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Divine Names of Arunachala

22. ॐ आहवैश्वर्यदात्रे नमः

om̐ āhavaishvaryaḍātre namaḥ

Prostration to Him who bestows Sovereignty when invoked.

This divine name is expressed in a compound composed of three elements, namely ‘āhava’ from the root ‘ā-hū’ meaning to call, invoke, summon; ‘aiśvarya’ meaning sovereignty or superhuman power; and ‘dātre’, the dative form of ‘dātṛ’, one who gives. One interpretation would be glory to Arunachala for granting sovereignty when searched for sincerely.¹ When the ego is seen as non-existent, what remains is sovereignty, which symbolizes nothing less than the Absolute nondual Reality. Sri Ramana Maharshi ecstatically proclaims this notion in verse seven of the *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* as follows:

Until there is the I thought there can be no other thought. When other thoughts arise, ask “To whom? To me. Where does this ‘I’ arise?” Thus diving inwards, if one traces the source of the mind and reaches the Heart, one becomes the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. There is no more dreaming of such as in and out, right or wrong, birth and death, pleasure and pain, light and darkness.²

Of course, sovereignty can also be experienced by absolute surrender beyond boons of any sort and with the attitude that the self does not, has never and will never exist. Both surrender and Self-enquiry lead to the same state of *being* which is totally unattached to any thoughts whatsoever. Major A.W. Chadwick makes the point that being is Self-realisation and the final destination of all.

The whole thing can be summed up in four words: “There is nothing. Be!” When one understands these four words one understands everything including Bhagavan himself. Then there is no more to say.³

— BKC

¹ Since ‘āhava’ can also mean war, another interpretation would be ‘One who bestows glory in war’. Given alternative meanings and inherent ambiguity, many other interpretations are also possible.

² Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan.

³ Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick), ‘There is Nothing. Be!’ in *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, p.218.

Are We Ready?

Are any of us ready? Though many of us think we are, in fact it may not even be what we truly want! Of course we want Self-realisation, but are we prepared to truly shed the accumulation of *vāsanā*-s reflected in our body and mind...the person we have identified with all our lives? Think about it. We truly want the final outcome, in theory, but possibly not the details, in fact. We all come to Arunachala with our own idiosyncratic bag of anticipations and it takes many a tough moment to realise how inadequate our preparations generally are. And even if we arrive with relatively few expectations, after the initial euphoria at having arrived ‘home’, it does not take long to see that the road ahead is long and arduous. Slowly but surely our preconceptions are stripped away and we face a future in which we do not really know what will happen next. At this time, we may not know it, but we have taken the first significant step in making ourselves open to the possibility of true understanding, *jñāna*.

In Vedanta, a person who is sufficiently mature to start the journey of inner realisation is called an *adhikārin*,¹ that is, a person who is eligible; one who is qualified to pursue the spiritual path. For a person to be fit they should develop themselves to the point where they are capable and deserve to be taught, by reason of their cultivation of humility and truthfulness. Traditionally, the *adhikārin*-s on the Vedanta path should have purified their minds through the performance of duties commensurate with their position in life, particularly in regard

¹ Grimes, John, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, Indica Books, 2009. p.27.

to family, and adopted the *sādhana catuṣṭaya* or the four *sādhana-s* or means to illumination.² Every skill requires training to a greater or lesser degree.

You cannot become a doctor by saying, “I am ready to be a doctor, show me the book.” You cannot even become a competent electrician or stonemason by saying, “Show me the manual.” You need training. Why should we imagine that receiving enlightenment is easier? In the same way, yes we have the book, namely *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Yes, we have read other books on the life and teaching of Bhagavan. Yes, we have met, discussed and shared experiences with others who have been to the ashram. Yes, we felt a communion with something greater than ourselves yet we have not attained our goal. It is as if we have tasted food that was exquisite and we want more but do not know how to get it, a second bite is maddeningly elusive. Until we are prepared to assiduously work to understand how our minds function and meticulously follow the instructions given by Bhagavan, only then will we be liberated from the endless round of identification with transitory images which we mistake ourselves to be. This is when we must beware of the delusion of having achieved our goal. This is when some fall by the wayside and become ‘gurus’. Many such would-be gurus can cause great harm, both to others and possibly more seriously, to themselves. There is no reliable substitute for truth.

And while we come to acknowledge the truth of how hard it is to arrive at a true understanding of our undertaking, we are in the presence, and begging the help of one who broke all the rules and did in fact attain true self-realisation in one momentous flash. That was something so rare as to be virtually unique, and thus far only the seriously deluded have claimed a similar experience.

Aside from the written works by Bhagavan there is Ramanasramam which is a subtle pulsating centre that can enliven and cultivate our inward quest. It supports us in the development of our *sādhana catuṣṭaya*, our *sādhana-s*. We have seen often enough newcomers who spend time in the Old Hall and come out strangely moved by

² The four *sādhana-s* are *vivēka* (discrimination); *vairāgya* (detachment); *samādi-ṣaṭka* or the group of six spiritual attributes beginning with *śama* (peace or tranquillity) and ending with *samādhāna* or concentration; and finally *mumuṣutva* or intense desire for liberation.

being in Bhagavan's presence...they realise that the sacred silence they experienced is not a vacuum but a dynamic power that shifts our consciousness to a higher realm of understanding. It sweeps away useless thoughts and negative emotions. Quite often, we come out of the Old Hall slightly dazed and wonder what happened.

Though not necessarily obligatory, at some point in our search we do come to the ashram to receive grace and guidance. On the outer level the ashram appears to be a historical, material structure, which Sri Ramana Maharshi graced in his physical lifetime. To many it does not appear to be anything more than a pleasant memorial but for those with eyes to see, they feel a divine majestic presence that transmits a potent sense of peace and well-being. Once they have tasted that *bhāva* or feeling, nothing else seems to satisfy them. They are not only convinced of the rightness of their coming to the ashram but also start to feel perplexed because they discover there is a choice between the existence they had prior to coming to the ashram and a second alternative. A new horizon has opened up and with it the dilemma: how to recapture in their mind and memory the experience of this newly found shaft of illumination that has suddenly, unexpectedly, given them a renewed sense of purpose. This, then is what they were searching for, and it was not a fantasy, but on the contrary it is the only true reality! The pertinent question then is: what is the most important activity in their lives? It is for each to answer according to the intensity of their wish for liberation.

If we say yes to the realignment of our lives, we are faced with a conundrum. If we wish to make that experience permanent, it means changing our priorities, although we may come to see that it is not really in our hands. Call it *prārabdha*, call it destiny. Grace is not a material that can be possessed or controlled. Rather the reverse, it is the Grace that possesses us. Once we trigger the switch by a wholehearted commitment a new strata of possibility opens up, something we had never anticipated. If we approach with humility and a true desire to understand, then Bhagavan is on our side and there to help us. He has said that if the disciple takes but one step towards the guru, then the guru will take the other nine steps towards you.

The ashram is not an open buffet where you come and pick whatever you like which may please you. It is not a supermarket where you can reach for what you want and automatically get a

burst of energy, to ‘hit’ a high, whatever term you may use. In fact, quite the reverse, we are here not to gain something but to lose our ignorance. For this to happen the sense of the sacred is utterly crucial to our understanding.

It is beautifully expressed by Plontius in *The Enneads*:

This is the purport of that rule of our Mysteries: Nothing Divulged to the Uninitiate: the Supreme is not to be made a common story, the holy things may not be uncovered to the stranger, to any that has not himself attained to see. There were not two; beholder was one with beheld; it was not a vision compassed but a unity apprehended. ... filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation; all the being calmed, he turns neither to this side nor to that, not even inwards to himself; utterly resting he has become very rest.

The development of respect, the deepening of veneration is essential if we are to succeed in identifying with the presence, we call Ramana. An *adhikārin* understands this and behaves with decorum and reverence. It shows in their clean appropriate clothing, measured voice and awareness of the space required by others to move about. The Samadhi Hall of the ashram after all is a temple and should be respected as such. It is not just an interesting memorial to a dead saint. It is not a place to take photographs as though it were a sightseer's right. Unfortunately, modern society with its egalitarian and materialistic approach does not give importance to the sacred unless of course one can make money from it. However, from our own perspective we should treat any sacred shrine with respect and reverence. In the West people have come to treat their churches more like a tourist attraction than as places of worship. In India quite often the noise of people chatting as if they were in the market place can be distracting. But whatever the distractions that Presence is undisturbed. Why? Just as that which has no physical form is unaffected by heat or cold, so too that formless Presence is unaffected by our thoughts or emotions. Nothing we can say or do can subtract or add to its lustre.

Are we ready to be absorbed into this Light? ▲

⁴ Plontius, *The Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna. Revised by B.S. Page. Ninth Tractate. ‘On the Good, or The One’, Section 11.

*Dr̥ṣṭi Vāda*¹ and the Direct Path of Bhagavan

RAVI R. IYER

The prime spiritual path declared and encouraged by Bhagavan was always the direct path of inquiry into the root of one's own identity. The quest of 'Who am I?' was the nuclear missile that Bhagavan always insisted would shatter the ramparts of the fort of false ideation and allow emergence of the light of true Self-Awareness to shine forth as I..I in an experiential epiphany. Bhagavan emphatically stated that this truth was as simple and clear and self-evident as a gooseberry in the palm of one's hand, and on various occasions has assured disciples that once experienced would ensure the constancy of freedom from descent back into illusion.

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§383. Bhagavan: "There are three methods of approach in Advaita vāda. (1) The *ajātavāda* is represented by no loss, no creation, no one bound, no *sādhaka*, no one desirous of liberation, no liberation. This the Supreme Truth. (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Kārikā*, II-32.) According to this, there is only One and it admits of no discussion. (2) *Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥iṣṭi-vāda* is illustrated thus: Simultaneous creation. There are two friends sleeping side by side. One of them dreams that he goes to Benares with his friend and returns. He tells his friend that both of them have been in Benares. The other denies it. That statement is true from the standpoint of one and the denial from that of the other. (3) *Sr̥iṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi-vāda* is plain (Gradual creation and knowledge of it)."

Dr. Ravi Iyer came to Bhagavan at the age of 18 years during a time of great turmoil and anguish in his life. He has been practising Self-enquiry ever since and serves Bhagavan through his work as a physician in Virginia, USA. He visits the Ashram often.

Indeed, the path of Self-enquiry which Bhagavan has exalted as the Direct Path, has been likened by Him as analogous to a copper nail hammered into a tree trunk which over time will kill even a mighty banyan tree with a forest of branches. Similarly, the question ‘Who am I?’ is like a copper nail driven into the massive tree of the individual ego that is the basis for the universe of creation rooted in false ideation. Once the gong of enquiry is struck even a single time then the process has begun. The copper nail has been driven in. Now all that needs to happen is to sit back with immense unshakeable faith in the guidance of the Guru and continue to spin the wheel of enquiry and eventually even the greatest giant of an ego will crumble to its knees and freedom becomes the disciple’s constant domain.

Most of the seekers who came to Bhagavan would come to Him rooted in the idea that they could only experience the world as a transaction and their questions to Bhagavan would reflect this implicit standpoint. In response, Bhagavan would gaze silently at them for a long while and then softly ask the question, “Who is it that experiences?” This direct question by Bhagavan coupled with the Grace of His penetrating gaze would often suffice to lift the veil that separated the questioner from the essence behind all experiences, the One awareness that stood as the ground upon which all else stands. Old disciples like Muruganar and Mastan Swami would often say that Bhagavan would simply look at us and by doing so would give us His own state and we would be absorbed. In most cases, this would constitute their initiation into what may well be stated as Sri Ramana Mantra. The famous *Hṛdaya Kuhara Madhye* verse declaration of Bhagavan, called *Ekāśloki* or One Verse, teaches as follows:

*Hṛdaya Kuhara Madhye Kevalam Brahma Mātram
Hyahamahamiti Sākshāt Ātma Rupeṇa Bhāti
Hṛdi Viśa Manasā Svam Chinvatā Majjatā Vā
Pavanachalana Rodhāt Ātmanishṭo Bhava tvam.*

In the center of the Heart Cave (*Hṛdaya Kuhara Madhye*),
Awareness alone resonates (*Kevalam Brahma Mātram*)
As I... I... (*Hyaham aham iti*) as the direct (*Sākshāt*)
manifestation of the form of the Self (*Ātma Rupeṇa Bhāti*)
Dive within yourself (*Svam*) into the Heart (*Hṛdi Viśa*)
with mind and awareness focused on the search (*Manasā Chinvatā
Majjatā Vā*)

With perfect restraint (*Rodhāt*) on the movement (*Chalana*)
of your breath (*Pavana*),
Be your Self (*Bhava tvam*) without any fluctuation (*Nishṭo*)
as the unitary Self (*Ātma*).

But how do we investigate this process? How do we move from the stand point of a universe of separate sentient and insentient objects, a universe of individual consciousness where even the concept of God exists as an objectified consciousness to the experience of a unitary consciousness? How do we move from multiplicity to singularity? The validity of any postulate must be borne out in the crucible of direct experience. Bhagavan Himself repeatedly states that anything that cannot be demonstrated as true in your own experience has no basis.² Therefore, how does one proceed? The Direct Path of Self-enquiry that was propagated by Bhagavan is the most recent expression of established Advaitic thought and its most elegant synthesis.

To understand the mechanistic underpinnings³ of this deceptively simple and straightforward instruction we need to begin with an analysis, an Einsteinian thought experiment if you will. The *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* calls such an exercise as a *dhāraṇā*, a contemplative exercise.⁴

First, consider that the entire universe is a single Conscious entity (परममन). Think of a vast Conscious entity as the only Awareness (चैतन्यं) that is. Now consider that the entire universe and all its objects and phenomena are only projections of this singular Consciousness (चैतन्यं). All the galaxies, stars, solar systems, comets and asteroids and space dust; all the radiations visible and invisible, the gravitational fields,

² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§332: “In the union of the individual with the Supreme, the Supreme is hearsay and the individual directly experienced. You can make use only of direct experience; therefore look who you are.”

³ In the following sections I will expand on principles and concepts that have been succinctly stated in Kashmiri Shaivism texts like, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* by Kṣhemarāja; *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*; *Śiva Sūtras* as revealed to Vasugupta; *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa* of Abhinavagupta; *Spanda Kārikās* expounded by Vasugupta to Kallata (disciple of Vasugupta). Humanity owes a great debt to the labours of Sri Jaideva Singh who has by faithfully translating these ancient and rare texts into the English language brought this treasure into our grasp.

⁴ *Vijñānabhairava Tantra or Divine Consciousness*. Jaideva Singh. Introduction xiii.

all the life forms in the entire universe..... ALL OF IT.... are mere modifications of this singular consciousness.⁵

Now consider how this Consciousness would possibly experience all of this. Consider this Awareness as merely being aware of itself as Consciousness. At this stage the singular consciousness is not aware of itself as an object. The awareness at this stage is without an attribute. It is simply awareness of itself as awareness. There is no movement in this awareness. Only an interminable awareness..... I ... I ‘*Hyahamahamiti Sākshāt*’.

The next step in this *dhāraṇā* on the evolution of manifestation from the singular Awareness of *Parabrahman* is a descent from the stage of *ātma-niṣṭhā* (that is attribute-less awareness resonating upon itself without any movement). There arises an extremely slight, extremely subtle movement of this singular awareness. This slight movement expands the experience of ... I...I...I.... into I AM...I AM.... I AM. This, the texts declare is the genesis of PURE EGO (महत्). A Divine Ego that knows of itself as an object of its own awareness without any separation from itself. This subtle vibration or movement then becomes a larger oscillation that creates the experience of THIS I AM (*Aham* becomes *Idam*).⁶

With each increasing oscillation, there is greater and greater definition of the unitary singular consciousness. Apropos to this there is greater restriction. What was formless infinite is acquiring the faintest boundaries of form. In Kashmir Saivism this is creation happening right here and now. Also in the *Idam* stage of creativity, singularity has been lost and duality as a nebulous but definite concept has arisen. To say THIS I AM, the awareness ‘I’ has to stand on a ground separate from that which it declares as ‘THIS’. This separation

⁵ *Śiva Sūtras*. Jaideva Singh, pp. 6: 1st Sūtra: ‘*Chaitanyamātmā*; Awareness which has absolute freedom of all knowledge and activity is the Self or nature of Reality.’

⁶ *Pratyabhijñāhrdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition* by Jaideva Singh. Sanskrit verse and Translation. Verse 5: *Citireva cetanapadādavarūḍā cetyasankociniṅ cittaṃ* ||5|| It is *citi* (Universal Consciousness) alone (*eva*) by descending (*avarūḍā*) from level (*padāt*) of Pure Consciousness (*chetanā*). Contracts Herself (*sankocini*) (by assuming the form of) into the object or knowable (*cetyā*); and also it is also *citi* who simultaneously becomes the knowing mind (*cittaṃ*) ||5|| Note the rising of the Primal Feminine at this stage is signified by the term *sankocini* or ‘contracts herself’. In a separate text on Sri Vidya it is declared that ‘Sankocham’ or modesty or withdrawal is an intrinsic property of the Feminine.

is the rise of the Primal Feminine that is the admirer of the singular Awareness which is the Primal Masculine. This Primal Feminine is Śakti (I AM) and the object of its adoration is 'I' as 'THIS' which is the attribute driven definition of Consciousness that Śakti chooses to create out of herself in union with Śiva as 'I'.

From this point forward, how singular consciousness manifests depends on the nature of its vibration. Everything in the Universe is simply a vibration in this singular consciousness. The stability of each manifestation and the solidity, its characteristics, all its interactions with all other vibrations (all other phenomena and matter) is ultimately a property of the vibrations specific to each entity. Thus in this sense the entire Universe may be considered as a dance of Adoration between Śakti and Śiva.... Vibrating With Śakti constantly creating infinite objects in her Adoration of Śiva as the Universe.^{7&8}

At this point the fundamental framework of the entire structure of Advaitic thought, Kashmiri Śaivism and Tantra worship has been created.⁹ Given that the postulate of this framework is that Śakti manifests creation by vibrating in her union with Śiva, it follows that anything created by Śakti does not exist until it acquires a NAME (नामः). Thus, Awareness as Śiva perceives a vibration created by Śakti and proceeds to experience that vibration. This experiencing of a vibration is an instantaneous property of Awareness. It is called the Khechari Tattva¹⁰ of Awareness or the Property of apprehending (verb: ग्रह; adj. भाव्य) that which It directs its attention towards. Thus,

⁷ *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition* by Jaideva Singh. Sanskrit verse and translation. v. 7: *Sa caiko dvirūpastrimayascatruātma saptapancakasvabhāvah* | And (though) He is One, He becomes (through union with Śakti) of the two-fold form, three-fold form, four-fold form, and of the nature of the seven pentads.

⁸ *Trikahṛdaya* as stated in *Parātrisikā Vivarṇa*. p. 14: "The highest Lord is always intent on creativity (*visargaparamah*) through His Śakti. He showers grace, manifests and withdraws without any restraint (for grace only)."

⁹ *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition* by Jaideva Singh. Sanskrit verse and translation. Verse 8: *Tadbhūmikāh sarvadarśanasthitayah* ||8|| The positions of the various systems of philosophy are only the various roles of that (Consciousness or Self).

¹⁰ *Vijñānabhairava Tantra or Divine Consciousness: Sanskrit Text with English translation* by Jaideva Singh; v. 77, *dhāraṇā* 54. pp. 72-3. *Kha* signifies the expanse of consciousness. *Chari*: to move through. Hence *Kha-e-Chari* or *Khechari*:

when a vibration rises within Awareness impelled by the movement of Śakti (which is itself an intrinsic property of Awareness), this vibration becomes instantly apprehended by Awareness. In that instant of apprehension, the vibration acquires both Name (नामः) and Form (रूपः). The term Form means certain attributes or properties of function (*guṇa* and *tattva*). These attributes determine the parameters of existence of this vibration within Awareness, such as, what it looks like, what it can do, how long it will last and so on and so forth. In this manner we can easily see how the entire universe can be contained within our Awareness. This is the *Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥iṣṭi-vāda* of Sri Adi Śankara wherein he says that the Universe exists as a product of our own perception, a process which Bhagavan has termed the “doctrine of simultaneous creation.”¹¹

The value of recognizing that both Name and Form are co-equal in that they are both created simultaneously when Awareness apprehends the vibration of Śakti is that these two concrete attributes can be used by the practitioner in tracing the path back towards experiencing Awareness in its singular state of ... I...I...I. Thus, holding on to idol worship in the form of an *iṣṭadevatā* (Preferred God that one worships)

(cont.) She who moves through consciousness. The Sanskrit verb for apprehension is *Graha* (to grab); the adjective is *Bhāvya* (to penetrate or make one’s own).

¹¹ *Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥iṣṭi-vāda: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§25 and Talk§364. If Bhagavan’s questioners found the idea of *ajāta* or non-causality impossible to assimilate, he would teach them that the world comes into existence simultaneously with the appearance of the ‘I’-thought and that it ceases to exist when the ‘I’-thought is absent. This theory is known as *Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥iṣṭi*, or simultaneous creation, and it says, in effect, that the world which appears to an *ajñāni* is a product of the mind that perceives it, and that in the absence of that mind it ceases to exist. The theory is true in so far as the mind does create an imaginary world for itself, but from the standpoint of the Self, an imaginary ‘I’ creating an imaginary world is no creation at all, and so the doctrine of *ajāta* is not subverted. Although Sri Ramana sometimes said that *Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥iṣṭi* was not the ultimate truth about creation he encouraged his followers to accept it as a working hypothesis. He justified this approach by saying that if one can consistently regard the world as an unreal creation of the mind then it loses its attraction and it becomes easier to maintain an undistracted awareness of the ‘I’-thought. See *Guru Vachaka Kovai* verse 100. “Although Guru Ramana taught various doctrines according to the level of understanding of those who came to Him, we heard from Him that ‘*Ajāta*’ alone is truly His own experience. Thus should you know.”

is holding onto a singular Form, and focusing one's consciousness on a single Name eliminates all other Names (that is all other vibrations), and if done with sufficient intensity leads one to the point when the Śakti dancing in one subsides in pulsating union of singularity (*Hyahamahamiti Sāḁkshāt*¹²) and one has reached *Ātmanishṭo Bhava tvam* through the means of *Hṛdi Viśa Manasā Svam Chinvatā Majjatā Vā Pavanachalana Rodhāt*. More importantly, Bhagavan declares that once this singularity is experienced with full awareness of the experience, then the veil of illusion is ripped apart and from that point onwards the phenomenal world ceases to exist as an independent reality but is seen merely as a modality of the underlying singularity thus ensuring a constant residency at the baseline resting state, *Ātma Nishṭa*.^{13&14} (आत्मनिष्ठ).

Since vibration is what constitutes the agitation in unitary consciousness that results in the apprehension of a created entity. And since it is the apprehension of this entity as a distinct phenomena separate from unitary awareness that is the basis of illusion, it follows that vibration can be used as a tool to turn illusion upon itself and lift the veil that obstructs the direct perception of awareness. Electricity is just energy, but it manifests as different phenomena depending on what it flows through. Pass it through a tungsten filament in a

¹² *Parāṭisikā Vivarṇa* of Abhinavagupta. Pg. 13: In the Sri Ramana Mantra, Hridaya Kuhara Madhye, the phrase '*Hyahamahamiti*' comprises of '*aham-maham*' which when joined forms '*ahamaham*'. *Aham* consists of '*a*', '*ha*' and '*m*', where '*a*' denotes Śiva, '*ha*' denotes Śakti, '*m*' denotes *nara* and all objective existents. Thus '*aham*' denotes the state of manifestation or expansion (*prasara*) of the Divine in objective existence. '*Aham*' is known as *Srishtibija*. '*Maha*': This is the reverse process of *Aham* i.e., the process of withdrawal or absorption (*pravesa*). In this '*ma*' denotes *nara* or objective existents, '*ha*' denotes Śakti, and '*a*' denotes Śiva. This is known as *samharabija* or the process of withdrawal. Continuing this analysis further, the duration of interval between '*aham*' and '*mahā*' constitutes *sthiti* or maintenance. The *Hṛdaya Kuhara* within which this secret is hidden is the '*tirobhāva*' or veiling and the Guru's grace that guides the seeker as he plunges within is '*anugraha*'. Thus all the 5 functions of Parmeshwara is contained within this Ramana Mantra.

¹³ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§389. Namdev's story of the entire world as the God.

¹⁴ *Uḁladu Nārpadu*, v.18.

vacuum bulb it will glow as a light bulb, pass it through a coil and it will generate electromagnetic power, so on and so forth. Similarly, the power of Awareness is pure energy but it manifests as the entire universe by associating with various vibrations that emanate from itself. If things were left to just random chance then the universal law of entropy will push all manifestation down the path to more and more tamasic manifestation, more and more chaos. But there is a wild card in creation and that is Love! The essence of the Primordial Awareness is Love, and this love pervades even the most tamasic clouded perturbation as a subtle undercurrent that prevents everything from spinning out of control into darkness. This element of pure love results in a cyclicity in manifest creation that pushes the pendulum of manifestation from utter darkness and chaos to utter harmony and blessedness. This is the promise that is vouchsafed to all of us and if we can hold on to this promise then we will never be crushed by despondency and despair.¹⁵

The analysis presented here is only to demonstrate the structure and mechanics behind manifest creation. This entire process is occurring spontaneously in every sentient creature all the time and in this manner, this process produces the worlds and lifetimes for each sentient creature to experience. It is easy to get overwhelmed by all the terminology and analysis of the various *guṇa-s* and *tattva-s* and the multitude of the permutations and combinations associated with them. Bhagavan would, after discussing such topics with the various questioners, tell them that all this is just intellectual chatter and that it is not necessary to know all this and to only practise self-inquiry as described by Him. He would declare, “When you ask the question, to whom does all these *tattva-s* etc. belong?” the answer is to me! Then “Who is this I that sees all this?”

This effort cuts through the chatter of all the concepts and immediately transports you to the stage at the junction of I-AM & I-AM-THIS (*Sadakya / Sadāśiva tattva*). If you remain at this level

¹⁵ A sinner to Bhagavan: “Bhagavan I will go to hell because I have done a lot of bad things. Please forgive me and do not forget me.” Bhagavan replied, “Even if you forget me, I shall not forget you.” “But I will be in hell!” exclaimed the man. Bhagavan looked at him for a while and then said, “I am present there also”. From *Living by the Words of Bhagavan* by David Godman, p.142.

rising and falling in and out of this level, depending on the fluctuations of the intensity of your focus, your intuition (*buddhi*) gains strength. Then at an opportune moment you will get lifted up in a rush by the Grace of the Guru, and merged into Singularity, and from that point you no longer exist, so your fate is therefore indescribable.

The immense power of the Guru in this process is that the Guru by his mere proximity suppresses the masking activity of all the lower *tattva*-s and enables the disciple to remain at the level of *Sadākya / Sadāśiva tattva* with great ease. The effect is like the accelerated ripening of a fruit in a greenhouse. Thus, the ability to experience singularity becomes greatly enhanced in the Guru's presence. The purpose of human existence is to regain our lost identity. That identity with Śiva-Śakti that has become lost by the embrace with *māyā*. This recovery heralds your real birth and this is when you begin to live! ▲

Signs

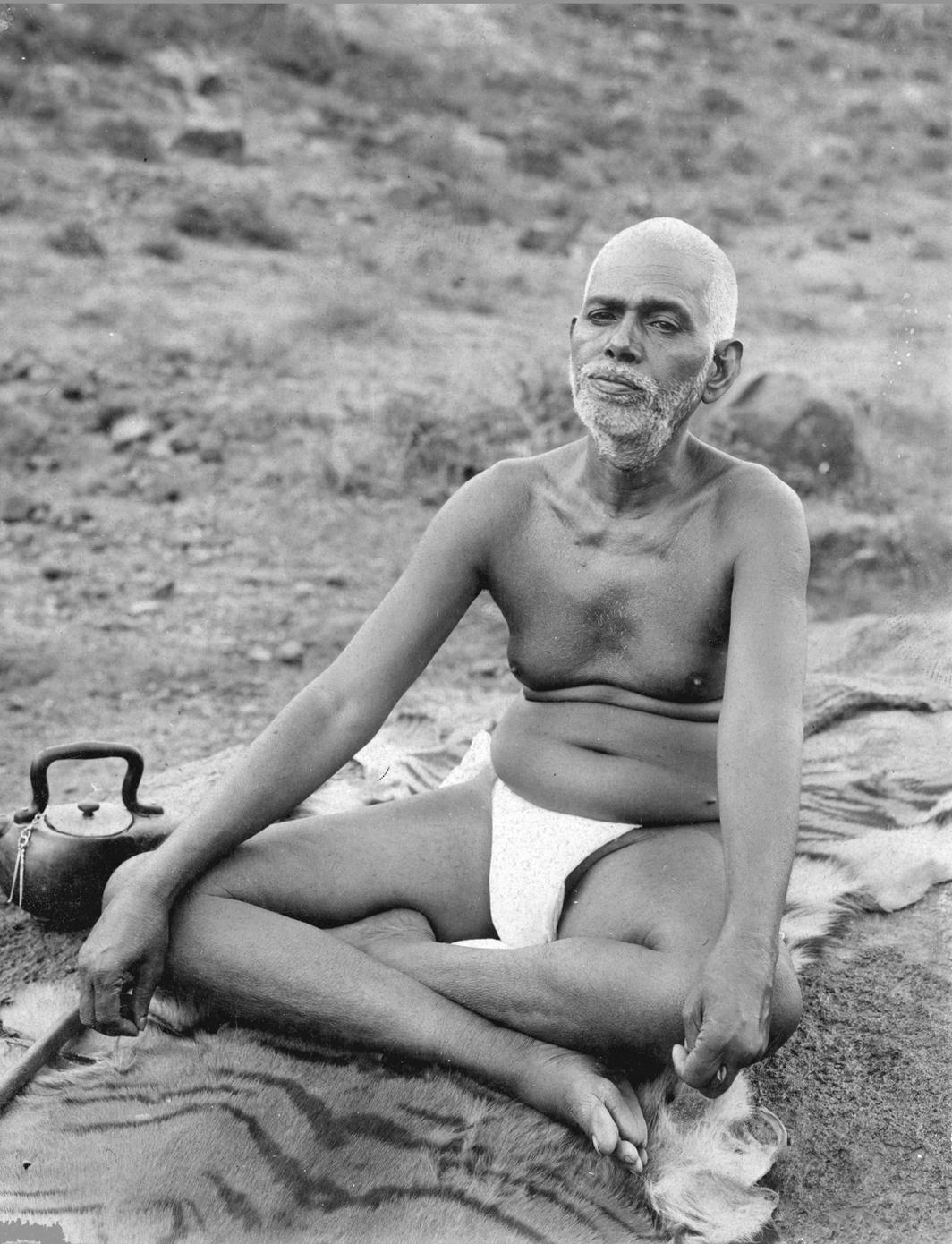
Upahar

In a still hour, I contemplate these things.
The soul's deep well; mind's threaded labyrinth.
Love's age-old promise waiting to be kept.

Body's translucent ark, borne on the flood
of transformations. Sleep, the home-ground, the dark
and grateful womb. Waking, the mystic mirror.

The phantom wheel of signs forever turning.
How shall I hope, or fear? Heart's only proof
Is its own pure transcendence. World's within.

A sudden beauty overflows the spirit.
Nothing need happen here. Let be what is.
I kiss these words into the void. I am.



Bhagavan Ramana: The Poet Supreme

Part Two

S. RAM MOHAN

Bhagavan reveals the nature of Lord Śiva in terms of opposites in *Śrī Aruṇācala Navamaṇimālai*:

“Though He is the ever unmoving one;
Yet in His dance of Bliss at the temple Hall [of Thillai]
He dances before The Mother, who is motionless there.
Now that power is withdrawn within [at Tiruvannamalai]
And His Form here motionless, still. He soars as Aruna Hill.”¹

Similarly, in *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* Bhagavan portrays the nature of Arunachala through a paradox:

“When I approach You thinking You have Form,
You stand here as a Hill on earth.
If regarding You as Formless and yet wanting to see You

¹ *Necklet of Nine Gems*, verse 1.

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And when I realise who I am, [then] what being have I
apart from You?

O, You stand as the mighty Aruna Hill?”²

Further, Bhagavan confirms the fact that Arunachala is his Guru
in *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*.

“From my unthinking childhood,

The immensity of Arunachala has shone in my awareness.”³

Bhagavan equates the Guru with Self, God and Arunachala. God,
Guru and the Self being the same, here Arunachala is declared as the
Guru.

Another traditional mystical-poetic device is the theme of the
journey or quest. The journey is humbly undertaken with strong faith
in the grace of the Divine. Bhagavan describes life itself as a journey
in *Ēkānma Pañchakam*.

Further, in *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*, Bhagavan compares our soul
to a running brook which is on its way to merge with the ocean:

“The raindrops showered down by the clouds, risen from the sea
cannot rest until they reach, despite all hindrances, once again their
ocean home. The embodied soul, from You proceeding, may through
various ways self-chosen, wander aimless for a while. But it cannot
rest till it rejoins You, the Source. A bird may hover here and there
but cannot remain motionless in mid-heaven. It must come back the
way it went, to find at last its resting place on earth. Even so, the
soul must turn to You, O Aruna Hill, and merge again in You alone,
ocean of bliss.”⁴

Just as the journey of the river ends in the ocean so also the quest
of the human ends in the merging of the soul with the Absolute. In
the course of this voyage, human beings are called to this inward
journey. Bhagavan encourages us to join in this quest to merge with
Arunachala in *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam*:

“How many are there who like me have been destroyed for
regarding this Hill as the Supreme Being. You men who, disgusted
with this life of endless misery, seek some means of giving up the

² *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* v. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 8.

body. Know that there is on earth a rare medicine which thought of but once kills without killing. Know that this rare medicine is the mighty Aruna Mountain, nothing else.”⁵

Similes and metaphors bring out the various shades of experience of the mystic union. Bhagavan has used similes that are appropriate to emphasize his idea. The presence of Arunachala as the basis of all, the binding force of all things in the Universe, is compared by Bhagavan to a thread in a garland that runs through and binds every gem. Every stanza is a string of similes for describing the experiences concerning the Absolute:

“Like the string that holds together gems in a necklace, You penetrate and bind all beings of the various religions. If like a gem that is cut and polished, the separate mind is whetted on the grindstone of the pure universal mind, it will acquire the light of Your grace and shine like a ruby whose brightness is not dimmed by any other object. When once the light of the Sun has fallen on a photosensitive plate, will the plate register another picture? Apart from You, O, Aruna Mountain bright, auspicious, does any other thing exist?”⁶

Similes used by Bhagavan are: beautiful and telling ‘like magnet and iron’, ‘like a statue nodding its head’, ‘like a deer trapped in the net’, ‘like a drunkard who asks Who am I? and Whence am I?’, ‘like a pearl diver’, and ‘like rain water dissolving into the ocean’. Apart from these similes, Bhagavan used Tamil and Sanskrit terms with the same meaning to convey the oneness of the bride and bridegroom like *Azhagu Sundaram pōl*. Both words mean ‘beauty’ while *pōl* means ‘like’.

Bhagavan employed another type of simile without explicit comparison. This means that both the topic, the actual thing which is being talked about, and the illustration, the thing to which the topic is compared, are placed side by side without direct comparison. Verse 8 in *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* exemplifies this. Here, water-cloud-river merging-with-the-ocean provides a visual image. The body or the individual rising from the Absolute and merging with Him constitutes another visual image. By means of this juxtaposition, one image reinforces the meaning of the other.

⁵ *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam*, verse 11.

⁶ *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*, verse 5.

Bhagavan is at once ancient and modern. Bhagavan also drew similes and metaphors from modern sources that were not well known at the time of his writing. These expressions were strikingly used to illustrate his concept of non-dualism. For instance, Bhagavan explains how Self alone exists and other things appear and disappear in it due to a perception of the world apart from the Self. Bhagavan says:

“You alone exist, O Heart, the radiance of Awareness. In You, a power mysterious dwells. A power which without You is nothing. From It [this power of manifestation] there proceeds, along with a perceiver, a series of subtle, shadowy thoughts which, lit by the reflected light of mind amid the whirl of *prārabdha*, appear within as a shadowy spectacle of the world. And it then reappears as the world perceived by the five senses as a film is projected through a lens. Whether perceived or unperceived, these [thoughts] are nothing apart from you, O, Hill of Grace.”⁷

Bhagavan compares sense-perception to projecting film through a lens.

He also used the cine-screen in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and viewed it as a metaphor to illustrate the unitive nature of soul and Self, i.e., the whole world is but the manifestation of the One, the Reality.

“Because we perceive the world, the acceptance of a multi-powered First Principle is settled. The picture of name and form, the observer, the basic canvas and the revealing light – All these are He Himself.”⁸

Bhagavan’s alliteration, front-rhyme and end-rhyme create incantatory effects particularly mind-stilling. An example is the syllable ‘aru’ repeated in a single line as in the lovely verse given below:

*Arunaiyenrenṇayāṅ aruṭkaṅṅi paṭṭēnuṅ Aruḷvalai tappumō Aruṅācalā.*⁹

Sometimes, alliteration, front-rhyme and end-rhyme occur in a single verse. Sri Aurobindo the mystic thinker, poet and critic says it so well:

⁷ *Śrī Aruṅācala Aṣṭakam*, Verse 6.

⁸ *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* verse 1.

⁹ *Śrī Aruṅācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, verse 102. I had but thought of Thee as Aruna, and lo! I was caught in the trap of Thy grace! Can the net of Thy grace ever fail, Oh Arunachala?

The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half-lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame and an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but allowing self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the worldly mind, a bringing out of inner experience, fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty.

In Bhagavan's poetry repetition of key words like Arunachala, Self, etc. is recurrent. In Bhagavan's mystical poetry repetition enhances the effect. Simile, metaphor, and other devices evoke the unitive nature of the individual soul and the Absolute. They also initiate the reader-devotee into a mystic experience enabling realization of one's relationship with the Absolute.

At no time did Bhagavan seek to write poetry. Instead, poetry flowed through him. His mother tongue was Tamil but he picked up through contact with devotees, Telugu, Malayalam and Sanskrit, and wrote poetry in these languages besides Tamil, making use of the conventions of these languages and, on occasion, introducing innovations. It is difficult enough to write poetry even in one's own language but Bhagavan wrote poems of exceptional beauty in four. To my knowledge there is no instance of a mystic composing verse in several languages. Bhagavan is thus not only a mystic but a unique mystic poet.

Let us now briefly look at Bhagavan's enduringly popular work, the *Śrī Aruṇācala Stuti Pañcakam*, which is recited at every Ramana gathering and in many households.

Of the five hymns to Arunachala composed by Bhagavan Ramana, the present one was originally written in Sanskrit for Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri, the great Sanskrit scholar and devotee, who requested Bhagavan one day in 1917 to compose a poem in Sanskrit. Bhagavan replied with a smile that he knew little Sanskrit and less prosody relating to that language. But Kavyakanta was not willing to leave the matter there. He explained to Bhagavan the technique of one of the Sanskrit metres called *ārya*, and repeated his request. When he saw Bhagavan again in the evening, the poem was ready in exquisite Sanskrit, expressed in five short verses addressed to Arunachala, the

entire teaching of Vedanta. Reading them Kavyakanta was ecstatic and exclaimed to his disciples, “Can anyone of us write like this?”

This hymn consists of five gem-like verses on Arunachala; hence the name *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*. In the first two verses, the characteristics of Reality is set forth from two levels, *svarūpa* (essential) and *taṭastha* (marginal or incidental). In the remaining three verses, the paths to perfection are sketched in outline. Thus, in this short poem, Bhagavan has given us in sutra-form the quintessence of Vedanta, as also the distinctive points of emphasis that are to be found in his teachings. This poem has also been rendered by Bhagavan into Tamil *venba* for the benefit of Tamil-knowing aspirants. This was done in 1922 in response to a request from a devotee who wanted to add this to four other poems in Tamil on Arunachala written by Bhagavan, and publish the collection under the title *Aruṇācala Stuti Pañcakam*.

In the first two verses of the *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*, as we have said, the nature of Reality is indicated. The *Upaniṣad*-s describe the nature of Reality in two ways:

On account of *māyā*, it appears as the cause of the world. In the first verse Bhagavan refers to Arunachala, the Supreme Self (*Paramātmān*), that is unconditioned and unqualified existence-consciousness-bliss. It is a supernal light; it is the ocean of bliss. In it there is no plurality, there is no world. Thus, the world is a projection of Arunachala Brahman; it has no reality in itself. For the purpose of meditation on Arunachala, a location is assigned in the body – the location is the ‘heart’, not the physical heart which is in the left side of the chest, but the spiritual heart which is in the right side.

In the third verse, Bhagavan teaches the path of self-enquiry. This is the same as *jñāna-marga* (the path of knowledge). Bhagavan’s formulation of the *jñāna-marga* is well-known. It takes the form of the inquiry ‘Who am I?’ Although all can take to this path, for sure and quick success one must possess a pure and one-pointed mind. The aids that render the mind fit to pursue the path of inquiry are meditation (*dhyāna*), devotion (*bhakti*), and action (*karma*).

In the fourth and fifth verses, Bhagavan mentions helpful disciplines. Selfless service (*karma-yoga*) removes all impurities from the mind. Devotion to God (*bhakti-yoga*) and meditation (*dhyāna-yoga*) impart to the mind one-pointedness. When the mind turns within

and into its source, it merges in that source which is the Supreme Self, Arunachala. This is the final goal of all spiritual disciplines — the plenary experience, which is *sat cit ānanda* (existence-consciousness-bliss).

The essence of Bhagavan’s teaching is beautifully expressed in his two vedantic works: *Upadēsa Undiyār* and *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. *Upadēsa Undiyār* contains 30 succinct verses enveloping the entire gamut of philosophy. Muruganar had started to write about instructions of Lord Śiva to the rishis of Darukavana on the subject of the futility of action and the effect of *niṣkāmya karma* as aid to liberation. While poet Muruganar proceeded with the introductory verses leading to the *Upadēsa Undiyār*, he found it difficult to compose the actual instruction part. He therefore requested Bhagavan to compose that portion dealing with Śiva’s instruction to the rishis. Accordingly Bhagavan composed 29 Tamil verses. He later rendered it into Sanskrit and then into Telugu and Malayalam. The *Upadēsa Sāram* encompasses all the paths to liberation in the form of a guide along the ladder of spiritual evolution. It starts from *karma yoga* graduating to *bhakti* and *para bhakti* and then it deals in few verses on *hatha yoga* and *dhyāna* (various aspects of meditation). Then Bhagavan gives succinct instructions on the path of self-enquiry and *jñāna*.

The *Upadēsa Undiyār* can be rightly termed as the most comprehensive and efficient epitome of the entire philosophy of India in 30 beautiful and enchanting verses.¹⁰ He discussed in successive verses the ritualistic worship, prayers and meditation, breath control and other methods. He also advised the *sādhaka-s* to go for total destruction of mind (*manonāśa*) rather than *manolaya* or temporary subsidence. He advises the *sādhaka* to focus attention on the spiritual heart as an effective way to destroy the mind. He follows it with the instruction on the effective method for Self-realisation, namely *vicāra* or path of enquiry. When the mind unceasingly and silently enquires into its own form, it realises that there is nothing designated as ‘mind’ existing here. Holding on to single-point attention and turning within, searching as to from where this ‘I’ thought arises, makes false ‘I’ ashamed and it vanishes. When this ‘I’ ends and ego fades away, there

¹⁰ Sri Muruganar composed verse 30.

shines ‘I – I’, which is One, which is the very Self and Infinite. ‘I – I’ is the substratum of everything. Even in deep sleep, where we lose the sense of ego, we continue to exist, because the Self always exists.

The body, senses, mind, breath, and sleep — these are insentient and unreal. They cannot be the true ‘I’, for knowing the Self, which is One, there is no other knower. Hence ‘Being’ is awareness. The creator and the created, the nature of being are all of the same substance. Knowing one’s Self denuded of all attributes and limiting adjuncts is to experience the Almighty. Knowing one’s Self and abiding in it that is, without beginning or end, one abides in unbroken Consciousness and Bliss. Those are the instructions of Bhagavan in *Upadēśa Undiyār*. While chanting these hymns, both chanters and listeners automatically see their mind focus on the Self.

The other important work of Bhagavan is *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* of 40 verses. In the entire 40 verses of the text there is no mention of a Personal God. Thus, it is an unalloyed presentation of pure Advaita, leading us to the plenary advaitic experience. Apart from this, there are another 40 verses collected or written by Bhagavan, which is titled *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham* (supplement). Many of these verses being translated mainly from *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, some fourteen verses having been written on a specific request. These 80 verses are comprehensive exposition of Bhagavan’s teachings. These have also been translated into Telugu and Malayalam, and the Sanskrit rendering of the forty verses was done by Kavyakanta Ganapathi Muni. It is sufficient to say that this book has to be deeply studied to understand the total concept of Advaitic Vedanta. Aphoristically stated, the teachings can be said, “Seek to know the Self and Knowledge will make you free.” This can be done through the enquiry ‘Who am I?’. The most efficient method for this is *vicāra* or Self-enquiry. This is not a mental process to explore the mind’s nature. Here the entire mind is focused on its source. When this is sought with one-pointed enquiry, the so-called ego vanishes. When the ‘I’ has been investigated back to its source through wisdom, there is no bondage. This is the essence of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*.

Next there are two important translations from the *Āgama*-s. They are *Ātma Sākṣātkāra Prakaraṇam* and *Devikālottaram* which are translations from Sanskrit to Tamil verse. The *Āgama*-s are traditional

Hindu scriptures regarded as no less authoritative and authentic than the Vedas. They are regarded as divinely revealed teachings and no human authorship is ascribed to them. The temple worship is mainly founded upon them.

There are twenty eight *Āgama*-s that are accepted as authoritative. From among them *Sarva Jñāṇōttaram* and *Devikālottaram* are outstanding as expressing the standpoint of pure advaita or nonduality. *Ātma Sākṣātkāra* is the most essential part of *Sarva Jñāṇōttaram*.

The Maharshi spontaneously translated both these *Āgama* into Tamil verse. *Devikālottaram* in the very early days when he was living in the Virupaksha Cave and the *Ātma Sākṣātkāra* in 1933 at the present day Ashram. Both are instructions on the path of knowledge given by Lord Śiva, the latter to his son Guha (another name for Lord Subrahmanya) while the former was taught to his consort, Parvati.

Verses 70-72 in *Devikālottaram*, forbidding the harming even of plant life, are valuable advice on ecological preservation. In this, no extremes of discipline or behaviour are demanded of the devotees. Indeed, as is generally indicated in these two *Āgama*-s, questions of disciplines, rituals, and behaviour are far less important on this path than any other, since it is a path which works directly on the heart, awakening spiritual knowledge.

Bhagavan has also done the translation of the 42 verses from *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* that He considered were the most important selections. He selected 42 verses and arranged them in a proper order to serve as spiritual guidance. He also rendered them into Tamil and Malayalam verses for the benefit of devotees. It is interesting to note that he has omitted the popular verses of *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* starting with *sarva-dharmān parityajya*.¹¹

We have enjoyed so far a snapshot of Bhagavan's teachings revealed in his poetic work. I am sure this must enthuse us to study further and in greater detail the great poetic creations of Bhagavan. ▲

¹¹ Chapter 18, verse 66. 'Abandon all varieties of *dharmas* and simply surrender unto me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful reactions; do not fear.'



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty Seven

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

21st December 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om: What are called the first person, second person and third person in English are respectively called *tanmai*, *munnilai* and *paḍarkkai* in Tamil. *Tanmai* literally means ‘selfness’, so though in some contexts it means the first person, in other contexts it can mean nature, essence, inherent quality, character, condition or reality. *Munnilai* literally means ‘what stands in front’, and *paḍarkkai* literally means ‘what spreads out’, so one way in which we can interpret these two terms in the context of Bhagavan’s teachings is that ‘second person’ (*munnilai*) refers to whatever we directly perceive by our senses at this present moment whereas ‘third person’ (*paḍarkkai*) refers to anything else we may think of.

In the fifth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?) Bhagavan says:

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.

Of all the thoughts that appear in the mind, **the thought called ‘I’ alone is the first thought** [the primal, basic, original or causal thought]. Only after this arises do other thoughts arise. Only after the first person [ego, the primal thought called ‘I’] appears do second and third persons [all other things] appear; without the first person, second and third persons do not exist.

Likewise in verse 14 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* he says:

If the first person [ego] exists, second and third persons [everything else] will exist. If the first person ceases to exist [by] oneself investigating the reality of the first person, second and third persons will come to an end, and [what then remains alone, namely] the nature [selfness, essence or reality] that shines as one [undivided by the appearance of these three persons] alone is oneself, the [real] state [or nature] of oneself.

When I first read these two passages, I thought deeply about the implications of what Bhagavan teaches us in them, and I was struck by how he explains in such a simple and logical manner not only the entire appearance of multiplicity but also the means to get rid of it, and how apt is his use of these three terms, *tanmai*, *muṇṇilai* and *paḍarkkai*, to explain this. The first person is ‘I’, the ego or subject, which is the knower or perceiver, whereas second and third persons are all other things, which are objects, things that are known or perceived by the first person. Since second and third persons appear only in the view of the first person, they cannot exist without it.

When he says ‘If the first person exists, second and third persons will exist’, and ‘without the first person, second and third persons do not exist’, he implies not only that second and third persons depend for their seeming existence upon the seeming existence of the first person, but also *vice versa*. That is, the first person cannot stand without clinging to the appearance of second and third persons, so the first person is no more real than second and third persons, and they are no more real than it. However, though they are mutually dependent, and therefore arise and subside simultaneously, logically what must arise first is the first person, because the first person is the cause whereas second and third persons are its effects. As soon as we rise as the first person, we bring second and third persons into existence along with

us. Therefore the first person is the root, whereas second and third persons are what instantly sprout from it.

That is, the first person is the subject or knower whereas second and third persons are objects or things known by it, so only when we rise as ego do other things come into existence. We can understand this from our own experience. In sleep we do not rise as ego, and consequently nothing else appears, but as soon as we rise from sleep, whether in waking or in dream, other things appear, and they seem to exist until we subside again in sleep. However, though this is what we experience every day, we generally overlook the significance of it until Bhagavan points it out to us.

We overlook its significance because we assume that the things we perceive in our current state continue to exist even when we do not perceive them, but Bhagavan teaches us that this assumption is incorrect. When we are dreaming we assume that the world we then perceive exists whether we perceive it or not, but as soon as we wake up we recognise that the dream world was just a creation of our mind and therefore does not exist now that we do not perceive it. Our assumption that this present world exists whether we perceive it or not is just like the assumption we had about the dream world so long as we were dreaming. Just as our experience in dream did not support what we assumed then, our experience in this state does not support what we assume now.

Why do we not perceive the dream world now? Because it does not actually exist, and therefore seemed to exist only so long as we perceived it. Likewise, we do not perceive this present world while we are dreaming any other dream, because our present state is just a dream, so this world seems to exist only so long as we perceive it. In sleep we do not perceive any world at all, even though we are aware of our own existence then, because no world exists then for us to perceive.

Why do we perceive a world in waking and dream but not in sleep? What is the fundamental mistake that we make in waking and dream but do not make in sleep? In what way are we different in sleep to how we are now or in dream? In sleep we are aware of ourself just as 'I am', and consequently we are aware of nothing other than 'I am', whereas in waking and dream we are aware of ourself as 'I am this body', and consequently we are aware of numerous other forms, so

it is only when we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’ that we are aware of any world or anything other than ourself, as Bhagavan implies in verse 4 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? The [real] eye is oneself [one’s real nature, which is pure awareness], the infinite [and hence formless] eye [so it can never see any forms or phenomena, which are all finite].

What we call the world is nothing but a collection of forms of various kinds, and we perceive such forms only when we mistake ourself to be the form of a body consisting of five sheaths. What we actually are is just pure awareness, which is infinite and hence formless, so as pure awareness we are never aware of any forms. How then do we mistake ourself to be the form of a body? What is aware of itself as ‘I am this body’ is not ourself as we actually are but only ourself as ego, which is what Bhagavan refers to as *tanmai*: the first person. Only when we rise as ego and thereby mistake ourself to be a body do other forms seem to exist, so as he says in the fifth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*: ‘Only after the first person appears do second and third persons appear; without the first person, second and third persons do not exist’.

Therefore the root cause for the entire appearance of multiplicity is only our rising as ego and consequently mistaking ourself to be a body. How then can we avoid rising as ego? As ego we are always aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, which is not what we actually are, so ego is a false awareness of ourself, and hence it can be eradicated only by correct awareness of ourself: that is, by our being aware of ourself as we actually are.

Since the nature of ego is to be aware of itself as the form of a body and consequently to be aware of other forms, so long as our attention is directed towards forms of any kind whatsoever we are thereby nourishing and sustaining the ego, as Bhagavan implies in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

Grasping form it comes into existence; grasping form it stands;
grasping and feeding on form it grows abundantly; leaving form,

it grasps form. If sought, it will take flight. [Such is the nature of] the formless phantom-ego. Investigate.

Ego is a formless phantom because it has no form of its own, so it seems to exist only when it grasps the form of a body as itself, and having grasped the form of a body as itself, it stands and flourishes by constantly grasping other forms. Since grasping form is the very nature of ego, and since it has no form of its own, if it tries to grasp only itself, it will subside and dissolve back into the source from which it rose. This is what he implies when he says: ‘*tēḍiṇāl oṭṭam piḍikkum*’, ‘If sought, it will take flight’.

That is, since ego is formless, ‘grasping form’ means directing our attention away from ourself towards other things, so in order to eradicate ego we need to turn our entire attention back within to face ourself alone. Turning our attention back within to see what we actually are is what Bhagavan means when he says ‘if sought’ (*tēḍiṇāl*), and it is also what he refers to as ‘investigating what this is’ (*yādu idu enḍru nāḍal*) in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If ego comes into existence, everything comes into existence; if ego does not exist, everything does not exist. Ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating what this is alone is giving up everything.

That is, since ego ‘takes flight’ and ceases to exist when it investigates itself keenly enough, and since ‘if ego does not exist, everything does not exist’, we can give up everything only by investigating what this ego actually is. This is why he says in the second sentence of verse 14 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘If the first person ceases to exist [by] oneself investigating the reality of the first person, second and third persons will come to an end, and the nature that shines as one alone is oneself, the state of oneself’.

What he refers to here as ‘the nature that shines as one’ (*onḍrāy oḷirum taṇmai*) is our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is pure awareness, because when we investigate ourself keenly enough, we will see that what we actually are is just pure awareness, which is one and indivisible, and it is only when we see ourself as such that ego will be eradicated, whereupon everything else will cease to exist along with it. ▲

(To be continued)



KEYWORD

Avadhūta

Part Two

B.K. CROISSANT

For those of us who are struggling not only to reach a higher plane but to abide there as well, the *Avadhūta Gītā* is a welcome resource. In it the legendary Sage Dattātreya speaks to us in an ecstatic state of mystical rapture, not from the valley or the plains, but from the mountain top. At that elevation, he attempts to lure us into joining him, not through persuasive argumentation, but through a kind of shock therapy and the skillful use of various literary devices. To shake off the mind is the sole purpose of this small treatise, not surprisingly attributed to an *avadhūta*, one who shakes off all worldly concerns.

Essential to shaking off the mind, of course, is the notion of renunciation. In the traditional practice of ‘*neti neti*’ (not this, not this), seekers on a spiritual path first discriminate between the real and the unreal, then reject the unreal, including the mind, the body and the material world. In addition to that, however, the *Avadhūta Gītā* relentlessly emphasizes transcending all mental concepts of

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duality, resulting in a kind of extreme version of ‘*neti neti*’. Here, to experience the Truth as indivisible, it must be not only beyond evil but beyond good as well, not only beyond attachment but beyond detachment as well, not only beyond bondage but beyond liberation as well. Renouncing all, the *avadhūta* then renounces not only renunciation but the absence of renunciation as well. The remaining state is inexpressible. It is Reality as It really is.

Here is a revealing quote from Sri Ramana Maharshi on the subject of duality as it relates specifically to bondage and liberation.

*Mukti is not anything to be attained. It is our real nature. We are always that. It is only so long as one feels that he is in bondage that he has to try to get released from bondage. When a man feels that he is in bondage he tries to find out for whom is the bondage and by that enquiry discovers that there is no bondage for him but only for the mind, and that the mind itself disappears or proves non-existent when turned inwards instead of outwards towards sense-objects; it merges into its source, the Self, and ceases to exist as a separate entity. In that state there is no feeling either of bondage or liberation. So long as one speaks of mukti he is not free from the sense of bondage.*¹

Why is the *Avadhūta Gītā* so stirring to the soul? What makes it timeless and worthy of being read over and over again? There is no linear narration of events, no development of memorable characters, and, unlike the *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā*, the disciple never even speaks. On the contrary, its eight chapters, all on the same subject, are like a garland of beautiful hymns strung on a thread. The author has an amazing tool chest starting with a kind of shock therapy that is delivered over and over again by a few interrogative words. ‘*Katham*’ (how) and ‘*kim*’ (why), like a hammer or a thunderbolt, are instruments of awakening. For instance, we are told repeatedly and in no uncertain terms that each of us is indeed the One eternal, indivisible, indestructible, all-pervading, unmoving, self-effulgent Self. If so, why then do we shamelessly let our undisciplined minds rule us? Why do we continually desire transitory pleasures and endure grief and sorrow?

¹ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 5-5-46.

Another effective tool is repetition, not just of syllables and words, but of haunting refrains as well. Relentless but hypnotizing repetition. The economy of vocabulary is striking and persistent. Over and over again the same words are used throughout the Song. Different meters command our attention when they change or cast a spell over us when they do not. The subject is often vague. Who is the ‘I’ invoked? Sometimes the Brahman or *Ātman*, sometimes the Master, other times the disciple, who is as much you and I as the silent *śiṣya*, sometimes two of the three or all three at once. As in all timeless poetry, the quality of sound matters. Translations of the *Avadhūta Gītā* are helpful and even necessary to be sure, but the verses must, nonetheless, be read aloud in Sanskrit to comprehend and experience their full effect.

Chapter One, which has 76 verses, is a good place to start to illustrate these literary devices as well as the use of shock therapy. It begins with a moving invocation.

ईश्वरानुग्रहादेव पुंसामद्वैतवासना ।
महद्भयपरित्राणाद्विप्राणामुपजायते ॥

īśvarānugrahādeva puṁsām advaita-vāsanā
mahadbhaya-paritrāṇād viprāṇām upajāyate. (verse 1)

*Through God’s Grace alone there arises within inspired souls
the desire for union with the Supreme, which protects them
from great fear.*²

“After Grace is praised in the first verse, in the following verse on nonduality, shock therapy occurs for the first time.”

येनेदं पूरितं सर्वमात्मनैवात्मनात्मनि ।
निराकारं कथं वन्दे ह्यभिन्नं शिवमव्ययम् ॥

yenedaṁ pūritaṁ sarvaṁ ātmanaivātmanātmani
nirākāraṁ katham vande hyabhinnam śivam avyayam. (verse 2)

*How can I worship the formless, indivisible, ever-blissful Ātman
who fills the entire world in the Self with the Self by the Self only.*

‘*Katham*’ (how) is a key word that sets off an immediate arrest and gives us pause. It’s a sharp word, beginning with an occlusive

² Translations from the *Avadhūta Gītā* are by the author with assistance from Marcia Solomon.

consonant that stops the breath and delivers a call to attention. Indeed, if God is all, myself included, how can He be worshiped? The mind confronts a force bigger than itself, and is shattered. The next verse asks to whom shall I make obeisance, and the following verse, which also includes ‘*katham*’, ends speechless, the mind again struck down.

आत्मैव केवलं सर्वं भेदाभेदो न विद्यते।

अस्ति नास्ति कथं ब्रूयां विस्मयः प्रतिभाति मे॥

ātmaiva kevalam sarvaṁ bhedaḥbhedo na vidyate

asti nāsti katham brūyāṁ vismayaḥ pratibhāti me. (verse 4)

All this is the absolute Self only. It is neither with nor without differences. How can I speak of the real or the unreal? To me it appears wondrous!

[Note how the poet expresses nonduality in a minimal fashion, using a prefix or ‘na’ to indicate the opposite of a word (i.e., *bheda* + *abhedā*; *asti* + *na* + *asti*), while also creating repetition. This he does consistently throughout the poem. ‘*Kevalam*’ (absolute) and ‘*sarvam*’ (all) are words that appear over and over again.]

With verse 5, the scriptures enter the scene. They are the authority, the bedrock upon which all affirmations of union with the Self depend.

वेदान्तसारसर्वस्वं ज्ञानं विज्ञानमेव च।

अहमात्मा निराकारः सर्वव्यापी स्वभावतः ॥

vedānta-sāra-sarvasvaṁ jñānaṁ vijñānam eva ca

aham ātmā nirākāraḥ sarvavyāpī svabhāvataḥ. (verse 5)

The essence of the entire Vedānta is this supreme Knowledge only. ‘I am by nature the Ātman, the formless and all-pervading Self’.

Verse 6 states there is no doubt about the Truth of identity and likens the stainless Self to the sky. Verse 7 delivers the blow again with ‘*katham*’, this time asking how and to whom does joy and sorrow exist? Then, with the following verse, the rhythm changes, going from one meter (*anuṣṭubh*) to another (*triṣṭubh*). Repetition reigns (‘*karma śubhāśubham me*’ is repeated three times), and we are lifted from the plains to the mountain top on the wings of Dattātreyā, the embodiment of the *Ātman*!

न मानसं कर्म शुभाशुभं मे
 न कायिकं कर्म शुभाशुभं मे।
 न वाचिकं कर्म शुभाशुभं मे
 ज्ञानामृतं शुद्धमतीन्द्रियोऽहम्॥

na mānasam karma śubhāśubham me
 na kāyikam karma śubhāśubham me
 na vācikaṁ karma śubhāśubham me
 jñānāmṛtaṁ śuddham atīndriyo'ham.

(verse 8)

For me there is no mental activity good or bad. For me there is no physical activity good or bad. For me there is no verbal activity good or bad. I am immortal Knowledge, pure and beyond the senses.

[*Triṣṭubh* is a frequently used class of meters in Vedic and epic texts meant to convey a powerful or warlike impression. In this case, the particular meter in that class is called *upendravajrā*, *vajrā* meaning a thunderbolt, the weapon of Indra].³

In the next several verses, written in the previous meter, we are told there is no mind, and the Self is continuous, beyond space. Following that, in verse 11, the meter changes once again and we switch from the first person (*aham*) to the second person. The disciple, you and I, are now on center stage. '*Katham*' occurs twice, clearly prodding us by shame to share in the highest state beyond the mind.

त्वमेवमेकं हि कथं न बुद्ध्यसे
 समं हि सर्वेषु विमृष्टमव्ययम्।
 सदोदितोऽसि त्वमखण्डितः प्रभो
 दिवा च नक्तं च कथं हि मन्यसे॥

tvam evam ekaṁ hi katham na buddhyase
 samaṁ hi sarveṣu vimṛṣṭam avyayam
 sadodito'si tvam akhaṇḍitaḥ prabho
 divā ca naktam ca katham hi manyase.

(verse 11)

Why do you not understand that you are the One, alike in all and eternal? Ever-shining and indivisible, O Splendid One, how can day or night have meaning for you?

³ See *Croaking Frogs* by Les Morgan for a thorough treatment of Sanskrit metrics and figures of speech.

[The verse, which is 12 syllables per quarter line, is in the *jagati* class of meters. Most of the time in Chapter One, the poet moves from *anuṣṭubh* to *triṣṭubh*, like in the *Mahābhārata*, producing a jarring affect. The first three words, ‘*tvam evam ekam*’ (you are One) are like a beating drum. ‘*Samam sarveṣu*’ (equally perceived in all) occurs frequently throughout the text.]

Verse 12 tells us to know beyond doubt that the One Self is everywhere and asks, using ‘*katham*’, why we (you and I) divide the Indivisible. Good question! Why, indeed, do we persist in denying our very nature? The next four verses continue to affirm union with the Self, while rejecting birth, death, the body, senses and the universe. Verse 17 sums it all up and is haunting. ‘*Katham*’, of course, is there to question and give us pause.

जन्म मृत्युर्न ते चित्तं बन्धमोक्षौ शुभाशुभौ।
कथं रोदिषि रे वत्स नामरूपं न ते न मे॥

janma mṛtyurna te cittam bandhamokṣau śubhāśubhau
katham rodiṣi re vatsa nāma-rūpaṁ na te na me. (verse 17)

*For you there is no birth, death, mind, bondage, liberation,
good nor evil. Why, O child, do you weep? Name and form do
not exist for you and me!*

[Note the enchanting repetition in ‘*mokṣau śubhāśubhau*’. Read it aloud to feel its beauty.]

In the second line of the verse, ‘*rodiṣi*’ from ‘*rud*’, meaning to cry, weep, lament, is an important word in the *Avadhūta Gītā* and is used repeatedly. It also appears, to great effect, in Queen Madalasa’s Lullaby from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. Fortunate for her children, she introduced them to *Ātma jñāna* from infancy.

शुद्धोऽसि रे बाल न तेऽस्ति नाम
कृतं हि वै तत कल्पनयाधुनैव।
पञ्चात्मकं देहमिदं न तेऽस्ति
त्वं वास्य रे रोदिषि कस्य हेतोः॥

śuddho’si re bāla na te’sti nāma
kṛtam hi vai tata kalpanayādhunaiva
pañcātmakam deham idam na te’sti
tvam vāsya re rodiṣi kasya hetoḥ.

*O silly boy, you are without qualities and you have no name!
This body is made of material elements and mental fabrication.
It does not belong to you, nor do you belong to it. So dear child,
why are you still crying?*⁴

Verse 18 is a wonderful reminder of Ramana Maharshi's *Ēkānma Pañchakam*, where in the first verse the *jīva* is wandering about the entire world through innumerable births until it remembers its true nature. Here, after questioning with '*katham*', we are told to renounce and be happy!

अहो चित्तं कथं भ्रान्तः प्रधावसि पिशाचवत्।
अभिन्नं पश्य चात्मानं रागत्यागात्सुखी भव ॥

aho citta katham bhrāntaḥ pradhāvasi piśācavat
abhinnam paśya cātmanam rāga-tyāgāt sukhī bhava. (verse 18)

O mind! Why do you wander about confused like a demonic ghost? Behold the undivided Ātman. Let go of attachment and be happy!

Except for several verses at the end, the rest of Chapter One continues to describe and extol the Ātman in a state of rapture. Like waves, frequent changes in meter and the persistent use of '*katham*' occur to awaken us. The use of '*katham*' as a weapon can be compared to Ramana Maharshi's *brahmāstram* 'Who am I?' Suri Nagamma writes about it beautifully in her *Letters*:

You may ask, "Who gave the name of 'brahmasthram' to the stock reply of Bhagavan, 'Find out who you are?'" Two or three years back, when a sannyasi boasted about having read all books on religious matters and began asking Bhagavan all sorts of questions, he repeatedly gave the same answer, "Find out who you are." When the sannyasi persisted in his meaningless questions and arguments, Bhagavan in a firm tone asked him, "You have been asking me so many questions and entering into so many arguments. Why don't you reply to my questions and then argue? Who are you? First answer my question. Then I will give you a suitable reply. Tell me first who it is that is arguing." He could not reply, and so went away.

⁴ The lullaby is from Chapter 25, verse 11. Translation by Marcia Solomon.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Some time later, I developed this idea and wrote five verses on 'Divya Astram' and showed them to Bhagavan, when he said, "Long ago when Nayana (Ganapati Muni) was here, Kapali also used to be here. If they wanted to ask me anything, they would fold their hands first and say, 'Swami, Swami, if you will promise not to brandish your brahmastram, I will ask a question.' If during conversation the words 'Who are you' escaped my lips, he used to say, 'So you have fired your brahmastram. What more can I say?' They called it brahmastram and you are calling it 'Divya Astram'." After that, I too started using the word brahmastram. Really, who is not humbled by that astram?⁵

What a blessing that *ātma vicāra*, Ramana's divine weapon, has been made available to us in modern times! ▲

(To be continued)

⁵ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 22nd January, 1946.

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The Relevance of Some Jain Concepts

BHARAT MEHTA

Reverence for all forms of life is one among the main tenets of Jainism. Respect for all living beings starts with the recognition of this fact. It does not matter if the life form is an unicellular amoeba or something even smaller and ultra-microscopic. That is the respect Jainism accords to the living world. What is important is not the size, but that it is living and throbbing with life. Jainism behoves its followers, to so conduct their lives that they do not harm any form of life. Harm here goes beyond the physical aspect of killing or hurting and extends right up to the source of all action, which is in the realm of the mind, thinking. Such is the minute interpretation of every concept in Jainism.

The word Jain, coming from the word *Jona*, means a conqueror (of his own mind). This is the ultimate frontier to conquer and anyone who has been able to do so, is Enlightened and is called *Jina*. In the last 2,500 years, there has been only one who is known to have achieved this exalted status, viz Mahaveer. Such is the apparent impossibility of this spiritual conquest.

Before getting on further I would like to cover very briefly, the history of Jainism. The last exponent of Jainism who had attained the exalted status of Enlightenment was Lord Mahaveer who was the 24th in the chain of Tirthankaras, who had attained *Nirvan* or Salvation. This was around the sixth century before Christ. But Jainism was prevalent even before Lord Mahaveer's time as the relics in the form of idols, seals and tablets found among the ruins at Mohenjadaro and Harappa unquestionably refer to Lord Rishabdev who was the first Tirthankara. According to Jain history, these 24 Tirthankaras were preceded by another 24 before and so on. From this, it can be safely surmised that, Jainism dates back to a period where its beginning cannot be determined in time, literally providing a peep into eternity. So it is important to understand that Lord Mahaveer was not the founder of Jainism, but one who revived it in this era.

The mind controls the five senses and the emotions. Through the emotions we connect or sever our relationship with the world around us. These emotions are greed, anger, lust, pride, possessiveness, hatred, jealousy and others. For someone, who has been able to discipline the mind to such an extent, that he or she can voluntarily and deliberately control what he or she chooses to see, touch, hear, speak and smell is well on the path to liberation. With such phenomenal restraint, this person will never have to regret any decision in life, because every response is preceded with discretion and discrimination. This mental faculty acts as a protective armour, an impregnable defence against reacting impulsively. This is comparatively easy when we face major issues in life, because we have to step back and muster our forces to deliberate and plan our next move. The bigger problem is, the numerous smaller instances that spring up with surprising regularity, all through the day, that catch us unawares. This is our real test. Have we reached that state of rock-like immobility? Can we stay in control irrespective of the external provocation? Mind control therefore becomes the most stringent test of self-discipline. Sages, renowned for their knowledge, penance and concentration have failed when it came to exercising control over small irritations and discomforts.

Hence, Jainism accords the highest priority to discipline of the mind. To help us progress on this difficult path, it has laid down a few principles, following which, one can reach this state of equanimity. I

plan to present a select few of these tenets. The criterion behind this selection is their importance and relevance to present day life, even though these were enunciated 2,500 years ago. They are eternally relevant.

We were introduced to Jainism as kids, when our parents would selectively place before us some simple concepts. Apart from growing up with these, what also added to our understanding was the fact that they seemed relatable to our world. The first principle was that of AHIMSA, meaning Nonviolence. My Father would always borrow ideas and words from other sources, as confining the discussion to religious terminology would deter us. For instance, he explained Ahimsa by quoting Dr. Albert Schweitzer's famous words, "Reverence for Life". This external validation to our young impressionable minds made us realise early in life the importance of keeping an open mind. This was further simplified when he told us that what Dr. Schweitzer meant was "Live and let live." But Jainism had a small twist to it by shifting the emphasis from self to others. Jains would prefer to read this as, "Let live and live." In this context, it is important to remember that life did not just include man, animal, bird, reptile, fish but also plants, insects, bacteria and virus. All such life forms are equally worthy of our attention by way of protection as we go about our daily chores.

Ahimsa has a wider application, when we observe the diet of Jains. They are vegetarians. There is no need to resort to killing an animal just for titillating the taste buds. Today science has proved that a vegetarian diet can promote health and fitness in an optimum manner. If man had followed this dietary habit, the ecological status of the world today would be in perfect balance, a concept enshrined in the words, 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam' meaning, the world, consisting of all living forms, is one family. Imagine the harmony, respect and tolerance that would exist in the ecosystem of our planet, earth.

While most interpretations of Ahimsa confine their focus on acts of killing and hurting, the total ambit of Ahimsa is a lot more. Violence, like any other action, originates in the mind. To counterbalance these inhuman tendencies, the mind is also endowed with positive energy, such as Reverence, Respect, Empathy, Love, Care and Compassion. Let us find expression through them, to spread goodness and joy, in making this world more peaceful and safe.

As my reading habit increased, I came across a famous anecdote from the life of Mahatma Gandhi which gave me a subtle insight into Compassion. While boarding a train compartment, one of Gandhiji's slippers fell through the gap between the compartment and platform. There was no way to retrieve it while the train was still in the station. Realising this, Gandhiji in an instant took off the other slipper and threw it where the first had landed, so that, whoever finds it will have a use of the pair. This is the need of the hour. We need to feel the pain of those suffering and reach out with whatever resources we can muster, even a pair of slippers, to help and give them a sense of hope, which itself is a luxury in their miserable lives.

The resolution of conflict, is another area in which Jainism seems to be concerned with a sense of urgency. I say this as I look around the world situation today. Any conflict, seems to be preceded by a difference of opinion. The moment you say, "this is this" the tone carries an ominous harshness. It presupposes that, the one making the statement is not going to be open to any other interpretation, thereby implying a degree of aggressively asserting a desire to dominate. From a certain perspective, this is a form of violence. It presupposes a fierce intolerance, denying any opportunity for an opposing viewpoint from being heard.

The way this was explained to us when we were young was through a classic example. Students in a class were asked the colour of a banana. Those who came from affluent backgrounds described it as yellow with brown spots. The poorer students who could only afford the overripe ones would say it is dark brown. From the point of view of ANEKANTVAD, neither could be considered as wrong. Each was correct from a particular point of view.

This justifies the fact that reality has many facets, that can coexist simultaneously. It challenges any categorically asserted viewpoint, which claims to be the truth. We have seen how dogmatism or not accepting other view point is the cause behind so many wars. The increasing awareness, that no specific view point can be applied unconditionally, at all times and under any circumstance, must be seen as a sobering influence, helping to dilute any rigidity in one's stand. It underlines the limitation of human perception, from making sweeping generalisations.

Once again, the current situation around us, brings us to another important Jain principle. In a world where resources are limited, for Lord Mahaveer to have foreseen an imbalance in the distribution of wealth and that also 2,500 years ago when the total human population was a fraction of what it is today, speaks volumes about his foresight. He addressed this by laying down the principle of APARIGRAHA, or Non-possession. Accumulation of material objects, in excess of one's legitimate needs, was equated as an offence guilty of theft. Gandhiji makes a very profound statement when he says that, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed."

If we complied with this principle with sincerity, the problem of social inequality would never have happened. There would be peaceful coexistence, leading to greater harmony and peace. Lord Mahaveer then goes on to explain that, non-possession transcends the limited connotation of the word, when it is applied only in the context of material possessions. He goes on to elucidate that non-possession applies, equally to not rigidly adhering to one's views and beliefs. By not being overly protective of these and assuming a softer stand, opens the gateway for tranquillity and peace to reign. Attachment to one's goal to seek salvation, is the only form of attachment that is permitted. All others take us away from our path.

As regards the theory of KARMA, Jainism has a slightly different perspective to it, though the basic concept across Hinduism remains same. However, I would like to highlight what I consider a slight variant in the way Jainism approaches Karma theory. Like others, it emphasises that every individual is solely responsible for the outcome of their actions. In Jainism we tend to believe that there can be no external influence, that can dilute the intensity of retribution that is ordained by the wrong committed. The tendency to be dependent on the prayers and offerings of others, in the fond hope it will mitigate the adverse effects of any wrongdoing, becomes a futile expectation. The doer of the act, is solely responsible for the entire repercussions. Acceptance of this fact, makes one assume full responsibility for everything done.

When young, I always remembered the strict need to comply with a certain set of rules. The reasons were very evident, as they did not need any theoretical explanations. But that did not usually end in acquitting myself as was required. So I would be made to undertake

a promise, a vow, that I would not commit the given wrong which could be as simple as not telling a lie, not using abusive language, refraining from quarrelling with my sisters and so on. The moment the vow was administered, adherence to it seemed so much easier, than when left to my own free will. I realised later how a vow protected me from the temptation of an unguarded life. This system of VRATA went a long way in building up willpower and restraint. The ultimate goal of course was to control the mind and I am glad I was exposed to this concept in young age.

In fact for any imbalance that we encounter in life, it is very likely that there would be some form of specific correction available in Jainism. This time I am referring to the dismal position accorded to women in society. Once again, the astute perception and sagacity of Lord Mahaveer is noticed in his handling of this aspect, in which women were condemned to a miserable existence, with literally no presence in community life. Jainism was perhaps the first to accord equal status to women. This elevation in their stature reached the highest rung, when women could be inducted as priests, 2,500 years ago.

In keeping with the philosophy of being tolerant, as opposed to being rigid, Jainism welcomed anyone in its fold, even those who were born in non-Jain families, because there was no precondition of exclusive birth rights. It had a very forgiving approach, as it never denied anyone from following its practices, irrespective of their caste, community, gender or any such label. Gandhiji's mother was a Hindu, but deeply followed Jainism, which perhaps left an indelible impression on his mind. Later in life, Gandhiji met Shrimad Rajchandra, a Jain scholar of very high standing. They stayed in touch through letters and occasional meetings. Such was the impact of Shrimad Rajchandra on Gandhiji's life that he adopted Ahimsa as a cardinal principle not only in his personal life, but structured his political career around it. Satyagraha, an offshoot of Ahimsa, finally got India its freedom. From monks and ordinary people, here was a national leader, embroiled in a revolution, using the precepts of Jainism with courage and dexterity. In turn, it moulded the political life of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. So Jainism, from being a religion of subtleties and minute interpretation, could also stand up against the might of the British empire and proved, that it

was a way of life and could present a defiant look, if it was needed, to protect fellow human beings.

As laymen, there would be numerous instances in life when we would have intentionally or unintentionally harmed someone through thought, word or deed. On the eve of Samvatsari, once in a year, all Jains seek forgiveness from all members of the community for any such harm done. Ego often prevents us from following this practice. We expect the other to initiate this move and stay attached to our status and stature. This stepping down from the pedestal of arrogance can only come to those who are humble. This sort of humility is a mark of the brave, not the meek. Again, we see how Jainism is a way life, of respecting life.

So we have seen how Jainism has foreseen the problems faced by humanity in 2020 and for which Lord Mahaveer had appropriate approaches enunciated to alleviate mankind from suffering. Jain philosophy emphasises in understanding of oneself. This enquiry into the depths of one's inner being, will eventually bring the seeker to emancipation. The knowledge of the true self is important because we identify with obody so completely, that we overlook the fact that it is mortal and by making it the centre of all our activities, we miss the main purpose of birth, in this human form.

Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi's exhortation to all his followers was to find out, the nature of oneself. Relentless enquiries about one's coming to birth, from where did one come, the purpose of this life and from this life, where is one to go? In short, the famous line, 'Who am I?' This was in complete alignment with what Lord Mahaveer preached. The sage from Tiruvannamalai, urged all his devotees to dwell on this question with calm introspection, to bifurcate the body from the soul that inhabits it, for the limited journey of this lifetime, which in Jain parlance is referred to as ANYATVA BHAVANA. He beseeched all to consider this body as a vehicle, on this journey of life, to be utilised to improve our future lives, with the ultimate goal of aborting the endless cycle of birth and death.

My ultimate take at the end of this writing, is to say that there is no Jain, no label that makes Jainism any different from others. We are all in it together, with the same goal. Our paths may differ, but the acceptance of the end goal, unifies us as pilgrim travellers, in our quest for salvation. ▲



The Descent of the Divine

SRI SARATH BABUJI

The story of the life and mission of a perfect saint is an eternal theme that has no ‘end’, and so no ‘beginning’ too, in reality. Yet the thrilling saga of spiritual adventure and perfection of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi’s life ‘started’ when he was born to Alagammal and Sundaram Iyer on 29th December 1879 at Tiruchuzhi, a small village near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. The child, christened as Venkataraman, grew into a normal lad betraying no signs of a prodigy whatsoever. He proved more dynamic in the playground than in the classroom. There was nothing unusual about Venkataraman except two things: one was his abnormally sound sleep. He used to fall asleep almost inert like a corpse, and any efforts, including violent beating to wake him up, used to prove futile. The other unusual thing about him was his inexplicable intuitive fascination with Arunachala from his earliest days. Even though he did not know anything about Arunachala, the name used to effect a strange and mysterious feeling of awe and affection in him. But, except for this subconscious love of Arunachala, he was a very normal lad without any remarkable aptitude for devotion and piety.

One day the book *Periyapurānam*, which contains the biographical accounts of the famous sixty-three Saivite saints known as *Nāyaṅmārs*,

came into his hands quite accidentally. “The first thing that evoked bhakti in me,” Maharshi explained, “was the book *Periyapurāṇam*. Before that, the sixty-three images of the *Nāyaṇmārs* in the temple were mere images and nothing more. But afterwards (i.e. after reading the book), they gained a new significance for me.”

Just a few months after his reading of *Periyapurāṇam*, Venkataraman was blessed with an experience which transformed the whole course of his life. In July 1896, one day he was lying in a room upstairs in his house at Madurai. He was in a quiet and relaxed mood. Suddenly he was gripped by an intense fear of death. There was no obvious reason for such a fear. It was quite spontaneous. Yet, he suddenly felt that he was going to die and ‘he’ was being ‘lost’. It seemed to him that his body had actually turned rigid. Yet some innate fortitude made him watch the whole process as he lay stretched out like a corpse in rigor mortis. He found at once that apart from his body, the ‘I’ exists and that ‘I’ was a force or current, a centre of energy playing upon the body despite the inactivity of the latter. He realised it was that current that constituted his personality and that kept him moving, acting, talking, thinking, etc.

The spiritual alchemy of that experience was so thaumaturgic that it completely changed his mental attitudes and habits. His former preferences for some foods and aversion to others dropped off completely. He used to swallow any food whether it was fresh or rotten, tasty or tasteless. Worldly duties and school became merely mechanical. They were performed ‘possessed’ all the while by the *āveśam* (to use Maharshi’s own terminology) or the current. Whenever he was left alone, the powerful current or *āveśam* would overcome him completely and he would sit rapt absorbed in it, charmed by his own Self.¹

¹ *Āveśam* (Skt. ‘possession’ or ‘pervasion’) is the subtle descent and infusion of divine grace or presence (*sannidhi*) into a sacred image (*ārcamūrti*) rendering it properly consecrated and worthy of worship. The Lord is thought to be physically present in such an *ārca* without compromising or localizing in any way His supreme power. The term was used respectfully by Sri Ramana Maharshi to describe his initial experience of Self-realisation (*cf.*, *Self-Realisation: Life & Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* by B.V. Narasimha Swami [Sri Ramansramam, 2002], p. 18).

Frequently he was drawn to the Meenakshi Sundaresa Temple at Madurai where he used to stand in blissful ecstasy before the idols of Śiva, Meenakshi and the sixty-three *Nāyanmārs*. At times, he would sob with tears trickling down his cheeks, shaken by fervent emotion. Sometimes he would pray to the Lord with a yearning heart for the same grace that was shown to those saints. Mad after God, at times he would be imagining and expecting God to suddenly drop down from Heaven before him. He was gradually tuned to a continuous feeling of his personality as being the current, whatever he did, whether he read, spoke, walked or rested.

Despite his efforts to pretend that he was quite normal, the change was so glaring that everybody in the house and at school noticed it. When the elders at home pressed him to tell them what had happened and why he was so pensive, he simply told them that it was all due to some unbearable headache. But, Maharshi explained later, “It was not headache, but an inexpressible anguish which I suppressed at the time. I remember how anxious my aunt grew on account of my ‘headache’. She used to rub some ointment on my forehead every day. My anguish continued until I left Madurai and reached this place (Arunachala).”

About six weeks passed in that state. One day Venkataraman was working at his desk on some homework in Bain’s English Grammar. After a while he felt the whole job meaningless, dry and drab. Automatically, he set his notebook aside, and sat cross-legged, absorbed in the Self. His elder brother, who was in the same room, had been watching the whole drama. Quite annoyed at his brother’s continuous indifference to studies, he remarked sarcastically, “What use is all this to such a one?” meaning that one who wished to become a *sādhu* had nothing to do with worldly duties by staying in the house. Though not hurt at the taunt, Venkataraman too felt instantaneously that he was not worth the salt he was enjoying at home while continuing in that state of mind. He resolved to leave his home at once. But where to go? Arunachala came to his mind spontaneously. He felt that his brother’s remonstrance was indeed prompted by Arunachala and took it as a call from Him. He did not wait even a moment longer, but got up at once, took five rupees from his brother’s trunk, left a parting message there, and set out to reach Tiruvannamalai. Unconsciously, he was following the scriptural injunction, “*Yadā Herēva Virajet*

thadha havārēva pravrājet’ (‘Renounce the world the very day you feel dispassion’).

The seventeen years young Venkataraman, led by an out-of-date Atlas (time-table) of India, got into the wrong train for Tiruvannamalai. He would have gone astray but for the timely advice of a mysterious Muslim Moulvi who accosted him in the train and diverted him to catch the right train at a particular station, then disappeared as mysteriously.

As soon as he set his foot on the sacred soil of Tiruvannamalai, on September 1st 1896, he ran straight to Sri Arunachaleswara Temple where he silently stood before the Lord – alone – overwhelmed by joy and excitement. Since then, till his *Mahāsamādhi* in 1950, he never set his foot away from Arunachala even once.

He came out of the temple and started wandering around the town. As he was walking near a tank to the east of the town, a stranger accosted him for no obvious reason and enquired if he would like to have his head shaved. Puzzled, Venkataraman meekly nodded his head. The stranger took him to the house of a barber who worked in the temple barber shop.

There, Venkataraman got his tuft completely removed. Then he moved along to a nearby tank, stripped off the dhoti he was wearing, tore off a strip from it, put it on as a codpiece and threw away the rest, including the remaining money he had. He never touched money again in his life and remained wearing only a codpiece. Then he cast off the sacred thread, which is a sign of caste, and returned to the temple. In spite of the custom to have a bath after a shave or haircut, he simply ignored it thinking that it would be a waste to give the block of his body the luxury of a bath. But suddenly there was a short shower of rain, and by the time he got back to the temple he was virtually bathed in the heavenly waters. It is interesting to note that even though young Venkataraman was ignorant of the scriptures and the tradition, he was spontaneously following the scriptural injunction to the letter. For *Brahmopaniṣat* says,

A sage must shave his head along with the tuft, and by removing the external sacred thread must put on the thread (principle) of Transcendental Brahman (Reality) which is indestructible.

Superb is the knowledge of the saint who has the ‘tuft’ of one-pointed focus and devotion, who ‘puts on’ the sacred thread of knowledge (*jñāna*) and sticks to the knowledge perseveringly. That *jñāna* is held as the most holy.

Then he sat in the temple compound rapt in deep self-absorption. He seldom moved. He never spoke to anybody. He did not take any vow of silence, yet he was so absorbed in the bliss of silent introversion that he did not feel like talking to anyone. Silence came to him quite naturally and spontaneously. Moreover, he found a *sādhu* observing a vow of silence and saw how convenient it was as the crowds did not pester him with questions.

He was so oblivious of his body and its needs that somebody or other had to spoon-feed him as he sat motionless in deep *samādhi*. Soon he became the cynosure of the town urchins who, out of their boyish cruelty and mischief, started pelting the young Swami with stones. A great saint known as Sri Seshadri Swami, who had been moving about the town as an *avadhūta*, at times used to come to the rescue of the young ascetic. But this soon roused the curiosity of the townspeople in the Swami, because it was a wonder for them to find that Seshadri Swami who used to be Indifference Incarnate, was so interested in the young *tapasvin*. In order to escape the increasing assaults from the town urchins and to avoid the attention of the crowds, the Swami had to shift from place to place in the temple compound and in the town’s vicinity.

In those days the Swami’s body was dirty and his hair unkempt, as he had no bath for months together since his arrival at Tiruvannamalai. He was even nude for some time, like an *avadhūta*. The Swami with scanty clothing and nothing to cover himself sat under some tree in the temple garden day in and day out, fully exposed to the extremes of tropical sun and cold. In the winter nights he would fold his legs, rest his head between them and remain motionless in that posture throughout the night. On seeing him in that condition people used to say, “He is sitting like a *jaḍa* (inert), he must be a mad fellow,” and pass on without paying any attention. But the Swami used to be amused at such talk and wish that such madness should overtake all the people. Describing those days, Maharshi himself recounted

later, “Days and nights would pass without my being aware of their passing. I entertained no idea of bathing or cleansing even when I had defecated. The face got begrimed, the hair grew long and became one clotted mass like wax, the nails grew long. People used to say that I was very old in years though so young in appearance, and that I had existed like that for centuries.”

After shifting from place to place, he reached Pavazhakkunru in 1898, the place which is believed to be the feet of Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon. From there he ascended the Holy Hill as if to sit in his Father’s lap in all his glory. Henceforth the Hill became his happy abode, till 1922, when he descended to the Southern foot of the Hill where the present Sri Rāmanāśramam stands.

Maharshi’s love for Arunachala was something ineffable. He was always untiring and enthusiastic in narrating the stories describing the greatness of Arunachala, whom he used to refer to as his father and Guru. Even the mere mention of the name Arunachala would evoke an emotional fervour in him and, while narrating the Puranic stories about Arunachala and the sixty-three *Nāyaṅmārs*, he used to be so moved with emotion – tears rushed forth from his eyes, his hair stood on end, his voice became choked –that it would be difficult for him to continue with the narration unbroken.

He used to aver, “Some *Śakti* (power) draws people from all parts of the globe to this center,” meaning Arunachala. If any devotee suggested that the *Śakti* was none other than Maharshi himself he would briskly retort, “What *Śakti* drew me here originally? That same *Śakti* draws all others also.”

The twelve years between 1896 and 1908 witnessed Maharshi engrossed in deep introspection with his eyes mostly closed to the external world. From 1908 onwards another phase of divine activity started issuing forth through him with great vigour. As his first ‘death experience’ at Madurai initiated the first phase, a second ‘death’ ushered in the second phase of his life. That was in about 1912. While he was returning to Virupaksha cave from a nearby tank after an oil bath, he suddenly felt faint. He sat down near a rock, cross-legged in *paḍmāsana*, lest he should fall. Suddenly, as Maharshi himself described later, the vision of the natural scenery in front of him

vanished and he felt as if a pervasive curtain of bright white light was drawn across his view. The blood circulation and breathing stopped. The skin took on a deathlike hue and got duller. He felt the muscular heart on the left had stopped working. But still the body continued erect in that posture, without even leaning against the rock. One Vasudeva Sastry, who was by the side of Maharshi at that time, was scared at the sudden ‘death’ of Maharshi, clasped him in embrace and began to lament. But, as Maharshi explained later, “All the time I was feeling that the Heart center on the right was working as well as ever. This state continued for about fifteen or twenty minutes. Then suddenly something shot out from the right to the left resembling a rocket bursting in air. The circulation revived with tremendous force and there was perspiration at every pore. Then I felt all the subtle forces of the body which till then had been submerged, suddenly breaking out again with great strength and vehemence. The living colour etc, reappeared on the skin. I opened my eyes and said, ‘Let’s go’. Without further trouble I came to the Virupaksha cave. This was the only fit I ever had in which blood circulation and respiration stopped.”

Correlating the experience in terms of Yoga, Maharshi explains that when the Yogi’s *Kunḍalinī* is awakened, a *nāḍī* known as *Paranāḍī* rises up from the *Mūlādhāra* (coccyx) to the *Sahasrāra* (crown) through *Suṣumnā*, and again descends to the ‘Heart’ – the Spiritual Heart on the right side just below the chest – as a symbol of the final step. The Heart is what our scriptures call *Hṛḍaya Granthi*; it is the descent of the divine (*avaṭāra*). In *kēvala nirvikalpa samādhi* it opens and shuts again afterwards. But when the *samādhi* becomes *sahaja* (natural), it opens for good. Maharshi’s experience vouchsafes the truth of the scriptural descriptions and reminds one of the similar ‘death’ of Sai Baba of Shirdi, who ‘died’ and again came to life after three days in 1896. In the latter case Baba had foretold his temporary death whereas Maharshi had not. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa says that only those who belong to *Īśvarakōṭi* (divine beings descended to the human plane to uplift seekers) outlive the complete annihilation of the *Hṛḍaya Granthi*. The mystery of mysteries is that Maharshi’s spiritual heart on the right was so dynamic that its vibrations were palpable even to the external physical touch. One Viswanadha Iyer,

Narayana Reddy, and some others were privileged to feel Maharshi's Heart Center to be on the right by placing their hands on his chest! Maharshi too admitted the fact many a time subsequently!

It is really wonderful to see how various animals responded to Maharshi, acknowledging his greatness. The sagacity and human-like behaviour of Lakshmi the cow is well-known. The wild monkeys of the neighbouring forests used to be very humble and amicable with Maharshi, seeking his arbitration whenever they had any strife and for solace when they were in trouble. It was really a sight for the gods to see hundreds of untamed animals falling into an orderly queue to receive *prasād* from Maharshi's hands. Even wild animals like tigers, cheetahs and cobras behaved as tame creatures and even used to obey his commands meekly.

When Maharshi's mother Alagammal, who came to live with her saint-son, was on her deathbed, Maharshi sat by her side looking at her intently and placed his right hand on her heart and his left hand on the head, till she breathed her last. Evidently the spiritual force generated by Maharshi's touch had enabled her soul to merge in the Heart and thus get liberated. Then he rose up and said to His devotees in a jovial tone, "Now we can eat! Come along! There is no pollution." Maharshi's mother's body was interred at the foot of the Arunachala Hill. At that time, when pure water was not available for the funeral, Maharshi stopped at a spot, removed some earth from the ground, and lo! There rose up a spring of pure water which people call Sri Ramana Tirtham. Perhaps that was symbolic of the spring of the holy waters of life emerging from the Holy Hill of Arunachala through Maharshi. Maharshi eventually came to live at the foot of the Holy Hill, and the devotees thought that it was to make himself easily available to seekers who were unable to ascend the Hill to meet him, that He himself 'descended' (from His Father's lap) to fulfil His Father's Mission.

Maharshi's personal life can be deemed to have practically ended after he came down from the Hill and settled at Pali Tirtham. He was always seen to be doing some work or other, like cooking, cleaning the vessels, grinding grain or gram, cutting vegetables, stitching leaf-plates, hewing wood, smoothening coconut shells and making cups and spoons out of them, chiselling the fallen branches of trees

into walking sticks, or he would be correcting press proofs, making copies of sacred texts for devotees' use, binding notebooks, etc., or he would be seen feeding the squirrels, monkeys, peacocks, and other beasts and birds, calming the dogs and the sort. It would be puzzling to see the great Master working at these seemingly unimportant and trivial jobs with absorbing interest and perfection. It reminds one of the cryptic declaration of the Zen poet P'ang Yün [Layman P'ang, 740-808 A.D.]: "Miraculous power and marvellous activity – drawing water and cutting wood."

Maharshi always insisted that his doors should always be open for the devotees. His standing watchwords to the Ashram management were: "People come for me at all hours, they may have to leave immediately, why fix separate hours for *darśan*? If you don't permit them to come in, I myself will go out and meet them. You may lock me in." How different from the modern so-called 'Bhagavans' and 'Gurus' who require 'appointments' to be seen sitting comfortably cushioned amidst the corniced walls of their luxuriously furnished A.C. rooms.

Bhagavan's way of instruction was in strict accord with the great Masters and the tradition. He never formally initiated anybody with any mantra or otherwise. He used to say that true initiation must be through silence. It was the experience of innumerable devotees who flocked to him from far and wide that there was a peculiar spiritual aura or influence in his presence which pushed their minds toward the Self automatically.

Once, a chronic paralytic for about 25 years was brought to Maharshi. All treatments and pilgrimages had proved futile. As soon as he was brought into the presence of Bhagavan, lo! He stood up by himself and walked up to Maharshi and prostrated to him and handed over his horoscope to Maharshi in which it was written that he would suffer from paralysis for 25 years, but would be cured of it by the *darśan* of a *Mahāpuruṣa*. This miracle happened in broad daylight to the utter amazement of the many devotees who were present at the time. But Maharshi too shared in the surprise and expressed his happiness that the man was cured. Such miracles were seen around him umpteen number of times but Maharshi never claimed he was the performer. He remained a humble son of the divine Father all

through his life saying, “A son is beholden to his Father.” Whenever devotees suggested it was the *Śakti* (power) of Bhagavan that drew innumerable souls from all corners the globe to Tiruvannamalai, Maharshi would immediately retort, “What *Śakti* drew Bhagavan here originally? It is Lord Arunachala who draws them all to Him.” May God bless the miracle-mongering ‘Godmen’ with such divine humility and meekness.

His total neglect of his body during the early days took its toll in the form of a sarcoma in 1949. In spite of his persistent objections, all systems of medicine were used but in vain. He was operated thrice but on each occasion he never allowed anaesthesia. Yet, he never winced in pain. When the devotees were disheartened at his failing health, Bhagavan used to say, “They say that I am dying, but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here.” True to his words even after he attained *Mahāsamādhi* on 14th of April 1950, his divine presence and guidance have been continuing and lighting the fire of *jñāna* (knowledge) in the hearts of innumerable devotees.

Rare is a saint adored and praised by all contemporary saints and the masses beyond all controversy. Great saints like the former Kanchipuram Śaṅkarācārya (Chandrasekharendra Saraswatī), Swāmī Rāmdās of Kanhangad, Avadhūta Pitchamma of Kurumaddali, Śrī Poondi Swāmī of Kalasappakam, Mahatma Gandhi, Paramahaṃsa Yogānanda, and many others paid their respectful homage to Bhagavān. As Śrī Ānandamayī Mā declared, “He was the Sun and we are its rays.”

Om Namō Bhagavate Śrī Aruṅācala Ramaṅāya

POSTSCRIPT

This remarkable biographical essay is a loving tribute from one young saint to the great saint Śrī Ramana Maharshi whose holy life had inspired him to take up the path and reach his present state. Its author, Sri Sarath Babuji (1954-2010), was already free when he wrote this account for a souvenir published for the inauguration of the Shirdi Sai Baba Mandir in Vidyanagar, A.P., in March of 1981, under the auspices of his guru, Acharya Ekkirala Bharadwaja. Inspired by Sri



Sri Sarath Babuji

Ramana and sharing his love for Arunachala, Sri Babuji took much of his *sādhana* in Tiruvannamalai from August 1972 to July 1974, living in temple *maṇḍapams* and in caves on the Hill, subsisting on puffed rice and leaf-juice. Occasionally he passed nights on the porch of Sri Krishna Bhikshu's home near the Ashram, where they would talk of Sri Bhagavan. Krishna Bhikshu was a close devotee and author of Sri Bhagavan's most authentic biography in Telugu, *Sri Ramana Leela*, the only biography read and approved by Sri Bhagavan in his lifetime. From other old devotees like Sri Muruganar, Suri Nagamma, and Souris and Chalam, he heard first-hand accounts of Sri Bhagavan, and how his *bhakti* had impacted their lives even more than his *jñāna*.

Sri Babuji's *sādhana* culminated in August of 1974, when, at the behest of his guru, he paid a month-long visit to the great Avadhūta, Sri Poondi Swami of Kalasapakkam, where he had vision of his chosen deity, Shirdi Sai Baba, in the Swami's presence. He was barely 20 years old. Later in life, when his own fame as a saint had spread and he was asked what relation these three great saints had in his life, he remarked, "Sri Bhagavan showed me the vessel. Sri Poondi Swami emptied it and Shirdi Sai Baba filled it." Although intended only as a metaphor (since experientially the three are one), its charming plausibility ensured its survival as an *obiter dictum*. Until the end of his life, Sri Babuji maintained a small flat in Tiruvannamalai and spent part of every year there. His karmic ties with Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala, plus his intimate contacts with other great saints and peers, may explain Sri Babuji's deep empathy with Sri Bhagavan's *sādhana* and his narrative focus on Sri Bhagavan's life rather than his teachings. From their lives it is clear that both Sri Bhagavan and Sri Babuji felt one of the best forms of *svādhyāya* is reading lives of the saints.

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The Opportunities and Joys of Seva, Service

M.B. ATHREYA

To render *seva*, service, has always been one of the great satisfactions and joys of life. Without the *seva* of our parents, we would not have this great boon of human life. The *seva* of the mother, in particular to carry us in her womb, for nine months, give us birth, and nourish us in the early, vulnerable years is beyond recompense. Those who have done *Matru Srardham*, mother's death anniversary rites, in Gaya, among Hindus, will recall the 64 slokas that we recite, conveying our *paschatapam*, contrition, on all the innumerable troubles, pains and worries we have given her from conception to, at least, adulthood; and, sometimes, even later; and, in a few cases, even till her death. She has done all that *seva*, of course, out of her unconditional love and affection for us; and not in expectation of our *paschatapam*; or *prayaschittam*, amends; or any other reward, although it is our *dharma*, duty, to do all these. The father, elder

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siblings, teachers, friends and similar *sevaks*, honorable servants, have also contributed to much that is good in our life. It is our turn to return this to the next generation, and also to those among our contemporaries, and seniors, who may be in need of different kinds of *seva*. While total personal, national and global income and wealth are growing, the need for *seva* remains, due to various reasons such as inequalities, unemployment, poverty, disability, illness, old age, addictions, etc. In this article, we will look at the deep meaning of *seva*; the emerging major issues of the 21st century; the many types of consequent needs and opportunities for *seva*; strategies for such *seva*; the qualities required in a *sevak*; how to develop oneself as a better and better *sevak*; and a draft action plan for a worthwhile life of increasingly intensive *seva*.

The Meaning of *seva*

In Sanskrit, the word *seva* is derived from '*saha eva*', to be one with another person, who is in need, and therefore, serve her/his needs. Such service is part of the values of most religions. *Seva* is a prominent core value in all Indic religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, in particular. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, probably the most well known Hindu text, the aspirant is advised to perform *Karma Yoga*, throughout life, as the path to *Gyana Yoga*, spiritual wisdom. As many readers would be aware, the central element of *Karma Yoga* is *nişkāma karma*, action without desire for its fruits. The action will benefit the needy. For the *sevak*, such helpful action is its own reward.

Sometimes, the *seva* may benefit not just an individual, but a group; an organisation; a community; nation; region; or even the world. The *Gita* advocates *seva* for *loka sangraha*, holding society together. Those people who have adequate income and wealth, can buy the goods and services they need in the market place. Generally, it is the poor who need *seva* in basic areas such as physical survival; health; education; skills; and jobs. Sometimes, the severely sick or old may have the problems of loneliness, sadness, depression, etc. So, *seva* can take many forms. Feeding the poor; helping illiterate adults; educating the youth; ministering to the sick and old; helping to cremate the poor, abandoned dead; caring for the severely disabled, physically and/or mentally; serving one's *guru*; maintaining an ashram, gurukul, school,

hospital, hospice or similar institution of *seva*. Similar concepts and practices also exist in other great world religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Some major issues of the 21st century

At the end of the long Cold War, with *glasnost*, openness, and *perestroika*, restructuring in the former Soviet Union, under the courageous leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, there was a great deal of optimism. In the 1990s, some argued that elective democracy and capitalism had emerged as the effective ultimate solutions. Francis Fukayama wrote of the ‘end of history’. Alas, our experience, so far, in the 21st century belies this optimism. There are several continuing, and some new problems.

Inequality

Rising inequality has rocked the economic and social fabric of many countries. The 2008 global financial crisis, began in the US, with the collapse of the bank, Lehman Brothers. It gave birth to the ‘occupy’ movement. The inequality was highlighted by the sharp contrast of the 1% very rich population versus the 99% middle class and poor. This was followed by similar public uprisings in other parts of the world. A popular movement brought about democracy in Tunisia. The Arab Spring in Egypt raised hopes. The discontented poor have voted for right wing leaders in the US and some European countries. The people of the UK voted by a narrow margin, for Brexit, for Britain to leave the European Union. The trend is unabated. In 2018, the ‘Yellow Vests’ demonstrations in Paris and other parts of France have shaken the initially promising government of President Macron.

Unemployment

One key contributor to inequality is unemployment. The Great Recession in the US triggered by the 2008 financial meltdown, led to a decade of low growth, and rising joblessness. This has spread to Europe and the rest of the world. In addition, many technological innovations are leading to the replacement of labour. These include AI (artificial intelligence), machine learning, robotics, drones, automation, etc. The concern about chronic, long term high unemployment is making experts and governments look at new ideas

like UBI, Universal Basic Income, a guaranteed minimum income to every citizen. This will require the better off to pay higher taxes, not only under legal compulsion, but also as their *seva* to society.

Migration

In addition to poverty and unemployment, factors like terrorism, civil wars, discrimination, dictatorships, etc. are contributing to mass migration. Migrants from the Middle East and Africa have been pouring into Europe. Migrants from South America are headed for the US. On the other hand, the rich countries are closing their borders, reducing immigrants and visa quotas, etc. Large numbers of intending immigrants are dying, on the way, in the sea and land route.

Climate Change

Although warnings about the adverse effects of pollution, waste dumping, deforestation, degradation of the environment etc. began in the 1960s, the responses of governments, businesses and people have been rather slow. Global warming has continued. The negative impacts are becoming more and more visible in the form of higher temperatures, rising sea levels, droughts, floods, cyclones, tsunamis, etc.

Threat of Wars

There are new threats to regional and world peace. In South East Asia, there are tensions between China and its neighbours, especially on sharing the rights to different parts of South China Sea. North Korea continues as a potential flashpoint. The South Korean President is making admirable efforts to bring peace. But, differences continue between North Korea and US. In the Middle East, in Syria, Yemen and Israel-Palestine, wars of different intensities have gone on for several years. Similar problems exist in Africa and South America. At the global level, a World War 3 cannot be ruled out. It may primarily involve the US, China and Russia. It could drag in the EU and Japan. Even the hope of deterrence, the fear of the annihilation of the human race, is weakening. Wars seem more likely to emanate from extreme nationalism. Major religious wars appear less of a threat. But, the terrorism of radical Islam may continue to haunt cities and popular tourist spots.

Consequent Needs for *Seva*

The above is not a complete list of all possible issues of the 21st century. But, these are major problems which are already affecting humanity. Their impacts may worsen before they get better. They also give rise to several needs for *seva*, service, help. Such needs are opportunities for *sevaks*, servants, helpers. These problems cannot be solved entirely through individual and NGO-led *seva*. They require appropriate government policies and programmes. But, even when such programmes are formulated, there are many gaps in implementation. *Sevaks* can help intended beneficiaries get their legitimate benefits from such policies.

Reducing Inequality

Given individual and socio-economic factors, in all societies, at all times, inequality cannot be eliminated. But, it can be reduced to acceptable levels. The very rich can and should engage in big *dānam*, philanthropy. There was recently an inspiring case of a donor, who himself lived a simple life, in California, but donated eight billion dollars, to various causes. Even more, he wanted to be anonymous. The press managed to probe deeply, identify and reveal his identity. When asked why he gave so much and was himself so frugal, he said that we, humans, come only with a bare body and die only with it. We cannot take our wealth with us. Leadership for business philanthropy has been provided by committed, generous multi-billionaires, like Warrant Buffet and Bill Gates. The individual rich and upper middle class citizens have many options to donate to health, education, arts, culture etc. in their locality; state; nation; continent and the world. They should reduce their conspicuous consumption, waste etc. and donate a rising share of both their accumulated wealth, and accruing annual income. Those who cannot donate much, can do *seva* by sharing their time, knowledge, experience, skills, labour etc. with the disadvantaged.

Human Resource Optimisation

Chronic unemployment is painful for the jobless, and their families, at the personal level. It is also a gross underutilization and waste of human potential, at the societal level. Businesses should raise their level of *seva* to all stakeholders. It is in their direct self-interest to

serve the customers, because their sales, and consequently profits, depend on the customers. The successful businesses also serve their shareholders through dividends and capital growth. They need to also retain and retrain their existing employees. They should keep creating new job opportunities. They should avoid new automation-type technologies, unless they are essential and unavoidable for quality, safety, competitive survival, etc. To the extent, they go in for such technologies, they should reinvest the higher profits, to create more jobs. Both businesses and professionals can provide free skills training for redeployment of the unemployed in growing sectors and organisations.

Development of all Nations

As long as we have a few highly developed, prosperous nations, and many less developed countries, there will be pressure for migration from the poor to the rich nations. The rich countries will want to take only a limited number of highly qualified and skilled immigrants. This is a double loss to the poor countries — losing part of their valuable human capital, and being left with the less educated and skilled, rising population. Poorer nations often see a scramble for resources between different groups based on regional; religious; linguistic; ethnic, or other divisions. This can spark civil wars. Poverty and discrimination also tempt some to join terrorist groups. A sustainable, long term solution would be to help every country develop and create adequate wellbeing for all its people.

This provides the opportunity for many types of *seva*. The rich in the poor countries should retain their original citizenship, and not migrate to a richer country. They should do *seva* to their own motherland. Normally, one's *janmabhoomi*, country of birth, should also be her/his *karmabhoomi*, a place of good work and contribution. When a country is well developed, some of its citizens may consider doing *seva* in poorer countries. Here, again do *seva* in the poorest countries; and there, to the poorest of the poor. Citizens of the rich countries may also do *seva* to the poor countries, by giving their expertise, donations in cash and kind, etc., if they cannot actually be there physically.

Climate Change Mitigation

The latest global conference in Poland, in November 2018, has built on the 2016 Paris agreement. It has developed a rule book to guide implementation, and sharing of progress data. In the countries most vulnerable to climate change, in addition to government efforts, a great deal of *seva* opportunities are already crying for *sevaks*. Small island nations are most immediately, under threat of partial or total submersion. Countries with long coastlines, come next. And so on. The better off professionals of these highly vulnerable countries must be the first *sevaks*. Professionals from other countries, less under threat also have a great opportunity. Time is running out. There is urgent need for greater speed and more substantial action. The target of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C should be met. We owe it to the existing young population; future generations; flora and fauna, etc.

Securing lasting peace

There is a need for many peace and war relief *sevaks*. In conflict resolution and bringing peace, there are outstanding, global role models like ex-US President, Jimmy Carter; and ex-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. More such high level peace *sevaks* are needed in all war zone countries. In addition, there is a tremendous potential for state, local and community activists to promote peace and amity between nations, especially among immediate neighbours. Besides, in places like Syria and Yemen where wars have already wreaked incalculable physical, human and institutional damage, lot of *seva* is required for relief, rehabilitation and rebuilding.

Strategies for *Seva*

There are, broadly, two sets of *seva* strategies that a person needs to have. First, what kinds of *sevas* to render. Second, how to actually deliver them. The soundness of these two strategies will determine the ultimate effectiveness and value of any *seva*. It is a good and noble start to want to engage in *seva*. But, ideally, it should also be both efficient and effective. Not amateur and shoddy.

An individual's choice of *sevas* can best be made in four steps. One, what are all the *seva* opportunities that exist, and are coming up shortly? Two, out of those what are the *sevas* I am most equipped

to do, in terms of my strengths and weaknesses. Three, among those options, which are the socially most relevant and urgent ones. Fourth, out of this short list, let me pick those which will give me most satisfaction and fulfilment. Examples are fighting hunger; providing basic clothing; accommodation; health; literacy; education; job skills; helping the disabled, old, children, women, refugees, etc.

An individual can look at the following *seva* delivery strategy options. First, direct personal presence and delivery. Second, where feasible, by distant teaching, guidance, counselling, mentoring, etc. Third, through an international, national or local NGO, in the target country. Fourth, through a government aid program. Fifth, look at other new, innovative options.

Qualities of a *Sevak*

Every role in our life and work is more effective if we possess the requisite qualities. The same goes, naturally, for a *sevak*. The role competencies may, comprehensively be understood in four dimensions. KASH — Knowledge. Attitudes and Values. Skills. Habits. These four are, in that order, increasingly more difficult to acquire, retain, update and deploy.

In terms of Knowledge, the *sevak* should understand the brief history, current context, needs and expectations of the target of her/his *seva*. The attitudes of profound compassion, humility, respect, tolerance of difficulties will enable the *sevak* to sustain the *seva*. Intent to give *seva* is noble. But, skills to deliver it well are essential to meet the true needs of the recipient. Skills specific to a particular *seva* such as cooking, medical, teaching, communication, team building, leadership etc. will help. Consistent habits of punctuality, homework, preparation, attendance, discipline etc. will make the *seva* efficient and reliable. The *sevak* can continue to learn from historic role models like Mahatma Gandhi, Baba Amte, Florence Nightingale, as well as from the many current and emerging heroes of *seva*.

Developing oneself as a better *sevak*

One does not become totally perfect in any role in life. There is always both the need and the opportunity to keep learning, and getting better at a given role. By its very nature, people tend to be more effective

and growing in *sevak* roles than in more personal gain oriented roles. Still the growth vista beckons.

Self-development as a better *sevak* can be done through the following kinds of steps. Begin with introspection and self-assessment as a *sevak* so far, in one's life. Such assessment can be done in terms of the four elements of K, A, S, H. In each element, identify two strengths and two relative weaknesses. Both diagnoses are necessary. Plan to utilise the existing strengths more effectively, through better strategies of *seva* choice and delivery. Also, envisage actions to limit the negative impacts of one's weaknesses on the *seva*; and, further to reduce, and even remove them, gradually. Going further, by focus and effort, try to convert weaknesses, by intense awareness and honest effort, into strengths. Periodically, such as a month; quarter; year, review self-development. Take satisfaction from progress, and make further plans to fill gaps. Throughout this process, don't lose focus on your *seva* delivery. That is the main purpose. Avoid excessive self-absorption.

Plan for a life of *seva*

While one may begin as an occasional *sevak*, at some stage, earlier than later, it is useful for self and the world, to make a broad *Seva* Plan for the rest of one's lifetime. Given the right parental and teacher guidance, such an initial, rough, draft plan can begin early in life. A useful kick off point is the final year of school, before entering college. In the contemporary, dominantly materialist era, a lot of effort goes into getting admission into the right college, institute, university, etc. While that has its place, students should be guided to think of *seva* as an important strand for the total quality of their lives. The key thing is to imbibe the value of *seva*; and have a self-vision for life as a *sevak*, in addition to a successful career in one's profession, and a happy, but not selfish family life.

With the above foundation and commitment, a *Seva* Plan can be made for the next three years. The specifics may change, depending on location, environment, needs, opportunities, etc. But, one's own temporary financial problems, health, time pressure etc. should not be used as alibi for not engaging in *seva*. One can be frugal, but not deprived; stay in good health by avoiding excesses; find the time, etc.

MOUNTAIN PATH

The *Seva* Plan should, naturally, be reviewed, and updated, in the light of successes and gaps; one's learning; new needs etc.

As a *sevak* grows in life, and *seva* experience, he should motivate other new *sevaks*, and be their guru, coach, mentor. These new *sevaks* can be youth; recently retired; coming out of bereavement; coming into big inheritance, etc. A *sevak* is a *bikshu*, mendicant. Not afraid to ask help for a good cause. Not fazed by refusal and even indifference or insult.

Let us, together, build a world of more and better *sevaks*, to prevent the worsening of problems of the 21st century, mentioned in Section 2 above; and to mitigate the ill effects of any that do, alas, arise.

Let us follow the shining example of the Emperor of India (Bharat), Yudhishthira, after the Mahabharata *dharmayuddham*, Righteous War, when he made the unique declaration:

*Na kāmāye rajyam, na sukham, na swargam;
Kāmāye ārthinam ārtha nāshanam.*

I do not want a Kingdom, nor Comfort, nor Heaven;
I only want to remove the sufferings of the afflicted. ▲

My Garden

Suresh Kailash

I've ploughed my heart,
planted all the seeds,
watered them well,
and plucked out the weeds.

When it blooms, Ramana,
my garden will be ready,
with a soft, fragrant carpet,
of flowers for your feet.

Surrender and Self-Enquiry

NADHIA SUTARA

Surrender is not mere passive acceptance, but is rather to consider everything that happens as coming from God.

— Swami Atmananda¹

Sri Bhagavan used to say that one must either enquire into the source of the ego or surrender that it may be cut down. He also used to say that ‘Bhakti is *jñāna mātā*’ – ‘Devotion is the mother of a *jñāni*’. Much has been written from a scholarly viewpoint on these two approaches, but I prefer to write of my own experiences with both surrender and enquiry. This is not by way of arguing with anything Sri Bhagavan or any other Master has said, but rather to relate my own experimentation and what it has yielded during my more than 45 years of serious *sādhana*. Perhaps my experience may prove useful to others.

First, let it be known that I am a Westerner, born, educated and enculturated in the fragmented, insanely materialistic Western way of approaching life, where the object of existence is to be the most gorgeous corpse in the graveyard ... or else the richest ... if not both. I have no idea whether my experience would have any value for an Indian.

¹ *Death Must Die*, by Swami Atmananda, edited by Ram Alexander. 2020, p.188.

At the outset of my *sādhana*, I was driven by despair. If the gross materialism I was immersed in was all there was to Life, I wanted out. Moreover, I knew I was mad. I experienced periods of lost time, my mind was chaotic and out of control, driven and scattered by a host of screaming, contradictory voices (*saṃskāra-s*) – mostly very bad – that I was born with and had acquired through family and social conditioning; all of this pushing me in seriously self-destructive directions. In retrospect, it was this very tension between the mind and emotions being deranged and a witness knowing that they were deranged that enabled any *sādhana* to take place. Of course, I had no idea of this at the time.

Having a devotional temperament and an *iṣṭadevatā* from birth (unconnected with any religious influence), it was devotion to this *Iṣṭa* that carried me through the darkest days of my life until one day I realised that I did NOT need a psychiatrist: I needed a spiritual teacher. So I sought one out and became a serious *sādhaka*. But in the beginning I was so unself-aware and steeped in the Western attitude of doing, fighting and imagining I had free will that the idea of surrender never entered my mind. Devotion isn't much without surrender, but I didn't see that.

As Sri Bhagavan pointed out, complete surrender is rarely possible for most people at the beginning of their *sādhana*: the mind is too scattered; we are too identified with a host of miscellaneous *vāsanā-s*, each of which calls itself 'I' when it arises; and we are too identified with one or another *vāsanā* to separate the 'host' from the 'guest'. Some *vāsanā-s* are all for love, devotion and harmony; others are rebellious; some even want to pursue a spiritual path; and others are entirely devoted to the external world and its shenanigans and want no part in spirituality. And all of this happens so continuously that we never notice that we are a traveling circus with a cast of thousands, no ringmaster and no permanent 'I' that we are aware of. I quickly recognised this as my own condition, and sought ways to solve this crazy cacophony in my head. So, when I encountered the notion of surrender, my question was, 'Who surrenders?' 'Will the real me please stand up!'

I should add that at the beginning I had neither any plan, path, guru or preconceived notions. I found a local teacher who was a master of

the scatter method: a little of this and a little of that, offering exposure to a variety of teachings, teachers and paths – a survey course in spirituality, my ‘supermarket’ phase. I was also reading diligently and taking into consideration whatever made sense to me, applying what I could – all rather hit and miss – doing whatever made sense at the time – clutching at straws, some of which turned out to be just straws, others to be lifelines.

I still had only one absolute certainty: that I did NOT need a psychiatrist. There were several in my family, and they were all as clueless as I was.

When I finally arrived at Arunachala some years later, it was literally love at first sight, and I found myself making my first spontaneous, whole-hearted act of surrender. As I climbed the slopes behind the Ashram for the first time, I was so overwhelmed by the power of the sacred Mountain that my *Iṣṭa* merged in It and I found myself falling to my knees and praying: ‘If I live or die, if I go mad or sane, whatsoever happens, I surrender it all to Thee, O Arunachala!’ Within a few months I was living on the Mountain, and this first act of surrender became, in essence, surrender to life itself as it unfolded while I lived on the Mountain.

This was very new for me. As a Westerner, I was steeped in the notion that I had free will. Yet Sri Bhagavan taught that there is no free will at all. How to reconcile these two opposing views? As I contemplated them, I suddenly saw that Sri Bhagavan’s view – whether ultimately true or not, I couldn’t say – was an excellent antidote for my Type A go-getter personality. My nature was to do whatever was required to obtain whatever result I deemed necessary. So how to harmonize this with surrender? One day a resolution arose: to follow the caveat that after doing what my nature forced me to do, I should then surrender and accept whatever resulted as God’s will. And this worked wonderfully for me.

At the same time, I needed to deal with a seemingly endless mass of seriously negative *vāsanā*-s that had no intention of surrendering to anything or anyone, and fought back by creating crippling migraine headaches whenever I tried to meditate. I had by then learned about Bhagavan’s self-enquiry, but I had a problem with it because I was unable to grasp in practice what he meant: I had no experience of an

underlying permanent ‘I’. One day I asked a very wise friend of mine, ‘What’s the point of all this “Who am I?” business?’ His response cleared all my doubts: ‘Who am I?’ is the last question anybody ever asks,’ he said, ‘but it need not be the first.’ So this is an account of how both approaches arose, grew in power, ever complementing each other, until finally self-enquiry swallowed up everything else.

After a lot of hit and miss, it occurred to me that, again according to my nature, I could try a double-edged approach: to resist whatever negative *vāsanā* was in my face – with awareness; and when that got stale and ceased to yield results, to indulge it – again with awareness. Awareness being the common denominator. And diligent vigilance being the required *sine qua non*.

It had always been my aim to become ‘portable’, not to fall apart because I wasn’t on the Mountain or in Tiruvannamalai, or even in India. That is, to find Arunachala in my heart so that I need not be glued to any physical place, so that the grace I experienced living on the Mountain should be with me wherever I found myself. After all, Sri Bhagavan did say that the real Arunachala is in one’s own Heart.

Thus it turned out that, being pragmatic, I came to be practising both surrender and enquiry simultaneously, and while this may not suit anybody else, it suited me very well. Swami Atmananda, a Western woman and direct disciple of Anandamayi Ma for more than 40 years, had met and much admired Sri Bhagavan. She had this to say about the merely apparent contradiction between surrender and enquiry:

Is ‘awareness’ not ‘surrender’ – a taking stock of everything that constitutes one’s mind and emotions and burning it in the light of the Unthinkable.²

When I was first introduced to the idea of self-enquiry, I understood that it was valid and crucial but, as I mentioned above, my problem was WHICH of the innumerable ‘I’s that I was aware of was the real ‘me’. Obviously, I did not properly understand what Sri Bhagavan was talking about, but one thing was clear: the need to detach from this host of negative *vāsanā*-s so as to collect and purify the mind.

I have heard people say that this is an exercise in futility: ‘Why examine all the garbage? Ignore it!’ My response – again based upon

² Ibid., p.223.

my experience – has always been that if there is something stinking up one’s house, it’s there because one is identified with it. Unless one is a very mature *sādhaka*, there is no point in ignoring it because the source of the stink will remain there, keep on stinking, and negatively affect one’s mind, life and *sādhana*. Much better to find it, put it in a garbage bag, tie up the bag and put it outside so the Garbage Man can take it away. Because if you don’t, the garbage will continue to pollute the mind and you will continue to identify with it. Thus the very weight of the garbage will prevent any effective self-enquiry or surrender. Nisargadatta Maharaj put this very succinctly when he said, ‘Remember, you cannot abandon what you do not know. To go beyond yourself, you must know yourself.’³ Or as Sri Bhagavan would put it, ‘To know that there is no mind, you have to constantly examine it.’⁴

There does come a time, however – and I reached it after many years of practise – when the personality, the lowest manifestation of oneself (from *annamaya kōśa* through *vijñānamaya kōśa*) – is purified enough that it can be detached from as a whole: *neti-neti* as soon as any aspect of it arises, without any need to perform the detachment atom by atom. Sri Bhagavan has said that first the *ku-vāsanā*-s (bad tendencies) must go, then the *su-vāsanā*-s, the good tendencies.

Back in the early 90s, I had one profound experience of genuine enquiry that convinced me that I was going in the right direction. I was asking an elder a question about ‘Who am I?’ when suddenly my mind turned 180 degrees and, instead of being focused outward (the 4 lower *kōśa*-s are, by nature, externally directed), turned completely inward towards the Source.⁵ At the same time I heard my voice say, ‘So that’s enquiry!’ This profound difference between the outward-going mind and the inward-directed mind was a revelatory experience. As I was still incapable of this dramatic re-direction on my own, I realised that only a much more collected, purified mind had the *adhikāra* (or qualification) to sustain such an inward momentum.

So, due to the intransigence of my strong Type A personality, I find myself still practising both approaches: surrendering to what

³ Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That*, Chap. ‘Responses of Memory’, p.24.

⁴ *Upadesa Saram*, v.17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, v.16.

is inevitable, and enquiring into any and all obstacles that present themselves.

I feel it is important for me to add that this enquiry does not take the form of ‘Who am I?’ but rather arises from the profound conviction – equally sastric and essentially not different from ‘Who am I?’ – that whatever I am aware of cannot be me: *neti-neti*.

One last observation about surrender seems pertinent. We Westerners, most of whom are already broken before we leave the cradle, are driven by an inner compulsion to find someone to unconditionally love us, to complete us, make us feel whole because we feel totally broken, worthless and empty inside. And we look everywhere, try everything that ‘guarantees’ us happiness, enlightenment, ‘freedom’ – sex, drugs, entertainment, extreme sports – the errors are legion. To my knowledge, Indians do not have this experience: children are considered their *raison d’être* and greatest treasure. Alas, it is tragically the opposite in the fragmented materialistic West, where quality of life has been mistaken for quantity of comforts, the extended family has ceased to exist, and children are left to be raised by a daycare centre so that both parents can work to support a ridiculously luxurious lifestyle. Is it any wonder that one Buddhist teacher referred to the rich West as a land of hungry ghosts?

This situation carries over when such an individual embarks upon a spiritual quest, and one of the first blunders many aspirants make is to fall in love with their teacher and mistake this for devotion. In Sanskrit there are some 20-odd words for love. In Greek and Latin at least four. In English, only one, and this says it all. Naturally Westerners are confused and this accounts for a great deal of our counter-productive behaviour, so puzzling to Indians. We tend to mistake all sorts of ‘business’ exchanges for unconditional love: sex, a ‘kind’ money-changer who may or may not be giving the correct rate of exchange, a beggar who smiles ingratiatingly, personal attention or any of the many disguises that masquerade under the paltry English word ‘love’. As a result, it is very rare for a Westerner to be able to truly surrender to a Guru in the way an Oriental can. To Life, yes perhaps, if they have not completely lost their ability to trust. But to a person, alas rarely. As one wise person said, ‘Devotion is unsuited

to the West. You are all smelled flowers, and a smelled flower [like tasted food] cannot be offered to God.’

The usual scenario is that everything goes along like a perfect honeymoon until the teacher – deliberately or unconsciously – steps on the student’s ego. The ego rebels, the student is indignant, decides the teacher is a fraud (which may or may not be the case), departs and, unless the student has acquired some wisdom, throws the baby out with the bathwater, never seeking the error within himself. And off he goes to find someone else to ‘complete’ him, make him feel good about himself, worthy, and so forth. And alas, this does not further their *sādhana* so much as it creates even more pain than that which set them on their quest in the first place.

Perhaps the best summary of this topic are the words of Socrates, the greatest of the Greek sage-philosophers: ‘Man, know thyself.’

It is astonishing to me that this simple aphorism, known to every reasonably educated Westerner, is so often overlooked. Westerners these days want instant gratification, and most would purchase what they consider ‘enlightenment’ if they could. And if asked what enlightenment means, they usually describe some kind of heaven where they are free to do whatever they please, have whatever they want, and experience no suffering whatsoever. Without ever taking a personal inventory, they embark on what is usually either a chimaera or a diploma course in ‘enlightenment’; something they can, after a few years, turn into a career path. After all, it’s a great way to make money, is better than taking drugs, and somewhat diminishes the income of the equally unself-aware psychiatrists.

In an extraordinary way, what I considered my curse proved to be a blessing. I had to take stock, I had no choice but to identify the voices (*vāsanā*-s) that were afflicting me and separate from them, and this – combined with the techniques that developed as I went along – quite literally not only restored me to sanity but have enriched my life in ways beyond description. ▲



The Secret Allure of Sri Ramcharitmanas

BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

Hari anant Harikatha anantā, Kahahi sunahi bahubidhi sab santā.

Hari (God or Vishnu) is infinite and stories of Him are also infinite. Many and varied are the ways in which saints understand and retell the tales. — Tulsidas

I was first exposed to the secrets of the Ramcharitmanas five years ago when I spent six months at a yoga school where the *Sundarkāṇḍ* section of the book was chanted after dinner each night. This was their formula to guarantee peaceful resolution of the day's turbulence and allow sound sleep. Since then pointers to deeper significance of the text have continued to enter my range of vision, so I was surprised that the article in *Mountain Path* Jul-Sep 2020 had no mention of what is perhaps the core significance of Tulsidas' epic poem.

Each afternoon at Sanyās Peeth, Monghyr, Bihar, priests perform a *havan* to the chanting of Ramcharitmanas by villagers who stream

Bharati Mirchandani was blessed to spend enough time at Tiruvannamalai in her youth to enable her to design books, calendars and other materials for Sri Ramanasramam. Decades later, she finds herself located in Delhi, and increasingly uses words to make contact.

in from the neighbourhood. Many of them are not just illiterate, but till recently exposed only to the occasional Ramlila. Yet many recite the entire work of over ten thousand verses verbatim. The simplicity and easy rhythm of the text is not sufficient to explain this phenomenon. Swami Niranjananand revealed that Tulsidas had woven many *siddh shabar*¹ *mantras* into the text adding immense power. Repeated recitation not only allows the meaning of the words to play on the psyche and gradually heighten intuitive wisdom and corresponding ethical conduct but the *shabar mantras* also work to fulfill practical and mundane desires. *Shabar mantras* pack so much power that unwise persons could create havoc, so they have been hidden ‘in plain view!’

The most important aspect of this epic poem is in another dimension altogether. This aspect is hinted at within the text by Tulsidas himself when he describes the seven *kāṇḍ*-s (cantos or chapters of the Ramayan) as seven steps that lead to the lake of sacred waters, a symbol for *mokṣa* or enlightenment. It was Sw. N. again who called the Ramcharitmanas a manual of yoga. The seven *kāṇḍ*-s describe the seven *chakras*. He refused to divulge more as he felt individual meditation and repeated readings would unfold secret knowledge based on that hint.

Despite my curiosity being piqued I don’t read Devanagari with ease, and even the simple tunes of the *chaupais* and *dohas* (quartets and couplets) remain beyond me. Yet gradually the meanings have continued to unfold with their own momentum. Comments in books and chance conversations added some understanding of this Manual of Yoga. I share these below in humility and awareness that my understanding is extremely limited, only so that others may dig into the treasure chest of Ramcharitmanas.

Bālkāṇḍ, the first canto is the longest and has about everything in it. Many people spend entire lives dominated by this base or *mūl chakra*. This section starts with invocations to Saraswati as giver of wisdom and Ganesh as remover of obstacles, both certainly needed for any new venture to reach successful fruition. The story of Śiva

¹ *Shabar* means indigenous. These are powerful mantras written in indigenous languages other than Sanskrit.

and Pārvati is recounted, events leading to the incarnation of Rama, his birth, childhood, his role in protecting a Rishi's *yagña*, a fragrant garden where Sita first sees the two brothers, the breaking of Śiva's bow at the *svayamvar* organized by her father, and Rama's marriage with Sita, right up to their arrival in Ayodhya together.

There seems to be very little reason to progress from this level of awakening, yet the human spirit surges as and when it must. *Svādhiṣṭhāna* is supposed to be the natural abode of the dormant *kuṇḍalini*. Excess attachments, *moha*, often lead the *kuṇḍalini* to sink lower. Yet rising of energies to this centre feels ecstatic only till the realization that this joy is hollow and pushes one to journey farther.

Svādhiṣṭhāna chakra is described in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍ* as beginning with the promise of great joy and celebration but ending with sorrow, angst, displacement, sense of betrayal, and a feeling of splitting of reality into fact and its subsidiary symbol, here described as the *pāduka-s* placed by Bharata on the royal throne. After invocations to the divine couple, Śiva and Pārvati, preparations for Rama's coronation and joyous celebrations in the city are described. Many different topics are discussed in this chapter, love with and without attachment, equanimity and despair, keeping one's word in deeds but failing to sustain the spirit as Dasaratha gives up his life in sorrow, Bharata fails to prevent Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from venturing farther into the forest and he returns alone to the kingdom to rule as regent.

Sadness and disappointments lead on to *Manipūr* which is the *chakra* of great energy. One of the shorter cantos, *Aranyakāṇḍ* has the most action and deals with the most topics. It describes the idyllic settings of lush forests with abundance of natural beauty and peace where every physical need is catered for. Many sages live in different forests and Rama, Sita and Lakshmana learn much from meeting them. Again this canto ends in despair as Sita's enchantment by a golden deer leads to her abduction by Ravana.

From this *chakra* a person may progress upward or relapse to the allure of that already experienced, called *asura*. *Deva* is the term for what is awaiting exploration. Divine blessings and the wisdom of sages help sustain the upward journey.

Anahat chakra is described in the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍ*. The shortest canto primarily describes the monkey Hanuman, son of the wind, an incarnation of Śiva himself and his meeting with Rama where they both recognize the divine nature of the other. This section describes the royal brothers as gods who through their own play of *māyā* appear in mortal form as beautiful beings, here compared to a blue lotus and a white jasmine. In Kishkinda the leadership of the monkey-clan is restored to *dharma* after the *adharmic* abdicator is destroyed. The canto ends with the decision that the clan of monkeys will work together with Rama and his brother Lakshmana to seek Sita. Energies have by now been channeled in the right direction, risk of falling again is low, but hard work remains to be done.

The *Sundarkāṇḍ* is the favourite of many. The mood finally lifts to one of hope and joy as Sita is located, both Rama and Sita are reassured that their reunion is within sight. Hanuman's exploits entertain. Vibhishana is accepted by Rama's love despite being an *asura*. Lanka is burnt down. Rama tames the ocean to cross the waters. This *Viśuddha chakra* is the one that defies meditation by concentration. It is the most fragile, nebulous and dynamic. It is also the bridge across a narrow divide to a very different level; a goal that is both tantalizingly close, and yet almost impossible to cross. Once here, carnal levels of existence are no longer possible.

Rama stays in Lanka through the entire *Lankākāṇḍ*. Divinity is a permanent feature of the active *Ājnā chakra*. This is also a state of great risk as all *kōśa-s* need to be in sync to sustain high level of subtle vibrations. Any imbalance can be self-destructive. Both verbal and physical conflicts take place. For a while Lakshmana is seriously injured, but herbs and loving attention of great souls restore his health completely. Goodness dominates again as Ravana is killed, Vibhishana is crowned king. Sita is reunited with Rama, and their journey home begins.

Uttarakāṇḍ is really just an appendix. The story of action is already over. This is an epilogue to explain that after the goal of life is achieved, only an uneventful and easy flight brings one back to where the journey began. There in Ayodhya nothing has changed, yet everything is different. Peace, prosperity, harmony and joy have spontaneously spread across society and environs. Rama rejects Sita

based on some gossip but accepts her after an *agni pariksha*, test by fire. This is explained by Tulsidas as a ploy to replace the secret clone who travelled to Lanka with the real Sita who had been hidden in safety with the god Agni. Vestiges of the ego, fearing extinction, try to assert dominance again. This has to be thwarted by the fire of *tapas* and *jñāna*. Twins are born to Rama and Sita, indicating that the world of duality is not destroyed by union of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.

The epilogue to the story also lays emphasis on the importance of the living unbroken *guru-śiṣya* lineage. Tulsidas says the story of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman and Ravana was first told by Śiva to Pārvati, meaning that it has a divine beginning, and then carried by flying beings (Kākbhuṣuṇḍi and Garuḍa), it was conveyed to sages who communicated it to others who spread the glories among peoples everywhere.

And what a story this is! Tulsidas cleverly takes a historical figure already legendary in his time due to Valmiki's Ramayan, although that was read and recited only by the elite. Tulsidas was a Sanskrit scholar himself and despite being vilified for his work in the vernacular, his overflowing *bhakti* for Rama and love for humankind poured into this insightful retelling.

Just as Kabir used his vernacular simplicity to bring Adi Sankara's philosophy to the illiterate masses, Ramcharitmanas makes the Ramayana accessible to all. He does this in a way that subtly underlines the unity of the divine and mortal. By elevating the historical person to godhood, he simultaneously points the way to awaken the divine latent in us through the awakening of the *chakras*, offering descriptions that highlight the allures, traps, signs along the way; and the assurance that the journey does not take anything away, only elevates what is to a higher, harmonious and fulfilled level of being.

Rama means that joy which pervades; which abides everywhere and permeates all things. Sita is that sharp bit of a plough that cuts the earth releasing fission energy (just as a neutron hits an atom, splitting it to release nuclear energy). It is this energy which travels through a series of *chakras* to unite with that which is everywhere, and when that union happens one abides in completeness, harmony, abundance; expressing fully one's potential and purpose. ▲

What Do I Need? *Enna Vendum....*

Sadhu Om

What I need and don't need
All this My Lord (Ramana) knows
better than I.
He is Father and Mother to those
who need him.
Need I, his son, then go after anyone else?

Is it proper that I want and he gives?
Is anything good which is not his wish?
He gives what he wishes.
Can one who asks be a devotee?
Can what the All-Knowing One does
be wrong?

Is there a life more joyous than the
one bereft of desire?
Is there anything more blissful than
Knowledge sans thoughts?
We call him our Father who
makes us fearless.
All that which others can give is just misery.

He will show me whatever is good to see.
He will rein in my sense organs and body.
He will Grace me by checking my ego.
Off and on he will make me dance to his Divine tunes.

Do I need to do anything anywhere anytime?
He will do that. Do I have to ask?
Will anything except good ever touch me?
Do I need anyone or anything except Ramana?

— Translated from the Tamil by KVS

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

The Way Out is In

WASYL NIMENKO

We are not born unhappy but because our external circumstances make us unhappy, we try to find the happiness we know is inside.

Our parents usually influence us more than anyone else in our life and this was certainly the case for me as I went from a western spiritual path to an eastern one. My mother was a Catholic western European from the west of Ireland whilst my father was an atheist Eastern European from eastern Ukraine.

The summer of 1967, which, for many, was the summer of love, saw the end of my innocence and the appearance for the first time of acute and painful sadness in my heart. I was 11 years old. It was Saturday night, and my 14-year-old brother hadn't come home from playing cricket for his school. By 6.30 pm, the school told my parents that he hadn't shown up for the cricket match. At seven o'clock, they phoned the police who searched the whole house including the attic where we used to play. We did not know if he was hiding, if he had run away, if he had been abducted or if he was dead. By the end of the first week, Interpol had been contacted, and there was a picture of my brother in the local papers and on the local TV stations.

My brother's running away from home for nearly two years left me in shock at his deception. I felt abandoned, alone and sad as I also quickly realised I was isolated from my two sisters who were older

and disinterested in their younger brother. I also witnessed and felt the acute chronic sorrow, which my parents were experiencing then at the loss of their son.

At school, no one said anything to me about my missing brother as if it was taboo or they just didn't know. The local priest sought solace in alcohol like my war-traumatised father so there was no one to go to for support, hope and understanding. Although I did not wallow in the feelings I was experiencing, I was acutely aware that I was without any help or understanding of what was going on inside me. The pain was like a gnawing hunger for help.

Meanwhile I was expected to respond and tried to respond to all of the people in my world normally whilst inside I was confused and unsupported because my family was broken. I wrote letters to my grandmother in Ireland and I tried listening to my radio under the blankets at night to produce a happier inner life but my life remained the same. I didn't accept this and continued to look for a solution.

For weeks I searched in books. Then I found myself in the middle of a book by a nun called *The Story of a Soul* and for the first time I felt like I was listening to a fellow child speaking. However, the strange and attractive thing about her was that she was describing how she was so happy because of her suffering. I wondered how anyone could be so happy because of their suffering, whilst I was miserable. But what was even more mysterious was that she looked out for suffering and deliberately put herself through pain as a way to happiness.

I liked what she wrote about being like a simple wildflower in the forest subjected to the elements of nature but also nurtured by them so that she could flourish. Knowing all along that she was of nature too.

“He opened the book of nature before me, and I saw that every flower He has created has a beauty of its own, that the splendour of the rose and the lily's whiteness do not deprive the violet of its scent nor make less ravishing the daisy's charm. I saw that if every little flower wished to be a rose, nature would lose her spring adornments, and the fields would be no longer enamelled with their varied flowers.” (*The Story of a Soul* p. 4).

There was honesty in St Theresa of Lisieux's trust and complete self-surrender. She practised detachment of everything about herself to love what she saw as her sense of her soul, which she saw as God. The

more she forgot about herself and deliberately suffered, the more she experienced a feeling of love in herself. Here was a shining example of acceptance. Of gratefulness. And the result was happiness. In my state, how could I not try and copy her.

Towards the end of the book, I read that she wore a cross with sharp points on the back to produce physical pain. I had nothing to lose so I pushed four drawing pins through a cross I bought at the local church. I tried wearing it, pushing it against my chest, eventually stopping because it was too much. As an adult, I learnt that she had to give this up because it made her ill.

These days it could be seen as self-flagellation, self-harm or an ignorant attempt at an endorphin high. But I was actually just looking for happiness and love. With the family in a state of grave unhappiness, personal happiness and love was on hold and seemed impossible. So, at that time anything was worth a try to find some kind of love and happiness.

I was looking for understanding and for love. I knew they were there. I knew I could love, but whom? The easiest, most available target was God . . . not a Christian or Hindu god, or a god of any religion, but a sense of myself being one with something greater, almost as if I was superimposing an image on the stars in the sky. I realised that I was distilling my own sense of God. It was an act of transferring something from deep inside me, a sort of ‘inner me’, onto someone or something that was on the edge of my consciousness that I could not quite grasp. Everything tangible that I had learnt or knew had turned out to be unreliable. I was trying to become self-reliant, not only on a worldly plane, but in my sense of the spiritual. I sensed this was more dependable, permanent and more real, and had more meaning even though it couldn’t be touched but only felt deep inside.

This revelation of the tangible being unreal and the intangible being real came to me through pain, and in the process of searching for happiness. I had turned inwards because I had not been able to find happiness anywhere outside. What began as a conscious projection of my inner self onto the stars took five years to turn into a meditative, sense of just being.

Most importantly, I saw her example and description of complete self-surrender was the way to the soul, to the self. She forgot about herself and turned her life over to her inner sense at every opportunity she could in all her encounters.

As much as I could see that happiness was not outside me, I had learnt that outward physical suffering was not necessary, only inner surrender. This was the first turning inwards. It was only then that my sense of pain, from the burden of my thinking, seemed to disappear. I experienced a unity of happiness about everything, in everything. I had a new lightness of my heart I had not known was possible. It was as if I was intoxicated by happiness.

Five years later, perhaps my adolescence pulled me towards the east and once more inwards. In 1972, I became interested in meditation and I learnt mantra meditation which had become popular in the 1960s. Using a mantra, I was able to move inside close to the place where I had previously found such blissful happiness. But there was something not quite right about this which I found difficult to be precise about. I had an awkward sense, almost artificialness about the mantra technique, as if I had the wrong clothes on. I had paid money for a relaxation technique, which was later replaced by mindfulness. As a teenager, I learnt that a spiritual path could not be paid for with money. The only currency of exchange for learning spirituality is complete surrender of the ego.

Being dissatisfied and rudderless as a student in London in 1974, I started looking for something else and so once again I looked in books but my search was unfruitful. In the summer of 1982, I was at a talk given by Jiddu Krishnamurti at Brockwood Park and there I met some people who had been to a sacred mountain in South India called Arunachala. However, it was not until 1985 that I eventually I came to read Arthur Osborne's book *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge* and I realised from this that the search for me was simply one of always turning inwards. I decided that I needed to go to India and see if Arunachala was as special as I had heard and read about.

After a gruelling but interesting five-hour bus journey, I got to my destination . . . Arunachala. I arrived at Arunachala with only the clothes I stood in. It was early winter in England, thirty degrees C in South India and my summer clothes were with the rest of my luggage, which the airline had sent back to England and then lost. It was the early 1980's and Tiruvannamalai was quiet with only a handful of visitors at the Ashram.

What struck me most at first was the immediate feeling of inner peace in the Old Hall, which I visited twice a day. Although I stayed in a cave on Arunachala for some nights, amidst the hustle and bustle of Tiruvannamalai, I failed to notice the most important aspect of Arunachala until I had returned to the mountain; it is not just still, it is stillness.

Sri Ramana Maharshi simply advocated being still. He also suggested enquiring into what our personal thinking consisted of. He said that if this was done diligently by going to the root of thought then our ignorance would be removed and we would see that the ego is only a collection of thoughts. He once said, “..the removal of ignorance and the cessation of false identification reveal the Self which is always present - here and now. This is called realisation. It is not new. It amounts to elimination of ignorance and nothing more.”¹

Surprisingly, he also advised that total surrender could produce exactly the same result. He said “It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of ones being. Do not delude yourself by imagining such source to be some God outside you. One’s source is within oneself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should see the source and merge in it.”²

It was only after some considerable time following Sri Ramana Maharshi’s advice that I could see that St Theresa of Lisieux and Sri Ramana Maharshi led almost exactly the same lives. It was one of always turning inwards. They were both consumed by their surrender. Journeys in different directions for truth have but one destination. A person’s circumstances may be different but the inner means and destination are the same.

They are widely regarded as saints in their own countries. St Theresa of Lisieux was born in France 1873 and Sri Ramana Maharshi in South India in 1879. Her mother died when she was four years old whilst his father died when he was 13 years old. St Theresa of Lisieux entered a Carmelite convent aged 15 and stayed there until her death aged 24 from tuberculosis. Sri Ramana Maharshi left home aged 16 and lived a life of inner silence on and beside the mountain Arunachala until he died aged 70 of a sarcoma.

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§245.

² Ibid., Talk§208.

St Theresa of Lisieux lived a hidden life in a Carmelite convent and wanted to be unknown but she became famous after her spiritual autobiography *The Story of a Soul*. Sri Ramana Maharshi lived at and near Arunachala, virtually sitting still in silence, most of the time, for 54 years.

They both led lives of complete surrender, having given up who they previously were and dedicating their lives to spiritual practice. It seems as if neither tried to avoid any suffering, which they encountered because they were already consumed. There are no recordings of their voices but there are written records of some of their words. They both wrote little.

Their early lives were characterised by profound loss, which must have been unbearably painful. Whilst barely out of childhood they both renounced the material world and entered the environment where they would spend the rest of their lives. Curiously St Theresa of Lisieux was surrounded by her blood sisters in the convent and Sri Ramana Maharshi was surrounded by his mother and brother on Arunachala. It seems like once in the convent and on Arunachala their worldly achievements came to an end as outwardly they appeared to do nothing more. Nevertheless, this was just the beginning of their work.

Their complete surrender of permanently retreating into the inner world and not identifying with the personal ego continue to shine out brilliantly as rare examples of living fully in the spiritual domain. They lived in two different cultures influenced by two different religions but their inner means and destination unified their different paths. The result was happiness in the form of bliss.

There is not much more to add to this, which is helpful. You have to see what they were able to be. You have to want it. Then you have to get on with it in your own way, wherever you are.

The catastrophic family crisis triggered by my brother's running away and total disappearance for eighteen months created an opportunity for me. It showed me a path, turning me inwards and unveiling my inner happiness.

Although this inner path may not always seem easy for us to access, it is here now and there is always help. Sri Ramana Maharshi and St Theresa of Lisieux are like two silent guiding beacons, lighting up the path. ▲

The Maharshi and the Mother

Part One

KAYS

The celebrated ancient scripture *Durgā Saptasatī*, confers divinity on womanhood by stating that “All women are but Thee, reverential Mother.” Amongst those worthy of worship, tradition accords precedence to the Mother over the Father, Guru and God. Even a renunciate, who has severed all familial bonds and to whom even a sovereign ruler is irrelevant, is enjoined upon by Hindu *sanātana dharma*, to pay obeisance to his mother alone the instant he sets his eyes on her.

Most blessed among women was Mother Alagammal for bearing and then blessing humanity with the fruit of her womb – a *yuga puruṣa*, God come as a man so that men may learn to become God. Since nothing comes out of nothing, this great, good fortune must have been the outcome of immense austerities performed and merits earned over countless births. We are forever indebted to this Holy Mother for making it possible for the innumerable lives that have been redeemed and for those in the future who wait to be absorbed into Arunachala. ‘May our obeisance be to Her.’ This phenomenon by itself entitles her to our worshipful adoration as ‘*yuga puruṣa jananyai namaha*’.

Sri Ganapati Muni leads us by hailing her as follows:

Kausalya gave birth to Rāma, the protector of the sages;
Devaki to Sri Kṛṣṇa, the Teacher of yoga;
Renuka gave birth to the Teacher Paraśurāma, a life-long
celibate.

And Māyā Devi to Buddha, the sage of the Śākya who gave
refuge to all beings;

Mother Mary gave birth to the Son of Man who bears the burden
of sin of all devotees.

Likewise, for the welfare of the world, for the removal of the
darkness of ignorance, for the casting away of all ill-conceived
notions, for the realisation of the Truth, Mother Alagammal
gave birth to Bhagavan Sri Ramana. To her Saundaryāmbā, the
beloved wife of Sundara, our salutations.¹

The Maharshi too, in tune with the tradition of *mahātmā-s*,
acknowledges the debt and immortalizes her in *Śrī Aruṇācala
Akṣaramaṇamālai* by specifically mentioning her name. In the 9th
verse of *Navamaṇimālai* (The Necklet of Nine Gems), the sage son
to whom Arunachala is the All, speaks of her as yet another form
of Arunachala. And what is more, Holy Motherhood received its
crowning glory at the hands of Bhagavan for rarely do we hear in the
sacred history of holy Bharat chronicled down the ages, of a temple
erected, consecrated and sanctified by a *jñāni*. Even Ādi Śankara
though a *sannyasin* was beside his mother during her last moments as
he had promised earlier and lit her funeral pyre vouchsafing for her a
supreme state (*vaikuṇṭha*) as per her wish and not absorption into the
Absolute. No wonder it has become a powerful centre pulsating with
spiritual energy, radiating Bhagavan's message and accomplishing
the mission he was born to. In short, 'the Mother of the Maharshi
liberated, became the Śakti and provided the '*pītha*' (place) for the
Maharshi and his teachings.'²

The apotheosis of Mother Alagammal – the seed sprouting as the
mighty Banyan of Sri Ramanasramam – was pre-ordained by the

¹ या मुनीनां त्रातरां श्रीरामं कौसल्येव, योग्विद्योपदेशकं श्रीकृष्णं देवकीव, आकौमारब्रह्मचारिणं देशिकं
परशुधारिणं रेणुकेव, सर्वभूताभयप्रदं शाक्यमुनिं मायादेवीव, भक्तपापभारभृतं मनुष्यकुमारं मेरीव,
सर्वैरैर्गुर्वपि भगवन्तं भवन्तं लोकस्य हितायाविद्यान्धकाराणामपनोदनाय कुवादानां दूरीकरणाय
सत्यस्यावेदनाय च सुषुवे; तस्मै सुन्दरिप्रियायै सौन्दर्यरबायै नमः।

² Sankaranarayanan, S., *Bhagavan and Nayana*, p.29.

divine and the unfolding of this ‘*līlā* of *kaivalya*’ can be perceived in three major landmark events in all of which the mother was the chosen instrument.

At the empirical level her life was one distressing drama of pain relieved only by occasional episodes of happiness. The rude shock of the passing away of her husband was followed by the pangs of separation from the loved ones of the family that had to split and live in two different places. Soon came the devastating news of her second son fleeing home which was a heavy blow.

When news of his whereabouts was known after 28 months of worry and anguish, she came to Pavalakundru with the specific purpose of taking him home. It was a poignant and heart-rending moment for her to see her beloved son’s emaciated and unkempt body, matted hair, dirty *kaupina* and long-curved nails, which tore at her heart. Her plaintive cry to her son went unheeded. Though her mission apparently failed, in time both she and all humanity gained a golden opportunity for liberation. But at the time she did not realise this and left Arunachala dispirited. In time however she gained the unique honour of being the very first recipient – significantly, a woman – of *upadeśa* from the brightest luminary in the galaxy of sages, the Maharshi. This *upadeśa*, springing from the absolute quiescence of the Self with all the power and thrust of ceaseless abidance in the Self, embodies the sum and substance of surrender in its finest spirit and subtlest texture. This instruction, the eternal Truth that every religion espouses and bespeaks of remains to this day an integral part of his two-fold path to the kingdom within. The other being Self-Enquiry, the epitome of his teaching. “May our obeisance be to Mother.”

The written *upadeśa* is as follows:

The fates of souls are all by God ordained/
According to the deeds they have done/
That end that’s ne’er destined to be/
Will never be achieved by any one –/
However hard they try. All those things,
too/
That are destined must occur one day,
/Will come to pass whatever you may do/
To interfere and try their course to stay;
/And this is certain. At length we come to see/
That it is best that we should silent be.

This is reminiscent of the ancient tradition recorded in sacred scriptures like *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* wherein sage Kapila initiates his mother Devahūti or Dhruva, his mother Suniti.

Though Alagammal left Arunachala having apparently failed, the seed was sown and was certain to take root and bear fruit, for the grace that invariably accompanies the words of Truth spoken by a sage inevitably does accomplish the radical transformation of a soul, albeit silently and invisibly. That seed was nurtured by Mother Alagammal and was watered by a steady, gradual dispassion that culminated in a total and uncompromising spirit of surrender, which equipped her for the next stage in her ascent of the Hill of Grace that finally led to its summit. Arunachala, time and again, has proved Himself a past Master in this art.

“Arunachala is relentless and tears one away from everything, strips one of everything, removes every support to which one might still be tempted to cling”³ for that is how He wants it for the one he has called. This is but reminiscent of what Bhagavan Viṣṇu emphatically declared to Mahabali in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*:

“I take away the fortune (power etc.) of whomsoever I show my grace.”⁴

Does not Bhagavan hail this self-same trait in *Marital Garland of Letters*?

Moṭṭai aḍiṭṭenai veṭṭa veḷiyil nī/naṭṭamāḍinai eṇ Aruṇācalā!

What a wonder is this, Arunachala! Stripping me bare of all attachments of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ thus rendering me Pure, Thou, in joyous bliss, dancest in the Transcendent expanse of my heart, Thy sovereign right!⁵

Alagammal’s life henceforth became yet another testimony of this truth. Continuous bereavements, financial stress and hard work became her lot.

Another visit to Arunachala in 1913 earned for her two visions that convinced her beyond doubt of her son’s identity with Lord Śiva. However, it was the subsequent visit in 1914 that turned out to be a momentous event, which fundamentally transformed her life. She was laid low with typhoid that took a turn for the worse. Now the roles of mother and son stood transposed. For Bhagavan he had

³ Swami Abhishiktananda, *Secret of Arunachala*, p.36.

⁴ यमनुगृह्णामि तद्विशो विधुनोम्यहम् (yamanugrṇhāmi tadviśo vidhunomyaham) – 8-22-24

⁵ *Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, v. 85.

but one mother, but he was the Mother to many devotees. How can Bhagavan, the Universal Mother, with Infinite compassion, which embraces every being, preclude his biological mother? Donning the robe of a mother he nursed her.

When her life was despaired of, Bhagavan prayed to Arunachala – for the first and only time – to alter the natural course of events. Having been the chosen instrument of bearing the Supreme Brahman in her womb, she richly deserved it. The gist of the prayer was:

Hill of my refuge that cures the ills of recurring births! O Lord!
It is for Thee to cure my mother's fever.

O God! That smites Death Itself! Vouchsafe Thy grace unto my mother and shield her from Death. What is Death if scrutinized?
Enfold my mother in Thy light and make her one with Thee!
What need then for cremation?

Arunachala, Thou chasest away illusion (Maya). Why delayest Thou to dispel my mother's delirium!

Besides Thee, is there anyone who with maternal solicitude can protect the suppliant soul and ward off the strokes of destiny?⁶

She, who bestowed on humanity the divine gift of the instant cure for primal ignorance (*bhava roga*, the disease of birth) was the one for whom he prayed to the Hill of Fire.

It is, indeed, a paradox that this monarch of monism who is none other than Arunachala Himself, prays for intercession to the Mountain or is it to the Mountain of the Self? The play of the laws of Grace is mysterious indeed and beyond the understanding of the human mind!

Grace flowed and she did recover, for it was preordained that the evolution of Ramanasramam as it stands today is linked to the culmination of mother's spiritual evolution. The Hill, the mountain-shape of Bhagavan, is repeatedly hailed as the Hill of potent medicine, of resplendent *jñāna* that cuts asunder the cycle of births and deaths. No wonder Bhagavan, the human aspect of the Hill, provides an instant cure for the disease of transmigration, has earned the obeisance of numberless devotees as '*bhavaroga bhiṣagvarāya namaḥ*'.⁷ May our obeisance be to Alagammal for bestowing this divine gift on humanity!

⁶ *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, 'For The Mother's Recovery', p.149.

⁷ Best of physicians who destroys the disease of birth and death – *Aṣṭottaram*, v.103.

The year 1916 was another significant moment when mother returned to Arunachala for good. The awakening within, initiated by Bhagavan had worked in silence and blossomed in full. Amidst some resistance from the devotees of Bhagavan out of fear of Bhagavan moving away from the ashram, Bhagavan took her under his wings to allow her to blossom forth in full under his spiritual tutelage. Now the relationship of mother and son stood transformed to that of disciple and *sadguru*. She joined his band of devotees and was the first woman *sādhū* in his circle to undergo the privations of the life of a recluse. As the food procured by begging from town was not adequate to feed all, the innate nature of the mother in her, namely hospitality, came to the fore. The kitchen fire was first set ablaze by her and it still roars high today feeding the physically hungry even as the incandescent fire of *jñāna* blazes ever by its side and nourishes the spiritually starved. Both aspects have continued to grow over the years to feed all who come from all over the world. May our obeisance be to Mother!

Again the honour of being the first woman devotee to inspire Bhagavan to compose a song espousing precious wisdom and pregnant with the essence of Vedantic content belongs to her. She was fond of songs and her repertoire of Vedantic songs included those by Āvudai Akkā, Ādi Śaṅkara and others of Advaitic truth, which were couched in culinary analogies like ‘rice song’ or ‘soup song’. Bhagavan provided one in the same genre called ‘Appalam song’. Even as Arjuna was instrumental for Lord Krishna blessing humanity with the ‘Song Celestial’, so was Alagammal, a channel for Bhagavan for bestowing on the community of seekers this ‘Song of Sadhana’. May our obeisance be to her.

The final leg of spiritual ministration began when she was nearing the end of her earthly sojourn. The powerful presence of the Maharshi in which she constantly lived and moved, his silent guidance, the close association with his devotees, listening to their conversations with him and the impartation of truths and *upadeśa*, as a means to salvation, all wrought a silent revolution in her and her receptivity to this transforming power yielded rich dividends. A dispassion raged so high within that it impelled her to take ochre robes – the first woman devotee to do so. The spirit of surrender infused and fostered by Bhagavan ripened, accelerating her *sādhana* preparing her for the

supreme consummation. She refused to leave the precincts of her son's ashram declaring, "Even if you were to throw my dead body in these thorny bushes, I do not mind but I must end this life in your arms."⁸ And so did it happen. The sense of finality in her declaration of refuge in her son alone echoes the heroic surrender of other outstanding devotees of the Divine Mother.

O Mother! Whether Thou abandon me by the wayside or to Pathala or establish me as a Sāmrat over an empire I shall not let hold of Thy Twin Feet, no, never.⁹

Yet some rough edges of her individual personality stood in the way of attaining perfection. Perception of difference between man and man, man and animal, initial pride of being the mother of a *jñāni* and the expectation of preferential treatment, a typical south Indian Brahminical brand of proper behaviour that was uncompromising in its adherence to rules of purity and orthodoxy loomed as obstacles.

But the studied indifference of the Maharshi, his sarcastic jibes, stern admonitions, love and humour, daily lessons on compassion were the multipronged attacks which, dealt heavy dents to her orthodoxy with a ruthless force and weaned her away from those attachments. The ensuing inner purity and spiritual ripeness quickened the pace of the journey within.

Bhagavan, left to himself would have lived in a cave, one of the many mansions of his Father's House, on the Hill as a *siddha purusha*, many of whom are still reputed to live but seen only by a fortunate few. In order that the unconditioned good fortune of his darśan be made accessible to the infant and the infirm, men, women and animals, the infinite compassion of the Divine created the propitious cause and conditions for the springing up of the present Ashram. For his very presence was the message.

Years before the end of Alagammal's sojourn on earth, the Maharshi to whom the spirit and heart of the sastraic sense was an

⁸ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 3rd April 1947.

⁹ pātaya vā pātāle
sthāpaya vā sakala-loka-sāmrajye
matas tava pada-yugalam
nāham muncāmi naiva muncāmi

(Commentary on *Lalitā Sahasranāma* by Bhāskarācārya)

open book, answered questions by that colossus of sastric scholarship and Vedic wisdom, Sri Ganapati Muni, his wife and other devotees, which provided the stamp and seal of authority in deciding any issue that occurred. These questions and answers were recorded by Ganapati Muni in a text entitled *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā* and now occupies the position of an authoritative Gītā. *Smṛti* prescribes burial of the body for one who has entered the 4th stage or *āśrama* even if he is not realized (*sannyāsa*). Bhagavan clarified that women have an equal right to *sannyāsa*.¹⁰ In addition, that there is no distinction in the experience of a *jīvanmukta* and the experience of a great soul whose life's breath gets merged in the absolute itself. Further, in verse 9 he emphatically declared:

As there is no distinction in liberation and knowledge, a woman liberated while alive should not be consigned to flames. Her body is a temple of God.

Such an unequivocal declaration is also found in *Tirumandiram*:

Blessed are those who in death unite with the Lord, for then even if dead, alive are they. They are siddhas true and Śiva they become. And if the body of such a one is consigned to flames, the entire populace will suffer in burning fever, famine and tumultuous war.¹¹

Further, Bhagavan Himself once affirmed that the 'samadhi' of the Mother is in tune with the tenets of sastras and quoted a verse from *Sūta Samhitāi*,

Be they women or men, if they had had in full the experience of the Self with the dissolution of 'I' and 'mine' in the body and objects, rules of varna and ashrama do not apply.¹²

In 1922 Alagammal fell seriously ill and it was evident that her end was near. In tune with the earlier prayer to Arunachala, the Hill

¹⁰ *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, chapter 13, verse 8.

¹¹ Tantra 7, verse 1907, 1911 & 1912. *Tirumandiram* by Tirumoolar.

¹² अस्ति चेत् बह्वविज्ञानं स्त्रियोवापुरुषस्यवा

वर्णाश्रमसमाचारस्तयोर्नास्त्येव सर्वदा॥

asti cet bahmavijñānaṁ striyovāpuruṣasyavā

varṇāśramasamācārastayornāstyeva sarvadā || – *Assorted Verses*, p. 5.

of Fire, to burn up his mother with the fire of *jñāna* the question of the cremation of her body after death was inappropriate. Bhagavan, Arunachala Himself, proceeded to fulfill her deepest *sankalpa* to be liberated by her son.

Bhagavan sat by her side with one hand on her head and another on her chest for eight hours till she attained *samādhi*. Bhagavan later explained how she was ‘absorbed’ and had not ‘passed away’. Bhagavan himself explained what transpired in those eight long hours:

The latent tendencies of subtle memory from past experiences, which lead to future births flared up. “Hence in the subtle world the subtle body was witnessing scene after scene of what was to happen. By this sequence of experiences the soul went through the future births and travelled towards the highest.”¹³

This experience was made possible by the current of Bhagavan’s spiritual power transmitted by touch. A veritable battle ensued between her soul forces and Bhagavan’s spiritual power in which the former was ultimately vanquished. Bhagavan actually described the scenes witnessed, including their intensity.¹⁴ Thus bestowed with the opulence of *Śivajñāna*, she, the pure spirit, a portion of the eternal, was made to merge with the fire of awareness whence it came. Her greatness lies in her resistance-free receptivity to the help extended and the passive cooperation in shedding her subtle sheath of mortal ignorance before she could be ensconced in Supreme Peace that passeth all understanding. Bhagavan later on reminisced, “her body glowed with a divine resplendence. She looked not like a corpse but like a *yogini* in meditation”¹⁵ and “divine light was seen in a holy dance in her.”¹⁶

In the words of Ganapati Muni:

Saundaryāmbā became the Effulgence proclaimed by the Vedas and Upaniṣads, the Effulgence is all pervasive, the Effulgence that manifests through the gaze of her son, Guha (Ramana).¹⁷



¹³ Krishna Bhikshu, *Sri Ramana Leela*, p.167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.167.

¹⁵ G.V. Subbaramaiah, *My Reminiscences*, p.41, 1994 edition.

¹⁶ Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, p.9.

¹⁷ *Saundaryāmbā Nirvāṇa Aṣṭakam*, v.4.



Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Five Part One

The Lord Serves Namdev as a Labourer

NABAJI SIDDHA

Namdev was, over and over again, engulfed in emotion by the compassionate acts of the Lord. With the wealth bestowed on him, he continued with greater enthusiasm his charitable acts of feeding Sadhus, Mahatmas and the needy, and presenting them appropriately with the gift of clothes and gold coins. He got so carried away by the joy of performing such noble deeds that soon the large stock of wealth was depleted. Yet his love for feeding Sadhus was undiminished and he had to sell his house also to continue his service to the devotees and Sadhus. When nothing was left to continue the service, he started spending his days in the temple singing the Lord's glories and dancing, and swimming in the ocean of devotional fervour and bliss. Since they had no more a house to stay, Damaseth made a shelter of thatched leaves for themselves on the common land and continued to offer Panduranga their daily Naivedyam out of money earned by their traditional occupation of tailoring. Rajabai, who was pregnant delivered a male child in due course. The Lord had to force Namdev to go home and see the child. Obeying His instructions, Namdev went home and after a cursory look at the baby was about to return to the temple. But the parents pleaded with him to stay for a

few more days with the family. Agreeing to their request, Nama spent a few days there, sleeping at night in one corner of the hut.

One night, there was a heavy downpour with flashes of lightning and loud claps of thunder. Rainwater started leaking through the holes in the thatched roof. The mother told the son, “Look at our fate in spite of the wealth we were fortunate to have. You not only gave away all the money, you also sold our only shelter. Can we, aged people, the tender infant and the young mother who is weak from childbirth bear the cold draft and this rain? The baby may even catch fever. Go and get some one to repair the roof.”

Nama replied in an exasperated voice, “O mother, this hut is standing only on three pillars made of bamboo poles and it is not even properly thatched, but covered only with wild grass. Who will come to repair this hut at this hour of the night? Even if someone comes, I don’t know how much wages he will demand. O mother, do I have the money for all this? Is it for this kind of vexing task that you asked me to stay here for a few more days?” After this harangue, he started to walk towards the temple.

But Gunabai was not someone to be daunted by her son’s indifferent attitude. She walked fast, caught up with him and then blocking his way she said, “O son, how much we cherished you and brought you up without any lack or want! Should you not give at least a fraction of such care to your son? Is it a trouble to protect your son and your wife who has shared your life through all travails? Because of our old age, we are not able to do anything for the family. How we are struggling to make both ends meet is not a new story to you.”

Nama replied, “O mother, God alone protects all. To think otherwise does not befit the devotee of the Lord. Will His Lordship who nourishes all beings from the lowest level of creation onwards ignore the needs of an infant? Will He be insensitive to our hardship?”

However, since it was past midnight, Namdev didn’t want to go against his parents’ wishes. He retraced his steps to the thatched cottage and stayed back. Curled up in a corner, he soon lost himself in the remembrance of the Lord. The gusty wind and lashing rain kept him awake. Because of the leaking of water inside, Damaseth and Gunabai kept changing the position of the thatches, depending on the direction from where the force of wind and rain was blowing

strong. This was going on for sometime with the old couple darting here and there, changing the grass sheets from one place to another to protect the new mother and baby from rain. Gunabai put up a loud wail, “O Lord, if the fragile roof collapses, mother and baby will be in trouble. O Lord of Pandhari, we are helpless in this situation. You alone can rescue us from this miserable plight.” Though assailed by worry, fatigue overpowered them. They became gradually quiet and then sank into sleep.

The Lover of devotees reached the hut in the guise of a labourer, carrying thick thatches and a bamboo pole for the fourth pillar and called out, “O Nama Swami! O Nama Swami!” He had to repeat it several times to be heard in the din of howling wind and heavy rain.

Namdev was thoroughly vexed with the caller. He wanted to be left in peace to continue his mental worship and contemplation. He said to himself in an aggrieved tone, “O Good Lord! Till now my old parents with their grumblings and pitter-patter didn’t allow me to be fully immersed in Your remembrance. Now they are lost in sleep and stillness, but another hurdle has cropped up to distract me. This fellow is screaming outside as if all his wealth has been robbed! It is true indeed that worldly life is an ocean of sorrow and is difficult to cross.” With this thought, he deliberately kept quiet without answering the loud call.

By now, the Lord pushing through the thatches entered the hut, came near Nama and said, “Hey Nama! Didn’t you hear Me? How many times I have called you. Why have you closed your eyes again, pretending not to have heard Me? For whose sake you have reared a family, yet looking upon it as a nuisance? Why can’t your father-in-law fix the fourth pillar and supply you with thatches? Is it a burden for a wealthy man? Being your neighbour, I am not able to watch their suffering and ignore their plight and plea. I am so worried about the condition of the mother and the new born that they might catch high fever and become delirious. I have a big family and can understand your family’s travails. I have been bawling out for the last half hour but you were not heeding me. Now be up and give me a hand in erecting the fourth foot of the pillar to keep the rain out.” Saying this, He gave the thatched wall a good shake and made a part of the roof crash down on Nama!

He, then, yelled, “Alas! In keeping with your lackadaisical ways, the roof has also collapsed. Come out quick.”

With great effort, Namdev got out and started yelling at the man, “Are you blind? You came here bragging that you are a help, instead you purposely brought down the roof. If you have so much goodwill, why didn’t you bring a labourer with you?”

“Hey Nama! Don’t let your tongue run away without restraint. I am not a wealthy man to hire a worker. It is my long-standing friendship with your parents and pity for the mother and the new-born that have brought me here at this hour to mend your roof and provide some relief. Now, have some good sense and give me a hand with this work.”

He made Nama forcibly engage in the work and hold on to the crumbling roof while he did a tidy work of patching up the leaky holes in the roof, closing the sides with the grass mats and tying them well with the support of bamboo splints. Then He beckoned Nama saying, “O Nama! you are good for nothing except for eating feasts on a plantain leaf if there is a free feeding. Now, look at the sides and the ceiling! Aren’t they neatly laid? Come on now, give me my wages. I have already lost my night’s sleep, slogging the whole night for foolish people like you. Now let me get going so that I can catch a little sleep. Hurry up with my wages. I am very tired. Pay me also for the cost of new thatches and the bamboo poles.”

Nama exclaimed, “Hurray! Wonderful! Did I ask you to bring all this and mend my hut? Did I come to you complaining about my misfortune? You came by your own sweet will. I think, you have come here at this hour to pick up a quarrel with me. I don’t have even the smallest coin with me to pay your wages or the cost of materials.”

The Lord in the disguise started jumping up and down, screaming at the top of His voice, “You scum, I won’t let you off the hook. Who is enjoying the safety of the shelter now, my wife or your wife? Is it your parents or my parents who are sheltered against the rain now? I dare you, hand over this very moment, all my dues or else I will set fire to the hut. Taking pity on these people, I came to their rescue. Not only do you have no word of thanks, on the contrary, you are insulting Me.” Moving out swiftly and sealing the entrance deftly, He added, “I have already sealed the entrance, so none can get out. I will go and get a firebrand.” The miscreant disappeared quickly around the bend.

Nama looked around for an exit. It was so well hooked that there was no way out. “Oh! this evildoer has done all this apparent repair, only to bring more trouble. There is nothing I can do now. Let me leave it in the hands of the Lord. It is all His sweet will.” Once again, Nama resorted to his corner and started uttering the Name of the Lord.

His wife who had been awake watching the scene reached him in one stride and said in agitation, “O Swami! You have refused to pay him his hard earned wages. You may not be having the money, but you could have appeased the man who helped us at this hour of dire need with polite words. Now you remain careless about our fate, flaunting your great devotion. Won’t you be burdened with the sin of getting us burnt in the fire? Is your conduct proper?” She picked up the baby and waking up her in-laws apprised them of the situation and said, ‘Let us somehow get out before the man returns and sets fire.’”

The aged parents became frightened and asked Namdev, “Is this all true? Oh...! yet another calamity has befallen us now! Why did you allow him to continue with the work, when you had no intention to pay him? Let us try to untie the grass mats.” But none of their efforts with hands, nails and teeth succeeded. Getting more and more agitated, they screamed loud which was heard by some neighbours who were, however, waking up as dawn was approaching. They came running to the hut. After hearing the entire story, they comforted them saying that they would keep a watch while, at the same time, trying to make an opening for them to come out. When they finally tore open the mats on one side which were tightly entwined with each other, Namdev emerged first and started walking towards Chandrabhaga muttering to himself, “Ah... freedom from all vexation! Now I can engage in meditation without any interference.” After his morning ablutions, he reached the temple and sat in a corner in total absorption.

Damaseth and his wife came out to inspect the repair work carried out on the roof and the side walls. They were wonderstruck to see the efficient work done on the dilapidated hut. When they entered the hut, they found the fourth pillar, the twine and the grass mats used by the labourer glittering in gold. Then they realized that it was the play of the Lord. Damaseth was speechless and his heart, as in bad times, turned to the Lord in good times also. They took a blade of the golden grass and sold it in the market. With that money, they rented a small house and secured all their belongings including the gold items there.

They purchased a large quantity of groceries and prepared a variety of food offerings and reached the temple with them. They woke up Namdev and told him to prepare for the worship and offer the food to the Lord and then return home.

Looking at the elaborate feast laid at the altar, Namdev was greatly surprised. But, it didn't occur to him to ask his parents as to how they managed such a rich fare for the Lord. He exclaimed, "O...! what a sumptuous feast for the Lord today! Come, my Lord and enjoy the grand banquet!" Saying this, Nama decorated the idol, worshipped it with flowers and then invited the Lord. Panduranga appearing before him asked, "Have you brought Me My wages for the repair I made to your hut last night?" These words struck Namdev like a thunderbolt and he was sore stricken with grief. He cried in distress, "O my Lord, my Lord! What have You done, making me Your master to pay You Your wages. Oh...! What have You done? What have You done? You touched the baby which was still under ritualistic pollution! Giving up the exalted status of the Lord of the Universe, You deigned to become a workman in my house, mending the ceiling and propping up the walls! You came to put an end to my poverty. You have flooded me with Your unconditional love, toiling at night in the storm, amidst all the rubbish scattered around in the hut, for the welfare of my kith and kin! You have proclaimed Your renown, time and again, as the All-merciful Lord and Master by deigning to serve Your devotees even in menial roles! What a heinous sinner am I that when You called out several times, I continued lying down as if I didn't hear You. Not only You put up with my insolent conduct, but You showered on me with Your unfathomable love." He was sunk in utter remorse. His mind and speech were soaked in a mixture of love, grief and gratitude. Consoled somewhat by the Lord himself, Namdev fed Him the delicious food. Then the Lord smilingly told Namdev to name his son as Vishnudas and merged in the idol.

When Nama reached the newly rented home with the plate, he beheld the treasure of gold and was again overtaken by joy and remorse alternately. Taking the baby in his arms, he cooed to him and called him Vishnudas. He arranged for a big feast for all the village folk and relatives to celebrate the naming of the child and to express his gratitude for God's compassion on him and his family by sharing God's bounty with them all. He gathered thousands of Sadhus and offered them food, gold coins, cows, raiment etc.

When the charity on grand scale was becoming an ongoing affair every day, Damaseth and his wife got worried and said, “O Nama, if you start spending like this, all the wealth will be depleted in no time. Who will supply us the riches time and again? Don’t you remember our days of poverty, leaky house, torn clothes, pitiable state of the new-born and its mother..? We had no money even to take care of the trivial needs of the baby. How much we had to suffer for lack of wherewithal? Do you want us to go back to that humiliating life again? You are well aware of our predicament. At least now, put the remaining gold in a secure place for our rainy days.”

Namdev whose spirits were soaring high told them about the glorious life of serving Sadhus thus, “O my dear ones! Service to the Sadhus and needy uplifts the givers and secures them a place in a higher realm. Those who deny succour to others will reach a lower plane. Such people, though live in the body, are like lifeless people. None, not even the husband or wife or father or mother will accompany the soul after death; it is only the noble and charitable deeds they perform in this life that will protect them. Those who live a righteous life on this earth will be free from wants and afflictions of all kinds. It will bestow even immortality.”

He proceeded further, “O folks! It is because of possessiveness and miserliness that the lowly and unrighteous Duryodhana met with his disgraceful end. Whereas Dharmaputra, even when he was exploited and divested of all honour and his kingdom, remained noble and took refuge in Dharma alone and became victorious in the end. He was righteous and gracious till the end, even though he lost his wife and brothers one by one on his ascent to Heaven. He didn’t let down even the dog which accompanied him at the cost of his being disposed of to hell.”

Namdev upheld before his parents the greatness of generosity and sharing of wealth and brought about a change in their attitude. They spent all the gold in feeding and helping the Sadhus and needy. Thereafter, Namdev made the temple his home and spent his time singing hymns to the Lord.”

Nabhaji remained silent for a long time overwhelmed by the exemplary life of devotion and renunciation of Namdev. Then he continued the tale.



Patience

Nirmala Bharadwaj

'How many times I explain to you
Yet, you always miss a thing or two...
I can't believe you still don't get it
This is so clear, why can't you see it!'

I've often railed with my kith and kin,
And felt my patience wearing thin;
Wishing someone would clue me in
To this hamster wheel I'm trapped in.

In the still of dawn, to this book I am drawn.
So many questions He answered in every known form.
So many languages, so many tomes
At their heart, the questions were the same.
— It would make anyone release a groan.

No parent, no friend can repeat so often
An advice with patience and such compassion
Anecdotes, metaphors to transport our thought
To focus yet again in what's being taught

The Nth time as eloquent as the first;
The wonder why He did that every time:
Was it Love, Grace, Compassion?

Or A Master's vow for our salvation...

We never know which ray of sun ripens the fruit
Which drop of rain sprouts the grain?
Which gulp of water quenches our thirst?
Which mouthful of food satisfied our hunger?

So, it seems, the endless stream
Often very similar questions
Is there for just that reason
To ripen us at the right season!

Vairagya Catakam

Part Two

TAVATTIRU SANTHALINGA ADIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Argument

The mind now requests further clarification on how the seemingly inevitable death mentioned in the previous verse can be escaped. Vivēkam replies that it is extremely difficult but can be done by clinging steadfastly to the feet of the Lord. He cites rishi Markandeya as one who achieved this.

Mind, apart from those who never leave Him who is the body's beginning and end, it is difficult indeed for all others to escape cruel Death. The son of matchless Mrikandu [Markandeya]¹ bears testimony to these words. Therefore do not fear. We do not know if this very moment is the moment when the body will meet its end. Accordingly, cling tightly each day to the feet of the Lord,² regarding them as our refuge. Thus may we too curb the might of Death. (15)

¹ *Mirukaṇḍu puttiraṇ* – the son of *Mṛkaṇḍu*, an ancient sage, the father of the rishi *Mārkaṇḍeya*, whose devotion to Lord Śiva was so great that when Death came to claim him, Śiva fought with Death and defeated him.

² *tañcam enru araṇ caraṇ viḍē* – regarding them as your refuge, you should not let go of the feet of the Lord. See *Tiru-k-kuraḷ*, 4:

Robert Butler has been a devotee of Sri Ramana for 40 years. He has published, independently and through Sri Ramanasramam, a number of translations and commentaries on works by Sri Ramana, Muruganar and earlier authors of works in the Tamil advaita tradition. Translations by him, including *Ozhivil Odukkam* and *Sonasaila Malai*, have been serialised in previous editions of the *Mountain Path*.

Argument

Vivēkam insists further on the need for the mind to direct all its efforts to the gaining of realisation, whilst it still possesses a physical body and mental faculties with which to engage in that task. It points to the fate of the sages Sambara and Sampati in order to underline the difficulty and uncertainty of gaining a human form again in a future birth.

When we leave this body, it is no easy thing to attain this human form again.³ The fate of the great *ṛiṣhi*-s, Sambara and Sampati who [as a result of Lord Śiva's curse] dwelt as eagles upon the Vedic Mount, bears witness to this.⁴ Yet while you still have your physical body, and your faculty of discrimination, so difficult to attain, my mind, you have not sought refuge in the Lord of Mount Kailash, put to an end to your many sorrows, standing firm with your mind one-pointed and inseparable from Him. (16)

They shall ever free from sorrow be, who for refuge go
to the feet of Him who neither desire nor aversion knows.

The metaphor of 'clinging to the feet of the Lord' does not really strike a chord with the majority of spiritual aspirants in the 21st century. What this means in modern terms is explained by sages of the modern era, like Ramana Maharshi:

If a man considers he is born he cannot avoid the fear of death. Let him find out if he has been born or if the Self has any birth. He will discover that the Self always exists, that the body which is born resolves itself into thought and that the emergence of thought is the root of all mischief. Find wherefrom thoughts emerge. Then you will abide in the ever-present inmost Self and be free from the idea of birth or the fear of death.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, 80.

Thus this 'clinging to the feet of the Lord' amounts simply to the endeavour of abiding steadfastly in the sense of one's own being and resisting the tendency of the mind to arise and seek gratification in outward phenomena.

³ TCS quotes the following verse from *Ānanda-t-tiraṭṭu* to illustrate the folly of not devoting one's human birth to the task of gaining liberation:

To gain a human form and then to seek worldly pleasures, becoming a slave to one's karma with no thought of gaining liberation, is like obtaining a magic sword and then, instead of defeating one's enemies, turning its blade, alas, upon one's own body.

⁴ *maṛai nagam* – *Mountain of the Vedas* is a Tamil rendering of the Sanskrit name *Vedagiri*, which came later to be known as *Tiru-k-kaḷu-k-kuṅṅam* – *The Holy Eagle*

Argument

Vivēkam now points out to the mind the dire consequences of taking the imaginary world created by the mind to be real. It is akin to attempting to raise crops in the water mistakenly perceived in a mirage under the midday sun.

Since this impermanent body passes away as swiftly as a lightning flash⁵ you should with equal swiftness direct your worship to Lord Śiva. If instead of this, my Mind, you propose to involve yourself in all kinds of worldly actions, you will be like someone who, believing that the mirage that he sees in the mid-day sun is a broad expanse of water, decides in his confusion to use it to raise rice and other crops through his own efforts.⁶ Realising this, you should give up such activity. (17)

Argument

Vivēkam explains in more detail what is meant by the ‘one-pointed’ state referred to in v. 16. This advice amounts to dwelling as the Self, Śivam, in the eternal now, free of the sense of doership.

Mount. This shrine is a rock-cut Śiva cave temple dating from the 7th century C.E., situated at the top of a hill in Chengalpattu district in the state of Tamil Nadu. The temple complex is in two parts, the temple at the top of the hill being dedicated to Lord Śiva as Vedagiriswarar and the large temple complex at the foot of the hill being dedicated to his consort Parvati, in the guise of Tiripurasundari Amman. According to the legend as related by TCS, two rishis, Camparaṇ and Campāti, performed arduous *tapas* with the end of gaining worldly pleasure. But when Śiva appeared and asked them what they wanted, they claimed it was only *mukti*, liberation. In anger at their deceit Śiva cursed them to remain as eagles on the Vedagiri mount without regaining a human form from the first, *Kṛita yuga* down to the present fourth, *Kali yuga*.

⁵ Compare v. 27 of the *Kandar Anubūdi* of Arunagirinathar:

Is my attachment to this fleeting life that passes like a lightning flash
the fruit of deeds of lifetimes past? Gold! Gem! Grace! Reality!
Ruler of the world!
Peacock-mounted Celestial Lord!

⁶ TCS quotes v. 1 of Māṇikkavācagar’s *Tirutōṇōkkam*:

Dancer of the sacred dance in Tillai’s shining Hall,
who freed me from the foolish nature,
which, thinking, ‘Here’s a lotus-brimming tank!’
made me from the water of a ghostly mirage draw,
[let us two] *Tōṇōkkam* [play], that now I might
with your holy, roseate feet unite.

This is the truth. Understand it well, good mind: do not entertain any thought for the future, not even for the next moment of time. It is impossible for you to be certain if your body will last that long. By the same token, do not dwell upon any act that occurred in a previous instant of time.⁷ There is no point in this. Even in the fleeting present moment, of which we speak, why dwell upon joys and sorrows, since these are furnished by Civan as a result of our good and evil deeds?⁸
(18)

Argument

Vivēkam explains to the mind that, as ordained by destiny, pleasure and suffering will inevitably arise but that it should remain at all times with its attention firmly fixed on the Self, not allowing itself to be captivated by the impressions of the five senses, just as an actor in

⁷ The ego-mind's perception of a body and a world existing separately from itself is purely a mental projection which requires the idea of a past, present and future, occurring in finite space, to support it. However if the mind is turned inward to dwell on the sense of being in the timeless now, that body and world disappear like a mirage in the desert, along with the space-time continuum in which they appear to exist. Ramana Maharshi addresses this issue in vv. 15-16 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*:

When we investigate, where is time and where is space apart from ourselves?

If we are the body, then we will be caught up in time and space – but are we the body? Now, then and always we are the same One. In space, here, there and everywhere we are the same One. Therefore we alone exist, we in whom there is neither time nor space.

⁸ In this timeless state referred to above, all is seen to unfold as the workings of the Self, Śivam, Brahman. This is what is referred to in the Śaiva tradition as the Five Divine Operations, *creation, maintenance, destruction, veiling and the granting of grace*. In this state we are entirely free from the burden of believing that we are the architects of our own destiny. TCS give two quotations illustrating the consequences of failing to grasp this fundamental reality, not devoting oneself to the task of liberation but spending one's existence in a mental world of chimeric ideas. The first is *Tiru-k-kuraḷ*, 374:

If they'll live another hour or two, they can't be sure,
yet they hatch not ten million plans, but many more.

In a similar vein TCS quotes verse 28 of Auvaiyār's *Naḷvaḷi*:

A measure of grain to eat and four cubits of cloth to wear are all a man needs.
Yet his thoughts multiply a billionfold. Living life blindly, his domestic life as fragile as a clay pot, he suffers till the day he dies.

a play does not become identified with the part he plays. By so doing liberation can be easily attained, it declares.

The destiny that is allotted to you will include good as well as evil. Like the actor who balances on a bamboo pole and recites dialogue and so on,⁹ or like the wife who, though she desires another, obeys the command of her husband, even though you apprehend through the senses that which destiny brings, if you practice the freedom from desire of which I speak and if you do not leave hold of the Lord, either by day or by night, my Mind, the bliss of liberation will be easy to attain. (19)

Argument

Vivēkam explains to the mind that it consists simply of thoughts, which arise again and again out of its desires, its attachment to an imagined world which it erroneously perceives as other than itself. When these desires are curbed and disappear, there is an end to thoughts and a de facto union with the Self, here figuratively referred to as worship of the golden feet of Lord Somasekharan.

⁹ *kaḷai mēl niṅṅru uraiḡaḷ ādi cey kūttaril*— Like a dancer, standing on a bamboo pole, [who] recites dialogue and so forth. TCS expands this in his *urai* as follows: like a performer who displays his physical prowess, expertly performing conjuring tricks such as *tiyākiyai-p-pugaḷdal* (the praising of a patron), whilst balancing on a tall pole without losing his concentration and falling over. The description suggests someone who is giving a performance of acrobatics, juggling and conjuring tricks, interspersed with dialogue, possibly in praise of an actual or potential patron. There are a number of ways of interpreting this simile. One would be that, just as the acrobat, through long practice, executes his routine to perfection, yet remains fully aware that it is just an act and never loses his focus on the balance he must maintain, the advanced spiritual aspirant skillfully performs his role in the world as ordained by his destiny, yet never letting go of the awareness that it is Lord Śiva, the Self alone who is the sole author of his actions. Compare *Oḷivil Oḷukkam*, v. 34:

The modifications of *māyā* are endless, like the delusion caused by intoxicating liquor. They will not be eliminated by your own efforts unless you remain as you are, without identifying with them, as one who is merely playing a part in a masquerade. This you should know.

Truly, your very desires are the seeds which furnish you with births over and over again.¹⁰ Restrain them, my mind! The sea of desire will dry up. The waves that are your thoughts will vanish. All thoughts will die away. There is no doubt whatsoever that, in each moment [that those thoughts are absent], there will be for you in that moment worship of the golden feet of our Father Somasekharan, He who is the fullness of Reality.¹¹ (20)

Argument

Vivēkam explains to the mind that, since Śivam, the Self, cannot in any way be grasped by the mind, it is a grave error for the mind to waver from the fixed state alluded to in the previous verse and to spend its time analysing whether its conduct is virtuous or sinful. Its proper course is to regain that fixed state, abandoning any such concerns.

It is a sin to waver from your fixed state ever so slightly, by thinking ‘We have offered *pūjā* to the Lord, and performed many other good deeds,’ or ‘Rather than do those things, we have committed wicked

¹⁰ TCS cites *Tiru-k-kuraḷ*, 361:

The wise declare that for all living beings
it is desire that of births is ever the seed.

And *ñānavāciṭṭam*:

When the fuel of desire is spent, the fire of thought subsides. This is a truth upon which we should reflect. Mounting the tall chariot of renunciation, O hero, and looking upon the poor earth, sorely afflicted by desire, with the noble gaze of compassion, remain free of any lack.

Compare *Oḷivil Oḷukkam* v. 171:

Do we not know, from the way in which trifling pleasures arise and then just as quickly fade away, that supreme bliss is simply the eradication of desire? If we enquire into it and clearly understand that it is like the bamboo container into which insects enter, get stuck and die, desire for the pleasures of the five senses will end.

¹¹ See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 618:

The degree of the absence of thoughts is the measure of your progress towards Self-Realisation. But Self-Realisation itself does not admit of progress; it is ever the same. The Self remains always in realisation. The obstacles are thoughts. Progress is measured by the degree of removal of the obstacles to understanding that the Self is always realised. So thoughts must be checked by seeking to whom they arise. So you go to their Source, where they do not arise.

deeds.' Why so? If you remain perfectly still, free from thoughts, my mind, be assured that so doing will surely bring you to experience deep bliss at the Lord's holy feet.¹² (21)

Argument

In the next two verses vivēkam expresses its amazement at how the mind finds the simple practice of turning inward to dwell in the thought-free state so difficult, whilst considering it an easy option to involve itself in meditation and other practices, which only sustain its ceaseless activity.

Mind, you were convinced that true *jñāna* and true *nishṭa* were hard to attain, and that performing *dhyāna* and other practices without the least respite was easy. Like small children, you found it impossible to remain still, whilst exertion came easily to you. What strangeness is this. Pray, stay and tell!¹³ (22)

Argument

Vivēkam points out to the mind that their respective strategies for attaining liberation are mutually opposed: The mind is obsessed with

¹² Having experienced to some degree the thought-free state alluded to in the previous verse, it is an error to then begin to question oneself as to whether one's conduct towards the Lord is worthy or unworthy. In so doing, one is drawn back into the realm of the ego-mind and commits the sin of regarding the transcendent Self as something that can be the object of thought. TCS glosses:

Here it is said that, since it is pure imagination to assume that one has a form and then to perform worship to Lord Śiva, perceiving him as having form also, this is an affront [to the Lord]. And since the true reality is to remain as pure consciousness, abiding motionless in the Śivam which is the consciousness that underlies consciousness itself, then this alone is *pūjā* [to the Lord].

TCS cites *Āṇanda-t-tiraṭṭu*:

The true *pūjā* to the Lord is only performed by realising that He exists as the consciousness that shines as all that is, not by any other act. Only thus, through *jñāna*, may the Lord be truly worshipped.

Compare also v. 582 of the *Sri Ramana Guru Prasadam* of Sri Muruganar:

The soul is nothing other than the Śiva lingam itself. It is a grievous error for those who are unable to concentrate their attention and realise this through the subtle awareness that enters the Heart and asks, 'Who am I?' to vilify themselves and lament as if they were sinners.

¹³ In saying 56 of his *Cātakarkuriya Cattāna Neṛigaḷ* – *The Disciplines that are essential in the Spiritual Aspirant* Sri Muruganar highlights the danger of over-

actions, both physical and mental, whilst it is the desire of vivēkam merely to remain still. Vivēkam points out to the mind that since Śivam is beyond the reach of the mind and senses, the only means to reach Him is to remain still, free of all mental activity.

Mind, your desire is to move about, never remaining still, whilst my true desire is to remain still, abandoning movement. How you wander about, attempting to realise the lofty state of liberation, considering it a sin to remain still and quiet upon this earth! Civan is not something that can be perceived by the senses. Therefore realise and clearly know that to remain free of thoughts is the means for you to reach Him.¹⁴

(23)

Argument

Vivēkam describes to the mind the fruits of remaining in the thought-free state described previously.

Mind, when the perceptions of the five senses disappear, and you shine unobscured like a waveless ocean upon which the *vāsanā*-s that arise from those perceptions neither arise nor subside, will a single sorrow remain for us? In that state, liberation will be as clear as a *nelli* fruit in the palm of the hand.¹⁵ There will be a refuge for us

indulgence in supposedly spiritual activities which only serve to strengthen the mind and remove us yet further from the state of peace and equanimity we are seeking:

No one who occupies himself in *puja* to god and service to *sadhus* and so on with a very active and wandering mind, sacrificing in so doing the calm peace of the Supreme within his heart, will be able to reap the benefits that are the true purpose of those activities. They will be useless like sacrificial offerings poured onto cold ashes. Therefore in all situations the first duty of the wise is to preserve a clarity of mind that is not affected by the least disturbance.

¹⁴ Compare Ramana Maharshi, *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, v. 22:

Giving light to the mind, [the Lord] will shine within that mind. Other than by curbing the mind, turning it inwards and embedding it in the Lord, how can there be any thinking of the Lord on the part of the mind? Consider this.

¹⁵ The state of liberation shines forth as itself, simply upon the eradication of the sense impressions and the conditioning they give rise to. TCS quotes from *Caci varṇa bōdam*, a Vēdānta work by Tattuvarāyar:

at the feet of the guru, that cut off the fear that has haunted us from time immemorial. (24)

Argument

The mind raises a doubt as to how the eradication of those sense impressions may be achieved, in order that that state free of the vāsaṇa-s which they give rise to may be gained. Vivēkam replies that such doubt stems from the mind's persisting in its dualistic thinking. In the nondual state no such doubts can arise.

According to the utterances of the Four Vedas, the wave of nondual experience [*parai*]¹⁶ with which you are united in the ocean of the supreme Brahman, impossible to describe, will transcend and dispel the bubbles and so on within it that are the world and all living beings. Therefore what is there to be grasped, or what to be let go of? Mind, affirming that the bliss of the Self is all that is, drive out your dualistic thinking. (25)

If you ask what is the state in which we may know the Supreme,
if the state of waking sleep is gained,
upon the abolition of senses and deeds,
that shining Reality will be clearly be seen.

¹⁶ *parai*, Skt. *parā* is a Siddhānta term which describes the state which supervenes as the culmination of the work of grace; in this state everything is now of the form of grace itself, and the *jīva* is no longer aware of itself as a separate entity, just as the flame of a lamp is no longer visible in the full light of the sun. This state is synonymous with *paripūraṇam* – the all-embracing fullness [of Reality], since there is no longer a personality to experience it as other than oneness. The state of *parai* appears comparable to the state which Sri Ramana refers to as the *ātma sphurāna*, the 'I am I' state:

Again, *sphurāna* is the foretaste of Realisation. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If the man mistakes himself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from him. They are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject's enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self. (Talk§62)

Realisation is simply to be permanently established in this state upon the destruction of the ego.

Mind, remain firmly established in the thought-free state. If you cannot do that, remain with your thoughts firmly fixed on the fair, all-embracing Supreme, other than which nothing is. If that is impossible, stand firm in the understanding that the world is the body of the black-throated Lord. And if you cannot do that, reflect upon the form of those who have come upon the earth to remove our deceitful nature, suffusing us with grace. Thus shall you win salvation. (26)

Mind, we shall win salvation. Silence your voice.¹⁷ you cannot, speak only the truth. Even words spoken in truth are false if they do not promote the good. And even if they do, words still result in untruth, if we say ‘I did’, ‘Others did’, and even when these falsehoods have gone, know that it is false for you to say that anything at all is other than that Śivam, so hard to attain. (27)

If we examine the matter, you should bring this body to a state of stillness in the state of *samadhi*, like a picture of a lighted lamp. If you cannot do that, take up the lofty service of the supreme Guru.¹⁸ Mind, whatever other activity comes to you as a result of your ordained destiny, do what is best for all other life forms. Do not gratify the excrement filled, corpse-like body that bears the stench of putrefaction. (28)

(To be continued) ▲

¹⁷ TCS quotes *Tiru-k-kural*, 127:

Whatever else you fail to guard, guard your words. Or else, through a slip of the tongue, much misery will be felt.

¹⁸ TCS cites *Olivil Oḍukkam*, v. 15:

This work is for those who would enter fire, or abandon themselves to a tiger or a snake, if the guru so commanded it. They are to him as life is to the body, as the eyelid is to the eye, or as thread is to the needle. It will be of no use to the spiritually immature, just as a banana stem will not be consumed even if burned in a hot fire, nor a clay pot transformed into gold by the alchemist’s stone.

BOOK REVIEWS



CALL OF THE INFINITE: THE WAY OF SHIN BUDDHISM by John Paraskevopoulos. San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2009, pp. 114, US\$14.95. ISBN: 978-1-59731-095-6

“For those who are ready, / The door to the deathless state is open. / You that have ears, / Give up the conditions that bind you / And enter in.”— *Majjhima Nikāya*

In light of the increasing interest in Buddhism among many Westerners, it is curious that little is known about the Pure Land tradition of the Mahāyāna ('Great Vehicle'). The most prominent sect of this denomination, *Jōdo Shinshu*, was founded by Shinran (1173–1263) and remains the largest school of Buddhism in Japan today. The book addresses the general reader by keeping technical terms to a minimum and employs accessible language, allowing those who are unfamiliar with Buddhism to learn more about this remarkable religion. The author points out that this book “is not a work of scholarship but rather a contemplative and devotional study of what lies at the heart of this important Buddhist tradition.” (p. xi)

This work consists of four parts that present the key teachings of Shin Buddhism: Chapter One: Pain and Longing; Chapter Two: Infinite Light; Chapter Three: Awakening to the Real; and Chapter Four: Joy Amidst the Shadows.

Gautama Buddha, perhaps like no other religious figure, taught – most directly – the inescapable truth about the inherently unsatisfactory nature of the human condition (*dukkha*). Our false identification with the empirical ego creates a troubled mind and unstable behavior, as Shinran teaches: “Maddened beyond control by blind passions, we do things we should not, say things we should not and think things we should not.” (p. 70) “In the face of this transitory existence, we seek security in order to shield our vulnerability. The Buddha realized that it was through coming to terms with the

suffering, disappointment and anguish of human existence that we can discover its underlying meaning. By seeing that our own minds create the dissatisfaction that plagues our lives, we can be led to seek shelter in that which transcends the conditions of ‘birth and death’” (*samsāra*).

The following is an extract from a foundational scripture of Shin Buddhism, the *Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life*:

People of the world, being weak in virtue, engage in strife over matters that are not urgent. In the midst of abject wickedness and extreme afflictions, they painstakingly toil for their living. Whether noble or corrupt, rich or poor, young or old, male or female, all people worry about wealth and property. In this, there is no difference between the rich and the poor; both have their anxieties..... (p. 3)

Without realizing it, we continually yearn for spiritual emancipation, as Paraskevopoulos perceptively observes: “What we are seeking is the Infinite—something that is recognizable in the finite, at the heart of all things, but which surpasses them.” (p. 9) He continues, “If we are able to look deeply into ourselves with clarity, we may come to see that we are inextricably linked to the Infinite, and that only through contact with it are we able to attain the kind of profound fulfilment that so distressingly eludes us in our lives.” (p. 9)

While every person longs to be happy, we are often unclear about how and where to find fulfillment. Paraskevopoulos explains that “if we identify our well-being with a life that is meaningful and which connects us to something greater than ourselves ... then we may be closer to finding what we are looking for.” (p. 14) Paraskevopoulos writes “Nirvana—[is] a state of unutterable happiness,” which is what every human being knowingly or unknowingly is seeking in this existence. In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, an early Buddhist scripture, Nirvāna is depicted as:

[T]he far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unaging, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge... (p. 21)

The Buddha taught the truth of the Dharma in many ways, depending on the level of comprehension, ability and temperament of the individual. Paraskevopoulos expresses how “The Pure Land path was his direct response to the pressing needs of ordinary men and women who hungered for a spiritual life without having to renounce the world or observe monastic precepts and taxing austerities.” (p. 22) As with other Buddhists, those who follow the way of Shin treasure the Buddha’s teachings as transmitted through the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-fold Path and the Six Perfections. And yet, because of our tenacious clinging to a distorted conception of self, we cannot see things as they are and thus our spiritual objectives are often thwarted. The author writes:

As human beings, we suffer because our deepest self is essentially one with the Dharma-Body [*Dharmakāya*] (which, unbeknownst to us, we are seeking all the time) and yet, in our ignorance, we look for it in those things that are but its ephemeral appearances. This is why we are so constantly disappointed by the shortcomings of everything we encounter and pursue. It is as if we recognize something of this higher reality glittering in our world of forms but, when we aim to grasp it, it dissipates like gossamer in the wind. This is what constitutes the tragedy of our human condition. (p. 24)

Human identity consists of both ephemeral and immutable dimensions; however, our true identity is transpersonal or “supra-personal ... it is the source of all personality” (p. 31). In contrast to the empirical ego, Buddhism directs us to the ‘Great Self’, which is none other than the Dharma-Body, also known as Buddha-nature. According to the *Nirvāna Sutra*, “Although sentient beings are impermanent, still their Buddha-nature is eternal and unchanging.” (p. 48) Paraskevopoulos explains that behind our striving for happiness is the goal of attaining unity with the Dharma-Body as absolute reality (or Buddha-nature in its immanent aspect), for “nothing less than the Infinite can satisfy us. Indeed, our ardent attachment to life itself is but a reflection of our desire for the Infinite, alienation from which accounts for our constant state of dissatisfaction. All desires, in fact, even ones that appear aberrant or abnormal, are rooted in the quest for consummate fulfilment and the need to be humanly complete. (p. 33)

By invoking the Name *Namo Amida Butsu* ('I take refuge in the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life'), we become infused with immeasurable Wisdom and Compassion which are the personal dimensions of inconceivable ultimate reality that constantly reach out to us in an accessible form. Shinran discusses how the reality of Nirvāna becomes vividly embodied in this practice known as *nembutsu* (which means thinking of, or remembering, the Buddha):

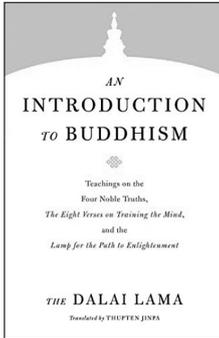
Amida Buddha grasps beings with the Name. Thus, as we hear it with our ears and say it with our lips, exalted virtues without limit grasp and pervade our hearts and minds. It becomes ever after the seed of our Buddhahood. (p. 57)

This path provides an integral and universal spiritual method of accessing the transpersonal that is available to all. It is known across the religions by different names: *japa-yoga* in Hinduism, the Jesus Prayer in Christianity, and *dhikr* in Islam.

Within the Buddhist tradition, there is a great deal of diversity; it is in no way monolithic and this needs to be remembered. Paraskevopoulos illustrates this as follows: "We need to accept that the scope of Buddhist practice is very broad, encompassing numerous approaches to the goal of spiritual realization and reflecting the immense variety we find in the aptitude and disposition of people." (p. 39) There are many paths, yet there is only one destination: that of Nirvāna, as T'an-luan (476–542) points out: "It is like the ocean's nature having one taste; when various streams enter, they necessarily become the one taste, and the ocean's taste does not alter." (p. 49) Again, "The Dharma is about awakening to the truth of existence, nothing less." (p. 40) Common to all sapiential traditions of the world, Buddhism, like other religions, leads us "to discover our true identity which demands that we relinquish all that we are to the realm of the spirit" (p. 81).

This is a highly accessible work that offers a clear and concise outline of the major insights found in Shin Buddhism which, regrettably, are little known in the West. In this respect, the book's value is found in introducing a compelling spiritual alternative that is unfamiliar to many seekers today. Paraskevopoulos, who is himself a Shin priest, brings both his theoretical knowledge and lived experience to this work, which will certainly inspire and increase one's yearning for the great peace and liberation of the 'Other Shore'.

— Samuel Bendeck Sotillos



AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM. The Dalai Lama. Shambala Publications, 2018. pp. viii+125, \$16.95. ISBN: 9781559394758

Speaking to an audience of Western students in Australia, His Holiness the Dalai Lama not only explains the three fundamental topics in Buddhist teachings—the Four Noble Truths, Mind Training, and Stages of the Path—but also shows us how to apply these principles to our lives.

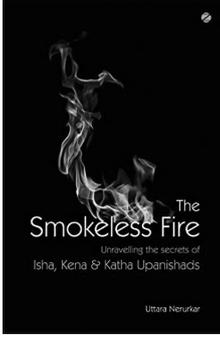
After a very brief discussion on various Indian philosophies, His Holiness discusses the Four Noble Truths that provides the framework necessary to understand the Buddha's basic teachings on working with suffering/dissatisfaction and cultivating happiness. Here, he develops the concept of karma, rebirth and dependent arising that are crucial concepts of Buddhism. He follows this with commentaries on two of his favourite books.

The first book is *The Eight Verses on Training the Mind* written by the Kadampa Geshe Langri Thangpa. These teachings are called *lojong* in Tibetan meaning training of the mind. The importance of this book can be gauged from the statement that His Holiness recites the verses in this book every day. Recognizing that we often impose exaggerated self-importance to our own emotions while ignoring the emotions of others, His Holiness emphasizes that we need to train the mind to remove negativity and develop compassion for others while simultaneously understanding the nature of reality.

The second book is the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* written by the famous eleventh-century Indian scholarly saint Atisha. The great yogi had extracted the essence of all 84,000 teachings of the Buddha and organized them into clear steps, known as the *lamrim*, or stages of the path to enlightenment. The practices of penetrative insight (*vipassana*) and calm abidance (*shamatha*) are discussed. The engaging commentary by His Holiness excerpts the meaning of this text for today's practitioners bringing the light of this age-old wisdom into the modern world.

Do not let the size and title of the book underestimate its value. Though it is only 125 pages and is supposed to be an introduction, each sentence is dense and powerful. The book can be read and completed during a long train ride but to understand and implement these teachings

in our lives may require a lifetime. Written lucidly with a subtle sense of humour, these chapters require multiple readings, contemplation and meditation to fully understand the implications of the texts. The clarity and understanding one derives from the teachings of His Holiness is, of course, incomparable and beyond value. — M. Giridhar

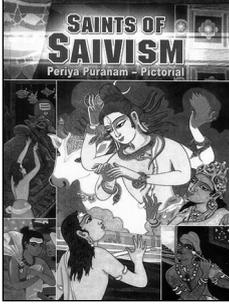


THE SMOKELESS FIRE by Uttara Nerurkar. Zen publications, Mumbai.2018. pp. 178. Rs.250.00. ISBN: 9789387242210

The author, who has written several books and runs a YouTube channel on Vedanta, discusses three *Upanishads* in this book. She explains how the wisdom contained in the *Isha*, *Kena* and *Katha Upanishads* are relevant for both worldly and spiritual life today. The book starts with a brief introduction and then discusses each *Upanishad* with its original verse in Sanskrit followed by its meaning and brief commentary. The author successfully provides both the traditional and modern interpretation of the verses. In addition, she connects the verses to other popular scriptures such as the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* and Patanjali's *Yoga Darśanam*.

For example, the verse 1.2 of *Isha Upanishad* that suggests one to live a life of right effort is echoed in *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* verse 2.47, wherein Lord Krishna exhorts an individual to perform action without regards to the fruits of the action and be the witness. As the witness, one perceives one's Self to be distinct from the body and mind and understands that it is the self-luminous *Ātman* that governs one's psycho-physical being. In the *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.2, the Self is realized as 'the Ear of the ear, Mind of the mind, Speech of the speech ... [as] also Breath of the breath, and Eye of the eye. This witness-self is known as the inner controller and is described in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3&4 as the rider within a chariot-body. The charioteer is the intellect, the reins are the mind, the senses are the horses and the roads travelled are the mazes of desire. These verses are similar to those found in *Bhagavad Gītā*. Similarly, verse 2.2.12 of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is similar to the verses found in *Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.12 etc. These aspects are well discussed in the book.

Despite the applicability of the *Upaniṣad-s* to the worldly life, their primary emphasis is on realizing the witness-self that transcends the changing states of the mind, neither suffering nor enjoying the mental and physical conditions of human existence. The author could have taken specific topics of such interest and discussed how they are interspersed in various *Upaniṣad-s* and other scriptures. However, this is not a drawback and does not decrease the value of the book, which is a good addition to the traditional literature on the *Upaniṣad-s*. — M. Giridhar



SAINTS OF SAIVISM Periya Puranam
Pictorial General Editor Dr. N. Mahalingam.
pp.302, Rs.300. ISBN: 978-81-7883- 602-7
DIVINE PLAYS OF LORD SIVA Tiruvilaiyadal
Puranam Pictorial Editor Dr. N. Mahalingam.
pp.404, Rs.400. ISBN: 978-81-7823-662-9. Sri
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The *Periya Puranam* is a key book to Ramana devotees as it is the one book that he read after Self-realisation during his young days in Madurai. Though I have read the *Periya Puranam* before in various editions, this presentation by the Ramakrishna Math has a charm all its own. It is directed to a younger audience with full-page coloured illustrations that accompany the story of each of the 63 Nayanmars. Much care has gone into the production and the Math is to be congratulated for the polished publication. The stories are simply but intelligently narrated by Prema Nandakumar the respected scholar, and they are a joy to read. So much so that I began all over again to read and be inspired by these ‘hounds of Siva’. For those who wish for their children to understand more their Tamil culture and to delight in the rich heritage of Tamil spirituality then this is a book for them. And for you too, adult reader!

The *Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam* is another source book of Tamil spirituality, which has cultivated and enhanced Tamil devotion and spirituality. The book was composed in the 16th century. The *Puranam* describe the *līlā* of Lord Siva who in disguise creates trials to purify his devotees of their ignorance. It is a perfect introduction for children to their heritage. — R. Sivadas

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti

On Thursday, the 31st December 2020, devotees gathered at Bhagavan's Shrine to initiate a worldwide online celebration of Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti. The morning began at 4.15 am with Marghazhi puja. The 24 hours global live streaming began at 6 am with a Jayanti Special Tamil Parayana programme followed by milk offering. Kalasabhishekam and Jayanti puja took place around 10am. The Programme has been uploaded for later viewing. To see the celebrations go to <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>, <https://youtu.be/M08EgQiqxwA> and <http://www.youtube.com/c/ArunachalaAshrama>.

Pali Tirtham Bodhi Tree

The Bodhi tree at the southern bank of Pali Tirtham has long been an appropriate place to conduct death ceremonies by townspeople. A large, graceful tree, it was probably some 120-140 years old. The bodhi (pipal) tree platform was inaugurated by the Chettiers in 1880 and the Ganesa statue was installed in 1930. Over time the aged tree had been hollowed out by white ants and would have fallen soon and possibly injured someone. The municipality took the difficult decision to bring down the giant tree that had served for long decades.

At 9:45-10 am on the morning of Wednesday 30th December, with the former Minister Sri Pichandi present along with Ashram devotees and management, a sapling was planted in its place. This followed extensive renovations to the tree platform and the surroundings supervised by Sri Ramanasramam.

Lord Arunachaleswar Pradakshina

Early on the 16th February 2021 Lord Arunachaleswarar made a circuit of the Mountain, stopping at the Ashram where devotees eagerly received Him with dhotis, saris and garlands. It had been expected that the entourage would proceed without making any stops whatsoever owing to Covid protocols. But at the last minute the decision was taken to make brief stops for the benefit of devotees.

Covid 19 at Sri Ramanasramam

Because of significant drops in the rate of Covid infections in Tamil Nadu and across India, the Central Government decided to take the bold step of moving towards reopening the various institutions and services. Positivity rates and fatality rates have fallen and are at their

lowest since April 2020 while hospital beds are mostly empty. The development suggests that pre-existing cross-reactive immune memory to SARS-CoV-2 may be a factor in this unexpected and welcome change. In India, the rate of (asymptomatic) infections may have been higher than previously known bolstering the collective defence against further spread. India's low mortality rate may be attributable to its population and 'the prevalence of communicable diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis may make the immune system more resilient to coronavirus.' Given these positive developments, Sri Ramansramam reopened in the first week of January with limited visiting hours (from 9.15 am-12 noon and 2-4 pm). Devotees are exercising caution and avoiding congested peak periods.

Obituaries

Thérèse Rigos, a French national died in Greece on the 7th December 2020. She had suffered a heart attack and died shortly afterwards, just a month before her 87th birthday. Her funeral took place on the 8th of December in the cemetery of the small village of Aria near the city of Navplio.

Thérèse Rigos and her Greek husband Richard, came to India in the mid 1960s where they served in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram as dentists to The Mother and the ashram in general. She eventually came to Bhagavan in the early 1970s. She was hidden from view during her long years in Tiruvannamalai and except for her husband, avoided the company of others for the benefit of her spiritual practice. There is hardly a single photo of her (excepting a passport photo) that can be located. During her thirty years in Tiruvannamalai, she spent many of them alone in the caves on the Hill. There was a determination in her brightly shining eyes and many were greatly impressed by her uncompromising dedication to meditation. In early 2000 Richard returned to Greece due to health issues and settled on the island of Poros. In 2002, Thérèse moved to Greece and took care of her husband. He died of a heart attack in 2008 at the age of 79.

On occasion people she had known in India would come to visit her, each one impressed with the radiance and deep inner peace she emanated in her later years. She never forgot Arunachala and although living a very simple life on very little money, she continued her financial assistance to two poor families in Tiruvannamalai.



Swami Ramanananda Saraswati was born in Rangoon, Burma, in 1938, and was named Seshadri by his family. He had one elder brother and two younger sisters. He came to India from Burma in 1942 during the War years as a refugee and did his schooling at the Besant Theosophical High School in Chennai. While still in his teens, he came across Arthur Osborne's *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* which had a great effect on

him. In the late 1950s, he met Ananda Mayi Ma at Ranchi who advised him to go to Sri Ramanasramam. After a lengthy stay, he made up his mind to settle permanently at Arunachala.

In the early 1970s he served Muruganar during his last years when his health deteriorated. He also helped in the construction of Bhagavan's Samadhi Mantapam and worked in the Ashram Dispensary preparing compounds. In 1973, he left the ashram to be more independent and stayed a year at Guhai Namasivaya and later near Nirrti (Nirudhi) Lingam.

In 1983, Seshadri got the blessing of the Paramacharya, the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, to take sannyas when the latter was travelling nearby. Eventually Ramanananda built a hermitage named *Ramana Padam* on the hill-round road near the Varuna Lingam.

Ramanananda had agamic knowledge of samadhi construction and assisted the Ashram in supervising the internment ceremonies of Muruganar, Ramasami Pillai and others. In 1996, he became the principal organizer of the Adi Annamalai Temple Maha Kumbhabhishekam and with permission from the Ashram management, based his fundraising efforts out of Ramanasramam. His enthusiasm for the project got numerous devotees involved and all participated in the event with enthusiasm.

Ramanananda's innocent child-like temperament, charitable disposition and great sense of humour allowed him to converse with people of all ages.

Following long months of poor health, on the 10th December 2020 at the age of 82, Swami Ramanananda Saraswati attained the lotus feet of Arunachala. ▲