospects and what was happening in the world. It was not all stern and serious. On the contrary there was a sunny atmosphere in the Old

¹ Shah, Idries, *Thinkers of the East*, Penguin, 1971. p.137.

Hall and devotees loved to hear Bhagavan tell stories, they would hang on each precious word. If we read *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, we can see story after story mentioned in the diary. The ashram has also published a whole collection of spiritual stories told by Bhagavan.

In those days everyone who was in or associated with the ashram in any capacity whatsoever, came to Bhagavan with any news, or query or story that they thought would interest him. In fact that meant practically anything, and he treated everyone, scholar or coolie, child or ancient, with the same respect and gave them his close attention. He would ask for the smallest details about incidents and give his considered opinion on the matter.

Bhagavan was a wonderful raconteur with the natural gift of any true story-teller, the ability to hold his audience transfixed.

He had an instinctively light touch and could immerse himself so much in the telling that it became a delightful performance with Bhagavan acting out the various characters and parts. The Old Hall would often literally be shouting with laughter. There were also times when he became so involved in the story of a saint who suffered numerous travails that he could no longer proceed and broke down in tears. Equally so, when describing an event of great joy he would shed tears of ecstasy as when he was reading the *Arunachala Purana* describing the visit of the goddess Parvati to the ashram of the rishi Gautama at the base of Arunachala.²

Bhagavan also encouraged other people to tell stories to which he would listen intently. His stories or even his comments on stories by other people, more often than not would contain the nucleus of a hidden truth. He planted seeds of consciousness in those who listened; seeds that one day would certainly blossom and bear fruit.

Stories and parables are meant to be entertaining but they also contain another intention: to teach us a significant insight into spiritual life and how we may apply it. Stories are not inflexible polemics but rather powerful, flowing ideas that free us from stale rigidity. There is a risk of making Bhagavan's transcendental teaching into a system.

² Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramansramam*, Chapter 3. 'The Quarrel between Uma and Maheswara', 23rd November 1945.

It is erroneous to conceive Bhagavan's teaching as a scheme, which if properly organised, will produce 'results' or *jñāna*. The more we examine the teachings and arrange them in categories, the more mechanical the teaching will become until there is nothing left but empty formulae. The teachings are meant to convey the truth but we should always keep in mind that they are not the truth itself. They are the train but not the destination!

For that we must become the teaching. To know *jñāna* is to be *jñāna*. There is no degree of separation. To say for example that one nearly understands would be equivalent to saying that something is nearly an orange. It either is or it isn't. There is no in-between. This is the litmus test for those who 'think' they know. We listen to stories for that flash of lightning revelation when everything is oh so clear like a 'gooseberry in the palm of one's hand'.³

This clarity is not a fixed phenomenon, it is a *sphurana*, a bubbling up, a fresh spring of inexhaustible nowness. To cling to a moment's revelation as if it is the ultimate goal, is a mistake. *Jñāna* is ever new. Ever alert and fresh. The Self is not an object you can grasp and control. The moment we do that we lose it. There is nothing we can hold on to although we can be like a shadow and move alongside it.

Though we may learn from the stories about and by Ramana, the historical Ramana no longer exists. That entity we call Ramana has transcended that name and form and is beyond our current capacity to grasp and possess as if it were ours. Consider for a moment what it means to be before the Samadhi of Bhagavan. How many prayers, how many thoughts and emotions by thousands upon thousands of people have been daily and simultaneously expressed? We cannot even begin to conceive the nature of that divine conscious force we call Ramana Maharshi which is aware of all. We may stand before the Samadhi and pray to him but what we are really doing is using those flimsy bits of information we have about Ramana to reach out and connect so that an 'automatic divine action' occurs. What we are really saying is that we wish to become one with him, to be like him — and over time we will be absorbed into 'that' as long as we

³ In Tamil there is an expression 'as clear as the *nelli* in one's palm' which is the equivalent to the English saying, 'as clear as crystal'. See *Atma Vidya*, v.1.

continue to let go of our attachments and imperfect ideas. Here is where wise stories help us, for they inspire and charge us with the necessary energy to go beyond our habitual thinking and emotions, and they do it in a way that appeals instantly to our ‘human’ nature. A story pregnant with meaning has the ability to stop our mind for an instant. Time stands still as we gaze between two thoughts.

Stories help us prepare. Like a rubber ball held in our palm we press and probe a story from various angles to get the feel of it. It is a creative act as we mull over stories about him and by him.

Yes, it is necessary to learn the theoretical background; yes, it is necessary to acquire a working knowledge of how *ātma-vicāra* works and to diligently pursue it; yes, we should deepen our devotion to that ineffable spirit we call Bhagavan who lived on this earth many years ago in the form we call Ramana. All this is but a bridge for us to transcend our limitations, first by understanding what they are and then discarding them as we are absorbed in what we cannot really describe except as Arunachala Siva.⁴ Others call it Brahman, the Light, Nirvana.... Essentially we are moving from form to the formless, from *samsāra* to *ātmasākṣatkāra* (‘direct insight of the Self’). All our self-disciplines such as the right diet, association with people of similar inclination, right livelihood, right thinking, are all meant to purify us so that our ‘mechanism’, our mind and our higher mind, *buddhi* are capable of understanding and absorbing the subtle insights necessary for liberation.

Stories are a vital part of that leaning process. Stories are food for the higher mind. A story contains a seed of revelation that when you reflect on it, shifts your perception because of its fresh insight. It is alive. And a living idea has the power to revolutionise one’s understanding. A single idea can nourish a person, a nation, humanity. Think of Mahatma Gandhi who nourished the soul of India with the ideas of independence, fearlessness, truth, equality and non-violence. His belief in these ideas transformed the nation. People were willing

⁴ “[Arunachala] May You, who are without flaw, grant me your grace and unite with me as one, so that I may experience always the supreme bliss of union with Yourself, leaving behind the suffering which has arisen from being parted from you till now.” *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*, v.52. Translated by Robert Butler in the Commentary by Muhamavai Kanna Muruganar.

to suffer and die for them. So also we who are devotees of Ramana Maharshi are inspired by certain ideas that have infused our hearts so much so that we are prepared to sacrifice much that is apparently desirable and easy to acquire for the sake of a greater purpose, the realisation centred on the idea of ‘I am’.

This ardent quest is not to seek one’s own satisfaction in acquiring knowledge or to find others who will confirm one’s validity. We should avoid the syndrome of the mutual admiration society. An interesting consequence of the 2016 American presidential and Brexit elections was the discovery that the algorithms of the various social media companies created blocks of like-minded viewers who confirmed each other’s opinions so much so that they thought this was the general sentiment of everyone. It was a grave mistake. Petty minded stories have no place in our world. In the same way insularity is an error. The ashram is not a benign bubble where all is bliss. The outside world constantly intrudes and this is an advantage because the situation demands that we respond appropriately. It stretches our inner resources and punctures our preconceptions and idle dreams. We are here to work and the principal work we are engaged in is on ourselves. This is the path of *jñāna yoga*.

Appropriately enough, let us conclude this editorial with a story titled ‘Which Way Round is Right?’

“A certain wise man was widely reputed to have become irrational in his presentation of facts and arguments.

It was decided to test him, so that the authorities of his country could pronounce as to whether he was a danger to public order or not.

On the day of the test he paraded past the court-room mounted on a donkey, facing the donkey’s rear.

When the time came for him to speak for himself, he said to the judges:

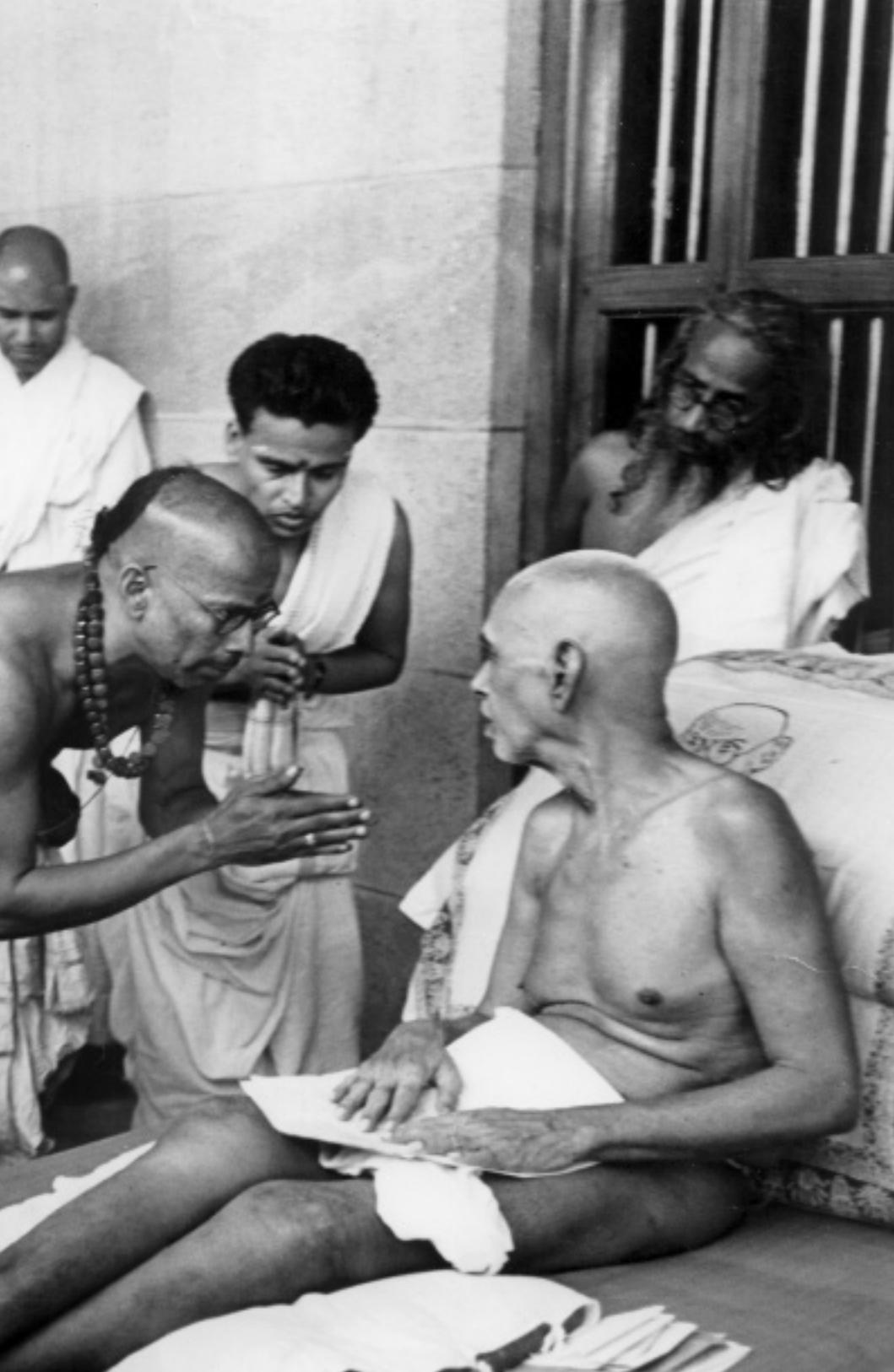
‘When you saw me just now, which way was I facing?’

The judges said: ‘Facing the wrong way.’

‘You illustrate my point,’ he answered, ‘for I was facing the right way, from one point of view. It was the donkey which was facing the wrong way.’”⁵



⁵ Shah, Idries, *The Way of the Sufi*, Penguin, 1968. p.192.



The True Meaning and Method of Surrender

Part One

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA GIRI
WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND GUIDANCE FROM
SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

To describe in one word an essential aspect needed for success that can be found in all schools of spiritual practice, it is surrender. Irrespective of which path one follows, or which teacher one relies on, surrender is a prerequisite.

Unfortunately, this fundamental attitude is easy to get wrong and a great number of us do so. But before such judgment is passed, let us analyze the proper Sanskrit dictionary etymology and meaning of the word ‘śaranāgati’, which is commonly translated into English as ‘surrender’.

The meaning of śaranāgati is derived from two root words. First is the word ‘saraṇam’, and finally, from the word ‘āgati’. ‘Saraṇam’ is defined with a list of synonyms including refuge, shelter, protection,

Swami Sadashivananda first came to Arunachala in 1970. After that initial darshan of Bhagavan he became a monk under the direction of Ananda Mayi Ma.

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succour, and interestingly, a place of rest. ‘Āgati’ means to come to; to go to; even to go quickly as an arrow released from a bow.

In the 18th chapter of the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Krishna uses this word twice in His final summation to Arjuna. The Lord reveals in verses 62 and 66 the highest and most profound secret regarding how to ‘surrender’ and what is its result.

*tam eva śaraṇam gaccha
sarvabhāvena bhārata
tatprasādāt parām śantim
sthānam prapsyasi śāsvatam*

*Fly unto Him alone for refuge
With your whole being, Arjuna.
From His grace, you shall attain
Supreme peace and the eternal abode. v.62*

*sarvadharmaṇ parityajya
mām ēkam śaraṇam vraja
ahām tvā sarvapāpebhyo
mokṣayisyami mā śucah*

*Abandoning all duties,
Take refuge in Me alone.
I shall liberate you
From all evils; do not grieve. v.66*

It is essential to note the precise words the Lord uses in both verses. In verse 62 the use of the word ‘*gaccha*’ signifies the exclamatory imperative act ‘to go!’. In verse 66 the word ‘*vraja*’, coming from the root ‘*vraj*’, implies a command ‘take, vow!’

Grammatically both usages are to be defined with extreme emphasis, for they are both 2nd singular imperative acts. The implication that Sanskrit scholars derive from this is that the Lord is revealing the act of surrender as a process of determined and totally concentrated effort. An often used synonym for ‘*śaraṇāgati*’ is *prapatti*, which means total surrender to God through devotion and adoration, combined with a life of purity and virtue.

Sri Ramana Maharshi clarifies the application of this secret

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revelation in the Gita when answering questions of devotees from both the *jñāna* and *bhakti mārga*:

“The ‘I’ casts off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remains as ‘I’. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of *bhakti* – I approach *Iswara* and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original ‘I’, perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the ‘I’ is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (*parabhakti*), *prapatti*, surrender or the height of *vairāgya* ... You give up this and that of ‘my’ possessions. If you give up ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus the evil is nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion (*vairāgya*) must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do it must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life.”¹

The *jñāni* ‘casts off’, the *bhakta* ‘approaches, prays and becomes absorbed’. Both are an active effort requiring ‘strong dispassion and concentrated eagerness’ to avoid being drowned in the waters of *samsāra* (an ocean of sorrows).

We can now discern that to believe ‘surrender’ is a whimsical act of ‘letting go’, ‘giving up the effort’, or casually and shyly ‘going with the flow’ is a lazy and erroneous assumption.

For Bhagavan and the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* declare that ‘surrender’ means flying like an arrow to a shelter, a refuge and a place of rest in God!

And if we try and try again to attain this most Blessed state, but find no help, our prayers will at least give us ‘ears to hear’ the proclamation from the *jagat guru*, the Spirit of Guidance:

“Devotee: We surrender; but still there is no help.

“Maharshi: Yes. If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently. Distress often leads men to faith in God.

“Devotee: But we are worldly. There is the wife, there are the children, friends and relatives. We cannot ignore their existence and

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

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resign ourselves to Divine Will, without retaining some little of the personality in us.

“Maharshi: That means you have not surrendered as professed by you. You must only trust God.”²

“In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*anisṭa*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Ishta*).”³

We now understand that the nature of surrender is a concentrated and definitive movement of the mind and heart towards God. Sri Krishna extolled us to “Fly unto Him, and take refuge in Him alone”. Sri Ramana Maharshi’s guidance gave us the conviction to abide by the will of God and not grumble at what may not please us. The distress we may feel often leads us to renewed faith in God.⁴

Without doubt, these words are full of Truth and inspiration, but, as is often said in the scriptures of both East and West: “Inspiration is one thing, the effect it has on our life and *sādhana* is quite another.” Soothing words do soften the sorrow of the human heart, but too often their effect fails to translate into lasting progressive movement towards God. Even if we are truly motivated to “Take wings and fly to the shelter of the bosom of our heavenly Father”, we are human by nature, and thus sybaritic by inclination. We may be really zealous in our austerities and vows in the beginning, but if we are not alert, slowly the vigour will be relaxed, the desire for comforts will creep into the mind and we will be caught in conflicts between our fears and desires. Thus a superficial understanding of ‘surrender’ is inconsequential when compared with an exact knowledge of what ‘śaraṇāgati’ is practically, and more importantly, how it is done.

For clarification of this most essential question let us now rely further on Bhagavan and the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* as our Guru, as our ‘Spirit of guidance’. Taking these two hands of Guidance and Blessing, we may securely proceed to the ‘further shore’.

“Blessings on your journey to the further shore beyond darkness!”⁵

² Ibid., Talk§43.

³ Sri Ananda Mayi Ma. Quotation from *Ananda Varta*.

⁴ Op. cit., Talk§43.

⁵ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.6.

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A visitor once asked of Bhagavan: “What is self-surrender?”

Bhagavan replied: “It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender...”⁶

“Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karma-s*, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him.”⁷

Bhagavan continued with a quote from the *Gītā*: “Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the *Gītā*,

ananyāś cintayanto māṁ
ye janāḥ paryupāsate |
teṣāṁ nityābhīyuktānāṁ
yogakṣemām vahāmyaham

Those men who worship, directing their thoughts to Me,
Whose minds do not go elsewhere;
For them, who are constantly steadfast,
I secure what they lack and preserve what they already possess.

— Śrī Bhagavad Gītā, 9.22

Bhagavan explains: “Arjuna had to do the fighting. So Sri Krishna said, ‘Place all the burden on Me, do your duty; you are merely an instrument. I will see to everything. Nothing will bother you.’ But then, before one surrenders to God, one should know who it is that surrenders. Unless all thoughts are given up there can’t be surrender. When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one’s Self. If surrender is in terms of bhakti, the burden should be thrown on God, and if it is in terms of *karma*, *karma* should be performed until one knows one’s own Self. The result is the same in either case. Surrender means to enquire and know about one’s own Self and then remain in the Self. What is there apart from the Self?”⁸

⁶ Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, Chap. VIII, Surrender. 2006. p. 56.

⁷ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Chap.109, ‘Absolute Surrender’. 10th April 1947.

⁸ Ibid., *Letters*.

Here, definitely, Bhagavan is guiding us towards a practice that culminates in *ātma-vicāra*. Many learned Sanskrit scholars define ‘*vicāra*’ as a process primarily of ‘reflection’ and secondarily as ‘enquiry’. We can see the efficacy of this within the guiding words of Bhagavan above in relation to ‘surrender’.

In order to, ‘Place all the burden on God, and do our duty merely as an instrument, for God will see to everything’, we surely must ‘somehow’ invoke and perceive THAT VERY PRESENCE. Otherwise, how in heaven or on earth are we to ‘throw our burden on the Lord’ if we do not know the place where to drop off the delivery!

The followers of all religions uniformly face the same dilemma; how is God to be found? All who seek to solve this ‘mystery of life’ find guidance in the saints. It is not essential to become a saint in order to find God, nor is it necessary. What is essential is that someone did it, and through their compassion they shed ‘light on the path’ that we may follow as we proceed toward attainment.

In India, one who sought and found, one who struggled and came through victorious, one who beheld the Face of God, was Swami Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala.

“Swami Ramdas gave great emphasis to constant chanting of God’s Name, His ceaseless remembrance and absolute surrender to His will. He even adds that these three are synonymous with God-realization. This means he who chants God’s Name constantly, has ceaseless remembrance of God and his surrender to God is absolute. He is as good as having realized God.

“‘Surrender’ is a word that appears in Beloved Papa’s (Swami Ramdas) utterances very often, because it is a magic word for him. He is very fond of it and extols it whenever he gets the opportunity. He assures, the moment we surrender to His will, we are flooded with peace.

“But, for the common man, the term ‘surrender’, means a sense of defeat and disappointment. When two persons or countries are engaged in a fight, one who feels too weak to defeat the opponent decides to admit defeat and face the serious consequences of humility and ignominy. He raises his hands in surrender. The fight ends with one in deep dejection because of the defeat and the other boisterous in his victory.

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“To a devotee, however, ‘surrender’ has an entirely different meaning. There is no fight. There is no defeat. There is no humiliation. There is only victory and the consequent joy. If at all we call it a fight, it is a fight with the ego, the individuality, for its survival. The ego, which is apparently fighting for its survival, does not really exist. It is only a product of the illusory veil put on by the *Atman*, on Itself, just for play – *līlā*, as the devotees say.

“‘Surrender’ here is the process of tearing off the illusory veil, which caused a sense of separation between the devotee and God. The result is the realization of the devotee’s oneness with Him. So ‘surrender’ here denotes the vanishing of the non-existent ego and therefore a victory of the devotee.”⁹

The death of the ego is when it is swallowed up, through liberating surrender. This is the victory of the devotee’s love of God. For the illusory veil is being rent asunder to the tune of the sweet ‘Song of the Spirit’, which touches the human heart.

The touch of Love Divine
Transmutes thee into purest light
A very mould of Truth
In which the Spirit Immortal
Sings to ageless tune;
The sweet strain fills limitless space
Love be thy God – only Love –
The liberating Mother Supreme. — Swami Ramdas

We shall now proceed to explore various methods of how to achieve true ‘śaranāgati’. These are presented by the most authoritative *jagat gurus* (world teachers). The various methods of *sādhana* presented lead to the same goal, if correctly practised with patient endurance. As Swami Vivekananda exclaimed to his Master, Sri Ramakrishna (who was delighted at the hearing): “God is infinite, and infinite are the ways to find Him!”

All great gurus universally agree that a quietening of thoughts is an essential prerequisite to control the mind and reflect upon its true

⁹ *Points to Ponder: Talks and Messages of Swami Satchidananda*, Anandashram Publications 2000, pp.78-79.

nature. Only those rare souls who are firmly grounded in the Self because of *sādhana* in past lives, effortlessly pass beyond this stage, even though they may be seen to undergo the quietening of the mind by tapas. One of the principal ways gurus taught is by focusing on the single sound (*aksara*) of God's Name.

Sri Muruganar, one of Sri Ramana's closest disciples wrote:

"Though Bhagavan rarely gave out mantras, when he did, he generally recommended 'Siva, Siva'. Muruganar himself was given this mantra by Bhagavan, as were several other devotees including Annamalai Swami, the brother of Rangan (who was one of Bhagavan's childhood friends), and an unknown harijan."⁹

Perhaps Bhagavan himself declared the reason for this by saying:

"Japa reaching to the source of sound is the best course for those who are not firm in consciousness which is the source of the 'I'."¹⁰

Perhaps we can take the liberty to conjecture that if one can say Bhagavan had 'motives', a profound one would have been to guide his disciples through the various stages of the bliss, which would act as catalysts to finally return, through *sādhana*, to their true home in the Self, God – the further shore.

"The purport of prescribing meditation on the *Pranava* is this. The *Pranava* is *Omkara*...the advaita-mantra which is the essence of all mantras.... In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the *Pranava*. ...The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [*mokṣa*], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss."¹¹

It has been said by those who knew Bhagavan and Ma that if there is a 'twin Spirit' of Bhagavan, an exact embodiment shrouded within a 'different' physical form, that is to be seen in Sri Anandamayi Ma. It is of great significance that Ma attended the ceremony for laying the foundation-stone of the planned stone edifice over the Samadhi of Bhagavan on the 5th November 1952, and strewed flowers over the structure.

⁹ *Padamalai*, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar, Translated and edited by T.V.Venkatasubramanian, R. Butler and D.Godman. pp. 224-25.

¹⁰ *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 'Nine Stray Verses', verse 2.

¹¹ *Self-Enquiry*, Section §28.

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If Bhagavan defines ‘self-surrender’ to be the same as ‘mind-control’ in a practice that reveals the knowledge of the Self, then surely Mother Anandamayi also guided Her devotees with a means to achieve the same glorious end.

Bhagavan declared to us: “When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one’s Self.”¹²

Sri Anandamayi Ma spoke directly about the means to annihilate the thoughts of the mind, which results in the direct knowledge of ‘Who we are’ and from ‘Whence we came’:

“In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*aniṣṭa*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Iṣṭa*). The notion that He is far away must be altogether given up. Thou art within and without, in every vein and artery, in every leaf and blade of grass, in the world and beyond it. The awakening of the sense of want is to be welcomed; it opens the way. He is there at every step to make the unfit expert. ‘As the sense of want and emptiness appearest Thou and no other—Thou art ever close by; Lord, I take refuge (*śaraṇāgati*) in Thee, I take refuge in Thee!’”

“The Name and the Named are identical; for He Himself appears as the Name. The sound (*akṣara*, the *praṇava Om*) is indeed God’s own guise.¹³ When the Name one repeats becomes alive, it is as when a seed is sown the tree grows out of it. If the Name that appeals most to any particular person is constantly repeated, one arrives at the realization that all names are His names, all forms His forms. Furthermore, that He is without name and form will also by and by come to light.

“*Karma* accumulated for ages and ages, sins and desires are wiped out by God’s sacred Name. Just as lighting a lamp illuminates a cave that has been in darkness for centuries, even so the obscurity of numberless births is annihilated by the power of a divine Name.

“The moment that has passed does not return. Time must be used well. Only when spent in the effort to know ‘Who am I?’ has it been used well.”¹⁴ ▲

¹² Op. cit., *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Chap.109.

¹³ Both Sri Ramana and Sri Anandamayi Ma, recommended the study of the Ribhu Gita. It states: “The syllable ‘Om’ is the Self.” (*Ribhu Gita* 10:22)

¹⁴ Sri Anandamayi Ma, Excerpts from *Ananda Varta* publications.



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

4th November 1978

Sadhu Om [in answer to someone who asked whether one's *sat-vāsanā* (inclination to just be) will be strengthened by one's cultivating love for God as a second person]: Yes, it will, by the power of association (*sanga*). That is, God is *sat* (what is real), so even when one thinks of him in a particular name and form, provided one does so with heart-melting love, one is thereby associating with what is real, so that association is what is called *sat-sanga*, and *sat-sanga* strengthens *sat-vāsanā*.

An effective practice in the path of bhakti is to think constantly and lovingly of God, his greatness, his incarnations, his *līla*-s and so on. For example, when Parikshit was cursed to die within a week, he asked Suka for guidance, so Suka narrated to him the life of Krishna,

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.

and while doing so he also taught him the path of *jñāna*. Parikshit listened to Suka's narration (which later became the *Bhāgavatam*) with so much devotion that after seven days his mind had been purified sufficiently for him to surrender himself entirely, thereby crossing the ocean of *samsāra* and attaining liberation. Such is the efficacy of listening to and contemplating on the life of a great sage or incarnation of God, and this is why I have written several songs narrating the life of Bhagavan.

If the second person we think of is truly a *jñāni* or an incarnation of God, like Bhagavan or Krishna, our thinking of them with love will certainly sow and nurture the seed of *sat-vāsanā* in our heart. By thinking repeatedly of that one second person, we will exclude thoughts of other more worldly second and third persons from our mind, thereby reducing the strength of our other outward-going *vāsanā*-s, and thus our mind will be progressively purified.

Moreover, by thinking often of Bhagavan we will naturally come to think of his teachings. How long can we think of Ramana without thinking of 'who am I'? Can one think of Rama without thinking of his bow? 'Who am I?' is the bow of Ramana, the supreme weapon he has given us to conquer ego and all its progeny.

17th November 1978

Sadhu Om [while suffering from typhoid]: When I was explaining the meaning of each verse of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, I was not satisfied with my explanation of verse 558 [in which Bhagavan says, "If it is asked, '[When the dream-body and the waking-body are thus different,] how does the semen in the waking-body drip out when one sees in dream that the dream-body has contacted a woman?', the answer will be that it is due to the speed of attachment with which one springs from the dream-body to the waking-body"], because I had never had such an experience, and I do not like to explain what I have not actually experienced. However, last night Bhagavan gave me a similar experience, showing me how an experience in a dream-body can be carried over into the waking-body, so I am now confident that I can explain the meaning of that verse correctly.

I was dreaming that some friends had bought a piece of land and were cultivating it to grow paddy. They had a powerful pump that was

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

pumping a large quantity of water from the well, and while working to divert the flow of water from one trench to another I was drenched by the jet of cold water. Since I was working hard in the hot sun, the sudden shower of cold water made me shiver so violently that the shock woke me up, whereupon I found my waking body shivering violently with a high fever. The force with which the shivering of the dream body was carried over into this body caused a feverish fit of shivering that lasted two hours.

With our way of life we are not given to have certain experiences that are usual for other people, so when Bhagavan refers to such experiences in his teachings we are not able to understand such teachings from our own experience. However, as in this case, if he wants us to understand any such teaching, he will give us some other experience that illustrates it equally well.

21st November 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan explained that in the story of Arunachala appearing as a column of fire in order to subdue the pride of Brahma and Vishnu, Brahma represents intellect (*buddhi*) and Vishnu represents ego (*ahankāram*). That is, Vishnu taking the form of a boar and burrowing deep down to find the foot of the mysterious column of fire represents ego diving deep within to find the source from which it had arisen, whereas Brahma taking the form of a swan and flying high to find the top of the column represents intellect going outwards in order to know and understand things other than itself.

Neither ego nor intellect can ever know what is real, so both Vishnu and Brahma failed in their attempts to find the lower or upper limits of the column of fire. However, because Vishnu was humbly going downwards in search of its foot, when he failed he readily acknowledged his defeat, whereas because Brahma was proudly flying upwards in search of its top, when he failed he was not willing to accept defeat, so he foolishly thought that it would be wise to tell a lie by claiming success, believing that there was no one who could expose his lie.

Scientists, philosophers, theologians and others who believe that they can know what is real by directing their intellects outwards, towards anything other than themselves, are like Brahma flying upwards

to reach the top of the column. They will surely fail, because they are looking in the wrong direction. What is real is only oneself, so we can know it only by looking within and thereby subsiding back into the source from which we have risen. Therefore, though such people believe that whatever they seem to know as a result of their research on second and third persons is the truth, it is actually a lie, because it is all entirely unreal.

However, all knowledge about anything other than ourself can be exposed as a lie only by true knowledge of ourself, which will shine forth from within, swallowing the ego and everything else, when the ego turns inwards and thereby subsides deep into the Heart, the source from which it arose. This shining forth of true knowledge is represented in that story by Lord Siva appearing out of the column of fire to bestow his own state on Vishnu and to shame Brahma for telling a lie.

28th November 1978

Sadhu Om: Complete self-denial is self-realisation. That is, what is called ‘self-realisation’ or *ātma-sāksātkāra* is nothing but annihilation of ego, so the mark or *lakṣaṇa* of one who has attained that state is that they will never give even the slightest importance to themself as a person.

Bhagavan said that there is nothing worth learning that we do not already know, so of his own accord he did not teach anything. In his view there is never anyone who is ignorant, because we already know ourself, and there is nothing else that needs to be known. What is required is not to know anything that we do not always know, but only to remove the wrong knowledge that seemingly obscures our knowledge of ourself as we actually are. This is why he often used to say that in this path what is needed is not to learn anything but to unlearn everything.

All learning is only for the ego, because our real nature need not and cannot learn anything. Therefore so long as there is any learning or anything learnt, there is ego, so in order to surrender ego we must be willing to give up all that has been learnt. That is, we need to give up all our beliefs, opinions, ideas, memories, hopes, aims, aspirations, desires, fears, likes, dislikes and so on, because all these have been

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

learnt in waking and dream, and none of them exist in sleep, so they are alien to our real nature, and we can exist, be aware and be happy without any of them. In sleep there is no ego, and therefore no awareness of anything other than ourself. This is why he says in *Nān Yār?* [in the final sentence of the sixteenth paragraph]: ‘At one time it will become necessary to forget all that one has learnt’.

He also said there is no need to give anyone initiation, because to initiate means to start, and each and every one of us has already started, because we are all seeking happiness, which is the sole aim and purpose of all spiritual practice. What we all want is ‘*duḥkha nivṛtti, sukha prāpti*’, ‘removal of misery and achievement of happiness’, but we cannot find that outside ourself. We are all looking for the right thing, but in the wrong direction. To find it we must look within ourself, so the ultimate purpose of all spiritual teachings is to redirect our seeking from outside to inside.

Therefore, though he did not outwardly give any initiation or formally accept anyone as his disciple, he is always giving true initiation and teaching within our Heart, silently drawing our attention back within and thereby gradually weakening the impetus with which we rise as ego. His true teaching is only silence, which is always shining as pure awareness in our Heart, so the sole aim of all that he taught us by words is to turn our mind back within to subside in and become one with that silence.

He is fulfilling his role as guru in a very silent, secretive and stealthy manner. He is always teaching us in the truest, deepest and most effective way, but so long as we are looking outwards we are not aware of his silent teaching, which is ceaselessly going on in our Heart, so to become aware of it and to listen to it deeply and attentively we must turn back within and subside into the source from which we arose.

▲

(*To be continued*)



KEYWORD

Kaupīna: loin cloth

B.K. CROISSANT

A simple dictionary definition of *kaupīna* reads: “small strip of cloth used to cover one’s private parts.”¹ It could apply equally to athletes or ascetics. Luckily for us, Sri Adi Sankaracharya wrote a well-known poem consisting of five short verses on the subject of he or those who wear a *kaupīna*. It is titled *Kaupīna Pañchakam*. The poem is usually viewed as a description of a beloved Master who has attained *turiya*, the state beyond the waking, sleeping and dreamless sleep state, but it also applies to those in the process of attaining perfection. The proof of the latter lies in the repeated use of the plural form of the present participle in Sanskrit, which is usually translated by ‘ing’ in English, implying that for most, the path consists of continuous and persistent practice in order to transcend the ego.

¹ Grimes, John, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*.

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वेदान्तवाक्येषु सदा रमन्तो
 भिक्षान्नमात्रेण च तुष्टिमन्तः।
 विशोकमन्तःकरणे चरन्तः:
 कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः॥ १॥

vedāntavākyeṣu sadā ramanto
 bhikṣānnamātreṇa ca tuṣṭimantaḥ |
 viśokamantahkaraṇe carantaḥ
 kaupīnavantah khalu bhāg्यavantah ||

Always delighting in the truths of Vedanta,
 Satisfied with a meager portion from alms,
 Released from all sorrow and wandering freely,
 Wearing only the *kaupīna*, how fortunate!

(1)

मूलं तरोः केवलमाश्रयन्तः
 पाणिद्वयं भोक्तुमन्त्रयन्तः।
 कन्थामिव श्रीमपि कुत्सयन्तः
 कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः॥ २॥

mūlam taroḥ kevalamāśrayantah
 pāṇidvayaṁ bhoktumamantrayantah |
 kanthāmiva śrīmapi kutsayantah
 kaupīnavantah khalu bhāg्यavantah ||

A mere tree root as refuge enough,
 Enjoying his simple meal in both hands,
 Spurning wealth like a tattered rag,
 Wearing only the *kaupīna*, how fortunate!

(2)

स्वानन्दभावे परितुष्टिमन्तः
 सुशान्तसर्वेन्द्रियवृत्तिमन्तः।
 अहर्निशं ब्रह्मसुखे रमन्तः
 कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः॥ ३॥

svānandabhāve parituṣṭimantaḥ
 suśāntasarvendriyavṛttimantaḥ |
 aharniśam brahmaśukhe ramantaḥ
 kaupīnavantah khalu bhāg्यavantah ||

Fully content from his own bliss within,
 Continuously calming the mind and all senses,
 Night and day in Brahman ecstatic,
 Wearing only the *kaupīna*, how fortunate! (3)

देहादिभावं परिवर्तयन्तः
 स्वात्मानमात्मन्यवलोकयन्तः।
 नान्तं न मध्यं न बहिः स्मरन्तः
 कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः॥ ४॥

dehādibhāvam parivartayantah
 svātmānamātmanyavalokayantah |
 nāntam na madhyam na bahih smarantah
 kaupīnavantah khalu bhāgyavantah ||

OVERTURNING ATTACHMENT TO BODY AND MIND,
 VIEWING HIMSELF AS THE ATMAN ETERNAL,
 NO LONGER CONCERNED WITH INSIDE, OUTSIDE OR MIDDLE,
 WEARING ONLY THE *KAUPĪNA*, HOW FORTUNATE. (4)

ब्रह्माक्षरं पावनमुच्चरन्तो
 ब्रह्माहमस्मीति विभावयन्तः।
 भिक्षाशिनो दिक्षु परिभ्रमन्तः
 कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः॥ ५॥

brahmākṣaraṁ pāvanamuccaranto
 brahmāhamasmīti vibhāvayantah |
 bhikṣāśino dikṣu paribhramantah
 kaupīnavantah khalu bhāgyavantah ||

REPEATING “BRAHMAN” THE PURIFYING WORD,
 KNOWING “I AM BRAHMAN” ALONE,
 LIVING ON ALMS AND WANDERING FREELY,
 WEARING ONLY THE *KAUPĪNA*, HOW FORTUNATE!² (5)

For devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi, these enchanting verses clearly describe their Master and recall his days as a youth at the Temple in Tiruvannamalai. Upon arrival, he immediately took leave of his worldly possessions, including his clothes, took only food given to him, and for some time sat at the foot of a tree. Being fully

enlightened already, he not just understood but embodied the meaning of Vedanta. Ganapati Muni refers to Bhagavan as the king of ascetics with hands soft as lotus that served him as a bowl, and later as a god in human form adorned by a piece of white cloth tied around his loins. Viswanatha Swami extols Bhagavan as the wearer of a pure white *kaupīna*, and in one of Suri Nagamma's letters, Bhagavan tells how he mended his *kaupīna* with a thorn.³

Bhagavan once commented on *bhikṣā*, which he practiced for some time in the early days, giving its true import for those who have never experienced the art of begging.

You cannot conceive of the majesty and dignity I felt while so begging. The first day, when I begged from Gurukal's wife, I felt bashful about it as a result of habits of upbringing, but after that there was absolutely no feeling of abasement. I felt like a king and more than a king. I have sometimes received stale gruel at some house and taken it without salt or any other flavouring, in the open street, before great pandits and other important men who used to come and prostrate themselves before me at my Asramam, then wiped my hands on my head and passed on supremely happy and in a state of mind in which even emperors were mere straw in my sight. You can't imagine it. It is because there is such a path that we find tales in history of kings giving up their thrones and taking to this path.⁴

An encounter he had later in life with the widow of his uncle brought up humorous memories of his early fears about wearing a *kaupīna*.

He remembered how on a festive occasion he was asked to help her in making some modakas (delicacies), but he hesitated and finally refused, because he was obliged to change his clothes and he could put on only koupina (loin cloth or codpiece) which made him feel shy. He was reprimanded by his uncle and

² Author's translation. Thanks to Marcia Solomon, Sanskrit scholar *par excellence* for her help and inspiration.

³ See verses 5 and 11 of *Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana*, letter 36, entitled 'Fortunate are Those with a Mere Loincloth', in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, and verse 99 of *Ramana Ashtottaram*.

⁴ Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 30-5-46.

the lady...Then Sri Bhagavan remarked, “If I refused to wear koupiṇa once, I am now made to pay the penalty by wearing it always.⁵

If the first two verses of the poem mainly detail the outward life of an accomplished ascetic, the last three focus more on the state of bliss associated with those who wear a *kaupīna* and on the practice necessary to attain liberation. “Continuously calming the mind and all senses” and “Overturning attachment to body or mind” are given as instruction. Consider these two quotes from Bhagavan, who tirelessly taught self-inquiry to his devotees at the foot of Arunachala.

All that is required of you is to give up the thought that you are the body and give up all thoughts of external things or the non-Self. As often as the mind goes out towards objects, stop it and fix it in the Self or ‘I’. That is all the effort required on your part.⁶

Ceaseless practice is essential until one attains without the least effort that natural and primal state of mind which is free from thought, in other words, until the ‘I’, ‘my’ and ‘mine’ are completely eradicated and destroyed.⁷

When the mind is continuously and persistently overcome through *ātma-vicāra* or ‘Who am I’, Pure Consciousness results. The one who wears the *kaupīna* is “Fully content from his own bliss within,” “Night and day in Brahman ecstatic,” “Viewing himself as the Atman eternal,” and “No longer concerned with inside, outside or middle.” A pithy commentary from Bhagavan is relevant to the last quote, which is often especially difficult to understand when one identifies with the body.

Consciousness is indivisible; it is without parts. It has no form or shape, no within or without. There is no right or left...Pure Consciousness – which is the Heart – includes all, and nothing is outside or apart from it. That is the ultimate truth.⁸

⁵ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§419.

⁶ Op.cit., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17-10-46.

⁷ *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter II, paragraph 18.

⁸ *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book II, Chap.IV, ‘The Heart is the Self.’

The final verse takes up the practice of invocation in the form of “Repeating ‘Brahman’ the purifying word.” When done sincerely, it is devotion or surrender and leads also to Pure Consciousness or bliss. Bhagavan makes this clear as follows:

One should not use the name of God mechanically and superficially without a feeling of devotion. When one uses the name of God one should call on Him with yearning and unreservedly surrender oneself to Him. Only after such surrender is the name of God constantly with you.⁹

He often stated the paths of *jñāna* and *bhakti* are the same.

There are only two ways to conquer destiny or to be independent of it. One is to enquire whose this destiny is and to discover that only the ego is bound by it and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, realising one's helplessness and saying all the time: 'Not I, but Thou, oh Lord!', giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is the love of God for the sake of love and nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through bhakti mārga.¹⁰

Contemplating or mediating on the *mahāvākyā* ‘I am Brahman’ also has a purifying effect. However, Bhagavan insists that it must be more than a mental exercise and must lead to direct perception of the Self and to knowing it, which is in truth *being It*.

In conclusion, the poem’s refrain associates the *kaupīna* with the highest state and the goal of all true seekers. Fortunately, however, Bhagavan, in His grace shows the path to that exalted state not just for those who wear the *kaupīna* but also for all of us who are seekers in the modern world, regardless of our various walks of life and in all circumstances. Consider the following:

⁹ Ibid., Book I, Chap. IV, ‘Bhakti and Jnana’.

¹⁰ Op.cit., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 28-6-46.

*Renunciation is always in the mind, not in going to forest or solitary places or giving up one's duties. The main thing is to see that the mind does not turn outward but inward. It does not really rest with a man whether he goes to this place or that or whether he gives up his duties or not. All that happens according to destiny. All the activities that the body has to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there.*¹¹

So we too are fortunate indeed!

Notes on the Translation

1. Of the many translations I consulted, only one acknowledged the nominative plural form of the present active participle, translating the poem's refrain as "Blessed indeed are those wearers of the loincloth." It was published, unattributed, in *The Mountain Path* in June 1997.

2. The first two lines of the fourth verse are usually translated as "witnessing his body changes and seeing himself as the changeless *atman*." However, the verb '*parivrt*' means 'to overthrow, invert, upset, destroy, annihilate', so that the first line could be translated as "overturning identification with the body, etc." A version of this interpretation appears in the unattributed translation referred to above. The entire verse reads: "Blessed indeed are those wearers of the loincloth, who having discarded the 'I am the body' thought, behold the Supreme Self within (themselves) and remain unaware of such concepts as the end, middle or outside of things."

3. The second line of the fifth verse is usually translated to mean "thinking, meditating or contemplating that 'I am Brahman.'" '*Vibhuh*', however, can also be defined as 'to perceive distinctly, ascertain, know, acknowledge, recognize'. I have chosen 'know' since it indicates more clearly that the Self has been reached as *being*.



¹¹ Op.cit., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 1-6-46.



Sri Mahaswami

The Sage with Eyes of Light

Part Three

SERGE DEMETRIAN

We continue the series of extracts from a manuscript titled Shri Mahaswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhātipati Jagadguru Śrī Sañkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

Kanchipuram, Friday, 5th June, 1970

Darśan in Silence

At the hotel I wash and dress quickly in the morning, as I was somewhat late. At around 6.40 am., I felt an immense luminous Presence in the room. For a few minutes I stood almost paralysed, frozen on the spot, my head towards the place where I was supposed to soon meet Śrī Mahāswami.

I was unable to move until this wave, which has come by itself, retired slowly, also by itself. I reached the choultry exactly by 7 am. It is strange how the doubts still raise their head: ‘And if Śrī Mahāswami has changed his mind!’, but I know that is not his habit.

I am received in a friendly manner by Mr Cunniah Chetty who asks me to wait. He will inform Śrī Mahāswami about my arrival. I am waiting in a condition of upliftment that does not usually come from

me; otherwise, I would produce it more often, especially when I am desperately short of it. For the time being, I endeavour to repeat the *mahāvākyā* that predominates nowadays, or the name of Ādi Saṅkara.

After fifteen minutes a servant girl, then someone else enters running: Śrī Mahāswami will come out for me in the customary garden-yard, that ground covered with fine sand and where coconut trees grow leafy enough as to give shade.

I quickly go to the same place as last time and stand in such a way as to see him as soon as he appears. Walking through the covered corridor and then through the yard he will have to cover almost forty metres. I try to concentrate as much as possible. A few thoughts of fear still linger... from where do they still come up? How could we be anything other than God? I start becoming more peaceful... now I am completely at peace. In the small courtyard, lit by the sun, a purer air emanates from where Śrī Mahāswami should appear. Mr Chetty arrives and removes twigs and leaves from the soil on the veranda by which he will pass.

Śrī Mahāswami appears finally. By gesture, he passes some orders behind himself then he enters the veranda. As often, he walks like in a dream, but very straight, gracious and firm at the same time. He approaches me. His contours do not seem clear to me, he has a diaphanous consistence... I could penetrate it with a finger, as one would be able to go through a seemingly dense cloud; and Jyet he wears his dark ochre robe, keeps his *dāṇḍa* under the left arm and the water vessel in his right hand. Legs and arms are very beautiful for a person of seventy-six years. His face might show his age but from what his features express one could not decide if he is young or old. Actually he appears, as he wants. He is almost blind, but in the place of the eyes two vaguely round windows open towards an interior ocean of calm and soft light, slightly bluish. From these openings, I feel there springs out a sort of fog that absorbs my own eyes like a funnel of light. As he moves nearer, a bridge comes up between him and me. Now he is less than three metres away; I withdraw, but only a little, as I remember that he does not see with his physical eyes beyond this distance.

While continuing to fix my eyes he takes a short stride on his left, brings the water vessel up to his chest in a gesture full of modesty and sweetness, while he bends his head a little as he was greeting me

and was asking to be excused as he did not want to frighten me. He had perceived, surely, the fears that have raged in my heart before the *darśan* and he did not want to alarm me anymore.

I am waiting, hands in *añjali*, as now he wants to sit; he squats at the foot of a coconut tree, with a surprising ease for his age, on a small mat brought by one of his four assistants. He leans against the trunk on which a tiny wooden plank has been placed. I deposit in front of him a small basket of yellow flowers, prostrate, and stand up at some three metres away. All of a sudden, I become a kind of indifferent observer located in the cold framework of a body that had become an almost foreign unmoving puppet, the witness of myself, witness of this being of flesh and thought, commonly known as ‘Demetrian’. One can still notice how this body, ‘this one’,¹ desperately offers itself, through its eyes, to the eyes of Śrī Mahāswami, while silently repeating a *mahāvākyā*. How much time did pass? A few minutes perhaps. This time Śrī Mahāswami’s look remained unchanged: ‘this one’ feels as if it was being rummaged through by a current that does not know any obstacle. This body stood frozen. While staring at it, Śrī Mahāswami’s lips have muttered something, once or twice. At a definite moment, the certitude arises that Śrī Mahāswami comes nearer, even nearer. Moreover, Śrī Mahāswami’s eyes touched mine that had become as transparent glass in this transfixed body. A few seconds, two or three, perhaps more, only a dense cloud or a silvery light water was perceivable.²

When the consciousness of the ‘I’ came back, from very far, I perceived only blurred shades of the four assistants, two each side of Śrī Mahāswami.

The *darśan* neared its end. I prostrated once again: the departure salute. Nobody had whispered a word, neither the assistants, nor Mr Chetty, who stood slightly farther, behind me.

¹ ‘This one’ that I can only define as ‘a feeling of individuality’, ‘idea of I’ and ‘witness of oneself’.

² One could ask how it is possible that a ‘transfixed’ being could be able to remember something. The reply is that ‘transfixed’ does not mean dead. There was still an elementary consciousness corresponding to the basic activities of an organism: breathing, blood circulation, glandular secretion, fundamental nervous activities for the maintenance of the body balance, etc., which means that in the organism, to a certain degree, the capacity of recording was present.

Śrī Mahāswami nimbly got up; before turning to leave, he looked once again straight in my eyes. What a being! One would not believe that such a man could exist ... yet... he is there, he exists! He starts to move away slowly, feeling his way along with the foot to where he thought was the threshold of a higher inner platform. I follow him with the eyes along the exterior corridor. He disappears on the left side, behind a wall, after showing his assistants that they should not follow him. The assistants had been very considerate towards me, and up to the last moment had avoided coming between us while I followed him with the eyes. Deeply moved, I collected a few grains of sand from the place he had just left at the foot of the coconut tree. Mr Cunniah Chetty comes nearer and we start going, without a word, towards the large building on the street, where, at the ground floor, my friend has his office.

I take rest for a few minutes in a condition of elevation where thought has little place. I had not yet come back to normality as someone arrives from the choultry: Śrī Mahāswami is calling Mr Chetty. I stay back keeping safe the sand in a small bag and I am waiting, happy. Calm ideas come in; what a joy for the people who are permitted to live day and night in Śrī Mahāswami's immediate vicinity! And others, I know at least one, but I will not name him, fallen as by a parachute from far-off lands, can meet Swāmiji only now and then and with how much difficulty! Still, neither my friend nor his family seem too much impressed by the favour that Destiny has granted to them.

After a short time, Mr Chetty comes back, accompanied by two assistants: Śrī Mahāswami is in the court-yard where I saw him disappear and he wants to know what are my intentions: "He has seen you several times; he wants to know what are your needs and how you sustain yourself; how long you will stay in India."

My friend takes a paper and gets ready to note down everything. After a moment of hesitation I understand that I have to give a resume of my life story, from the age of seventeen, in the same way I had done it almost two years ago, at the time of the first encounter, at Secunderabad. Mr Chetty writes everything with the care of a schoolboy. I finish by stating that I am not interested in anything else than in the fourth aim of the *purushārtha*, that is, *mokṣa*, the



final Liberation. I do not insist on my health or money problems, my difficulties with the heat of the Indian summer and so on. So much I am sure he knows all this: can he not walk through my heart and my mind, as he likes? In addition, I take him as a witness of all my words and gestures. I mention, in conclusion that an Indian astrologer, amateur but talented, I recently consulted – following the local habits and pushed by my friends – said that I would be destined for a life of spiritual research. Mr Chetty called me to come this evening as he will type my statement and will show it to Śrī Mahāswami.

Before we part, he informs me that this morning, by 7.10 am, when he went to Śrī Mahāswami in order to announce my arrival, Śrī Mahāswami asked him:

“Is he not waiting since half an hour?”

It was the precise moment where, at the hotel, from 6.40 am. I was experiencing that immense luminous Presence.

Kanchipuram, November 1970

Offerings to the Guru

For the last three months, a persistent question occupied my heart as to whether I am permitted to consider Śrī Mahāswami as my Guru. I cannot ask him about this in public, nor talk about my doubts with friends, as I hold this question as being the most intimate of my life. After mature thinking, I decided to resort to a stratagem. I knew already that in olden times a master called to himself the aspirant, chosen to become his disciple, by ordering him:

“Bring fire wood, my friend, I will initiate you [as a *brahmachāri*] as you have not parted from the Truth.”

Indeed, the disciples, who lived near the house of the Master or under the same roof, had the mission, requiring the utmost trust, to see to the fire in the house and especially the ritual fire that was necessary for worship. I had already observed that a fire of wood was kindled in the places where Śrī Mahāswami resided. From where came the wood? Mr. Cunniah Chetty, my friend and public relations-cum-information officer in Kanchipuram, declared:

“The wood is furnished by the math, if no donation has taken place.”

“So there are wood donations?”

"Evidently, and, besides, they are well received," declared my friend.

Prudent and diplomatic, Mr C. Chetty sounded out the entourage of Śrī Mahāswami to find out if an offer of wood would be acceptable. The reply was positive. The wood store was nearby. The cool season had started so it was a good time for this sort of donation to be made. I also bought for Śrī Mahāswami a good shawl of fine wool from the *khadi*-craft store. I prepared myself for a *darśan*.

On the chosen day, the *darśan* was fixed for ten o'clock in the morning. One hour before, I bought with the help of my friend the quantity of wood which could be contained in a two wheeled cart pulled and pushed by two strong strapping lads happy to serve a worthy undertaking. The *darśan* will take place in the small yard near the southeast entry of the Pilgrims' House. I stopped the vehicle on the nearby street in sight of the Pilgrim's House and Mr Chetty informed Śrī Mahāswami that I had come.

Śrī Mahāswami came out almost immediately.

In spite of the coolness, he wore only his thin ochre cloth. He did not look either at the shawl nicely folded on a basket I kept in hand or the overloaded chariot which blocked the entry towards the street. However, I think I discerned the hint of a discreet knowing smile on his lips.

I prostrated in front of the stairs while he was still on the threshold. Usually I kept the offerings on the threshold itself as he stayed inside, in the hall. This time I did not know how to continue, as he gestures that he wanted to come down the stairs at the bottom of which there was a very small garden, about two metres by three in area. He came out of the choultry and sat facing south-west. He asked that a mat should be brought for me and requested me to sit down in front of him. He had never acted this way during the usual offerings. This time, Śrī Mahāswami knew well the sense of my gift and wanted to give the occasion a solemn air. Mr. Cunniah Chetty is the interpreter:

"Demetrian wants to offer to Śrī Mahāswami this quantity of fire-wood", explained my friend, while showing him the cart. Śrī Mahāswami turned his hand to the cart then to his chest. He repeated the gesture towards me as if to say: "I accept your offering and I accept you also."

I placed the basket in front of him.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Mr. Chetty said, “Demetrian offers to Śrī Mahāswami a woollen shawl as we are in the cold season.” Śrī Mahāswami laid a hand on the water vessel he had kept on the ground, tilted it, gathered a few drops, and sprinkled the shawl in order to purify it. He acts this way with all the clothes that are offered to him for his own use; he then took the shawl and kept it on the left shoulder showing he accepts it and he will wear it. He once again turned his open right hand towards me and then touched his chest. Śrī Mahāswami stayed a long moment with his eyes closed, then he sighed, his lips murmured a while. For some moments, I saw him losing his contours and being replaced by a grey cloud, hardly denser than vapour, just what is necessary to maintain a human form. A very subtle, light and luminous current came from him, gently touched my head and impregnated me. I profoundly sighed.

He took back his ordinary shape and through loving gestures, he showed that he has taken charge of me. He waited for me to finish the departure prostration, got slowly up and turned toward the murky hall from where he had emerged. While passing by, really close to me, I felt penetrated by a luminous, ethereal, perfumed draught. Before melting with the darkness, he turned once again towards me for a second.

▲
(to be continued)

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Just the water-bloom,
Chaitanyakusumapriyaa,
will satisfy you
as an offering: the flower of
the soul, musky with living.

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of five lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra seven-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.

Sri Chakra Puja

Part Two

KAYS

This universe is not outside of the Self. It is like the creation of the dream world which had no existence before going to sleep nor after waking up. It was only an appearance projected by the ‘I’ consciousness. Being just an appearance, it cannot exist without awareness. On waking up, the whole of the dream world becomes non-different from the ‘I’ that projected it. The dream-world did not exist even during the time of witnessing the dream. The waking world of *māyā*, similarly, never exists as different from the consciousness aspect. Remaining with this *chit* [consciousness], the *Brahmakalā* is, indeed, *jñāna*. “Thus by understanding the source of activity through activity one gets established in the Self.”¹

This *Brahmakalā*, Awareness of Being, is the “spark of *jñāna* that will easily consume all creation as if it were a heap of cotton. All crores of worlds topple down when the atomic bomb of *jñāna* comes down upon them.”²

A hymn in *Mahānirvāna Tantra* declares,

¹ *Ramana Gita*, chapter 12, verse 31.

² Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 22.11.45.

I bow to Thee, Pure Consciousness
The purity of all purifiers.

Therefore the worship of Devi does not consist in the offering of mere flowers. She, *caitanya kusuma priyā*³, loves the fragrant flowers of awareness, and the ideal flower to worship her would be the offering of an intellect firmly established in the supreme void of thoughtless *cidākāṣa* (awareness). The ritualistic offering of Pure Awareness alone constitutes the ideal worship of Devi as she is extolled as *caitanyārghya samārādhyā* (well worshipped with Awareness as the ritualistic offering).⁴

The worship befitting the Illimitable and Formless Mother of Infinite Compassion is in the Golden Temple of Awareness. Hence offering of Awareness to the Mother perceived as the form of Pure Awareness indeed constitutes true worship of the Mother, as *Bhāvanopaniṣad* proclaims. Yet the Divine Presence of the Mother is sought in a sculpted image of stone in a temple or in a Sri Chakra. Worship of an idol or image is the most external form of worship. As the Divine is indeed spread everywhere in its formless Infinity, It reveals Itself in finite forms as well. The Image is not a mere material figure but a conscious Presence that inculcates true consciousness. The Image worshipped, thus provides the nodus for the meeting of the human consciousness that seeks and loves and the Divine Consciousness that manifests itself in response to our aspirations. The Image, when installed with strict adherence to the injunctions of Agamic Sastras, becomes verily a living Presence. When installed and sanctified by a *jñāni*, It becomes spiritually surcharged radiating a palpable presence and profound grace.

The ritualistic worship of the Mother Divine called ‘Srividya’ has three integral parts, namely, Tantra, Yantra and Mantra, which we may say, form the three corners of the Triangle of Sri Vidya. The origin of all these is ‘*apauruṣeya*’ – not human, but divine. The litany of *Lalitā Sahasranāmam* that provides the picturesque portrait of the Divine Mother both as the Transcendent Brahman and as the Universal Mother with Her enchanting beauty and power, hails Her

³ *Lalita Sahasranamam*, 919.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 918.



Bhagavan at the consecration of the Sri Chakra Meru in the
Matrubhuteswara Temple in 1949

as the embodiment of all Tantras, as the soul of all *yantras*, and as the essence of all mantras. And again extols her, as Herself being the greatest Tantra, the greatest Mantra and the greatest Yantra (Sri Chakra).⁵

As verse 31 of *Saundarya Laharī* reveals, “Siva, who bestowed the 64 Tantras confers only one or another of the various psychic powers and worldly fulfilments but on Devi’s special insistence, Siva revealed ‘Sri Vidya Tantra’ which besides bestowing the benefits of all the other Tantras on Her devotees, also confers the ultimate gain.”⁶

Tantra is derived from the word ‘*tan*’ which means to spread or to elaborate in detail. Tantras are basically *sādhana śāstra-s*. What ensouls Tantra is essentially the substance of Vedas, and Self-Realisation is their goal as can be seen from the following statements: “The Goddess of Lalitha whose body is the Universe is verily one’s own Self.”

There is no greater happiness than *jñāna*
*na hi jñānādadhikam sukham*⁷

And the declaration,
 I bow to Thee Pure Consciousness
 The soul that sustains the Universe.⁸

Every deity has a yantra, which is also called a Chakra. A yantra is a mystical and geometric design consisting of lines, angles, triangles, circles, symbols like lotus with seed (*bija*) letters specific to the deity inscribed on it. It is not merely a symbol; it represents the manifestation of the deity and is, indeed, a store-house of Power. “As the body is to the *jīva*, as oil is to the lamp, so is yantra, the established seat of all Deities.”⁹

⁵ Ibid., *om sarvatantrarūpāyai namah* | 206; *om sarvayantrātmikāyai namah* | 205; *om sarvamantrasvarūpinyai namah* | 204; *om mahātantrāyai namah* | 226; *om mahāmantrāyai namah* | 227; *om mahāyantrāyai namah* | 228.

⁶ *Saundaryalaharī*, *catushaṣṭyā tantraiḥ sakalamatisamdhāya bhuvanam/ sthitas tattatsiddhiprasavaparatantraiḥ paśupatiḥ / punastvannirbandhādakhilapurusaṁ rthaikaghātanā-/svatantrām te tantrām kṣititalamavātītaradidam || 31||*

⁷ *Tantra Raja*.

⁸ *Kularnava Tantra*.

⁹ *śarīramiva jīvasya dīpasya snehavata priye sarveśāmapi devānā mayā yantri pratiṣṭitam – Maha Nirvana Tantra.*

Of all the yantras, the yantra, the Abode of the Divine Mother, alone is considered as the holiest and most significant and the worship of Devi is done on that. It alone has the prefix ‘Sri’ attached to it, Sri Chakra, denoting auspiciousness and so her mantra is called Sri Vidya. As Sakti is not other than Siva, Sri Chakra is regarded as the one body of Siva and Sakti, *śrīcakramā śivayor vapuh*.

Sri Chakra, symbolic of the Universe and the human body, represents everything in manifestation; the various powers operating in the macrocosm and the microcosm. Sri Chakra – the wheel that represents constant movement – reveals the dynamics of the Divine, namely the process of devolution of the One Supreme Consciousness step by step, layer by layer, into this creation of multitudinous forms. The *bindu*, the dot, is the centre, the Eternal Bliss of union of Pure Awareness, Sakti, with Siva. It is this bliss of union that permeates through the whole creation as its sap and sustenance. Everything, including the gods, derives authority and Power from Her. Hence She is described as ‘*parā bhattrikā*’ – Her Most Imperial Majesty. Her various Powers personified as attendant deities – called *yoginī-s* – are posited at various angles. She exists before creation, fills it all and finally absorbs it all in Her in dissolution.

At the microlevel the *bindu* represents the spiritual Heart. The inmost triangle represents Tripura (*tri*, three, and *pura*, city), that is, place or field of action. Brahman, *sat cit ānanda*, becomes the knower, known and knowledge; waking (*jāgrat*), dream (*swapna*) and sleep (*susupti*); gross, subtle and causal and the three-fold Sakti, *icchā* (desire), *kriyā* (action) and *jñāna*. She represents all the triads and also transcends the triad. The nine chakras are the *āvaraṇa-s* or veils which have a close correspondence to the levels of being in the aspirant. This Sakti of Siva weaves the magic web of *māyā* that ensnares and enslaves the *jīva-s*.

Thus Sri Chakra is the Transcript of the Transcendent providing schemes for the evolutionary return of the individual unit back to its source of Supreme Consciousness, by cutting asunder the ‘veils’ through the process of Self-enquiry aided by Her Grace. The same can be accomplished by a spirit of surrender to this cosmic consciousness inspired by the exhibition of the astounding rhythmical harmony and order in creation at the cosmic level, where the stars and planets hurtling

with terrific speed never ever collide, and the belief that in the atomic life of individual where everything proceeds with same rhythm ordained by Her, nothing can – or will – ever go wrong. A true seeker will look upon a seeming punishment as a bestowal of grace. Or an apparent rejection as simply a postponement of grace and furtherance of protection, for the Divine Mother will carry the aspirant to the goal. The Grace of the Divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme.

Let us stand in the centre and be impelled by the Grace of the Mother. To remain as the Self is the true Sri Chakra Puja.

A Meru is but the three dimensional form of the Sri Chakra.

The mantra ensouls the yantra. “Mantra is that which protects those who repeat it (*manavānām trāyate iti mantrah*). Mantra is the sound-body of the deity and each deity has a specific mantra. These mantras are discovered by ‘*mantra drishta-s*’ – seers, rishis. The *nāda* – the lines of vibration – specific to each deity in the etheric expanse (*parame vyoman*) is heard by a rishi in his occult audition, and vocalable equivalents of the Divine vibrations are spontaneously discovered. Thus transmuted by the articulate tongue of the seer it becomes a mantra. Vedic rishis call mantras, “Carved out of the Heart,” (*hrdayāt tastan mantram*). The mantra enshrines the deity and reveals the deity to the earnest seeker with ardent piety. The most subtle form of worship is the mantras preceded by *bījākṣara-s* or letters indicating certain indeclinable seed-sounds.

Sri Vidya mantra, the sound body of the Divine Mother, is the 15 lettered *Pañca dasakshari*. The mantra – the Divine power clothed in sound – when chanted with heart and soul in it, evokes the living Presence of Her, for mantra is a way of calling a Deity just as a person is called by a name. By way of response, the Mother Consciousness envelops the chanter, inspiring instant surrender. When the chanting is accompanied by call, surrender, prayer and waiting upon her Grace, the light dawns dispelling the darkness. Hence Sri Vidya is called Brahma Vidya and in the light of Vedantic interpretation, Sri Vidya Mantra would mean: “Oh! Sakti of Parabrahman! Efface your manifestation as the ‘ego’ in me. Make that felicity of yours, that draws into it even the Supreme, bloom within me and lead me to the experience of the universe as Self.”

The *bījākṣara* (seed letter) ‘*hrim*’ enjoys in Sakti lore the same reputation as ‘*aum*’ in Vedic and Vedantic wisdom. Christened ‘*māyā bījam*’, it is the one-lettered mantra of the Mother who projects the world manifestation. Also known as ‘*hrillekha*’, the ‘streak from the Heart’, (the *lekha* from *hrid*) it represents the aspirations rising from the heart yearning for the love of the Divine.

Sri Sankara in *Tripura Sundari Padastavam* announces, “Listen to me, my friend, I tell you with certainty. She, who is known as *chit sakti*, the Power of Supreme Awareness, She is the final goal and ultimate state of Liberation.” With this aim one should worship the *Sricakra* by uniting with the mantra, set aside the faded petals of ignorance and worship with the consciousness of ‘He am I’.”

tyajedajñāna nirmālyam so 'hambhāvena pūjayed |

The format of Sri Chakra Puja followed in the Ashram was formulated by Vedic pandits rich in Sastraic knowledge even during the life time of Bhagavan. After the ‘*abhiṣekam* of the deities (Meru, and Yogambal – the processional deity of Devi) accompanied by the chanting of *Sri Sukta* and *Durga Sukta* as per the Vedic injunctions and *alaṅkāra* (decoration), the presence of Devi is invoked with appropriate mantras. Then follows the worship offering of flowers and *kum-kum* (vermillion powder)⁹⁹⁹¹⁰ to the chant of names to the Nameless, Formless One – *parabrahman* (*nāma rūpa vivarjītā*) from *stotra-s* such as *Devī Khaḍgamālā*, *Lalitā Aṣṭottaram* (108 names), *Lalitā Sahasranamam* (1008 names) and *Lalitā Triśati* (300 names). The *Kadgamala* pays obeisance to various deities, personification of various powers of Devi, posted at the various points in Sri Chakra. *Lalitā Sahasranāmam* is unsurpassed in hymnal literature for the lyrical beauty of this litany brings out the eternal and exquisite beauty of the Mother, the *saguṇa* Brahman on one hand and on the other, it dwells elaborately on the Devi as *nirguṇa* Brahman – the attributeless substratum.

It is *Lalitā Triśati* that is held to be very potent, for every 20 names begin with each of the syllables of Sri Vidya Mantra called *pañcadasi*. Thus it gives out the mantra, though indirectly. The most

¹⁰ This *kum-kum* (specially prepared in the Ashram) offered in the worship is looked forward to as the sacred prasad.

salient feature, exclusive to Sri Ramanasramam, is the subtle practice followed in chanting this *stotra* which makes the *pūjā* all the more rich and vibrant with the power and presence of the Devi. Every namavali of the *Triśati* chanted is preceded by the four important *bījākṣara*-s of Devi and followed by the same in the reverse order. What makes it even more powerful is the enclosing of each name within a *rik* (couplet) of *Śrī Sūktam* at the rate of one *rik* for every 20 *nāmāvali*-s. In addition, at the end of these, *Devī Sūkta* which is celebrated in *Devī Śaptaśatī* as the most potent in invoking the presence of Devi, and two more pertaining to Durga and Lakshmi, are chanted, along with a hymn of Saraswati. While the seers or mantra *drishtas* of *sūkta*-s are normally rishis, the seer of *Devī Sūkta* is a *rishika* (a woman rishi) called Vāk Ambrini.

As an offer of profuse and grateful obeisance to Mother Meenakshi who inspired Bhagavan to leave Her lap and seek the shade and shelter of his Father Arunachala, so that generations of seekers may get a glimpse of Light and Truth, *Mīnākṣī Pañcaratnam* (Five Verses in Praise of Devi Meenakshi) composed by Sri Adi Sankara, is recited in the Ashram where *Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam* reverberates at every dawn and dusk. And as a grand finale, the chant of the celebrated *Devī Stuti* from the *Durgā Śaptaśatī*¹¹ ‘Namastasyai Namastasyai’, in a spirit of solemn surrender and soulful adoration is chanted soliciting the Grace of the Divine Mother. ▲

¹¹ Chapter 5.

Mirrors

Suresh Kailash

Mirrors seduce to multiply,
The vile ‘I-am-the-body’ lie,
No matter what a mirror’s size,
It has me firmly in its vice,

So, till this fiction I can forsake,
Or it’s you I see and not my face,
Let years of ill luck come my way,
Ramana, may all mirrors break.

Strength

SILUVERU SUDARSHAN

We should be prepared to deal with all problems of health, mind and soul by common sense methods and faith in God, knowing that in life or death our soul remains intact and unconquered.

If we have a strong will we can overcome all difficulties even in the midst of trials; we have to be aware that danger and we were born together, and we are more dangerous than danger! This is a truth we should always remember and apply it and we will see it works. We are the children of God.

We have to always pray: “Lord, may thy power increase in us. Keep us in the positive consciousness that with thy help we can always overcome our difficulties.”

We have to use every trial that comes to us as an opportunity to improve ourselves. We should think of every trial as a pickax with which to dig into the soil of our consciousness and release the fountain of spiritual strength that lies within. Each test should bring out the hidden power that is within us as a child of God.

Life is worth nothing if it is not a continuous overcoming of problems. Any escape from problems, physical or mental, is an escape from life, as there can be no life that is not bereft of problems.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Trouble and disease have a lesson for us. Our painful experiences are not meant to destroy us, but to burn out our dross, to hurry us back home. No one is more anxious for our release than God.

He is not happy seeing his children suffer so much dying from falling bombs, terrible diseases and wrong habits of living. If only we make the effort every night to meditate and be with Him! It is us who we have forsaken.

When we use life's experiences as our teacher, and learn from them the true nature of the world and our part in it, those experiences become valuable guides to fulfilment and lasting happiness. When we begin to see clearly the imperfection of the world, we will begin to seek the perfection of God.

Suffering is a good teacher to those who are quick and willing to learn from it. Suffering can teach us almost everything. For example, a stomach ache tells us not to eat too much and to watch what we eat. The consequences of wrong actions impel us to exercise discrimination.

Suffering is caused by the misuse of freewill. God does not want us to encounter woes, but will not interfere when we choose actions that lead to misery.

We should not blame God or anyone else if we are suffering from disease, financial problems, emotional upsets. We created the cause of the problem in the past and must make a greater determination to uproot it now.

The effects of our actions have less power to hurt us when we do not allow the mind to give into them. We can also resist by counteracting the bad effects of past wrong actions with good effects set in motion by present right actions, thus preventing the creation of an environment favourable to the fruition of our bad karma.

If we can clarify and expand our mind through meditation, and receive God in our consciousness, we too will be free from the delusion of disease, limitations, and death.

If we want to rise above karma, we should bear in mind these three truths: (i) When the mind is strong and the heart is pure, we are free. It is the mind that connects us with pain in the body. When we think pure thoughts and are mentally strong, we cannot suffer the painful effects of evil karma; (ii) In deep sleep, we are free; (iii) When we continuously pray and meditate, we go into the land of super consciousness, where no troubles can reach us.

We can be free from karma right now by these methods. Whenever karmic troubles plague us, we have to think pure thoughts and make the mind like steel, saying to ourselves: "We are above it all". Or best of all, in deep meditation we should go into the divine state of super consciousness. The Bliss of that consciousness is the natural state of our soul, but we have forgotten our real nature by being so long identified with the body. That untroubled, blissful state of the soul has to be reacquired.

The soul's nature is bliss; a lasting inner state of ever-new, ever-unchanging joy. This bliss eternally gives unfading joy to one who attains it, even when passing through trials of physical suffering, or death.

Material remedies – medicines, physical comforts, human consolation have their place in helping to remove pain, but the greatest remedy is the affirmation that we believe in God. This is the cure-all for every trouble, pain and bereavement – the way to freedom from all individual and mass karma.

We have to affirm that we know that God's power is limitless and as we are made in His image; we too have the strength to overcome all obstacles.

Whatever conditions confront us, we know that they represent the next step in our unfoldment. We will welcome all tests. Because we know that within us is the intelligence to understand and the power to overcome. ▲

Wave Song

Suresh Kailash

The mystery of your breath in me,
lifts me like a song,

The magic of your grace explodes
as silence in every storm,

Still deeper into your sea I dive,
but no end is to be seen,

Ramana, this wave rises only to fall,
and dissolve at your feet.



St.Teresa of Avila and Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akka

KANCHANA NATARAJAN

The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine they should see God as if he stood there and they here. God and I are one in Knowledge. The eye with which I see God is the same as that with which he sees me. — Meister Eckhart

This article is a brief comparative study of similar themes and trajectories in the mystical language used by two women contemplatives to express their spiritual revelations. These two saints were from different times, geographical regions and cultural traditions, but both used tropes of passion and ecstatic consummation to narrate their transcendent experience of merging with the Supreme. The renowned Spanish nun St.Teresa of Avila (1515-82) who belonged to the Carmelite order and spent most of her life in a

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convent is renowned for her visceral accounts of divine communion attained through prayer and meditation. Her renowned work *The Interior Castle* or *The Mansion* (1577),¹ a richly-wrought symbolic text written for nuns and directing the sisterhood to shape religious life through the disciplines of poverty, service and prayer, is justly celebrated as a very influential source of personalized theology in the Catholic canon. The largely unknown 18th century South Indian saint Avudai Akkal of Chenkottai, Tirunelveli, a former child-widow, was a maverick wandering renunciate who sang about the sublime bliss/peace of non-duality, articulating the intricate metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta in vernacular Tamil. Her followers were chiefly women, and she was especially loved by widows, the most abject members of her orthodox Brahmin community. She was a unique portal to the highest philosophical knowledge, traditionally denied to women at the time, and her compositions were orally preserved until they were collected and published in the late 19th century.

‘Ordinary’ language in daily use, based primarily on sense-experience and a five-fold relationship to the sense-organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue), is greatly inadequate as an instrument for describing the ‘extraordinary’ reality that lies beyond the matrix of the senses – i.e., highly charged mystical states that transcend all corporeality and cognition, including the binary logic of ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’. Those who are thus enraptured are often irresistibly compelled by its potent energies to share their experience of radical freedom with the world, pushing past convention and inhibition.

As St.Teresa affirms, “The joy of the soul is so exceedingly great that it would like not to rejoice in solitude, but to tell its joy to all... Impelled as it is by this great joy, the soul cannot be expected to keep silence and dissemble: it would find this no light distress.”²

In every context, circumstance and condition, mystics have drawn upon a rich vocabulary of profound spiritual symbols, parables,

¹ I have used the text: *The Interior Castle*; ('The Mansions') St. Teresa of Avila, Sheed and Ward, London, 1974. Another book *Way of Perfection* (1565-66) was written by Teresa keeping in view the “affectionate importunities of the Carmelite nuns of the Primitive Observance.” I have occasionally made use of this Text. *Way of Perfection* by St. Teresa of Avila, Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, 1995.

² *The Interior Castle*, p 101.

allegories, paradoxes and various other narrative to transmit these and other spiritual truths, i.e., as an attempt to describe the indescribable. Very often, metaphor is used across religious denominations and mystical traditions in a strikingly similar way, and in pragmatic terms this common aspect serves as a seed for the creation of inter-faith dialogue and benevolent action.

This is strongly the case with St.Teresa and Avudai, the two contemplatives I invoke in this essay. While I find the lives of both women equally fascinating, my short account here confines itself in each case to a few biographical details. St.Teresa established a unique set of rules for the Carmelite nuns, in contrast to other schools of Catholicism that replicated for their nuns the rules that had been established for their monks. Poverty, chastity and obedience were the nuns' cardinal principles, and with regard to the first tenet, Teresa in an another text *The Way of Perfection* written exclusively for the nuns insisted that "poverty must be everywhere, in our dwelling, in our clothes, in our words and above all in our thoughts... if you have an enclosed place with few shelters wherein you can be alone and pray, that is splendid."³ Inebriated with her passionate love for God, her fervour overflowed into composing hymns such as 'I die because I do not die'.

Committed to narrating her raptures, ecstasies and subtle flights of the spirit to her nuns and to the wider world, she was instructed by her confessor Reverend Velazquez to write *The Interior Castle*, even while she engaged in reform activities within the order and also endured great ill health that caused great suffering. The vigour, power and grandeur of this text remain unsurpassed to this day.

St.Teresa clarifies that her confessor "commanded" her to write the book because "the nuns of these convents of our Lady of Carmel need someone to solve their difficulties concerning prayer and as women best understand each other's language... in view of their love for me, anything I might say would be particularly useful to them."

She was intensely aware of the crucial need for spiritual narratives such as hers to be available for earnest practitioners:

³ *The Way of Perfection* by St. Teresa of Avila, Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, 1995, pp24-25.

“I fully realize how important it is for you that I should explain certain interior matters to the best of my ability for we continually hear what a good thing prayer is... yet they tell us nothing beyond what we ourselves have to do and say very little about the work done by the Lord in the soul – I mean, supernatural work. As I describe the things He does, and gives various explanations of them, it will be very useful for us to think of this celestial building which is within us and is so little understood by the mortals...”⁴

She held the view that the “door of entry into the castle of the soul is prayer and meditation” (which she sometimes calls “consideration”).⁵ Her text continues to have a very special impact on women who wish to follow the path of prayer and meditation on their spiritual journey.

Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal (henceforth in this essay more informally called ‘Avudai’) was born into an orthodox Tamil Brahmin family. The few available fragments of her biography reveal that she was married as per custom while a child, perhaps at the age of five, and widowed very shortly thereafter. She underwent the tortuous ceremonies of widowhood when she attained puberty and was condemned to a life of servitude and oppression, since widows of any age were stigmatized as inauspicious.

However, much to the anger and dismay of people around, the girl Avudai was rescued by Sridhara Venkatesa Ayyawal, a renowned spiritual figure of that region. Legend has it that while he was passing her village with his followers, Avudai, who was in a dark room of her house, somehow rushed out and flung herself at Ayyawal’s feet, begging him to save her from a dreadful fate. Recognizing her tremendous potential, Ayyawal initiated her into the great Vedantic *mahāvākyā*, ‘*Tat tvam asi*’ (‘Thou art indeed That’, from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*), and Avudai left the village along with his group of devotees.

Under Ayyawal’s guidance Avudai spent years immersed in Vedantic contemplation and devotion until she attained *jñāna*: Supreme Knowledge of the non-dual Self. This experience of permanent emancipation catalyzed an outpouring of rapture and joy, and the self-realized *jñāni* Avudai was motivated to liberate other

⁴ *Interior Castle*, p. 7. ⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

people from bondage and illusion by sharing her experience through her songs. Though she draws largely from folk and vernacular traditions and uses the simple colloquial Tamil of her home district, her compositions are infused with exalted metaphysical utterances – rooted in her personal attainment of the Self, but distinguished from canonical discourse by being interwoven with particular woman-centric symbols that effectively transmit the central tenets of Vedanta.⁶

The remainder of this essay presents seven prominent examples of the strikingly similar metaphors and emotional intensity found in the spiritual enunciation of these two extraordinary contemplatives.

I. The World-Illusion

As noted by St.Teresa's biographer who met her in 1579, the saintly nun had a vision that led her to write *The Interior Castle*: “On the eve of the festival of the Most Holy Trinity she was thinking what subject she should choose for this treatise, when God … granted this desire of hers and gave her a subject. He showed her a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven Mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendour, illumining and beautifying them all.”⁷ St.Teresa states that her book is meant to help practitioners develop spiritual ‘Quietude’ – the state of unperturbed equanimity, most lacking in those who are roaming distractedly outside the castle, talking to the guards, and ignorant of the structure’s divine interior. Prayer and meditation constitute the door through which the seeker can enter that luminous domain:

“We ourselves are the castle; it would be absurd to tell someone enter a room when he was in it already. But … there are many ways of ‘being’ in a place. Many remain in the outer court … not interested in entering it.. Put aside all unnecessary affairs and business. Moreover, if we fill the palace with vulgar people and all kinds of junk, how can the Lord and His court occupy it? When such a crowd is there

⁶ For a biography of Avudai Akkal see *Mountain Path*, Avudai Akka of Chengottai, Kanchana Natarajan, January 2010, pp17-29. Also Check *Transgressing Boundaries*, ‘The Advaitic songs of Shenkottai Avudai Akkal’ by Kanchana Natarajan, Zubaan, 2012.

⁷ Introduction to *Interior Castle* pp. v and vi.

it would be a great thing if the Lord were to remain for even a short time... [souls are] infirm and so accustomed to busying themselves with outside affairs that nothing can be done for them...unless they strive to realize their miserable condition and to remedy it, they will be turned into pillars of salt for not looking within themselves..."⁸

She declares that when the soul is closest to God, "it no longer is bound by ties of relationship, friendship or property."⁹

Compare this with Avudai's powerful song *Paraparakanni*, where the poet sings in a similar vein about her own spiritual journey that mandated the renunciation of all relationship to home, family and community:

Father, mother, daughters and sons
Became like a crowd in the market place,
Like animals in a flock, like a mere number,
While I became Timeless eternity.¹⁰

St.Teresa uses the phrase 'spiritual sleep' and 'Prayer of Quiet' to describe such a state¹¹ where the Soul is "Fully awakened to God and asleep to all that concerns attachment to any creature."¹² There is a remarkable similarity in the use of language.

II. The Perishable Body

Both St.Teresa and Avudai hold the absolute conviction that human beings waste their precious life in acting on the wrong belief that attachment to the limited physical body and fulfilment of its imperatives is indeed the primary goal of life – a root error which must be corrected through being exposed as illusion if one is to realize one's true nature. Addressing the sisterhood, St.Teresa declares uncompromisingly:

"It is no small pity, and should cause us no shame, that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves, or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person was asked who he was, and could not say and had no idea who his father or his mother... though that is great stupidity, our own is incomparably greater if we make no attempt to discover what we are,

⁸ *Interior Castle*, pp.11-12. ⁹ Ibid., p.55. ¹⁰ *Transgressing Boundaries*, p.87.

¹¹ *Interior Castle*, p.83. ¹² Ibid., p.91.

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and only know that we are living in these bodies... All our interest
is centred in the... outer wall of the castle – that is to say, in these
bodies of ours.”¹³

She prays to the Lord to give strength to committed practitioners
so that “we may dig until we find this hidden treasure, since it is true
that we have it within ourselves.”¹⁴

In song after song, Avudai cautions human beings about the
seductive identification of the self with the body. An autobiographical
lyric proclaims her attainment of spiritual detachment:

Renouncing the stubborn notion ‘I am the Body’,
I understood ‘I am That’.
And I then stood forever in silent resolve...¹⁵

She further declares:

Swimming across the ever fleeting ocean of birth and death,
And ascending the shores...
When the house called ‘the Body’
Became another object to be relinquished,
I forgot cows, calves and all relatives...¹⁶

She admonishes those who are enslaved to the intractable logic of
assuming that body is the Self:

Sir, tell me: Is it reasonable to regard
this ephemeral body as ‘I’, as ‘Me’?
The body, made of earth, water, fire, air and space,
Is indeed but a corpse.
You know well that its existence
Is as uncertain as a water bubble.
Yet you beg here and there, and you become crazy
Pursuing its survival.¹⁷

In yet another song, she sternly rebukes her own mind:

What assistance has the body rendered to you until now?
O mind, tell me!

¹³ Ibid., pp.1-2. ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 48. ¹⁵ Natarajan, Kanchana *Transgressing Boundaries*, The Advaitic Songs of Shenkottai Avudai Akkal, Zubaan, 2012, pp. 85. ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 85-87. ¹⁷ *Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal Padal Tirattu*, (Tamil) ed. Swami Nityananda Giri, Sri Gyanananda Niketan, Tamil Nadu 2002, p.217. (All translations of Avudai Akka’s songs are by the author.)

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Like a person relying on a clay horse to cross a river,
You have lost your reason – this is surely your ill luck! ...
Like those who suspend a cucumber safely on a hook
For a long time, hoping it will stay fresh,
You try to preserve this body by nurturing it well,
But the Lord of Death will surely take it away.¹⁸

She unequivocally inscribes the body as a shackle and a cause of profound suffering:

Burdened with the body made of food –
Why are you suffering?
Are you not the Soul which is infinite,
The eternal Fullness?
Can this rancid stench called the body be the Soul?
That which is infested with worms, the corpse –
Can it be the Soul?¹⁹

And in another song this very image undergoes a brilliant, and just as uncompromising, inversion:

Like a babbling lunatic, like a corpse, like one drunk,
I forgot the body.²⁰

For both saints, the body represents one's physical frame as well as the world and all the relationships involved therein. The aspirant needs to shift attention from the imperatives of the material body in the material world to the singular focus of prayer and contemplation away from that bondage.

Both saints present the idea of one's true nature being 'covered' by the world-illusion, that begins with attachment to the body, and the need for 'uncovering' in order to 'recover', the eternal Self that is ever-existent within us.

Teresa instructs us to concentrate on the centre of the castle, the site occupied by the Lord: "Think of a palmito²¹ which has many outer rinds surrounding the savoury part within, all of which must be

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.218-19. ¹⁹ Ibid., p.190. ²⁰ Ibid., p.191.

²¹ The translator tells us that palmito is a shrub, common in the South and East of Spain, with thick layers of leaves enclosing a succulent edible kernel. *Interior Castle*, footnote, 1, p.7.



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taken away before the centre can be eaten.”²² This is quite similar to the interesting analogy found in Vedanta, i.e., that the Self is seemingly ‘covered’ by certain false notions compulsively held by ignorant human beings, such as ‘I am the body’, ‘I am the mind’, ‘I am the breathing person’, ‘I am the doer’, ‘I am the enjoyer’, etc. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, describes the *pañca kōśa-s* that constitute the mind-body nexus, and pronounces that the aspirant has to advance from one *kōśa* to another cautiously to arrive at the core which is the Light and the Truth. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* concludes its teaching by saying that just as one removes the stalks of muncha grass to arrive at the sweet kernel, so too one has to draw oneself wholly out of attachment to the five material sheaths to arrive at one’s centre, i.e., Being.

III. The Journey to Self-knowledge

In the very first chapter of her text, St. Teresa declares that because we do not know ourselves, we are inevitably doomed to suffering. Our ignorance is a primary source of misery and confusion, and there is no greater stupidity than to fixate on the body and the material world rather than to consciously introspect and commit to practices that will help us to understand our true nature:

We know only very superficially we have souls because we have heard so, or because faith tells. Seldom do we consider what great value it is. Many souls dwell near the walls of the castle where the guards are and yet never care about going further into it. Neither do they wish to know what is within, that precious place nor who lives there nor what rooms there are. Some souls are so weak and so immersed in exterior things that they cannot by any means enter into themselves.²³

In anguish, she chastises those who are apathetic to the presence of the castle, due to their worldliness, and is wary of those who are indifferent to the presence of the castle, because of worldly distractions:

“If we have the hope of enjoying this blessing while we are still in this life, what are we doing about it and why are we waiting? What sufficient reason is there for delaying even a short time... instead of seeking this Lord...Oh, what a mockery is everything in the world if

²² *Interior Castle*, pp.7-8. ²³ Ibid., p.3.

it does not lead us and help us on the way towards this end, and would we even though all the worldly delights and riches and joys that we can imagine were to last forever!... Oh, human blindness! How long, how long shall it be before this dust is removed from our eyes?"²⁴

She insists that in order to enter the castle one should endeavour to give up all external activity that is not absolutely necessary.

Akka untiringly rebukes those who seek to escape the Truth/Self through seeking the ephemeral pleasures of the body and world. In many songs she caustically admonishes them as dim-witted, conventional and hypocritical:

Enough! Enough of having immersed yourself,
Deluded and confounded, in the holy river Kaveri!
Behold! Look at the Lord manifesting
Within this body!
Enough! Enough of visiting and bathing in Setu and Kashi,
Search! Find out who the wise master is and contemplate on this!²⁵

In several songs she invokes the truth of transience as she urges the wayward men and women to take to the spiritual path:

If you do not will to know the Truth now, then when will you?
Is it not better to cross the river when the boat is intact and ready?
The body can perish any time:
Give up the foolish attitude and begin the quest!²⁶

The spiritual ‘quest’ is what will lead us to renounce our ‘foolish attitude’ and enable the realization that the very nature of *samsāra* that we take to be real is nothing other than misperception, error, fluctuation, illusion, duplicity, limitation and sorrow. Liberation occurs when this transformative knowledge is internalized as immutable truth that enables us to fully detach from *samsāra*, internally renounce its relentless proliferating seductions that bind *jīvatman* (individuated consciousness).

IV. The Silenced Gaze

Both saints attribute great value to silent gazing as a means to communing with the Divine. St.Teresa advises that:

²⁴ Ibid., p.90. ²⁵ *Transgressing Boundaries*, pp.185-86.

²⁶ *Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal Patalkal*, (Tamil), p.223.

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“We close our eyelids, abandon all creatures, enclose ourselves wholly in the small heaven of the Soul... not enter into much inner discourse or high and learned considerations: but simply we must within ourselves, in the depth of the heart turn the soul’s gaze upon Jesus. The spirit has to develop the habit of acting only interiorly. This interiority happens with a gradual retiring within oneself... like a tortoise withdrawing into itself... these creatures, however enter within themselves whenever they like.”²⁷

She states with pure conviction that all one needs to do is to control one’s gaze so that one is able to experience the vision of the Lord within each of us. With committed and continuous practice, the introspection/absorption grows so deep that “the closed eyes become unable to open – effort would be necessary to hold them open.”²⁸

Silent gazing that catalyzes a total withdrawal from the world are also central to Avudai’s spiritual experience. This practice begins with her Master/teacher gazing at her during the process of initiating her into the system of knowledge transmission. Having received instruction, she remains in speechless amazement. She celebrates her transformation in song after song, for instance:

He placed his hands on my head, dear friend,
And reiterated, “The Absolute alone is the Truth.”
He asked, “Do you know yourself?”
I stood mute, gazing...

In another context she describes encountering this unsurpassed luminosity within herself:

“You are the Light of light,”
He assured me with these words, dear friend,
As I gazed at him with purified intent.
Like the solitary moon
I too merged into vast emptiness.
Like a full moon, brimming and intoxicated
I emptied into a radiant, infinite sky.
The five elements receded
Under his intent Gaze...²⁹

²⁷ *Interior Castle*, pp.40-43. ²⁸ Ibid., p.40. ²⁹ *Transgressing Boundaries*, p.110.

Avudai elsewhere describes the power of her Master's Gaze in the form of a dialogue between Mind, personified as a mother, and Intellect, personified as the daughter:

Mother, who instantly transported us
To the ocean of eternal joy, enabling
Our profound, uninterrupted immersion in that bliss!
O Daughter, it is the intent Gaze of the Master
That has brought us to this ceaseless delight...³⁰

V. Sovereign Marriage

In the elaborately allegorized lengthy song *Sri Vidya Shobhanam* ('The Consummation of Sri Vidya') Avudai sings about the jubilant flowering of Ultimate Knowledge in a young girl (Sri Vidya) who strives tirelessly and determinedly to come to it after receiving the spiritual instructions from her Master. After much perseverance, she attains the final beatitude, a state of oneness with the Divine. This metaphysical ecstasy is symbolized as the final consummation in a nuptial bed with the blessed Bridegroom, the Lord Satchidananda:

Like the coolness in cool liquids, merged
Like salt in water, like camphor in flame,
Now ever free from bondage, Vidya
Became one with Brahman, the Immaculate Light,
The Eternal Truth.³¹

In her similar use of the sacrament of matrimony, St.Teresa distinguishes a corporeal marriage from such spiritual union:

"[...] the soul is made one with God, who being likewise a Spirit... He has been pleased to unite Himself with His creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another; even so He will not separate Himself from her.³²

"...the rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring, there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens. Or it is like a tiny streamlet that enters the sea, from which it will find no way of separating itself,³³ or as if in a room there were two large

³⁰ Ibid., p.251-52. ³¹Ibid., p.217. ³² *Interior Castle*, p.135. ³³ Compare this with the Upanishadic passage "Look at these rivers. The Eastern ones flow towards the east, the Western ones towards the west. From the ocean do they rise and into the

windows through which the light streamed in: it enters in different places but it is all one.”³⁴

“This (union) is not a thing that can be imagined since with all our diligence we cannot acquire it. It is manifest not of our own coin, but of the purest Gold of Divine wisdom. Here the powers are not united but absorbed and astonished ...”³⁵

“This is distinctly the union of love with love, its operations entirely pure, delicate and gentle, and essentially indescribable to those who have not experienced it.”³⁶

VI. The Soul’s Crystal Radiance

What indeed is this ‘soul’ towards which these two saints urge us to turn our attention? St.Teresa describes it in the very first chapter of *The Interior Castle* as a castle composed entirely of light, brilliant like diamonds, and clear and colourless like crystal. In enchanting prose she warns her sisters that “we should not think of our souls as dark”:

“It must seem dark to most of us, as we cannot see it, for we forget that there is not only light which we can see, but also an interior light, and so we think that within our soul there is some kind of darkness...”³⁷

“It is not the radiance that dazzles but soft whiteness, infused radiance in which without wearing the eyes causes the greatest delight, nor are they wearied by the brightness which they see in seeing this divine beauty. So different from any earthly light is the brightness and light now revealed to us,... the brightness of our sun seems quite dim...Not that the sun or any other such light enters into vision, on the contrary it is like a natural light, and all other kinds of light seem artificial! It is a light which never gives place to night and being always light is disturbed by nothing.”³⁸

“We have to dig until we find this hidden treasure, since it is quite true that we have it within ourselves...”³⁹

The ‘treasure’ is the Lord, found at the depths of the castle. St.Teresa beseeches the Carmelite sisterhood to understand that this Fountain and this resplendent sun which is in the centre of the soul

ocean do they merge to become the ocean itself. In that state, none of them knows, ‘I am this river’, ‘I am that river’.” *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.10 1. ³⁴ *Interior Castle*, p.130-35. ³⁵ Ibid., p.38. ³⁶ Ibid., p.64. ³⁷ Ibid., p.130. ³⁸ *Interior Castle*, p.1, p. 5. p.6, p.115. ³⁹ Ibid.

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lose not their brightness or glory, for these always remain in it and nothing can take away its beauty.

“But if anyone should throw a black cloth over a crystal which is exposed to the sun, though the sun may shine upon it, it will have no effect on the crystal... Learn to understand yourselves and take pity on yourselves! Surely if you understand your own natures, it is impossible that you will not strive to remove the pitch which blackens the crystal...”⁴⁰

This remarkable comparison is reminiscent of the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* mantra which declares: “Neither the sun shines there, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the lightning shines there, that being the Light of all lights.”⁴¹

In several compositions Avudai refers to the soul as infinite, immaculate light, and sings in elation of how:

Like the rising sun, in the space called the Heart, it shines,
There is neither a night nor the light of the day there!⁴²

In another song about Self-illumination, she exults that:

There is neither a caste nor creed there,
Neither a beginning, a middle nor an end there,
There is no delusional night of ignorance,
There is no need to open one’s mouth to talk,
Neither is there any silent will operating there:
It is freedom, unalloyed, indestructible,
Eternal Fullness, ever pure —
This is indeed a rapturous wonder,
This is indeed a rapturous wonder!⁴³

And Avudai too presents the crystal as a symbol of transcendent purity:

Just as a red flower set next to transparent crystal
Floods it with colour, suffusing its sheer clarity,
You, enmeshed with the five sheaths,
Occlude the *guna*-free, ever-present,
Immutable Absolute.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.6. ⁴¹ *Mundaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.10, *Ishadi Nau Upanishad*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. ⁴² *Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal Patal Tirattu*, (Tamil) p.97. ⁴³ Ibid., p.225. ⁴⁴ *Transgressing Boundaries*, p.161.

VII. Asleep to the World

Both these saints describe the ‘crystalline’ state of spiritual awakening, when the individual aspirant moves away from all relationships, as a condition where one is thoroughly awake to God though fast asleep to all worldly phenomena. St.Teresa uses the phrase ‘spiritual sleep’ and ‘Prayer of Quiet’ to describe this experience, wherein the soul is “fully awakened to God and asleep to all that concerns attachment to any creature.”⁴⁵

Similarly, Avudai tells us that:

While wide awake (experiencing the Self), I slumbered:
Unmoved by the world as though in deep sleep.
Just as an object slips from the palm of one asleep,
Despondence slid away from me...⁴⁶

One is reminded of an incomparable description by Sri Ramana: “It is all the same to one who is fast asleep in a cart, whether the cart moves or stops, with the bullocks left yoked or unyoked. Similarly for the jnani who has gone to sleep in the cart of his physical body, it does not matter whether he works or is in samadhi or is asleep.”

Avudai’s songs are an explicit effort to rigorously wean the deluded, ‘despondent’ *jīvatman* from its desperate, agonized clinging to samsara. As a Vedantin she focuses primarily on the trajectory of consciousness – that of the suffering, transmigrating *jīvatman* needing to be spiritually redirected from tortuous entanglement in *samsāra* to the inviolate serenity of *advaita siddhi*, i.e., to merge in non-dual Brahman, the source of all. Through their metaphorical genius, as a remedy for the sickness of world-illusion St.Teresa and Avudai both prescribe the medicine of *vairāgyam* – the ‘sleep’ of dispassion, absolute detachment from the addictive and frenzied matrix of internal and external sense-objects, a purposive withdrawal that enables a total inward-turning, with the practitioner dedicating his/her entire subjectivity and practice to one concentrated object – realising the Self.

The spiritual journey is arduous, and St.Teresa warns us that it has to be undertaken with great humility and hope in order to reach inner ‘quietude’ – in Advaitic terms, the profound, unshakeable, ‘sleep’ of Self-realization, the ineffable silence of the Absolute that transcends

⁴⁵ *Interior Castle*, p.48. ⁴⁶ *Transgressing Boundaries*, p.86.

all discursive frames. In contrast to this ineffability, everything else in creation is available for linguistic discourse and translation. However, the very source of this activity, i.e., non-dual eternal Presence, the Light of Consciousness that makes all linguistic transactions possible, does not lend itself to discourse. The Absolute is not available for a description since it cannot be objectified.

For saints such as Teresa and Avudai, Truth/Realization is totally experiential. Thus, the Knower may not speak at all, remain in ‘Sleep’/Silence, and teach through that instrument, as Sri Ramana often did. However, even while there is no ‘other’ reality for the Knower, often an impulse arises from the depths of the Knower’s purified being, an urgent call to share that exalted experience of oneness with all creation (*sarvātmabhāva*) for the benefit of humankind.

St.Teresa and Avudai Akkal are indeed such Knowers of the Self, and both lament that though human beings are so richly endowed with the capacity to discriminate between truth and illusion, few among us actively commit to the process of ‘uncovering’/‘recovering’ our illimitable true nature. And perhaps even fewer among us would acknowledge St.Teresa’s categorical statement that to neglect this opportunity is the greatest loss of all – reminiscent of the incisive verse from the *Kena Upaniṣad* which declares that those who miss their chance to take the path of Self-knowledge suffer no less than *mahati vinashtih*, ‘great irreparable loss’, the loss of all losses, in this life.

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Grace and Divinity

B.C. MRUTHYUNJAYA

O Lord manifestation of Arunchala Siva
A personified force and purity of Silence
Always absorbed in the contemplation of the ‘Self’
You are beyond thought and mind
I bow to you and surrender my entire being. (1)

Born on the Arudradarshan day
A day sacred to Lord Siva who appeared as Nataraja
The great son of Sundaram-Alagammal
Renounced the world at the age of seventeen
Plunged in the life of solitude
How fortunate I am to be at your lotus feet! (2)

Bhagavan the one who is bereft of all desires
One who remains unconcerned and uninvolved
One who is established in the Self beyond time and space
One who is impervious to the strings of the world
I salute at your holy feet for emancipation of the Self. (3)

MOUNTAIN PATH

O Sage of Arunachala the embodiment of silence
Who dwells in the Heart of devotees
Reached the highest state of perfection
Taught us the mystery of life and universe
I bow to you who revealed the Supreme Truth. (4)

Bhagavan the Paramahamsa abiding in the self
Behold thy radiance and grace
Grant me your unfailing shelter
Grace me joy and reside in my Heart
How fortunate I am to be at your lotus feet. (5)

O Lord Beacon, hope of humanity
Remover of sorrows and frustrations of life
You are beyond thought, mind and delusion
Devoid of all kinship and worldliness
Lead me to attain salvation and bliss. (6)

Ramana the great sage of Arunagiri, the divine Alchemy
Who revealed the truth I am not the body but the Self
Taught us the mystery of life and Universe
You are beyond time, space, object and bondage
I bow my head at your holy feet. (7)

Bhagavan the divine abiding in the Self
Who is content with the one-ness of the Self
You are the essence of Knowledge supreme embodied
Embodiment of majesty and compassion
Behold thy radiance in me for ever. (8)

Dwelling in the caves of Arunagiri
Shining as the transcendental truth the world beyond
Who stands as one of the greatest guides
Taught me that the Self is infinite and ultimate
I find in thee the real abiding happiness. (9)

O Lord incarnation of Arunachala Siva
 Who communicates the spiritual insight
 Merged in the Self through ‘Self Enquiry’
 Unconcerned by the motivation of life
 I salute at your holy feet for emancipation of the self. (10)

Bhagavan the mighty spiritual preceptor
 With no taint of egoism in you
 Implied the path of discipline and devotion
 Upholding the traditions of *nishkāmakarma*
 Turn me towards immortality and peace. (11)

Ramana the spiritual genius of this Universe
 Plunged in the solitude at the Holy Arunachala
 Never sees difference between him and others
 Showed the path to the eternal truth of Vedanta
 Grant me your unfailing shelter and bliss. (12)

O Lord sage of Arunagiri always merged in the Self
 Speaking embodiment of Arunachala
 Mighty that you are but still sublime
 Remains whole and ever with no limitations
 You remain unconcerned to the strings of the world. (13)

Ramana the living embodiment of Divinity
 A living proof of Advaitic truth
 Remover of the illusions of the body from the self
 The Union of Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram
 Give me joy and reside in my Heart. (14)

Bhagavan abiding in perennial happiness
 An enlightened yogi to whom the Self is the supreme Being
 Being free from likes and dislikes, verily liberated
 The ultimate power of all creation of the Universe
 A Jnani who surrendered and left everything to the Lord
 Grant me liberation and bliss to rest in pure Consciousness. (15)



A Talk with Luang Por Sumedho

Part One Trust Your Awareness

CITTAVIMALA

This informal conversation with Luang Por¹ Sumedho was recorded at his jungle hermitage in Thailand on 12 January 2019. Born in Seattle, USA, Luang Por Sumedho was the first Western disciple of Ajahn Chah, an outstanding teacher of the secluded Forest Tradition of Thai Theravada Buddhism. He was the abbot of Amaravati Monastery in England for several decades and is one of the best-loved Buddhist teachers in the world. Known for their compassionate wisdom, clarity and humour, Luang Por Sumedho's teachings point to non-dual pure awareness as the ultimate reality. His teachings are identical with those of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, though they use the terminology of Theravada Buddhism. Many of his teachings can be accessed from the Amaravati Monastery website and from YouTube. Luang Por Sumedho has visited Sri Ramanasramam several times; his most recent visit was in December 2017. The following Talk is being published in three parts.

My visit to Luang Por Sumedho's jungle hermitage in Thailand occurred in January 2019. Towards the end of my visit, the abbot of Tisarana Monastery in Canada, Luang Por Viradhammo,²

¹ ‘Luang Por’ is an honorific term used for older, high-status monks; it means ‘Venerable Father’.

² Luang Por Viradhammo is the Abbot of Tisarana Monastery, near Ottawa (in Canada).

suddenly appeared. He, too, was visiting Luang Por Sumedho. Luang Por Viradhammo is an amiable, kind and wise teacher. Delighted to see him again, I confided in him as follows:

‘My twelve-day stay here has really been a challenge. I was on my own after 10 am., with not a soul to talk to. At night I’d worry that someone might break into my guesthouse or that snakes and scorpions might enter. My mind was therefore fearful, unhappy and complaining most of the time!’

Luang Por Viradhammo, who visited Sri Ramanasramam in 2017, said, ‘You stay at Ramana Ashram, you say that your mind is very calm and quiet over there, *so what’s happening?*’ I replied, ‘I don’t know!’ and he responded, ‘I think what’s happening is that you are actually *not practising* at Ramana Ashram! Ramana Ashram has this gift of bestowing peace of mind and you are just enjoying that, as many people do, but you’re not really trying to observe and practise and understand within yourself!’

What he said shocked me but I recognized it to be true. Luang Por Viradhammo concluded, ‘What you’ve got to do when these states of mind come up is, you’ve got to welcome the state and observe it. It’ll go if it goes, or not, if not!’

I repeated this conversation to Luang Por Sumedho when I met with him later that day at his *kuti* [hut], adding, ‘This may be a problem common to many of us at Ramana Ashram: many of my friends are like me. They, too, feel deep calm and peace, but they too, say, ‘When we *leave* this place, it all disappears!’ Gone! We’re back to ordinary. So, Luang Por, I think your advice on this would be very valuable!’

Luang Por chuckles: Well, what is it that’s aware of loneliness or fear? Or complaining? You know at the time that you’re complaining or frightened or lonely or bored... what is it that knows that? Because that’s a mental state – a mind state. And then, you know, you realize, that’s a creation, that’s an arising and ceasing condition, but what stays, what’s constant, is that awareness, it doesn’t come and go! Except that you’re seeing that complaining state as something wrong or yours and then you make it into something more than what it is! So that’s why welcoming is a better attitude than trying to analyse, ‘What’s wrong with me?’ or ‘Why am I at peace in Ramana Ashram and not here?’ Don’t proliferate about it, just observe it!

Q: I was also trying to get rid of it, Luang Por!

Luang Por: Yes, because you came here to be peaceful! (He laughs) And then when you're not peaceful you think something's wrong! But, you know, the world around us is conditions (*sankhara*). At Ramana Ashram you know people, you have a home there, everything is kind of taken for granted, whereas here you don't know exactly what you're supposed to be doing, or who you should talk to, and there are all the monastic rules and the different monastic styles.

Q: And also the environment, Luang Por: just the physical environment of the forest and the darkness at night was scary!

Luang Por chuckles: Well, conditions arise, then you feel like this. So, you know, if it's night time, the night time is scary, when it's dark you don't know what's going on – but you know fear or discomfort is *like this*! You know – so trust that knowing, rather than making a problem about the emotion or mental state that you're experiencing.

Q: Luang Por, what exactly do you mean, when you say, 'Trust that knowing'? Because at night, particularly, there was this real fear, of snakes or whatever, of people breaking in ... probably all very unrealistic, but I'm in a strange place and I don't know what might happen here....

Luang Por very sympathetically interrupts: Right!

Q: But Luang Por, when this fear arises, when you say, 'Observe it' – after that, then what? One observes it, one is aware of it...

Luang Por: Trust that awareness of it! 'Fear's "like this"!' And you begin to trust your awareness of fear, rather than just being reactive to the emotion that you're experiencing.

Q: But the fear remains? The fear doesn't go away?

Luang Por: Well, if you're patient with it, it's impermanent. Because with awareness there's no fear! But, you know, we've been frightened of a lot of things from childhood up to the present. There's a lot to fear in the material world! Two snakes were out there (pointing out of his window onto the lawn in front of his *kuti*), big, long ones!

Q: This morning?

Luang Por: Couple of days ago! I think they were ... mating! (He chuckles.)

Q: Good gosh!

Luang Por: And we've got this annoying peacock that squawks endlessly! You know, I did a lot of experiments in dark rooms in my

early years. When you ‘go *tudong*',³ you go out into the jungle and put up your umbrella [*krot*]⁴ with your mosquito net, when the moon is dark. There isn’t even moonlight! Then you’re sitting out in the jungle, you’re not inside your *krot* yet, you’re sitting out near a tree or something and it’s dark and you begin to imagine things – anything is possible! All kinds of things – in a tropical country like Thailand there’s all kinds of creepy-crawlies and whatnot!

Q: So, Luang Por, how do you deal with that?

Luang Por: Just observing it! And then I noticed that when I’d go into my *krot* and pull out the mosquito net and light a candle – that’s all the light I had – that I’d feel safe, sitting in a contained space, with the flame of a candle lighting up the space around me. I could see the things around me, and suddenly the fear was gone. But the important thing is: what is it that knows fear and knows the absence of fear? It’s *consciousness* – and that’s awareness. So, you know, consciousness is never frightened. Fear comes from conditions arising, that create this emotion.

And another time I was someplace where I put myself in a dark room where there was no light, closed the door, and I sat in a chair and I couldn’t even see my own hands. I put my hands up close, and I thought, ‘I can’t see anything!’ And then the insight came that I could still see – I could see darkness! And that’s consciousness, consciousness is light itself. Consciousness is luminous, so even in a dark room, where you can’t perceive anything through sight, which we normally depend on to feel safe, there’s still this light of consciousness, of knowing.

Luang Por continues: You know, another emotion that’s common is dread for the future: ‘What’s going to happen to me?’ We create that dread because the future is the unknown. When you’re feeling this dread or having doubts about what’ll happen to you, you tend to identify with the dread. But stop identifying with it, just recognize, ‘It’s like this!’ Feel it, in your abdomen or some part of your body, or just recognize that the general atmosphere of dread for the future is ‘like this’!

Luang Por laughs: So that sign at the base of the shrine, (indicating

³ To ‘go on *tudong*’ means to go wandering on foot without fixed abode.

⁴ A ‘*krot*’ is a large monastic umbrella that has a mosquito net attached to it. The large umbrella is hung from a string between two trees and the mosquito net is opened to form a tent beneath it.

a wooden sign that says ‘It’s *like this*’) is a reflection, encouraging contemplation. It’s not defining or describing anything, it’s *pointing* to the recognition, ‘When there’s fear, it’s like this; when there’s dread, it’s like this; when there’s confusion, it’s like this!’ and you are welcoming and patient. Because these are mental states you don’t want, so your whole life you’ve resisted them or suppressed them, so that the habit tendencies are there – to try and get rid of them, or analyse them or think about them, and all that thinking about them *makes* them yours, it increases a sense of ‘It’s my problem! It’s something I’ve got to deal with, I’ve got to find a solution to!’ You’re creating a whole sense of self and attachment to these negative emotions.

But when you see them more from the *buddho*⁵ – the Buddha – perspective, they are what they are, ‘like this’! And then, with *metta* or loving-kindness you accept them: they’re conditions arising and ceasing. They cease on their own. And as you learn to be more trusting with awareness and more patient, you will appreciate the absence of fear, the absence of dread. This really is a very direct way to deal with these feelings.

Luang Por continues: Regard the body similarly. You asked, ‘How to lose the identity with the body?’ It’s a fact that the body exists in consciousness. So, you’re aware of the body – right now you’re aware – you’re sitting there. But the body is in the consciousness. Awareness means that you’re aware of the body as a condition that arises and ceases. You’re the awareness. That’s your Buddho, that’s your refuge – and that’s not the body! So, you begin to recognize what your true nature is – that it’s the Deathless, it’s *amata dhamma*.⁶

Q: Luang Por, you once said something like, ‘Try to regard your body as a leaf, or a tree, or a dog!’ What did you mean Luang Por?

Luang Por: Well, it’s the same, it’s a *sankhara* [condition], you know. You look at a leaf falling from the trees out there (pointing out of his window) and you don’t think it’s *yours* (he laughs.) You don’t have any strong feelings about it – that’s just nature doing its thing. Well, that’s exactly what your body’s doing right now – it’s born,

⁵ ‘Buddho’ is the Pali word used for the practice of recollecting the Buddha, commonly employed in Thailand.

⁶ ‘Amata dhamma’ means ‘the Deathless’ in Pali.

grows up, gets old and dies – and its nature is the nature of conditioned phenomena. But this knowing, this awareness, is unconditioned, and as you cease your identity with and break through the illusions you have about yourself being this mortal body, this personality with these emotional habits and these memories and thoughts, as you see that, you are able, instead of identifying with them, to be a witness to these illusions. Because the whole point of awareness is to witness to whatever you're feeling right now. You're feeling it, but you're aware of these feelings! Like, right now, how are you feeling?

Q: Happy! Very happy!

Luang Por: But you're aware of happiness.

Q: Yes, Luang Por.

Luang Por: Then that's the awareness to trust. That happiness (he laughs) can easily change when the conditions change! So, this is what I keep trying to emphasize with people, how to trust this awareness, because it's the only thing you *can* trust. You can't trust what you think or feel at the moment, you know, because it changes and conditions change. One moment you're happy and the next moment you're sad and the emotions change even according to the weather – whether its sunny or gloomy! And the future is the unknown. So, trust your awareness! Then, as you get older, and things happen, you know, maybe a loved one dies, you will have awareness as your refuge, rather than believing your feelings. That's where you'll have your trust! And then things happen, and circumstances change and wonderful things can still happen.

So, that's where your real refuge is, in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha – these are Buddhist terms, of course, but they mean this awareness. Your refuge is Dhamma – consciousness is Dhamma! It's ultimate reality. It's boundless. And mindfulness is the way that we begin to realize that! When we're not mindful, when we're caught up in just the momentum of our habits and ignorant beliefs and thoughts and identities then there's fear and desire and restlessness and confusion. Because *samsara*, the worldly conditions, are very confusing! You know, that's their nature. How can you control them? How can you make them so that they don't upset you or confuse you? (Luang Por laughs as he adds:) Maybe Ramana Ashram is the best place to be! But – maybe there's confusion there sometimes too!

Q: Definitely. The world is at Ramana Ashram as well, Luang Por!

Ozhivil Odukkam

Four Complimentary Interpretations of the Work's Title

ROBERT BUTLER

The advaitic work Ozhivil Odukkam was published in the Mountain Path in serialized form between April 2013 and July 2018. Sri Ramanasramam is now preparing to publish the entire series of articles in book form. Ozhivil Odukkam was an essential book in Bhagavan's couch-side revolving book case and he frequently quoted from it.

This article will discuss four different interpretations of the title of the advaitic work *Ozhivil Odukkam* by Kaṇṇutaiya Vallalār, showing how each of these sheds its own peculiar light upon the topic of Self-realisation, which is the subject of the text as a whole. The first interpretation addresses the means of attaining that state, the second, the nature of dwelling in it, the third, its permanency or lack of it and the fourth, the possibility of attaining it whilst remaining in the body. The word *odukkam* is a noun from the verb *odungu*, which has amongst its meanings to shrink, subside, be absorbed, dissolve, disappear and the word *olivu* is a noun from the verb *oli*, which has amongst its meanings to cease, be ended, become annihilated, die, perish. The meaning of these two words remains broadly the

same through each of these interpretations, whilst it is the particle *il* appended to the word *oliv(u)*, which informs the various inflections of the overall meaning.

In the first interpretation we take *il* as a postposition of the Fifth Case which confers upon the noun it follows a causal meaning. It is not so employed in modern written Tamil, in which its meaning is confined to separation, movement away from, but in Classical Tamil, as the 13th century grammar *Nannūl* informs us, it can also convey the senses of *oppu* – comparison, *ellai* – limit and *ēdu* – cause. Thus, combining it with the meanings of the two nouns given above, we derive a meaning for the term *olivil odukkam* as follows:

Subsiding (*odukkam*) [into the Self, the Real] through (*il*) the annihilation (*olivu*) [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego].

This formulation is reminiscent of, the first *sutra* of the initial chapter of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, entitled 'Samādhi Pāda':

yogaś citta vrtti nirodhah – yoga (union with the Self) is the annihilation of the modifications of mind.

Vallalār gives us a plethora of practical hints as to how this might be achieved, along with a good number of admonitory verses, outlining strategies that are doomed to failure:

It is the habitual nature of the mind to be active even when it is not directed towards any object. If you try to understand this nature, how will you not be confused? At the slightest contact with it, there will be birth and death for you, but if it dies, you will become Sivam. (106)

The world of maya, arising and subsiding by turns, is unreal like the clouds in the sky. If we do not realise this, and attempt to suppress the world that rises up using the mind that rises with it, will this not be like a ball, bouncing back again each time we hit it to the ground? Therefore observe it as the witness only. It will be like a tree dug up by the root, yielding neither flowers nor fruits. (110)

Who has attained liberation by studying and learning the holy texts, which themselves are insufficient to contain all the religious

systems with their commentaries and interpretations? To do so is like going to the lengths of covering the sky with a canopy and the earth with leather when setting out on a journey, instead of simply wearing sandals and taking an umbrella. (132)

In the second interpretation we take *il* in its modern usage as a postposition of the Seventh Case, indicating location in time, space, etc. In this interpretation the emphasis is on the nature or experience of dwelling as the Self, rather than on the means for obtaining it:

Absorption (*odukkam*) [in the Self] upon (*il*) the destruction (*olivu*) [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego].

This in turn is reminiscent of the second sutra of ‘Samādhi Pāda’: *tadā draṣṭuh svarūpe [a]vasthānam* – Then does the seer abide in his own Self-nature.

Vallalār devotes a number of verses to attempting to convey some sense of this abidance in the Self, Śivam:

For those experiencing blissful union [with the Self], having come to know the true reality as surely as they had once known the false, there is no longer any connection with anything whatsoever. What a wonder is the destruction of oneself, like the spreading rays of the sun, rising in the vision of a clear-sighted eye [and blotting it out completely]. (88)

For those whose personal consciousness has been annihilated, what association with anything whatsoever remains? For them, the whole universe has been destroyed. Where might they go and hide? Like the tale of the man who once went in search of a tiger, [was mauled by it and devoured], the Self will hold them in its unblinking gaze, and bring them to complete stillness. (89)

Having realised the Self, they abide as That; for them, having perceived the nature of ignorance, there is neither knowing nor absence of knowledge. If one were to attempt to describe the bliss which flourishes in the pure emptiness of the Self, where they live without living, it would be like trying to calculate the volume of the heavens with a pint pot. (90)

These two interpretations are of course very closely linked, the first emphasising the means for the attainment of realisation, that is, the permanent destruction of the ego-mind, and the second, the state of absorption in the Self, which ensues upon that destruction. Vallalār would have been fully aware of these nuances, which exist due to the multi-valency of meaning inherent in the very structure of the Tamil language. It is significant that the very title of the work speaks, not of the gaining of some supernormal state, but of the removal of the obstacles that prevent the realisation of an already existing one, a point which Bhagavan also frequently made, both in his writing and in his talks with devotees:

The consciousness of the Self is the normal state; our present entanglement is the abnormal state. We imagine that we have to develop towards a perfect state – when we are in it now but have covered it with accretions of external things and thoughts. People talk of attaining the super-consciousness. This is wrong. This Self is our normal consciousness; we imagine we have to develop and attain it but we are in it all the time, only our attention is diverted away from it to intellect and objects.¹

Vallalār makes the same point in verse 155 of *Ozhivil Odukkam*, comparing those ‘accretions’ mentioned by Bhagavan to the ropes of a swing, upon which the jīva is suspended, unable to realise its ‘normal state’, the consciousness of the Self:

If the worldly bond falls away, the *jīva* will automatically come to rest in the Lord, just as someone swinging on a swing will come to rest on the ground if the rope breaks.

In the third interpretation we take *il* to be the negative root, which denies existence, standing for the adjectival participle *illāta* – which is without and forming a *vinai tokai* – verbal compound with the word *odukkam*, giving the meaning:

Absorption (*odukkam*) [in the Self] [which is] without (*il*) ceasing (*olivu*).

Vallalār is at great pains to explain what is not ceaseless abidance, particularly in the chapter on yoga, *yōga kalarri* – Transcending the

¹ *Conscious Immortality*, Conversations with Sri Ramana Maharshi, p.168. Chap. 19, ‘The Ultimate As Reality.’

path of yoga, in which he is scathingly dismissive of yoga practised as an end in itself:

To attain the state of *samādhi*, remaining motionless like a wooden post through control of the breath, which is not [naturally] under conscious control, is comparable to the fate of a dumb blind man who has consumed poison, and who, in walking to a certain place, stumbles into a deep pit in a desolate area. (94)

With your spiritual jargon, yogic postures and staring gaze, you act out a ludicrous pantomime of spiritual practice. Give up these worthless habits and remain motionless, as the pure consciousness which is all-embracing like the heavens, and in which there is neither knowing nor absence of knowing. (95)

In this interpretation we are emphasising the point that true realisation is permanent and irreversible, the state which Sri Ramana calls *sahaja nirvikalpa samādhi*, as opposed to the state in which the mind is simply in abeyance and surfaces again when normal activities are resumed, the state which Sri Ramana calls *kevala nirvikalpa samādhi*. In the latter, he tells us, ‘the mind remains alive, sunk in light, like a bucket with the rope left lying in the water in a well, to be drawn out by the other end of the rope,’ whilst in the former state ‘the mind is dead, resolved into the Self, like a river discharged into the ocean and its identity lost; a river cannot be redirected from the ocean.’ (See the schematic table in Talk §187 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.) One in the state of *sahaja nirvikalpa samādhi* will be unaffected by his bodily activities. Indeed he will be quite oblivious to them. In similar fashion, Vallalār too explains that the true *jñāni* remains quite unaffected by the operation of the mental and sensory faculties:

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

In this verse the Self, the transcendent reality, is compared to a king, whose power and authority protect all his subjects, whoever and wherever they are, and the various people and places in his kingdom are compared to the mind and senses. Once the *jñāni* has become the ‘subject’ of the Self, the world, the mental and sensory faculties will be perceived purely as the nature of the Self, and thus be powerless to harm him.

The fourth and final interpretation is one that takes *il* in the same sense as that of interpretation three, as a negativising particle, but interprets the word *olivu* as referring to the body-mind complex, with the meaning:

Absorption (*odukkam*) [in the Self] without (*il*) the annihilation (*olivu*) [of the body-mind complex].

This then becomes a reference to the state of the *jīvanmukta*, that of one who is liberated whilst still in the body. See for example verse 62:

Those who dwell as knowledge upon the abolition of ignorance; who, upon the abolition of both [knowledge and ignorance], do not know even that knowledge, and hence are not separate [from the Self], have attained absorption in true knowledge (jnana samadhi) through the loss of their personal self, and in that very instant are liberated whilst in the body (*jīvanmuktas*). (62)

We cannot of course know exactly what was in the mind of the author when he devised the title of the work *Ozhivil Odukkam* but it seems certain that he intended it to be allusive and multi-faceted and perhaps a little tantalising, in keeping with the work of a genius at whose head it stands. ▲

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

My Stay at Ramanasramam

T.B. SUCHINDRAAN

It was the month of May in the year 1994. We had been to Chennai for my cousin's *upanayanam* and we were enjoying our vacation in our maternal uncle's home. My father Mr. T. M. Bhargavan was an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Mahaishi since the early eighties when his uncle initially introduced him to Bhagavan's Grace. He originally planned to visit Tiruvannamalai alone, but later he wanted my mother, brother and me to accompany him. As a child I was not very inclined to spirituality as the limit of my involvement was simple prayers. One morning my father woke me up with a request to join him in travelling to Tiruvannamalai on a trip that he had planned for some time. I abruptly declined. He never coerced anybody, so later that morning he, mother and my brother left for Tiruvannamalai.

Days and years passed, when one day I was just flipping through a spiritual magazine and there was a piece on Arunachala and Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi. I just glanced through the article and immediately developed an interest in visiting Tiruvannamalai but my inner request was not granted. I did not finally get the opportunity

to visit Tiruvannamalai until two years later in 2003 after a gap of exactly nine years from when Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi first beckoned me. I was accompanied by my cousins on this, my first visit to Tiruvannamalai and I was extremely excited at the prospect. After our arrival we first visited the Mother's shrine followed by Bhagavan's Samadhi, and later the meditation hall. As our time was restricted we were not able to much spend time in Asramam. I found Bhagavan's Grace compelling and I felt remorse for not accepting my father's invitation a decade back. The journey only half satisfied me as I was not able to stay in the Asramam for a single day. I was wondering when the next call would come and looked forward to it eagerly. The thirst was quenched after two years and I had the privilege to stay in the Asramam along with my mother.

My Experience in the Asramam

As soon as the bus reached Tiruvannamalai and when I was on my way to Ramanasramam, the mind was again thrilled. As soon as I walked into the entrance of Ramanasramam the atmosphere made me feel that it was more a home coming than just a visit. We were provided with accommodation in the Morvi guesthouse. There are no words to describe the stay. I was completely fascinated by the serene atmosphere of the Ramanasramam. The magnet in Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi attracted me to him. The happiness I felt was as if I was in my real home. "Why did I come here so late?" was the question which perturbed me then and still disturbs me today.

In the Asramam I first visited the Mother's shrine, later Bhagavan's Samadhi. When I went round the Samadhi and later sat before it, I just felt asking Bhagavan, why did you call me so late to visit your place? Why didn't you call me a decade ago? Why was my mind not mature enough to accept my father's proposal to visit the Asramam. Later I visited the Old Hall and saw foreigners in deep meditation. I found a spare place and sat opposite to Bhagavan's image on the couch, and gazed in wonder at it. After reading about the death experience of Bhagavan which was displayed near the Mother's shrine, I wondered how at that age Bhagavan had travelled from his home town leaving his family and relatives. I felt this was not possible for a mere human being. He was an embodiment of God. He had come to live in this

yuga to guide his devotees and fortunately now I am one of them. Even today all my friends and colleagues ask me what do I feel when I go Ramanasramam. My answer is there are no words to explain. It is an inner feeling one has to experience for oneself when one stays in the Asramam. It is above all a sacred and serene atmosphere which words fail to capture. It is a gift from the *Sadhguru*, the true teacher, from whom we seek the sacred wisdom. It is a place where one should realise how to discover what one should know. It provides a pure environment that is conducive to the practice of spiritual discipline. Further, I have also made up my mind that henceforth I need to make a visit to Ramanasramam regularly, not only for the *darśan*, but also for calming the stressed mind.

By the grace of Bhagavan I found employment in a bank. With his divine blessing I was able to move up the ladder in that bank. Later I got married and was blessed with a daughter. I stayed for seven years in Hyderabad but suddenly one evening I received a transfer order to Kurnool now on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Kurnool was an unfamiliar place for me and my family. I wondered how I can manage the family in this new place. But I was always sure that the guru would guide me. The moment I settled in Kurnool I had completely surrendered to Bhagavan, and that it is up to Bhagavan to take care of me. Once I read a quote that deeply touched my heart.

“Do not ask God to lighten your load, but to give you strength, so that no matter what load you have on your head, you will be able to bear it lightly.”

I have faced some tough times in Kurnool, but Bhagavan at my side has given me the strength and made things easy.

While reading a book on Bhagavan, I came to know that Bhagavan helped cut the vegetables in the ashram kitchen which were needed for the preparation of the dining hall meals. This motivated me and now on a daily basis I cut the vegetables in our house, which helps my wife in cooking.

Now whenever I say the word Ramanasramam, my daughter gets enthusiastic and always wants to accompany me there. I also ensure that my wife and daughter join me during the journey.

But even today my conscience still troubles me; why did I not agree to my father’s call?



Courtesy of Ella Maillart

The Long Road to Bhagavan

Tracing the Pilgrim Life of Ella Maillart Part Two

MICHAEL HIGBURGER

In 1944, Ella sat down at Sri Ramanasramam and began to write *Ti-Puss*, her first book from an overtly spiritual perspective. Her narrative was interwoven with reflections on the Maharshi in whose presence she had now been for nearly four years.

That same year, the popular novelist W. Somerset Maugham published *The Razor's Edge*, his most acclaimed work which likewise contained references — though masked — to the Maharshi.

As a literary device, Ella made use of the life of a kitten she had adopted from Sujata Sen while at Ramanasramam, alerting the reader at the outset with the following words:

“Warning: Those who hope to read just another cat-story should not open this book. For three years I lived with an Indian cat: she became my confidante and, as we travelled together, I could not avoid mentioning to her the gist of my preoccupations. This is my apology for the two very different trends of my book.”¹

¹ Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, footnote to the *Table of Contents*.

The first line of Maugham's book also contained an unusual disclaimer:

"I have never begun a novel with more misgiving. If I call it a novel, it is only because I don't know what else to call it."²

What made Maugham's 'novel' unconventional was not just his insistence that its main character was a real person, but his decision to include himself in the story under his own name. Maugham's book would eventually sell five million copies, and within two years of its release, become a Hollywood blockbuster film starring Tyrone Power as the story's hero, Larry Darrell.³

While Maugham was writing in England, Ella was writing at Arunachala where she yearned to live life in the present whilst searching for the meaning of existence in her everyday pursuits:

"The teaching says: It is for the sake of the Self that all things are dear, though we usually think it is for the sake of the loved object. This cat, so alive in me that she has become like part of me, opened my heart where love was dormant, love being the real Self. When my feeling of love becomes uppermost for an extremely short while, there is neither cat nor any limited individuality. I am lost in love-impersonal, love which is a state where time has no power."⁴

As it turned out, both Ella's and Maugham's books were released by the same London publisher, William Heinemann, who had published Ella's *Forbidden Journey* in 1937, *Gypsy Afloat* in 1942, and would later publish *The Cruel Way* in 1947.

In the course of conversations with Ella on the veranda of his hut in Ramanasramam, Major Chadwick narrated the account of Somerset Maugham's scandalous visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1938:

"Somerset Maugham ran away from Pondicherry, he hated it so much. He came here with Mrs. Austin, had lunch in front of Olaf's hut with beer and gin—what a horror! Chadwick sent everybody away to avoid a scandal. Then Somerset Maugham asked to lie down. Chadwick sent Grant Duff away from his room and [went to tell] Bhagavan that Somerset Maugham [was not in a position to] come to the Hall. So Bhagavan came [to Chadwick's hut] and sat opposite

² Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, William Heinemann, 1941, p.1.

³ Bill Murray plays Larry Darrell in the 1984 film adaptation by Columbia Pictures.

⁴ Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, p. 61.



Chadwick on his veranda with Bhagavan's tiger skin



W. Somerset Maugham holding a copy of *The Razor's Edge*

Somerset Maugham for half an hour. At the end of it Maugham said: "Do I need to say something?" "No, silence is a good thing," Bhagavan said. [Bhagavan then added:] "I ought to go back [to the Hall]. They will be waiting for me."⁵

Maugham had not made a great showing and Chadwick was unhappy with him. But Maugham seems to have been awestruck by Chadwick.

In a letter to her mother in Switzerland, Ella writes:

"Chadwick had impressed Somerset Maugham because he looked so perfectly happy. Do you remember, I must have told you that I had lunch with Somerset Maugham at his daughter's place just before he left for India; he was certain that Europe had run off the track somehow and he wanted to see something of the ageless wisdom of India."⁶

Neither Chadwick nor Ella realised that Maugham, despite having behaved inappropriately at the time, had in fact been deeply taken by his experience of Bhagavan. Indeed, when his bestseller was

⁵ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

⁶ Letter to her mother, 12th December, 1940.

published in 1944, anyone who had ever visited Ramanasramam would have easily recognised the spiritual master Sri Ganesha as based on Bhagavan. Few, however, would have been able to identify Major Chadwick as the principal subject on whom Maugham's iconic character Larry Darrell was modelled. Both Larry and Chadwick were from good families, both had been wounded in the First World War, both had lost a close friend in battle, and at the end of the war, both gave up promising careers in order to travel to India to seek the transcendental meaning of life.⁷

Though unimpressive during his visit, Maugham had presciently diagnosed the spirit of the times and landed on the emerging archetype of twentieth-century Europe. His character matched not only the life of Major Chadwick but that of Guy Hague, Lewis Thompson, Paul Brunton, S.S. Cohen, Maurice Frydman, Ethyl Merston, Grant Duff and countless others who, like Ella, had come to live with Sri Ramana long before the appearance of *The Razor's Edge*. Ironically, as Ella and Chadwick joked about Maugham on Chadwick's veranda at Ramanasramam, Maugham was publicly validating their vocation and making them into unwitting heroes through the character of Larry.

The writer Louis Buss describes how just after the Second World War when the film version of *The Razor's Edge* was released, thousands of servicemen wrote to Maugham⁸ inquiring about the whereabouts of Larry Darrell who, Maugham had insisted at the beginning of the book, was a living person:

“This book consists of my recollections of a man with whom I was thrown into close contact only at long intervals, and I have little knowledge of what happened to him in between. I suppose that by the exercise of invention I could fill the gaps plausibly enough and so make my narrative more coherent; but I have no wish to do that. I only want to set down what I know of my own knowledge ... I have invented nothing.”⁹

⁷ In his *The Life and Times of A. W. Chadwick* (unpublished biography of Major Alan Chadwick), Louis Buss makes a convincing case that among Maugham's acquaintances, Chadwick is the central model for the composite character of Larry Darrell (pp.741-818).

⁸ Ibid., p.753.

⁹ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, Heinemann, 1944, p.1.

Maugham never revealed Larry's true identity and took care, it would seem, to guard Chadwick's coveted solitude in South India.

As for Chadwick, it is not clear how many years passed before he came across Maugham's novel and recognised himself in it. Nor do we know if Chadwick ever came to know of the book's phenomenal success and that of the subsequent film, and how his Ashram life had inspired millions around the globe.

To be sure, in 1944, neither Ella nor Chadwick had heard of Larry Darrell. But they knew Larry's script implicitly as it was the script of their own lives, the script of an irrepressible longing to abandon their native countries and come to the other side of the world in the hope of finding what-they-knew-not.

The opening line of *The Razor's Edge* is taken from the *Katha Upanishad* and reads like a prescription for the era:

*Rise, wake up, seek the wise and realise. The path is difficult to cross, like the sharpened edge of the razor, so say the wise.*¹⁰

While Maugham had rightly judged the timing for a character like Larry, he fell short in representing what his protagonist would have actually found in Sri Ganesha (Bhagavan). Maugham had not spent enough time at Sri Ramanasramam to learn anything of Bhagavan's teaching but instead, being a novelist on a research tour, only jotted down rudimentary observations. In recounting his darshan with Sri Ganesha, Larry could not speak convincingly nor with any real understanding, simply because his creator had not conducted the spiritual search himself and in fact had no idea who Ramana Maharshi really was.

Maugham could have benefited greatly from tracking the interior lives of Ella Maillart or Major Chadwick in the company of the real-life Sri Ganesha. If he had been privy, for example, to Ella's journalling or been able to see through her eyes what she beheld in the presence of the Maharshi, then Larry and Sri Ganesha would have been much richer characters.

As for Ella, like Larry and Chadwick, she too had been motivated by a longing to penetrate the 'mystery of life' and to know 'why we were on this earth', not as a philosophy to be chronicled and sold in one

¹⁰ Ibid., book dedication.

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of her popular travelogues, but so that by this realisation, the value of her life—the ‘book’ she was constantly writing—might be enhanced.

Later, on hearing it said that ‘going East’ had become cliché, Ella would have been quick to point out that the spiritual search is serious business, even if its Hollywood versions are at risk of being shallow and unreflective. *Going East*—the metaphor for a soul longing to know itself through interiority, through awakening to a deeper self-encounter—had become the fixation of a generation. Ella’s peers in the West, like those of Larry, were desperately attempting to build their lives on the fleeting things of this world — money, status, mundane knowledge and sense pleasures. Larry and Ella, in rejecting this, were part of a small but growing counter-cultural trend.

Seeking solace in the thought and cultures of distant eastern lands had its intellectual origins in, among other things, 18th and 19th-century German Idealism, in the advent of Freudian psychology, indebted as it was to Eastern understandings of subjectivity and the self,¹¹ in the Theosophical movement initiated in New York in 1875, and in Swami Vivekananda’s impressive appearance at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, just to name a few.

Like Larry, Ella found in spiritual India a culture that still cohered, in contrast to Western culture which had become fragmented and broken. Ella was emphatic in her final instructions to her caregiver and friend before she died:

“You will tell them that I knew the Great Euphoria on earth, that you understood it and that you shared it. You will tell them to translate into the Western languages the lessons of the Great Sage. Because there are not two wisdoms, one from the West and one from the Orient. There is only one wisdom. But never forget that we would be nothing without Asia.”¹²

During her years at Sri Ramanasramam, Ella came to understand what it was that plagued her native Europe, what it had lost and

¹¹ Freud was influenced by Schopenhauer who mastered Sanskrit, was steeped in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and translated Buddha’s teaching in disguised form in his *The World as Will and Idea*, 1818.

¹² Anne Deriaz, *Chere Ella: Elegie Pour Ella Maillart*, Paris, Actes Sud, 1998, pp.132-133.

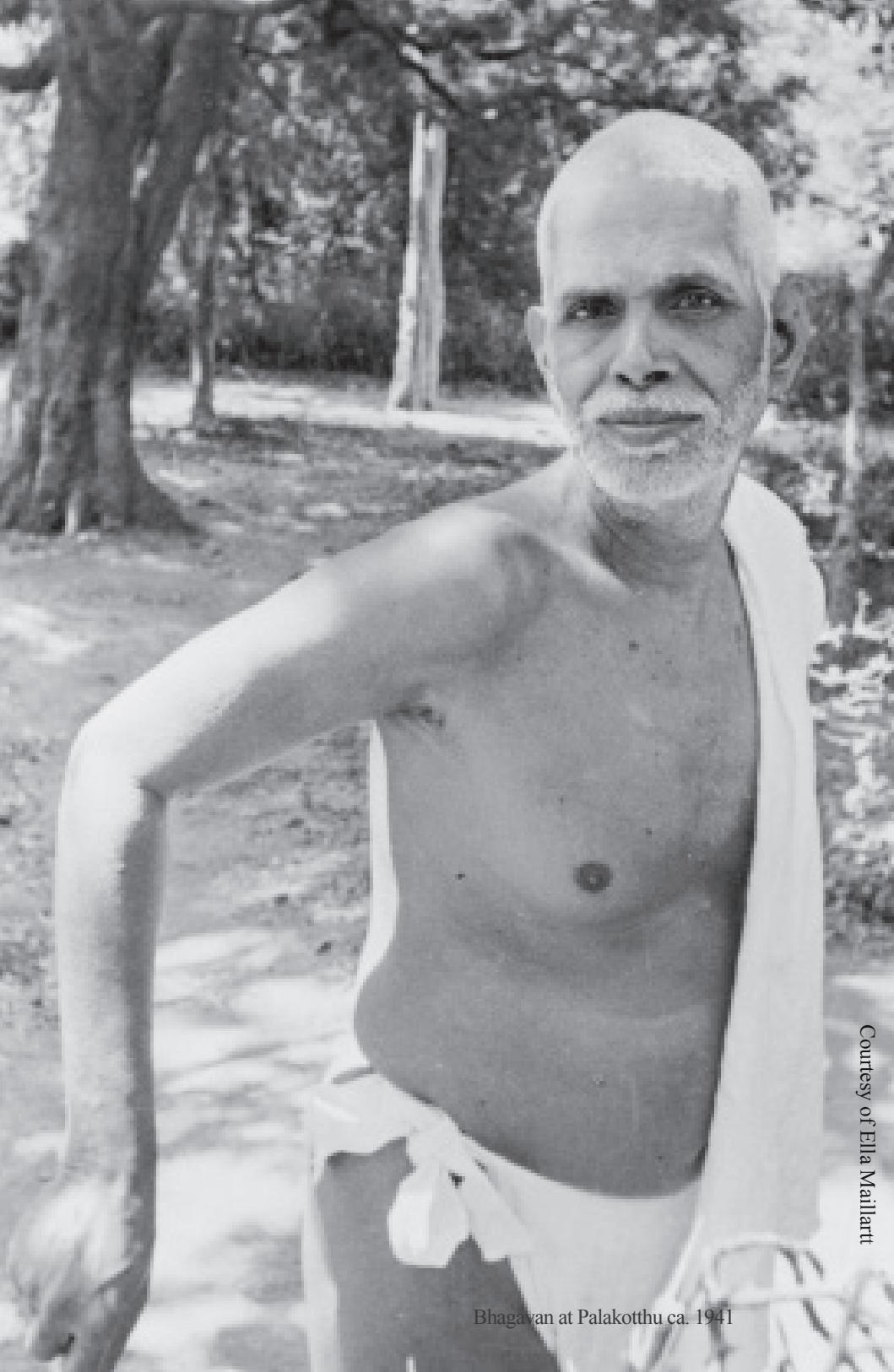


The 1946 Hollywood blockbuster *The Razor's Edge* cast Tyrone Power as Larry Darrell (based on Chadwick) and Cecil Humphreys as Sri Ganesha (based on Bhagavan)

what it was in need of recovering. She learned about the classical Indian teaching on the good life, composed of four requisites called the *purusharthas* — *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. *Artha* governs wealth, prosperity and the comforts of life; *kama*, the sense pleasures; *dharma*, ethical life and moral development; and *moksha*, the transcendent dimension concerned with God, spirituality and ultimate freedom.

Ella could see how this model applied to the West, where the first three had been developed to a significant degree but the fourth had atrophied in the modern era. Europe's materialist ethos had surrendered, it would seem, any concern for divine mystery and spiritual wisdom.

Hers was a culture in exile whose innocence had been lost centuries earlier when religious authority became conjoined with state power, and 'caring for the poor' had degenerated into the colonial pillaging of



Courtesy of Ella Maillart

Bhagavan at Palakotthu ca. 1941

the world's indigenous populations. The prospect of a vital religious culture where prophets and sages might readily appear seemed to have been inexorably forfeited.

The renunciant lives of Ella and her cohort at Tiruvannamalai mirrored the sannyasin vocation, i.e. separation from birthplace, from career, from family, from married life and from having children. If their quest appeared clumsy, it was because they had no way of articulating it, hailing, as they did, from countries where the monastic call had ceased to be a salient feature of the broader culture.

Larry, Ella, Major Chadwick and the expat community at the Ashram were disenfranchised not because their call was invalid but because the West no longer upheld or safeguarded the contemplative vocation. They had been drawn to a life dedicated to the inner search much the way men and women in every generation had been drawn. But their confusion lay in the fact that the collective memory had failed to retain the language to make sense of it. In short, the Larrys of the world were refugees from a civilisation in crisis. Ella writes:

“The timelessness of a concept has to be woven into the running warp of dying time; vertical power has to be wedded to the horizontal earth.¹³ If I think nations and democracy are hollow words, then God is the only real thing. Serve God? How? I have first to be trained sufficiently to be a ready tool ... to be used by God, if it pleases Him. If others die for a sham democracy, then much more can I die for God. Or be ready to do nothing so grand and heroic, be ready to serve most humbly, if this be His will.”¹⁴

By diagnosing the predicament of her own life, she was more readily able to identify what had happened to her native Europe. As she evolved in Ramana’s presence, her commentary matured:

“The more I advanced, the more I wanted to stay and try to transform myself and find out this truth which was in [us]. In the Gospel, Jesus said that the kingdom of God was inside us. Well, if someone would have explained these words of Jesus ... I would not have needed to [travel] so far. But my destiny wanted that being born in Geneva I should never [find there] a great sage on the spiritual

¹³ Ella Maillart <www.inspiringquotes.com>.

¹⁴ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

plane. I am sure that there are in Europe [those] who have realised the supreme truth but they are probably in monasteries or they stay inside their homes because most people are not interested in [them].”¹⁵

If Ella and her peers stood as a challenge to their tradition, Bhagavan Sri Ramana was the fulfilment of his. In respect of the latter, the healthy tension that arose with the appearance of the Upanishads three millennia earlier with its emphasis on the indwelling Atman, on God as Self, was in contrast with the earlier ritual tradition of the yagna that sought to communicate with the divine solely through fire-sacrifice. Ella had an advantage in assimilating Bhagavan’s non-duality simply because she had not been previously committed to any ritualistic religious system, and thus, Bhagavan’s teaching on the Self appeared to her as completely free of the trappings of formalised religion:

“I suddenly saw Bhagavan on his sofa. Out of my surprise, I laughed, while he was laughing at me, in a way which said: ‘Look where they put me, is it not fun?’ I had the feeling of being his accomplice and for [several minutes] we enjoyed the joke. It was like a wall falling [away] between us. This is the reaction of ‘limited being’ but, when I think beyond [it,] I know that he is forever in such a joy and bliss. I have a similar joy in me, just as eternal and powerful, if only I could give up my particularistic personality. His joy can be mine, as I have it in me. Joy, Joy. The world is alright [just as it is]. Suffering lies only within us. [And yet,] the snake doesn’t suffer from its poisonous fangs.”¹⁶

In the company of Sri Ramana, Ella found herself in the “unity of the world” where, she says, “we have come to the end of all our defences and are firmly established in this perception. It allows us to live the present moment in its entirety, and to feel the harmonics that bind beings and things rather than focusing on what separates them.”¹⁷

Her commentary continues, free of pretension:

¹⁵ *La Metaphysique d’Ella Maillart*, RTS–Religion, Babel, 17 September 2017, trans. Savitri Poornima.

¹⁶ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

¹⁷ Nicolas Bouvier, *L’Echappée Belle: Eloge de Quelques Peregrins*, Geneva, Metropolis, p.130.

“Snow, sea, friends, eyes … so much beauty [in this world] that it is nearly painful. What shall I do with this intensity in me? God, won’t you use me? No, no, don’t ask, be patient, just [be] ready. Tears fill my eyes. I do not need to be in samadhi to have a vision of God: the world is here, His [external form.] … What more proof is needed?”¹⁸

In another place, she says:

“The Maharishi had written in Tamil verses:

All-embracing Light of Consciousness, in Thee the picture of the universe is formed, has its stay and is dissolved; in this enigma lies the miracle of truth. Thou art the inner Self, who dancest in the Heart as ‘I’; Heart is thy name, O Lord!

“The state which had shaped [this] sentence took possession of me, abolishing my isolation; in the fullness that followed I forgot the where and the when. It was deep, unique, most precious; and I do not know words rich enough to be worthy of it. Opening my eyes, I saw the setting sun outlining a majestic cloud with gold … a striking symbol of my meditation: do not all forms rise in the light of consciousness? Consciousness, the changeless delight of being conscious!”¹⁹

In *The Razor’s Edge*, while the reader is not privy to the protagonist’s inner dialogue, Larry’s transformation born of the encounter with Sri Ganesha is nevertheless reflected and made plain by the compassion and self-sacrifice he demonstrates in the years following his journey to India.

In Ella, we hear of the changes going on within her in real-time as she is slowly transformed in Bhagavan’s presence. Firm in the conviction that the wisdom reflected by Bhagavan each day would one day become her own, the subtle phrasings of her private narrative convey the magnitude of the impact of his darshan:

“He implants a lasting peace in the centre of every heart. He is a link between the unknowable ultimate and man.²⁰ What, to me, was most important, remains unexplainable. Careful counting of the paces needed to cross a garden can never give us the scent of jasmine that

¹⁸ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

¹⁹ Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, William Heinemann, London, 1951, pp. 43-44.

²⁰ “The Sage’s Activity In Inactivity”, Ella Maillart, *Golden Jubilee*, Sri Ramanasramam, 3rd edition, 1995, p.264.

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overflows a wall. But here and there some of these paces might bear witness by showing how I moved from amused watching to painful bewilderment ... till much later, in my deepest moments, I could say with joyful honesty: I am rid of myself!²¹ [In his presence,] my thoughts stopped, and a grateful certitude, accompanied by a wave of love, flooded my chest. Finally, I was able to love without any restriction ... to love without asking for anything in return ... to love for the joy of loving.²² ▲

(*to be continued*)

²¹ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. Fr. 7111 B/2-6.

²² Ella Maillart, *Cruises and Caravans*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1951, p.229.

Mountain

Sivapriyaa

As we were climbing up the mountain
It was growing trees
And wearing tridents of lightning as a crown.
Strands of fire ran across the sky —
Swift streams without river beds.

Monkeys amused themselves staring.
Nights were windy whipping away the protective cover.
The rocks warm and cosy and hard enough,
To wake us up every few hours.
The night was singing while within us
Silence spread —
A glow of listening filling even the body;
We were aware and alert like a wild cat.

In Spite of...

P. RAMAKRISHNAN

In spite of clarifications from modern astronomy,
In me, I see the earth as flat.

In spite of information regarding the self-centred Sun;
In me, I witness, Sun rise and Sun set!

In spite of the year around cyclic seasons,
In me, I see my own living linearly.

In spite of the certainty of decay and death,
In me, I can't focus on 'my' own *end*.

In spite of all enunciations of non-duality,
In me, the spontaneity is of duality.

In spite of knowledge of rise and fall of everything,
In me, I can't come to terms with my own fall.

In spite of abundant evidences on lack of certainty,
In me, the urge of desire and fear crave my constancy.
In spite of sure path of birth, growth, decay and death,
In me, the will to survive is unabated.

In spite of ample proofs about foolishness of all faith and
feelings,
In me, the need for them seems unending.

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In spite of sure calamity in becoming and belonging,
In me there is solace in such engagements.

In spite of meaninglessness of all self-centred causes,
In me, I feel firmly rooted and oriented through them.
In spite of LIFE dislodging repeatedly my sand castle,
In me the urge to rebuild wells up unceasingly.

In spite of progressively failing sense capacity,
In me to depend on them, is the only certainty.
In spite of slavery due to bondages,
In me, I seek fulfilment and freedom through attachments.

In spite of real life examples of rare Masters,
In me the instinct is to only put them on altar for a hollow
worship.

In spite of the ultimate truth exemplified by their living,
In me there is a penchant only for delusion and falsehood.

In spite of wakefulness repeatedly nullified by dream and sleep,
In me wakeful is much more real than the other two realms.
In spite of all escapes being an impossibility,
In me dreaming and sleeping, are escapes from wakeful horrors.

In spite of repeated knocks on my door,
In me, my heart is darkness ridden, shut all around.
In spite of numerous pointers for dire need of awareness,
In me there is an inexplicable delight in inattention!



Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Thirteen

Kamal, Son of Kabir, Sets Out on a Pilgrimage

Part One

NABAJI SIDDHA

Kabir and Sundara were leading a life of piety and righteousness. To fulfil the desire of the celestial Ramba to unite with Suka in her previous incarnation, the Lord cast His power of maya on Kabir and Sundara and made them lead a normal married life. In due course, a son was born to them. As the face of the child was like a fully blossomed lotus, they named him Kamal. The child was born with thirty-two signs of auspiciousness. The child charmed his parents. Engaged in the profession of weaving, they continued to take delight in revering and hosting sadhus. Thus seven years passed.

One day, Kamal prostrated to his parents and requested them to permit him to go on a pilgrimage. Kissing the child tenderly, they said, “O dearest, you are too innocent and young to go without the company of elders on a *yatrā*. We don’t have the heart to send you alone. You may go after a few years.”

Placing his head at his father’s feet with reverence, Kamal said, “O father, he alone who takes this body, which is as evanescent as a

bubble, to be imperishable, will postpone any action to the next day with a certainty that he would be alive tomorrow. But one who knows otherwise about the uncertainty of life will put into action any wish at once. Therefore, please give me leave for the holy undertaking without testing my resoluteness.”

“O apple of my eyes, the Lord is omnipresent. He is the Indweller of all beings. Why do you want to wander all over the world in search of Him? While you can realize His divine presence wherever you are, will there be any gain in your vain pursuit?”, demurred the loving father.

“O beloved father, what you say is absolutely true. But it is also equally true that by visiting holy places, one accumulates merits; by taking bath in sacred waters, one’s sins perish; by meeting sadhus, all doubts are dispelled; by visiting different cultures one’s heart expands. That is why I cherish a desire to proceed on a *yatrā*. Please give your blessings to this endeavour without holding me back,” importuned Kamal.

Pleased with his son’s reply, Kabir said, “O beloved child, when one goes even to someone’s house, he should not go alone. Therefore find suitable company of a sadhu for your *yatrā*.”

“O father, while I have the sword of Ram Nam and the friends of good conduct, what is the need for any other companion? You are saying this because of your excessive fondness for me.”

Prostrating to his mother, he prayed for her permission. Sundara said, “You are very dear to me, you are foremost among ascetics. One should not stand in the way of good deeds; your initiative is indeed praiseworthy. Having already obtained your father’s permission, there is no need to seek my consent. May all good accompany you on your *yatrā*!”

Marvelling at her son’s yearning and daring to proceed on a *yatrā* at such a young age, she spoke with wonder to her husband, “How amazing for such a small boy to travel alone to distant places? He is a worthy son of your holiness, my lord; for even at the age of five, you (incarnating as Christ) engaged in debate with priests in the lineage of Adam. No wonder that your son, at this tender age has set out to far off lands to harmonise varied conflicting religious views. If father reigns supreme in this land, son will establish his sovereignty in the neighbouring land. Such an awesome feat may not have been achieved in any other Age.”

KAMAL SON OF KABIR SETS OUT ON A PILGRIMAGE

“You have spoken the truth, my dear. Even Sri Rama went on a *yatrā* only at the age of twelve. It baffles me that this youngster could even conceive of such a sublime idea. However, having secured blessings from you, the priceless gem among women, he will complete the pilgrimage successfully.” Their lives went on in the usual course of hospitality to sadhus, bhajans and communion with God.

Crossing the boundary of the country, Kamal came by the bank of Ganga to go across the river. With words of adoration, he worshipped Bhagirathi, “O Divine damsel! Are you pining for the Lord from whose crown you have flowed? O Ganga, are You hiding yourself, from the eyes of Parvathy, in the matted locks of Lord Siva? You quenched your desire for a child, by becoming the mother of Karthikeya. Moved by compassion for Bhagiratha’s austerities, O Mother, following him, you lifted the curse from the sons of king Sagar. You were gracious to bestow the boon on Bhagiratha that whoever has a dip in your waters would be purified of their sins. Just as you protected my father to reach this bank as an infant, please help me to get across to your other bank.”

After the worship, he started walking through the water. The people on the shore warned him that as the river was very deep, he should not foolishly attempt to cross it. They advised him to take a boat to the other side. Without paying any attention to their words, he swam across. He stopped in the middle, unable to go further due to strong currents. However, he turned and addressed people on the shore, “Having resolved to join the battle, a warrior will not retreat in fear. Arrows of love-god will not deter a woman vowed to chastity. A renunciant, having left behind home and hearth will not give up his penance. Similarly, having gotten into the water, I will not be intimidated by the depth or current. I will cross it by the grace of Mother Ganga. If I turn back, then I am not a worthy son of Kabir.” Then Goddess Ganga appeared to him and holding out her palms, told him to place his feet on her palms and walk ahead. Drenched in waves of bliss, he planted his feet on her palms and reached the other shore.

As he stepped on the bank, the Lord along with celestial sages in disguise met him there and asked him where he was going. Kamal, bowing to them, said humbly, “I intend to visit holy places like

Badrinath, Vrindavan and Haridwar and meet the exalted souls in those places to purify myself.”

The Lord told the sadhus mockingly, “Do you know that he is Kabir’s son, who is neither a Muslim nor a Hindu? Kabir’s parents and wife are Muslims, but his Guru Ramananda is a Hindu; his religion is Islam, but his faith is Hinduism. His mode of dress is like a Muslim, but way of life is that of a Hindu. He talks of knowledge of the Impersonal, but his allegiance is to the Name of Personal God. What he preaches is nondualism, what he practices is dualism!

“This little fellow is born to a man who is an outcaste, belonging neither here nor there. He is hardly out of his cradle, yet he has undertaken this journey alone. He plans to meet sadhus and engage them in debates and chastise conflicting faiths. Look at the play of this Kali Age, prompting such upstarts to aspire for great glories!”

“This ridicule raised Kamal’s temper. He said, “O fake sadhu! What you said is partly right and partly wrong. This may be taken as praise or blame or simply a provocation. One who squirms on hearing the truth is ignorant. Whatever you said is true - we are beyond caste, creed or race. Does my father become a Muslim and outcaste, just because a Muslim brought him up?

“Being a sadhu, you indulge in such slander. Harishchandra who lived the life of a householder passed through severe trials at the hands of Viswamitra, but never uttered a word of reproach against him. Being a householder, if he could conduct himself with such nobility and self-restraint, what should be the standard of behaviour for a sadhu like you? On the contrary, you stoop so low as to malign my noble father who has done no harm to anyone.

“Caste distinctions belong to the world and have no relevance in spirituality. He who has risen above the sense of duality is a Brahmajnani, he is not of the world of pluralities. This transcendence of differences is nondualism, no mere talk.

“Has not the Lord in the Gita mentioned both dualism and nondualism in the same breath? If advaita is superior to dvaita, why didn’t He condemn dvaita in His discourse? The Lord has treated both equally in His work.

“Even if one talks about advaita, what avail is it if he does not become self-oblivious? Is it possible for one bound to the waking

KAMAL SON OF KABIR SETS OUT ON A PILGRIMAGE

and deep sleep states to experience total absorption of non-duality? In Bhagavatam also, Veda Vyasa assigns equal status to both. As long as one is caught up in body-consciousness, he should not neglect his devotion to a personal Deity or Guru. If you are a genuine sadhu, you will not talk so mean. My father is indeed the aspect of Suka, my mother of Ramba, I am the aspect of Shanmukha. I know that You are the Lord himself! These sadhus here, are they not the celestial sages?

“In fact, it is Your trick to have mingled dualistic ideas in the pure advaitic treatise of the Gita. Is there anything else in existence besides You? Are You not everything and in everything? You took the forms of Rama and Krishna in Your wonderful incarnations. Where did they all spring from? Everything is Your play. In so many ways, You delude us. While the entire universe trembled at the sight of Your cosmic form, Duryodana was unfazed! Was it not Your maya? For You, the events of Ramayana and Mahabharata are mere juvenile play, like building of mud houses by the children. You make the world believe that You, the omnipresent Being, dwell in Vrindavan or Ayodhya.

“By your illusory power, You created the name, form and attributes out of Your nameless, formless nature. You wear different disguises, depending on the Age and deceive the world. Have You come in this form now to test this innocent, harmless child? O Lord of countless universes, won’t You reveal Your Divine form to this child? O eternal Bliss, effulgent One, please bless me with a glimpse of Your form.”

“Touched by this tender appeal, the Lord appeared as Rama along with Janaki, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna and drenched Kamal in the showers of His grace.

The Lord said, “O Kamal, I grant you the boon of Knowledge of all mysteries surpassing even that of your father Kabir, just as in the case of Kartikeya who acted as a teacher to His father Lord Shiva. Now, go forth in the world confidently and defeat the various false faiths prevailing among sadhus, establish dharma of sadhus and bring me a gift.”

Thereafter, Kamal visited the Himalayas, Naimisharanyam, Haridwar and established the supremacy of true faith, condemning superficial religious practices. Many miracles followed in his wake.

(To be continued)



Sivaprakasa Swamigal Jeeva Samadhi Temple

The temple is just off the main road NH332 between Villupuram and Puducherry in the town of Nallathur, Cuddalore District. Its approximately 16 kms. south southwest of Puducherry and 14 kms. north northwest of Cuddalore.

Sonasaila Malai

Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

The Biography of Sivaprakasa Swamigal continued.

Having remained in Chidambaram for some time, Sivaprakasa returned to Turaimangalam, residing in the *math* built by Annamalai Reddiyar and composing a number of works, including the *Vengai-k-kōvai*. When requested by Reddiyar to take a wife, Sivaprakasa expressed his determination not to do so in the following verse:

cēykonḍā ruṇkamalac cemmaluḍa ḥēyaravap
pāykonḍā rumpaṇiyum paṭṭīccu rattānē
nōykonḍā luṅkoḷalām nūruvaya dāmaḷavum
pēykonḍā luṅkoḷalāṇ peṇkolla lāgādē.

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Nāṛpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṇikkavācakar is now available at the ashram bookshop. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

Lord of Paṭṭīcuram, to whom Lord Brahmā, who dwells upon a bright red lotus blossom, and Lord Viṣṇu, who slumbers, resting upon a serpent as his couch, both make obeisance, if disease should afflict me, or I should be tormented by demons for a hundred years, let it be so. But let me be spared the taking of a wife!^a

However when Reddiyar made the same proposal to his two younger brothers, both assented and Sivaprakasa arranged for their marriages to take place. Thereafter he returned to Chidambaram with Reddiyar where he composed a number of works including the *Nālvar nāñ mani mālai – Jewel Garland upon the Four*, in praise of the three *Tēvāram* authors and Māṇikkavācakar, verse 2 of which is given in note 5 of the previous article.

(The biography will be continued in Part Five)

Please grant it, if you may,
 that the water that Unnamulai,
 of tiny, thread-like, swaying waist,
 used to cleanse
 the dish of shining gold
 with polished gems engraved,
 from which rich Pukali's king
 drank the milk that day,
 be poured out [now for me to taste].¹

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,
 where a langur in his cave,*

^a paṭṭīcurattāñē paṇiyum – *Lord of Paṭṭīcuram, to whom makes obeisance, arava pāy konḍ[u] ārum – He (Lord Viṣṇu) who reclines, taking a serpent [as a] mat, cēykonḍ[u] ārum kamala cemmal uḍaṇē – along with the Lord [Brahmā], who dwells upon a bright red lotus blossom, nōy konḍālum koṭalām – if disease should afflict me, let it afflict [me]. pēy konḍālum koṭalām – If demons should torment me, let them torment [me], nūru vayad[u] ām alavum – even for as long as a hundred years. pen kolṭal ḥagādē – [But] let there not be [for me] the taking of a wife.*

¹ See v. 32, note 6 in the April-June edition of the *Mountain Path* for the details of this incident in the life of Jñāṇsambandhar.

setting great bright gems for lamps
and spreading *ashoka* leaves as a couch,
sleeps there entwined with his spouse.

(45)

People of this world
seek only food
to meet the body's needs,
which arises as the fruit of deeds.
But daily they do not you beseech,
that they may gain the holy feet
bedecked with flowers honey-sweet
which lie beyond those actions' reach.²

Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,
where jewels cast,
to drive the flocks of parrots
from the millet crop,
go flying into rocky caves,
as though, knowing where
the deepest darkness lies,
to banish it they rushing go.

(46)

The head of the bard of Navalur,
where *kuyil* sing in mango groves,
with lotus feet to crown You deigned,
even though to wear them he declined.³

² To attempt to gain happiness by protecting the body is a fruitless task, since the actions that brought about its arising will equally bring about its demise. The wise course is to take refuge in the Lord, annihilating the ego and with it the attachment to the body that is the cause of all our troubles. Compare the second *Mangalam* verse of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Those people who have a deep fear of death will, for their protection, take refuge at the holy feet of Lord Siva, he who is without both birth and death. In thus taking refuge [in Him], they suffered their own death. For them, in this deathless state, will the thought of death remain?

³ The story is told in the *Taṭṭutāṭkonda Purāṇam* of the *Periya Purāṇam* of how Sundarar, the bard of Nāvalūr, feeling that it was not fitting that he should enter

Yet notwithstanding all my pleas,
You placed them not upon the head
of me your faithful devotee.
What reason for this could there be?

Waxing great you reach
the heavens' lofty outer shell,
yet in spite of that
you ride in state
mounted on a young bull's back,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(47)

Shall I that day ever see,
when through your grace
you grant to me
right conduct and good qualities,
a nature loving and benign,
engaging speech and the bravery

Tiruvadigai, where Appar had formerly performed service to the Lord, went instead to the nearby *sthala* of Cittavaḍam. Lord Śiva, however, determined to bestow his blessing upon Sundarar, took the form of an aged Brahmin and entered the math where Sundarar and his entourage were spending the night. Lying down and pretending to be asleep, the old man placed his feet upon Sundarar's head. When Sundarar pointed this out to him, he apologised and blamed his poor sight. Sundarar moved his head away some distance and went back to sleep, only to find out later that the feet were back on his head again. The story continues in v. 233:

When once more he placed his feet
upon the holy head
of the Sire of verdant Navalur,
girt by tanks where red carp leap,
'Who are you, sir,' Aruran said,
'who thus so oft' upon me tread?'
To which the Lord who concealed
Lady Ganga within his matted locks
replied,
'How is it that you knew me not?'
and in a trice disappeared from view.

Filled with devotion for the Lord, Sundarar sang the *Tēvāram padigam* which begins *tammāṇai ariyāda cādiyār uḷarē* – Is their any kinsman who does not know his Lord?

to conquer the senses enmity,
then banishing cruel birth,
you take me as your devotee?

Upon your slopes
the hillsmen bold
fell *aquila* and sandal groves.
Red gemstones, sifted
from the earth,
away they throw
and then the crop of millet sow,⁴
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(48)

I rejoiced to see your form adorned
with civet⁵ in a jewelled hall,
filled with incense's fragrant scent
as throngs of gods and holy sages,
crowding near with palms conjoined,
offered up their ardent praises.

Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,
where the chill moon, as it passes by,
meets a lofty *jyoti* tree,

⁴ Here the *kuravar* – *hill tribesmen* are again featured, this time clearing the land of trees and removing stones from the ground in preparation for the planting of millet. Because this is the fabled *Sōṇasailan* of the poet's imagination, the trees that are so carelessly discarded are precious sandalwood and eaglewood and the stones are rubies.

⁵ The story is told in the final chapter of the *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* of the *asura* Pulaka, who terrorised the gods in the form of a civet cat. The gods complained to Lord Śiva, who explained that it was not easy to vanquish him because he had garnered great strength from the act of shedding his fragrant civet over the holy mountain. However Lord Śiva summoned him and offered him liberation in return for giving up his civet cat form. Pulaka agreed but further begged that in return the Lord adopt as one of his names *He whom civet adorns*.

Lord Śiva consented and granted Pulaka salvation, whereupon gods, rishis and citizens adorned the Lord's matted locks with civet. The Tamil commentary notes that the ritual of anointing Lord Aṇṇāmalai with civet endures to this day and is held to confer great benefits.

before a dark cave soaring high,
 looking like a ball of finest rice
 placed before your open mouth
 [ready] to be gulped down [in a trice].

(49)

Just as in the world,
 in a flower beset by clouds
 of humming bees,
 inner petals with outer ones
 combined we see,⁷
 so it is fitting on your part
 that you should number me
 amongst the band of devotees
 who from anger['s taint]
 have freed their heart.

You whose body melted,
 [not your heart]
 when pressed by Uma's
 sandal-painted breast⁸

⁶ The cave is compared to a mouth, the tree to an arm and the moon to a ball of rice. One might imagine that the branches of the tree look like fingers grasping it. The *jyoti* tree is a tree that is supposed to shine in the dark like the *jyoti* creeper mentioned earlier in v. 9.

⁷ A flower has *alli* – *inner petals* and *pulli* – *outer petals*. In a lotus blossom, for example, the inner petals will be pristine and perfect, but the outer ones, in contact with the mud and water of the tank, are likely to be soiled or tattered, yet they are both part of the same flower. The poet suggests that in the same way he, a poor sinner, should be admitted into the company of the great ones who have mastered their emotions. He further implies that their glory would even be magnified by the comparison with his lowly self.

⁸ The story is told in the *Arunācala Purāṇam* of how Parvatī, as part of her penance for playfully covering Lord Śiva's eyes and thus causing universal chaos, built a *lingam* of sand on the banks of the Kampa river near Kāñci and performed puja to it. To test the strength of her *tapas* Lord Śiva unleashed the river Ganges.

In order to keep the sand *lingam* from being destroyed by that deathless river, Uma, daughter of the Himalaya, ruler of [all] the mountains, embraced it with her bangle clad arms, holding it ever tighter against her

and whose heart was touched,
 [not your body], by stones
 a certain devotee threw,⁹
 prompted by his love for you.¹⁰
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(50)

If I should cleave not
 to your holy feet
 and sing instead
 of elephants and prancing steeds,
 of chariots and palanquins,
 of gold piled up in heaps,
 and gem encrusted jewels,

breasts as if She held a lover in a passionate embrace, and even as She did so, the chest of the Lord, perfumed with sandalwood paste, melted, becoming softer and softer.

(273)

In preserving the sand *lingam* Parvatī left upon it the imprint of her nipples and bracelets:

Just then Lord Śiva appeared, mounted upon the bull, his body resplendent with holy ash; on his shoulders was the scar made by the Pandiyan King, who struck Him [with his golden cane]; on his feet were the marks made by the crowns of the gods, who worship Him morning, noon and night; and on his chest were the impressions made by the breasts and bracelets of Her whose hair is black as jet, when She embraced Him.

(276)

⁹ Cākkiya Nāyanār is one of the 63 saints of the *Periya Purāṇam*. On one occasion, seeing a Śiva *lingam*, he was filled with ecstasy and in his altered state flung a stone at it. Taking this as a sign that henceforth this should be the form of worship appropriate to himself, he adopted the daily practice of throwing stones at the Lord as if they were garlands of flowers.

¹⁰The conceit here is that Lord Śiva is being portrayed as reacting in an opposite manner to the people of the world in the two situations described above. The verb *kulai* is used twice, first in the meaning *to be soft, pulpy, squashed*, translated here as *melted*; and secondly in the meaning *to be tender, as the heart*, translated here as *was touched*. When his body (the *lingam*) was hit by the stones, it was not affected by them (i.e. crushed or squashed), but his heart was affected (it melted) due to Cākkiya Nāyanār's devotion. In the second instance, when Uma pressed her bosom against him, it was his body this time that melted not his heart, as would be the case with a human man, moved by the embrace of his wife. Thus the ways of the Lord are revealed to be quite other than those of mankind.

and of the wide earth and it rule,
what worth in my songs
could there be?

Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,
where mighty elephants, on whom
the threefold juices¹¹ flow,
feed on stands of tall bamboo.
With their trunks they bend it low,
then suddenly they let it go,
whipping the horses of the Sun,¹²
which startled,
drag his chariot swiftly on.

(51)

Whether you destroy for me
the fierce and cruel malady
of close pursuing, painful births
or not doing so,
let them e'er more numerous be,
not even in one forgetful moment
shall I
dwell on aught else but your lotus feet,
not on those gods who're bound to die.

Rivulets of nectar sweet,
flowing down your sides,
with your silv'ry streams compete,
one from hives that swarming bees,

¹¹ The *threefold juices*—*mu madam* in Tamil, are the three types of secretion produced by an elephant in must. They are *kanna madam*, *kai madam* and *kōca madam*, secreted from the *eyes*, *trunk* and *genitals* respectively.

¹² The iconography of Sūrya, the sun god in Hinduism, varies with its texts. He is typically portrayed as a resplendent standing figure, holding lotus flowers in both his hands and riding a chariot pulled by one or more horses, typically seven. Here we are presented with the rather comical image of his horses bolting in panic, when accidentally struck by a branch which has been bent back and then released by a great elephant on Sōṇasailan's lofty peak.

on honey drunk, have split and crushed
and one from elephants [in the must],¹³
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(52)

Those who your holy name
invoke
will never grieve
in water or in fire,
from fatal onset of disease,
asuras, evil spirits,
wild beasts or thieves.

You who Lady Uma's eyes recall,
pervading all directions four,
with *mani* that are gemstones
and her pupils bright;
with *ari* that are roaming lions
and tiny red veins in the white,
and *mai* that are the clouds
that gathering above you come
and her fair black collyrium,

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*¹⁴

(53)

¹³The golden streams of honey from the beehives and the black streams of the secretions from the temples of elephants in must are imagined to be tumbling down the mountainside, clashing and mingling with the mountain's silvery streams as they go.

¹⁴This couplet employs a poetic device called *cilēdai* in Tamil. It is a figure of speech in which a word or words admit of two or more interpretations, what we call in English *a play on words* or *a pun*, the technical term being *paronomasia*. Three aspects of the mountain are mentioned, which can be taken as referring instead to Umā's eye's when a second meaning to a word is taken. *mani*, when taken as meaning *jewel*, *gem*, refers to the mountain as being littered with gemstones from the hoods of cobras, but when taken as *pupil of the eye* it refers to the beautiful pupils of Umā's eyes. *ari*, when taken as meaning lion, refers to the widespread presence of prides of lions upon the mountain, but when taken as *thin red lines in the white of the eye* it refers to Umā's eyes, as being overspread with a network of fine red veins. *mai*, when taken as meaning cloud, refers to the dark clouds which gather over the mountain, but when taken as *collyrium*, *kohl*, black paint for eye

Grant your grace, that I
no longer pine for girls
with jewelled earrings bright,
like lanterns lit on either side,
their pretty face to light
and breasts with trinkets overlaid,
coming forth as if they might
eclipse the glow of Fortune's Maid¹⁵
like a lamp lit in daylight.

Unlike a household lamp
with bowl and wick,
and ghee and flame
and someone to ignite,
you rise up on high and shine
the entire world to light,

Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

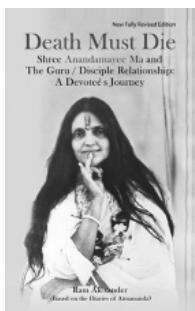
(54)

(To be Continued)

decoration, it refers to Umā's eyes as being beautifully made up with *collyrium* or *kohl*. The fourth aspect *nīlkai – width* can be taken as applying equally to both the mountain and Umā's gaze without the need to resort to a pun.

¹⁵ Fortune's maid translates the Tamil *malarāl*, literally *she of the lotus flower*, a reference to Lakṣmi, in Tamil, *tirumagal*, the goddess of wealth, fortune and prosperity. She is depicted sitting or standing on a lotus flower. The idea is that the radiance of those girls is so bright that even Lakṣmi's beauty would pale in comparison, just as a the flame of a lamp provides no perceptible illumination in broad daylight.

BOOK REVIEWS



DEATH MUST DIE: SHREE ANANDAMAYEE MA AND THE GURU/DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP: A DEVOTEE'S JOURNEY. Ram Alexander (Based on the Diaries of Atmananda), 2018 Revised Edition. Published by Lee (Ram) Alexander in conjunction with Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Archive Trust S-539, Greater Kailash-II, New Delhi-110048, India, 615pp., ISBN: 978-81-927273-7-0.

The present volume is a first-hand chronicle of the pioneering sojourn of Atmananda (Blanca Schlamm), an accomplished Austrian concert pianist who made inroads into Indian spirituality in the 1930s and 1940s. An ardent devotee of the Bengali saint, Anandamayi Ma (née Nirmala Sundari Devi, 1896-1982), Atmananda came into close contact with the great spiritual luminaries of the subcontinent long before most Western seekers had found their way to India.

Through her diaries, the reader is privy to the trials and tribulations of a spiritual search spanning forty years, offering glimpses of the cultural barriers facing a Western woman living in a traditional Asian society.

Born into a wealthy Jewish family in 1904, Blanca began her journey during the cultural and artistic flourishing of early 20th century Vienna where she trained in classical music. Like many, however, the cataclysm of the Great War (1914-1918) left Blanca struggling to make sense of life, and she embarked on a spiritual search that led her to J. Krishnamurthi and the Theosophical Society. She came to India for the first time in 1925 at the age of twenty-one to attend the Society's 50th anniversary.

Some years later with the rise of anti-Semitism, Blanca left her native Austria a second time, unaware of the danger her family was in, and came to India in 1935. She took a teaching position at the Krishnamurthi school in Rajghat and frequently performed on *All India Radio*. She later declined a job as director of European Music in Delhi in favour of her true calling—a dedicated pursuit of the Divine.

In time, Blanca became disenchanted with J. Krishnamurthi's rejection of tradition and the great teachers of India and redoubled her efforts

at the spiritual search, an exploration that eventually took her to Sri Ramanasramam.

Upon meeting Ramana Maharshi in 1942, she was convinced that her search had come to an end. For the following six weeks, she imbibed Sri Ramana's non-dual teaching which proved firm ground for the spiritual exploration that lay ahead.

Her diary entry of 17th May, 1942 begins: "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.* After sometime 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 her hesitation soon passed as the following entry from 26th May demonstrates: "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 ... 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 sometime."

She began to understand the great opportunity for guidance from a Master. On 3rd June, she recorded the following exchange:

Question: I do not know to whom to surrender. How do I know the Supreme? I may deceive myself.

The Maharshi: *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. 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.*

Atmananda's diaries go on to describe numerous exchanges

between her and the Maharshi, as well as other experiences in and around the Ashram. When the appointed time came to leave Tiruvannamalai and return to Benares to honour her obligations to the Rajghat school, she had already set the intention to leave the school and move to South India to be near Bhagavan. As fate would have it, however, her plans would be thwarted.

Around this time, British authorities imposed travel restrictions on ‘enemy nationals’ which included Atmananda, her native Austria being allied with Britain’s rival, Germany. She was thus compelled to content herself with work at the school and waiting out the war.

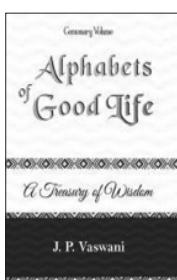
It was during this period that she met Anandamayi Ma. By the time the travel ban was lifted, Atmananda had surrendered her life to this great teacher, notwithstanding a longing to see Ramana Maharshi again.

Atmananda’s diaries chronicle long decades of gradual transformation under the guidance of Anandamayi Ma, a life in service to the guru.

In 1985 on the banks of the Ganga, Atmananda left the body in the meditation posture. She was given the honours accorded a sannyasin—not typical for a Western woman in a Brahmin community—and her mortal remains were ceremonially submerged in the sacred waters of the Ganga.

Death Must Die has become a modern spiritual classic and readers who enjoyed earlier editions will want to consult this new, fully revised edition.

— Michael Highburger



ALPHABETS OF GOOD LIFE. A Treasury of Wisdom. J.P. Vaswani. ed. by Dr. (Mrs.) Prabha Sampath & Krishna Kumari. Pub: Gita Publishing House, Pune (India); 2018. Rs.600. 520pp. www.dadavaswanisbooks.org

This book is a literary jewel and a spiritual treasure.

Dada Jashan Pahlajrai Vaswani, a brilliant student of physics with a post-graduate degree who rarely stood second in any examination, writes in a concise, flawless, utterly unpretentious simple style of impeccable beauty and power and one finds oneself

devouring each word and unable to put down this book of great wisdom and beauty.

Dada Jashan was a born saint. He was the nephew of the illustrious Sadhu T.L. Vaswani who was hailed as one of the three cultural (read spiritual) ambassadors of India, the other two being Mahatma Gandhi and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. Dada Jashan and Sadhu Vaswani were very lucky in each other. If Jashan found in his uncle the perfect guru, the uncle found in his nephew the disciple par excellence.

Dada Jashan Vaswani had a universal outlook transcending all divisions, like his great uncle-guru who said, "Children of the world, you are all one." He was as naturally at home in the *sanātana dharma* of which the Vedas, Upanishads, itihisas like Ramayana and Mahabharata which includes the book of books, the Bhagavad Gita, Puranas, the Brahma Sutras, Yoga Sutras etc. are part and of which the works of the various acharyas and maharshis; saints and singers are both exegeses and part, as in the teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira, of the Bible and the Qur'an, the Sufi mystic-poets and the Sikh gurus. He revered Sri Ramakrishna, Bhagavan Ramana, Mahatma Gandhi and Gurudev Tagore and other great souls. Coming from a relatively caste-free and entirely Untouchability-free Sindhi community, Dada like his uncle effortlessly went beyond every division that the world is troubled by today.

Dada Jashan admired Vedanta, the perfect science of Self-knowledge made much simpler and more direct by Bhagavan Ramana but he did not use the language of Vedanta. His was a personal, practical, gradual approach to the impersonal Reality. He did share many views with the Vedantins, he was for the transcendence of the ego and realization of the limitless reality within us, to him perfect happiness is the aim of human life and, of course, all life is one. However, like Sadhu T L Vaswani his uncle, Gandhiji, Vinobaji and other saints, he saw the world as real, as the visible God and was active literally till the last day of his one hundred years travelling, having *satsaṅga* with spiritual aspirants, helping the needy and sharing in every way. He steered clear of references to the serpent and the rope, elephant and wood, appearance and reality, the monkey and cat similes, the various kinds of samadhi and so on. He did not even talk about the *mahāvākyas*, nor of *śravana, manana* and so on

but kept his audiences riveted by his mesmerizing discourses. One inescapably listened to him with total attention and later dwelt on his words going deeply into their message. Attention, listening, learning and inward flowering become natural when one's mind becomes pure freed from the bric-à-brac of the past, of the burden of negative thoughts and emotions. The book under review, the very Alphabet of good, right, sane, happy living puts us through the paces, talking with utter humility and sense of equality in a gentle language of sweet persuasive eloquence. With the precision of the scientist that he was, he gives us with clarity and precision the steps to become free from anger, anxiety, attachment and moving towards Awakening which is the dawn of Awareness. The book tells us how to develop *bhakti*, practice true *brahmacharya*, cultivate compassion and contentment, discipline, how Enlightenment follows inner purity, how to conquer fear. The chapters on Love, Freedom, Happiness, Silence, Simplicity etc. are so powerful that they are reminiscent of St. Paul's timeless Rhapsody on Love in I Corinthian 13. The last alphabet Y in the book talks about Yoga but in the end the reader arrives at Z zeroing in on immense inner joy.

This reviewer had the good fortune of talking to Dada Jashan on phone around the year 1974, when he felt thrilled by the sweetness of his voice soaked in love. In this book Dada exhorts people to talk softly and sweetly. To him practice preceded precept.

Dada Jashan and his famous uncle-Guru came for Bhagavan Ramana's *darśan* at Sri Ramanasramam in 1939, sat for a while and left. Old Ashramite Balaram Reddygaru, the only person in Old Hall who recognized them was on silence that day. Later Bhagavan told him, "You should have spoken," and Reddygaru gave up observing days of silence. But the saintly visitors got much more from Bhagavan's silence than many could from the most eloquent words. Years later, referring to Bhagavan Ramana, Dada Jashan said: "He spoke very little but His profound silence communicated great truths and insights to those who could attune themselves to His vibrations."

—Didhyaasu

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Sri Vidya Havan

This year's Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday, the 22nd March beginning with *Kalasasthapana* and procession of the flame from Bhagavan's Shrine at 7 am. *Akalasa* is a vessel made out of copper, and *sthapana* means 'installation', hence, installing the vessels at the place of the *havan*, which, according to tradition, is in the north-east in a manner that those performing the rites have no view of the southern direction. *Navavarana Puja* (*Navavarana* = nine enclosures) took place from 8 to 11 am followed by *Lalita Sahasranamamam*, *Trisathi* and other recitations, ending with *poornahuti* and *arati* at 2.30 pm.

Aradhana 2019

Sri Bhagavan's 69th **Aradhana** began in the early morning hours of 2nd May. Devotees filled the Hall at 5.30 am for *Tamil Parayana* as purohits gathered in the Mother's Shrine for *Mahanasya mantra*. *Abhishekam* followed at 8.30am and final *arati* at 10.30am when the Hall brimmed with fervour. That evening the New Granathalaya auditorium hosted Ramana music by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar. On the following day, 3rd May, RMCL hosted the annual Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam, with selected verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai set to the *ghana ragas* of Thyagaraja and arranged by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan.

Mahapuja

Mahapuja festivities began in the early morning hours of the 28th May with flower decorations in the Mother's Shrine and New Hall and the sounds of *Mahanasya Japa*. *Abhishekam* began around 9 a.m. and was followed by *arati* and songs from Susilamma and other lady devotees.

Obituaries

Sri. K.V. Ramanan, who was absorbed in Bhagavan at the age of 86 on 24th April 2019, was fortunate to be born with fervent devotion to Bhagavan in his genes. His grandfather N.S. Ranganatha Iyer, playmate of young Ramana at Madurai and his father Professor N.R. Krishnamurti Iyer lived and had their being in Bhagavan. Ranganatha Iyer helped Ashram in the 1940's in acquiring the house Bhagavan was born in at Tiruchuzhi (Sundara Mandiram)



and the house at Madurai (Ramana Mandiram) and took good care of the Ramana Mandiram at Madurai till his last days. K.V. Ramanan's father, N.R.K. Iyer, brilliant man of science, knew the uniqueness of Bhagavan's timeless teaching. K.V. Ramanan started visiting Bhagavan from his age of five. When he came as a lad of 16 for darsan, he prayed that he should ever be close to Bhagavan and Bhagavan nodded his head. Later KVR did settle down at Tiruvannamalai and served the Ashram as its internal auditor for many decades. He was known for his honest, upright attitude. His son Ranganathan, fourth generation devotee, serves the Ashram as its internal auditor with the same meticulous attention to details and thoroughness as his father. Though K.V. Ramanan had to shift to Chennai a few years back for medical treatment, he regularly visited the Ramanalayam at Chromepet, Chennai, regardless of the long distance and his frail health.

Smt. Ramani Subramanian, wife of Sri V.S. Mani, Ashram Administrator, was Absorbed in Arunachala Ramana on 13th May.

Ramani was born in Cuddalore in 1947. Youngest among three sisters, she spent her early childhood in Chidambaram. Since her father was employed in the Indian Railways, they lived in various parts of Eastern India. Ramani had her education in and around Calcutta. Her maternal grandfather, who was the district education office at Tirukovilour, had taken her mother to have the darshan of Sri Bhagavan. That was the family's earliest recorded association with Sri Bhagavan and Sri Ramanasramam.



At the age of 22, she was married to Sri V. S Mani in Chidambaram. They lived in Durgapur and Bombay where they raised a daughter and son. During the summer break, they would make their annual family pilgrimage to Arunachalam, spending time in the ashram and connecting with family. Several ashram in-mates and family members would stay at their residence when visiting Bombay. In the late seventies, in the Western suburbs of Bombay, she took keen interest in conducting the monthly satsang at their residence.

When Sri Mani took voluntary retirement in 1985 to help his father, T.N. Venkataraman, in the management of the expanding Ashram, Ramani supported her husband whole heartedly. The family relocated to Tiruvannamalai. As there weren't any proper English medium schools in those days in Tiruvannamalai, she had to reluctantly part with her children, who were placed in J. Krishnamurthi's boarding school at Rishi Valley. Ramani took complete care of her father-in-law, the then President of Ramanasramam, Sri T.N. Venkataraman, who was widowed in 1984, and managed the extensive household in the vicinity of the ashram. Devotees, visitors, friends and family members would frequent the house and were greeted with the warmth and affection – a tradition that has continued from the days of Bhagavan's mother. Since she was well conversant with Tamil, English, Telugu, Hindi and Bengali and gregarious with a sweet nature, she endeared herself to devotees.

Ramani was one of the original members of the group that revived Tamil Parayanam at the ashram under the guidance of Sri Kunjuswamy. She would actively participate in all the ashram events, ably assisting her husband in several of the functions. Ramani had the privilege of meeting saints such as Mata Krishna Bai, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and senior devotees such as Sri Viswanatha Swami, Sri Kunju Swami, Sri Ramaswamy Pillai and Sri Kanaka Amma. Ramani had a special association with Kanaka Amma, who deepened her understanding of Bhagavan's teachings.

When her parents were aging, at Ramani's request they relocated to Tiruvannamalai where they shed their body under their attentive care.

While frail of health and not keen on long travel, but she did look forward to being with her daughter in Bangalore and her son in California.

Earlier this year, Ramani had the joyous satisfaction of celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary in January and Satahabhishekam (80th birthday) of her husband in February with family and devotees, two important milestones that she completed with a sense of purpose.

By the grace of Sri Bhagavan, she was absorbed into Arunachala on May 13th at 2.02pm with her loved ones beside her singing the sacred name of "Arunachala Siva". While her physical presence will be dearly missed, we celebrate her life that has touched thousands of devotees by her love and warmth, and her service to Sri Bhagavan. There has been an outpouring of love from devotees, who have expressed a stronger sense of being connected as Bhagavan's own through Ramani's radiant and peaceful presence.