D: How can it be said that the Heart is no other than Brahman?

M: Although the self enjoys its experiences in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, residing respectively in the eyes, throat and Heart, in reality, however, it never leaves its principal seat, the Heart. In the Heart-lotus which is of the nature of all, in other words in the mind-ether, the light of that Self shines in the form of ‘I’. As it shines thus in everybody, this very Self is referred to as the witness (sākṣī) and the transcendent (turīya, literally the fourth). The ‘I-less’ Supreme Brahman which shines in all bodies as interior to the light in the form ‘I’ is the Self-ether (or knowledge-ether): that alone is the Absolute Reality. This is the super-transcendent (turīyātīta). Therefore, it is stated that what is called the Heart is no other than Brahman. Moreover, for the reason that Brahman shines in the hearts of all souls as the Self, the name ‘Heart’ is given to Brahman. The meaning of the word hṛidayam, when split thus ‘hṛit-ayam’ (‘this is the centre’), is in fact Brahman. The adequate evidence for the fact that Brahman, which shines as the Self, resides in the Hearts of all is that all persons indicate themselves by pointing to the chest on the right side when saying ‘I’.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Self-Enquiry*, Section 9
The aim of this journal is to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.

Contributions for publication are welcome. Please address letters and submissions to The Editor. They should be in English, original and previously unpublished. Contributions not published will be returned on request. Contributors may also send articles by email attachment.

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A new edition of Revelation has been released. Sri Lakshmana Sarma (‘WHO’) was a great scholar who was personally taught Ulladu Narpadu by Bhagavan. Sarma translated each of these verses into Sanskrit over several months. He would submit each verse to Bhagavan for correction and approval. If Bhagavan’s correction and approval was not forthcoming he would rework the verse again and again till both he and Bhagavan were satisfied. Bhagavan called such dedication as tapas and indicated that this translation conveyed the correct meaning of the original Ulladu Narpadu in Tamil.

In this edition we have faithfully restored both the Sanskrit and English verses from the original 1934 edition that had been personally checked by Lakshmana Sarma himself.

Release of IPhone App

Ashram has already released the Android Application for Ashram Parayana. It contains both Tamil and Sanskrit Parayana with English Transliteration and meaning. This helps devotees chant the Parayana by using this App.

Now Ashram is releasing the Parayana with an App for Iphone users also in the Apple Store under Sri Ramanasramam. We hope this App will be useful for many Iphone users.

Available from: Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam & PO Tiruvannamalai 606603, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.
Also available online: http://bookstore.sriramanamaharshi.org
(Postage and packing charges extra).
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Divine Names of Arunachala

27. ॐ नटनेश्वरयानमः
om naṭaneśvarāya namaḥ
Prostration to the Lord of Dance.

Naṭanam means dance and īśvara Lord.

One of the most powerful representations of Siva is Lord of the Dance, and the most enduring and brilliant image of that Dance is the bronze Nataraja created in South India by ārya-artists during the Chola Empire. It represents Siva as creator, sustainer and destroyer of the entire cosmos dancing for an ecstatic assembly at Chidambaram. In truth, the Dance exists within the Heart and is experienced by ardent devotees through all time and space as pure Bliss when all illusion has been destroyed and Sakti merges in Siva.

The first verse of Ramana Maharshi’s Śrī Aruṇāchala Nava Maṇimālai was written at Virupaksha Cave in response to the repeated request of a Dikshītār that the Maharshi visit Chidambaram and have darśan of Lord Nataraja. Finally Bhagavan responded with this majestic and enchanting verse which satisfied him. He never made the request again.

Though He is the ever unmoving One, yet in the temple hall (of Tillai) His dance of bliss He dances before the Mother moveless there. Now that Power withdrawn within, His form here moveless, still, He soars as Aruna Hill.¹

Elsewhere Bhagavan beautifully states in mystical terms the union of Siva and Sakti.

“[The world] and its diversity too cannot be exclusive of the Reality, the original Source. Here a play is going on in which the One Single Being becomes manifold, is objectified and then withdrawn. There must be a Sakti (Power) to do it, and wonderful too! She cannot also be independent of Her origin. In the Self-shining pure Being this Sakti cannot be seen. Nevertheless, Her actions are only too well-known. How sublime!”²

—— BKC

¹ Translation by Prof. K. Swaminathan.
² Munagala S. Venkataramiah, Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk§ 323.
Sri Ramanasramam began without any definite intention. It evolved organically according to the times and needs of those who surrounded Sri Ramana Maharshi. This is important to remember as this was and continues to be the guiding principle of the ashram’s evolution. The ashram is not a fixed bloc insensible to change but a living entity that responds to the needs of those who come in search of knowledge and consolation.

The ashram as we know it today began with the mother of Bhagavan who attained mukti on the 19th May 1922. Her body was subsequently brought down from Skandasramam to what is now Sri Ramanasramam but in those days it was a deserted area used for burials. At first Chinna Swami decided to bury the body near the Chengam Road but was dissuaded as the location was too public, and the body was buried further in where it rests to this day.

The first stones of the mother’s samādhi were laid on the 20th May 1922, during the first maṇḍala or forty-day period in which specific ritual practices are conducted, Chinna Swami and Dandapani Swami who conducted the rituals, for whatever reason, decided to live permanently near the samādhi and several grass-hut structures were constructed.

“Sri Bhagavan remained at Skandashram but almost every day he would come down the hillside to the tomb, about half an hour’s walk away. Then one day, about six months later, he went out for a walk and, as he was walking, felt a powerful impulse to go down to the tomb and remain there. When he did not return, the devotees followed him down
and thus was founded Sri Ramanashram. ‘It was not of my own volition that I moved from Skandashram,’ he said later, ‘something brought me here and I obeyed. It was not my decision but the Divine Will.’”

When Alagammal first came to settle in Tiruvannamalai to be with Bhagavan, he soon after moved to Virupaksha where she joined him in spite of opposition from some who had already gravitated to Virupaksha Cave. Bhagavan was quite firm that she could stay despite being a widow and thus according to orthodox precepts ineligible to remain in a traditional Hindu establishment meant for sādhu-s. Bhagavan’s will prevailed which changed the way activities were conducted around Virupaksha Cave. And so too with her death and interment at what is now inside Sri Ramanasramam, for it marked the beginning of a new phase. By allowing the establishment of a place of worship of a Brahmin widow, Bhagavan went against the prevailing customs and rituals and was severely criticised by the traditionalists.

We may not think it today but it was a radical development and was an indication of Bhagavan’s sympathy and acceptance of women as an essential part of a Hindu religious institution. Many widows would later seek solace at the ashram and be accepted as legitimate members. Sri Ramanasramam thus became a leading proponent in the breakdown of the rigid codes which developed over the centuries that created so much unnecessary misery for women in particular.

On reflection, everything Bhagavan did was out of love. Adhering rigidly to customs that gave pain to others was against the true spirit of Bhagavan’s being. He personified kindness and compassion.

With the creation of the samādhi of Alagammal and the installation of the liṅgam and the name of the shrine as Matrubhuteswara, that is, Lord Śiva as the Mother, and the initiation of daily rituals, the ashram as we know it today had begun and the purpose of Bhagavan’s birth into this world started to become manifest.

Energy or prāṇa is required for any activity gross or subtle and it is no different for the running of an ashram. In a way that is mysterious to us, the release of Alagammal from this world activated an energy that propelled the development of the physical ashram with all its

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1 Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p.52. For more details about those first days see also *Saranagati Newsletter*, April 2022, ‘The Ashram Centenary Year: In the Beginning’, p.11.
various buildings so that those who came could be sustained while they imbibe that mysterious energy we call Arunachala Ramana. Instead of being impeded by her nirvāṇa, it had the opposite effect and activated the creation of a new ashram. “There were devotees who felt that, as Šakti or Creative Energy, her presence was more potent now than before. On one occasion Sri Bhagavan said: ‘Where has she gone? She is here.’”

The ashram is a living organism. It is not a static machine that is switched on and off each day. Anyone with some degree of sensitivity who walks into the ashram immediately senses that there is a difference in the air. It is as if one enters another realm where the rules are different, where there is perfect order without rules.

The ashram has a purpose and that is to elevate those who actively want to go beyond their mechanical states of mind so that they can get a glimpse of their own higher being unimpeded by distractions. Over the decades, millions of people have passed through the portals and contributed to the atmosphere of sacredness which pervades the ground. Their intention has made it easier for us as we walk in their tracks.

Like physical muscle there is mental muscle. If we continue to exercise our minds in a specific direction we develop a mental highway that is easy to move along whatever the circumstances. Just as a highway is generally immune to wind, rain or thunderstorms because it is well made, so too our minds and hearts if properly cultivated, will weather any storm and we will be unperturbed by unforeseen obstacles and challenges. To develop a mature mind we need to focus our attention on that which we understand is important, not that which is frivolous and lasts but an instant. Once we understand what is important we concentrate our energies in dispensing with what is irrelevant or harmful to our aim.

\[
\text{asato mā sadgamaya |} \\
\text{tamaso mā jyotirgamaya |} \\
\text{mṛtyormāṁrtaṁ gamaya ||}
\]

From what is not, lead me to what is; from darkness, lead me to light; from death, lead me to what is undying.  

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2 Ibid., p.85.  
3 Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, I.3.28
The ashram has been created to help us nurture this *sankalpa* (intention or resolution). As Bhagavan said in another context, we come to the ashram for a bath that will cleanse us of our inner impurities. Our intention is crucial if we want to be purified. The greater our desire, the greater the possibility of change. Nothing is accomplished by weak-willed wishes. Simply gawking at the peacocks or loitering around the *samādhi* is ineffectual. Some people are galvanised by their encounter with the spirit of Bhagavan; unfortunately others remain completely untouched. They leave the same as when they entered: unmoved and therefore, unchanged.

Like any living organism the ashram is created anew each day. It is not as if once erected it will go on forever. No, like any other building complex it requires maintenance and not just on a physical level but also on a spiritual. Our thoughts, our emotions and aspirations, our prayers sustain the ashram and renew it so that it remains fresh and pertinent to our ideals.

Though we each know through our own intimate experience that Bhagavan’s reach is unrestricted in terms of his influence and active intervention, it is in the ashram that it is easier to feel that revelatory presence and power. Like any other institution the ashram can die from neglect or misuse or from plain irrelevance. It is our responsibility to keep it alive and we do that by following Bhagavan’s teachings.

The ashram is like a great transformative apparatus: our aspirations combined with methodical practise of the teachings elevates us to a higher level of reality. We share in a high state of being that transcends words. With diligence we learn to remain above petty concerns and keep centred on that which makes our lives blessed.

This year the ashram will be one hundred years old. Whether there will be a second century of its existence is in part our responsibility. It is not a one way street where we are fed much like a baby until we die to this world. Once we learn to stand straight we too participate in keeping the flame alive. Each breath consciously completed with Bhagavan’s name or form on our lips or mind or heart feeds the fire of awareness we all share who are the children of Arunachala Ramana.
Maharshi, the Spiritual Magnet and Kanakammal, an Iron Filing

APARNA KRISHNAMURTI

Indescribably great is the glory of devotees for they hold the very Lord captive in the altar of their Hearts. — Saint Avvaiyār

Kanakammal belongs to that class of devotees who, surrendering their hearts and souls to Bhagavan, breathed Bhagavan. She lived the teachings of Bhagavan learning the Ramana way from Muruganar who totally absorbed the elixir of Ramana bōdham.

Her memory invokes a journey back to how we first met. It was a Jayanti day in the early eighties and the Samādhi Hall was fully packed. In those days too, as now after abhiṣekam the curtains would be drawn aside when Sri Ramaneshwara Mahālingam would be seen decked with garlands. This interval was used to release the official publications of the Ashram. A few copies of the newly released

1 Kāntam irumbu-pōl kavandu enai viḍāmal kalandu enōdu iruppāi Aruṇāchalā (Akṣaramaṇamālai, verse 16)
Meaning: Like a magnet that draws iron filings to it, Thou, by the strength of Thy Grace draw me, hold me firm never letting me go and be in non-dual union with me.

2 Iraivarō tonḍarullat-toṇḍukkam, tonḍar-tam perumai sollavum peridē.
books would be presented to senior, old and esteemed devotees. After honouring two or three devotees a name was called out. No one stood up for a full two minutes. Then the lady seated next to me got up and devotedly reached the front, and receiving the copy in utter humility and reverence resumed her seat – a perfect example of the old adage of ‘still waters running deep’. With some trepidation I struck up a conversation with her and was more than delighted to find my eagerness reciprocated with warmth. The relationship then blossomed into a many-faceted bond between an admired teacher and an eager student, a loving senior and a naïve junior, friends full of warmth of love and concern and most of all fellow-pilgrims treading the path of Bhagavan. This endured till literally the very last day, when on that memorable and auspicious day of Bhagavan’s *Jayanti*, when she merged with Bhagavan in Bhagavan’s shrine, I was privileged to give her the last sip of water.

Her first visit to Sri Ramanasramam was as a girl of eight when her family visited her uncle Sri Ramakrishna Iyer, the then Munsif of Tiruvannamalai Town. The entire family was greatly devoted to Bhagavan. Sri Ramakrishna Iyer both in his official and personal capacity was of great help to the Ashram. His son, Radhakrishnan called ‘Radha’ by Bhagavan enjoyed much freedom in the presence of Bhagavan and was the recipient of His grace. Kanakammal, at the very first sight, of Bhagavan was completely overwhelmed by the smile that blossomed and lit up his face and the power of his eyes simply stole her heart and remained etched in her memory forever.

She later used to recall that the kitchen then was housed in a thatched shed in exactly where the shrine stands now. The sight of roasted *appalams* heaped in a bamboo basket and the aroma of ‘*Vaththak-kuzhambu*’ that filled the air were still in her memory.

Born into a cultured family who were full of spiritual awareness, she was a highly evolved soul. Right from childhood she exhibited an uncommon spiritual maturity. The world she saw around her helped her to become very dispassionate. Inspired by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa she was all afire with spiritual longing for a Master and Swami Vivekananda was her ideal. Many a sleepless night would

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3 A South Indian delicacy similar to *sāmbhār* but without pulses.
be spent in tearful prayers for a Master and guide. Her father afraid that she might give them the slip, given her spiritual leanings, used to sleep in the same room barring the exit door. One night she woke up suddenly and saw Swami Vivekananda standing before her and blowing ‘vibhūti’ all over her. Her father as he was fast asleep woke up exclaiming, “Where does this strong smell of vibhūti come from?”

When she was just 12 years old arrangements were being made to have her marriage performed. Her vehement resistance went unheeded. One day, she unequivocally expressed to her father her stout refusal to get entangled in matrimony. On looking back, it was the sheer power of grace from within that made her behave so. The understanding father, though he went ahead with the preparations, agreed to her having her way if she so desired after the marriage. The other orthodox members of the family did not take to it lightly especially when she flatly refused to live as a married woman. While she spent her early mornings in meditation and the rest of the day in pūjā, prayers and reading scriptures they thought she was possessed by evil spirits and had even recourse to a type of exorcism, much to her distress and anguish.

Her visits to the Ashram in the company of her uncle continued. Every time, Bhagavan’s presence radiating divine peace and his continual rain of Grace on all seated in the Hall bewitched her, and her longing to be one among those at His Feet in the hall became intense and irrepressible. The soulful prayer to Bhagavan brought copious tears and Bhagavan sat looking at her all the time, a mere witness to her anguish.

Then at last her trials were over. Just a few days before her arrival she had a beautiful experience in a state that was neither awake nor sleep. She felt Bhagavan’s presence close to her and saying, “What is it that you gave me? Why is it that I love you so much?”, he stroked her with an infinitely tender touch. A fullness of peace and contentment possessed her in the innermost depths of her being. The dazed state she was found in more than convinced her parents that family life was not for her and they consented to her permanent stay in Tiruvannamalai in 1946.

In those days the few houses in Ramana Nagar were occupied by the owners themselves. Her initial stay in town was short, for the way
MOUNTAIN PATH

to the Ashram wound through long and desolate paths necessitating an escort especially in the early morning hours. At last she found a very small room with a thatched roof at the farthest end of the house of a devotee next to a rubbish dumping ground in Ramana Nagar itself.

Even the basic needs like running water and electricity were absent and cooking had to be done with coal or wood. As rationing was in force essential items were in short supply. Snakes and field rats had a free run in the entire compound. With minimum time spent in cooking a meagre meal she, to use the words of Kunjuswami ‘sat rooted in the hall’. Yet all difficulties and frustration of domestic life simply faded into nothing for every morning and evening the prospect of yet another darśan of that enchanting power-packed form, though frail, set her heart singing. During her entire stay, she simply feasted her eyes on His Form and drank deep the golden utterances of Bhagavan. A single smile would cause a transformation in her and peace and bliss simply drowned her heart in pure delight. She records in her book that by a single look he enabled the devotees to register the experience of His upadeśa, even though it was impossible to meet the intensity of his gaze.

Sri Venkataratnam, an attendant of Bhagavan who stayed near her house kept her abreast of all that transpired in the old hall in the night. The freedom and liberties the attendants enjoyed with Bhagavan then were the richest recompense received for the services they rendered, for Bhagavan would sometimes regale them with his reminiscences of earlier days on the Hill. The delectable narration of stories in his inimitable style and his light-hearted raillery at the attendants delighted them all. They could ask any question to dispel their doubts. Thus, she enjoyed the best of both the worlds.

Self-effacing and shy by disposition, she spoke to no one, had no social contacts and did not make friends easily. She spent all her time in the Old Hall basking in the sunshine of His presence. The very sight of Bhagavan even from a distance would quell all her inner turmoil. Bhagavan’s words possessed an electrifying effect when accompanied by his look of grace. This ‘initiation by look’ had been her experience many a time and needless to say she was in ecstasy. A rare privilege indeed to be so singled out. Every look, word and gesture was a valuable lesson. Bhagavan never said anything more
than once and it was up to the devotee to listen, meditate and realise the truth and act accordingly.

Though Bhagavan was totally detached, his great concern for and compassion to her especially during times of her father’s illness filled her heart with melting devotion and infinite gratitude. So long as Bhagavan was in the body just to remain in his presence was, to her, the greatest fortune.

After the Mahānirvāṇa of Bhagavan she did constant pārāyaṇa of His works though she did not comprehend them fully. She, along with a few others, then, listened to the poetic works of Bhagavan – a rare wealth of poetry and a treasure of jñāna – explained by none other than Muruganar, of the stature of the poets of Sangam era. He, in turn, was one of the very few devotees who had the privilege of hearing these works explained to him by Bhagavan himself. That Muruganar, a great poet himself, should teach the rich content and most intricate poetry of Bhagavan to one unfamiliar with the nuances of grammar and syntax, is in itself a manifestation of the profound Grace of Bhagavan. The clarity, the wealth of illustration and allusion to other poetic works that Muruganar, the experienced teacher brought to bear in his explanations made the content register indelibly in her heart. Thus, journeying in the voyage of spiritual discovery as taught by Bhagavan, feeding herself with intense devotion to Bhagavan and nurturing herself with the subtle knowledge of Bhagavan’s works, the treasure of jñāna, she like a shielded lamp, remained in bliss.

Her way of life received the stamp of an emphatic approval from no less a personage than the Sage of Kanchi. In three succinct questions the Paramacharya simply summed up the most significant aspects of her life. They were:

1. “A life of contemplation in solitude?”
2. “Listening to Vedanta?”
3. “Cooking for yourself?”

The emotional satisfaction that she derived then was indescribable. After a decade or so, a few devotees requested her to help them

comprehend the *Nūl Thiraṭṭu* — a veritable treasure of *jñāna*. But being humble to the core and ever receding into obscurity she declined citing her incompetence but finally relented and acquiesced to the demand of the devotees, who were captivated by the beauty, depth and the richness of the content of her expositions, coaxed her to write them all down. The fraternity of Bhagavan’s devotees and posterity owe her an immense debt of gratitude for this wonderful work.

A lady from France, an annual visitor to the Ashram, sought her in her house and simply sat before her morning and evening for half an hour without either of them uttering a single word and would go away. This went on for some time. One day Kanakammal appraised me of the predicament she was in for the lady did not know Tamil and she knew not her language and sought help. It transpired that by merely sitting in her presence that lady derived serene peace. But she did have some difficulty in understanding some verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu*. Thus the *satsaṅg* that started with just two ladies was slowly expanded over time. In the course of her explanations, she would invariably be led to refer to some memorable incidents or ennobling conversations that occurred in the Old Hall.

The pen picture that she presents in her book came alive for us thanks to her total involvement in her narration. It was a wonderful sight. While describing His words every one of which was a *paravak* and actions every one of which was an expression of his experience of *akhaṇḍa*, her face would become radiant and it was obvious that she, transported to the Old Hall of bygone years, was reliving those heavenly moments. “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.” She who had feasted her eyes on Bhagavan and had drunk deep the words of Bhagavan and let his bliss drown her, let out a few drops of that nectar, fragrance and serene bliss throughout her narration.

If a mere recollection could grant so much to the listener, how blessed were those who were actually present, then? Looking at our crestfallen faces and guessing our longing she was quick to reassure us, “It is true that we saw Bhagavan and were irresistibly drawn

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5 *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi.*
6 Transcendental power of speech (inspiration).
7 Entire, indivisible, perfect.
towards that supreme spiritual magnet. But you have all come just after hearing about him. Are you not equally graced?”

Yet towards the end she once said “Whether I gain mukti or not, I care not. I have beheld Him, heard Him and been looked at by Him. That is mukti enough for us.”

A lady once wanted to know what her state of being was then. After a few minutes’ silence she said, “I am always at peace. No thought ever comes to me.” Before a lady could check herself, the words were out of her mouth, “Oh! You did not get entangled in saṁsāra like all of us. That is why.” Silence reigned in the hall. Then quietly with a joyous smile lighting up her face she said, “Yes! Ma! Bhagavan has kept me for himself.”

Whenever doubts and difficulties assailed the devotees, local and foreign, be they temporal or spiritual, they approached her unhesitatingly. After lending them a patient hearing and abiding in silence for some time, she would come out with suggestions and solutions that would provide lasting peace. On looking back, we used to feel that mentally she would have pondered what Bhagavan’s answers to those questions would have been and let him speak through her.

Her service to fellow devotees in many ways marks her as one among the chosen few. Her commentaries on the Nul Thirattu have carved a special niche for her. Her book on Muruganar and her own ‘memories’ – Ninaivil Niraindavai⁸ are all a spiritual feast for which seekers and those with a spiritual thirst would be grateful forever. She had no access to intellectual excellence by way of higher academic studies. Yet her capacity to comprehend subtle truths and explain them all in a simple way so that even ordinary folks could understand was indeed a rare gift. Her memory was phenomenal. She never noted down what transpired in the Hall nor did she take down notes while listening to Muruganar’s explanations. That she could reproduce them all after three full decades in all their subtlety and fullness with all their nuances is purely the gift of abundant grace. She also admitted that it was surely the power of grace that guided her through her work.

⁸ Cherished Memories.
What she revealed just before her merging with Bhagavan bears this out. It was an experience that could neither be described as a dream nor a vision. Bhagavan appeared before her and asked her to put out her tongue and wrote something. She was too exhilarated to know or remember what he wrote, with what and in what language!

Tradition holds that whenever Lord Śiva appears on earth the host of Śiva namely the śivagaṇas, too appear for furtherance of the cause namely for the light of Enlightenment and Atman to flourish. Bhagavan was but Arunachala incognito. Muruganar, the prodigious poet, who was but Nandi, the chief of gaṇas, in his very first verse which he wrote without even seeing Bhagavan and in the very first line hails Bhagavan as “one who leaving Kailash reached Arunachala” and in the second verse as “The form of fire unable to be cognised by the two great Gods.” So does Satyamangalam Venkataramana Iyer sing of him as “abandoning His abode Kailash and coming to earth.” The chroniclers, biographers and writers of reminiscences are all but the host of Śiva, and Kanakammal is undoubtedly one of them.

That she merged with Bhagavan on the auspicious day of Bhagavan’s Jayanthi and in his very shrine may be a rare coincidence. But in the words of Bhagavan is this not a ‘wonderful coincidence?’

(To be continued)

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9 Sivakkac chin-mayam chezhikkat tan-mayam, v. 8, Navamaṇimālai.
10 Pārvaḷar kayilai, v. 184, Dēsikap Padikam, Srī Ramaṇa Sannidhi Muṟai.

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Sri Ramanasramam Centenary

Sri Ramanasramam’s Centenary celebrations officially began on Matrubhuteswarar Mahapuja Day, 24th May 2022 and will continue until Bhagavan’s Jayanti on 28th December 2023. It is recorded in one place that Bhagavan came down the hill to stay permanently about one week before Jayanti which fell that year on 3rd January 1923. If so, this means the Ashram would have been established around the 28th December 1922.
Acceptance and Meaning in Grief

Normal Reactions to Abnormal Circumstances

Peter Egan and Wasyl Nimenko

Grief is one of the most powerful and difficult experiences of our life. There is no right or wrong reaction to loss because our grief is unique to us and we find our own individual way through it, with the help of others. No one is an authority on grief. There are no words for grief and like the love that produces it, grief changes us and does not have an end.

There are a range of things we might experience which may not seem normal to us because they seem so foreign and strange to us, but they are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances. We all need help to get through our grief and sometimes we need help to know we are normal, are not going crazy or doing anything wrong. Grief can overwhelm us so that we get stuck and put our life on hold but it is only occasionally some of us need some extra help.

Peter Egan is an actor and animal advocate. Wasyl Nimenko is a doctor and psychotherapist.
At first almost all of us are in shock. This varies from person to person and can last days, weeks, months or even years. We can feel numb and as if we are living in a different unreal world. We might see the person or hear them and speak to them which are all normal. This happens because we can forget they are dead, in-between trying to process that they have gone.

It is also normal to go over and over what happened to the person. We might feel anger or guilt over what we or others did or didn’t do. It is normal to think what we or others could have, would have or should have done. We do not forget what happened but we can see it differently, especially if we talk about it. Some of us find it easy to cry and some of us don’t. This is all normal adjusting.

We might think we can outrun grief by keeping busy doing things, such as keeping busy with work, shopping or housework. So, we keep running on adrenaline, thinking ‘it won’t catch me.’ We might drink lots of tea or coffee, and then need alcohol to sedate us at night so that we can sleep. We can numb ourselves with lots of different things including alcohol, to fill the hole in our soul, to avoid being caught by grief.

Some of us can lose our appetite or find sleeping very difficult. But the reverse can happen and we can overeat or sleep much more. We can feel low in our mood or very anxious and be more panicky. Our body can ache in pain. These are all normal in trying to adjust to what has happened to us and is happening to us.

Unusually Difficult Grief
We may have had no time to say goodbye and can be left feeling we have unfinished things to say to the person. This can happen if they died suddenly with no warning in an accident or by suicide or they had a very short illness like Covid. At worst, our emotions can be fatal as in the occasional cases of severe grief which can cause ‘Broken Heart Syndrome,’ now well recognised as ‘Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy.’\(^1\) The impression that grief can damage the physical heart was first described in biblical times in the 8th century BC when Isiah said, ‘He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.’\(^2\)

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1. [https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/can-you-die-broken-heart](https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/can-you-die-broken-heart)
2. [https://biblehub.com/isaiah/61-1.htm](https://biblehub.com/isaiah/61-1.htm)
Some of us do not have opportunities to grieve with others at all because they may not understand our relationship with the person who has died. For example the death of an adopted person’s birth parent they never met or the death of a ‘non-blood’ related person, or even a lover unknown to others. This may also be the case with a miscarriage or a stillborn child. This has come to be known as ‘disenfranchised’ grief. This also includes the death of pets.

Losing someone can seem like an impossible thing to get through and so we need help and support from friends and family and everyone around us. We also need a lot of listening to and understanding of ourselves by us and others over a long period of time. There may be practical things we can actually do to help us get through a particularly difficult loss.

Acceptance that we have lost someone can be the longest and most difficult part of grieving. At some moment we find and experience acceptance and see that we can carry on. However, sometimes we cannot find acceptance and grief can overwhelm us so that we get stuck and put our life on hold. Some of us may appear to grieve too much and this can be because the death and loss is unusually severe.

Finding Acceptance With the Help of Others
A mother went to see a priest several months after her son committed suicide by jumping off a high building. She said that she was Catholic and believed her son had gone to Hell because he had committed a mortal sin by his suicide. The priest said that maybe her son changed his mind whilst he was falling, in the last seconds of his life and had not wanted to die. Seeing this possibility, the mother was able to believe her son had changed his mind about killing himself and although he could not stop it, because he didn’t want to die, he had not automatically gone to hell but was in heaven. Believing her son was not suffering she was able to accept his death.

Sharing what we believe and what are our deepest feelings can let others help us with their experience of death and loss in ways we might not have thought of.

A young man was having more frequent moments of feeling sad about things. He couldn’t put his finger on anything in particular or why he looked sad. He spoke with a therapist who asked about
his parents who had divorced when he was a baby. His mother had
died when he was eleven years old, but he only found out about his
mother’s death at the end of the week, when it was announced in
church. He was not allowed to go to the funeral and didn’t know where
his mother’s grave was. With encouragement from the therapist he
found his mother’s grave and held his own private ceremony there
with flowers, fireworks, food and drink to celebrate his mother’s life.
He buried a long letter there to his mother, telling her about his life
and saying goodbye. When he returned to see the therapist, he looked
transformed with a beautiful smile and sounded like a different person.

Even when we have no way of going back in time and compensating
for lost opportunities to grieve, this young man’s story shows that we
can create our own personal way of going through our grief.

During Buddha’s time, there lived a woman named Kisa Gotami.
She married young and gave birth to a son. One day, the baby fell sick
and died soon after. Kisa Gotami loved her son greatly and refused to
believe that her son was dead. She carried the body of her son around
her village, asking if there was anyone who can bring her son back
to life. The villagers all saw that the son was already dead and there
was nothing that could be done. They advised her to accept his death
and make arrangements for the funeral. In great grief, she fell upon
her knees and clutched her son’s body close to her body. She kept
uttering for her son to wake up.

A village elder took pity on her and suggested to her to consult
the Buddha: “Kisa Gotami, we cannot help you. But you should
go to the Buddha. Maybe he can bring your son back to life!” Kisa
Gotami was extremely excited upon hearing the elder’s words. She
immediately went to the Buddha’s residence and pleaded for him to
bring her son back to life.

“Kisa Gotami, I have a way to bring your son back to life.” “My
Lord, I will do anything to bring my son back.” “If that is the case,
then I need you to find me something. Bring me a mustard seed but
it must be taken from a house where no one residing in the house has
ever lost a family member. Bring this seed back to me and your son
will come back to life.”

Having great faith in the Buddha’s promise, Kisa Gotami went
from house to house, trying to find the mustard seed. At the first house,
a young woman offered to give her some mustard seeds. But when
Kisa Gotami asked if she had ever lost a family member to death, the young women said her grandmother died a few months ago. Kisa Gotami thanked the young woman and explained why the mustard seeds did not fulfil the Buddha’s requirements. She moved on to the second house. There a husband died a few years ago. The third house had lost an uncle and the fourth house had lost an aunt.

She kept moving from house to house but the answer was all the same – every house had lost a family member to death. Kisa Gotami finally came to realise that there is no one in the world who had never lost a family member to death. She now understood that death is inevitable and a natural part of life. Putting aside her grief, she buried her son in the forest. She then returned to the Buddha and became his follower. ³

Perhaps listening to people from many households about death and loss let her see that although we experience loss uniquely, we are the same, as our loss is similar to everyone else’s loss.

A woman from the north of India had been swimming with her husband in the sea in Madras when in front of her eyes he was taken by a shark. She couldn’t cope with it. She went everywhere seeing wise men and holy men to ask, ‘What did we do wrong? Who did we harm? We married each other. We behaved correctly. Why?’ She had found that many people had talked to her, but when she went out, she couldn’t remember what they had said. They had used long phrases about the soul and spirituality. She wanted an answer.

She visited the Osborne family in Tiruvannamalai, whilst going to see the Indian sage Ramana Maharshi. Katya Osborne, who was a young girl at that time recalls her experience and says that she couldn’t bear sitting with the woman because she was tense and wound up. Katya was asked to take the woman to see Ramana Maharshi and she showed the woman into the Hall where Ramana Maharshi sat.

At the sound of the lunch time bell, Katya went to get her to take her back home. When she got back to the hall Katya saw the woman and sitting still and said, “She was at peace and I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe that this was the same woman that I couldn’t bear to be with a couple of hours ago. So I wanted to ask her what he had said because I thought to myself; whatever he had said to her . . . those

³ https://buddhiststories.wordpress.com
words must be the most important words in the World, they changed this woman completely, what are they, what did he say? I thought my mother will ask her, then I will find out. So we came home and my mother did ask her what she said and the woman answered, ‘Nothing’. She had her list of questions which she took out. When he looked at her he looked so compassionate, she suddenly thought, ‘It doesn’t matter.’ She left the list of questions and came out of the hall.”

The silent look of compassion this woman received had such a profound effect on her that its impact was not only seen and felt by Katya when she collected her, but still is today when she tells her story to share with others on YouTube.⁴

Even in the presence of a person with a long list of questions, Ramana Maharshi chose to communicate as usual through silence. His silence needs some explanation because although it seems unusual, silence is well recognised as sometimes being one of the most important means of communication. Ramana Maharshi taught almost exclusively in silence. In the daily recorded dialogues over 4 years and 3 months, it can be seen that he only spoke on about 40 percent of the days and only spoke on average 165 words a day which by any standard is virtual silence.⁵ In 1935 Ramana Maharshi outlined the origin of the use of silence:

M.: . . . By silence, eloquence is meant. Oral lectures are not so eloquent as silence. Silence is unceasing eloquence. The Primal Master, Dakshinamurti, is the ideal. He taught his rishi disciples by silence.⁶

The English psychiatrist Anthony Storr encouraged this type of communication in his last book *Feet of Clay* . . . if someone must seek a guru it is best to choose one who does not speak.⁷

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⁴ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFyMG4ml_oQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFyMG4ml_oQ) Kitty Osborne later wrote about the incident: “I still remember very clearly the occurrence of the lady who lost her husband. What now occurs to me is that although I was astonished at the change in her, I was not in the least astonished that it had happened! As far as I was concerned, if Bhagavan noticed anyone, then of course everything would be alright. That was natural and not worthy of comment.”

⁵ Munagala S. Venkataramiah, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§ 323.

⁶ Ibid., Talk§20.

In chapter 56 of the *Tao Te Ching*, silence is regarded as a mark of primal union, the highest state of man.

Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.
Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.

He who has achieved this state
Is unconcerned with friends and enemies,
With good and harm, with honour and disgrace.
This therefore is the highest state of man.8

When Albert Einstein and Ramana Maharshi helped people in grief, what they said in their own way communicated the same error we have about being separate individuals.

Ramana Maharshi on another occasion speaks of grief.

M.: The birth of the ‘I-thought’ is one’s own birth, its death is the person’s death. After the ‘I-thought’ has arisen the wrong identity with the body arises. Thinking yourself the body, you give false values to others and identify them with bodies. Just as your body has been born, grows and will perish, so also you think the other was born, grew up and died. Did you think of your son before his birth? The thought came after his birth and persists even after his death. Inasmuch as you are thinking of him he is your son. Where has he gone? He has gone to the source from which he sprang. He is one with you. So long as you are, he is there too. If you cease to identify yourself with the body, but see the real Self, this confusion will vanish. You are eternal. The others also will similarly be found to be eternal. Until this truth is realised there will always be this grief due to false values arising from wrong knowledge and wrong identity.9

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Albert Einstein echoed this in replying to a letter in February 1950 from a rabbi who wrote to him for help as he was distraught at the death of his eleven year-old son from polio:

Dear Dr. Einstein,

Last summer my eleven-year-old son died of Polio. He was an unusual child, a lad of great promise who verily thirsted after knowledge so that he could prepare himself for a useful life in the community. His death has shattered the very structure of my existence, my very life has become an almost meaningless void — for all my dreams and aspirations were somehow associated with his future and his strivings. I have tried during the past months to find comfort for my anguished spirit, a measure of solace to help me bear the agony of losing one dearer than life itself — an innocent, dutiful, and gifted child who was the victim of such a cruel fate. I have sought comfort in the belief that man has a spirit which attains immortality — that somehow, somewhere my son lives on in a higher world…

What would be the purpose of the spirit if with the body it should perish… I have said to myself: “It is a law of science that matter can never be destroyed; things are changed but the essence does not cease to be… Shall we say that matter lives and the spirit perishes; shall the lower outlast the higher?

I have said to myself: “Shall we believe that they have gone out of life in childhood before the natural measure of their days was full have been forever hurled into the darkness of oblivion? Shall we believe that the millions who have died the death of martyrs for truth, enduring the pangs of persecution have utterly perished? Without immortality the world is a moral chaos…

I write you all this because I have just read your volume *The World as I See It*. On page 5 of that book you stated: “Any individual who should survive his physical death is beyond my comprehension… such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls.” And I inquire in a spirit of desperation, is there in your view no comfort, no consolation for what has happened? Am I to believe that my beautiful darling child… has been forever wedded into dust, that there was nothing within him which has defied the grave and transcended the power of death? Is there nothing to assuage the pain
of an unquenchable longing, an intense craving, an unceasing love for my darling son?

    May I have a word from you? I need help badly.
    Sincerely yours,
    Robert S. Marcus

A few days later Einstein sent a reply to the man who was a complete stranger.

    February 12 1950
    Dear Dr. Marcus:

    A human being is part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

    With my best wishes, sincerely yours,
    Albert Einstein

Rumi the Sufi mystic expresses this unity in a poem:

Look at Love

look at love
how it tangles
with the one fallen in love
look at spirit
how it fuses with earth
giving it new life
why are you so busy
with this or that or good or bad
pay attention to how things blend
why talk about all
the known and the unknown
see how the unknown merges into the known
why think separately

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10 https://atkinsbookshelf.wordpress.com/2019/04/19/einsteins-touching-letter
of this life and the next
when one is born from the last
look at your heart and tongue
one feels but deaf and dumb
the other speaks in words and signs
look at water and fire
earth and wind
enemies and friends all at once
the wolf and the lamb
the lion and the deer
far away yet together
look at the unity of this
spring and winter
manifested in the equinox
you too must mingle my friends
since the earth and the sky
are mingled just for you and me
be like sugarcane
sweet yet silent
don't get mixed up with bitter words
my beloved grows right out of my own heart
how much more union can there be.\textsuperscript{11}

In Part II we will look at the ‘meaning’ of help from others and at
‘meaning’ in relation to the grip of grief.

Recovering the Eye of the Heart

Samuel Ben deck Sotillos

Our whole business … in this life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen. – St. Augustine¹

For it is the wish of Wakan-Tanka [the Great Spirit] that the Light enters into the darkness, that we may see not only with our two eyes, but with the one eye which is of the heart [Chante Ishta], and with which we see and know all that is true and good.

– Black Elk²

The eye of the heart (the spiritual eye), which is seventy-fold and of which these two sensible eyes are (only) the gleaners. – Rūmī³


Samuel Ben deck Sotillos is a practising psychotherapist who has worked for years in the field of mental health and social services, focusing on the intersection between spirituality and psychology. His works include Paths That Lead to the Same Summit: An Annotated Guide to World Spirituality, Dismantling Freud: Fake Therapy and the Psychoanalytic Worldview and Behaviorism: The Quandary of a Psychology without a Soul.
God gives one divine eyes; and only then can one behold Him.
– Rāmakrishna

The eye with which I see Amida [Buddha] is the same with which Amida [Buddha] sees me.
– Kenryo Kanamatsu

At the centre of the human being is the heart, the intersection of the macrocosm and the microcosm, where the whole of Reality meets. Among the spiritual traditions of the world, we find unanimous agreement that the tripartite constitution of human beings and that of the cosmos – of which we are but a mirror – consists of Spirit, soul, and body; or the spiritual, psychic, and corporeal states, remembering that the seat of consciousness is in the heart rather than the mind. The ‘heart’ to which the diverse traditional cultures refer is not the physical heart that can be felt in our breast, but a transpersonal faculty where the Divine meets the human, which is often regarded as the seat of consciousness itself. When opened, this organ of spiritual knowing becomes a threshold or gateway between our world and the unseen. It illuminates our spiritual intelligence to disclose the nature of reality and our place in it. The universal recognition of this subtle and supra-individual faculty has been known since time immemorial.

All the religions are in unanimous agreement that the hardening or corrosion of this faculty is the source of all spiritual malaise. With the eclipse of the heart, all the other faculties become fragmented and myopic. Due to our samsāric or fallen consciousness, we have lost our capacity for spiritual vision: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Our condition is such that “Though seeing, they do not see” (Matthew 13:13) or “ever seeing but never perceiving” (Isaiah 6:9).

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In the Hindu tradition, it is said that we live like “blind people … without seeing through the eye[s].”⁶ According to a renowned ḥadīth, “Hearts rust like iron, and their polishing is through remembrance of God (dhikr Allāh)” and the Qurʾān states: “For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind” (22:46). It is through spiritual cleansing that the “eye of the heart” can truly see so that our spiritual illness is able to be healed and our primordial nature restored.

Due to modern Western psychology’s rejection of its sacred and metaphysical roots, the “eye of the heart” has become eclipsed, causing a myriad of mental health challenges to ensue; maladies that cannot be treated by the crippling reductionism of its methods. As American psychologist James J. Gibson (1904–1979), one of the most important contributors to the field of visual perception, has noted:

The conclusions that can be reached from a century of research on perception are insignificant. The knowledge gained … is incoherent. We have no adequate theory of perception, and what we have found in the search for sensations is a mixed batch of illusions, physiological curiosities, and bodily feelings. The implications are discouraging. A fresh start has to be made..⁷

Wolfgang Smith attests that visual perception pertains to the vertical or spiritual dimension and that “all attempts to understand the phenomenon of visual perception by way of a physics-based science are bound to fail.”⁸ For this reason, it is paramount to undergo a cross-cultural analysis of how distinct traditions understand this organ of direct transpersonal knowledge – also known as the Intellect. By doing so, we will be able to facilitate an integral psychology or ‘science of the soul’ that honours the full plenitude of what it means to be human.

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The symbolism of the ‘eye of the heart’ is universal, as it can be identified throughout the world’s religions: it is known in Lakota as chante ishta; in Sanskrit as buddhacakṣus or dharmacakṣus; in Hebrew as ‘ein ha-lev; in Arabic as ‘ayn al-qalb; in Persian as chishm-i dil. Plato refers to ‘eye of soul’ and St. Augustine to the oculus cordis; not to mention the ‘third eye’ of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Dutch Indologist Jan Gonda (1905–1991) notes that “The heart is the organ with which one is able to see what is denied to the physical eye.”

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic philosopher and renowned scholar of comparative religion, writes: “The eye of the heart … is none other than the immanent intellect, is the faculty with which we are able to see the Invisible World and ultimately God, but it is also the eye with which God sees us.”

Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) comments on how wide-ranging the symbolism of the heart is within the world’s spiritual traditions: “The eye, owing to its particularly adequate correspondence with the Intellect, lends itself spontaneously to traditional symbolism, and it is to be found—although varying widely in degree of importance—in the symbolic language of all Revelations.”

The modern world has categorically ruled out all forms of knowledge that are not derived from rationalism or empirical means, essentially abolishing all ways of knowing that transcend sensory experience and human reason. This does not take into account that such means of knowing are limited to the relative order and can discern nothing of the Absolute. This has fomented the notion that science and religion exist as two incommensurable domains. In earlier eras, whether of the East or West, these domains were understood to be interconnected and mutually influential.

A human being in the traditional world could fluidly cross the boundaries of empirical modes of knowing to spiritual states of awareness without confusion, as they were not viewed as inimical to

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each another. Today’s predominantly secular mindset has split these domains, making them antagonistic. Yet it is in the transpersonal domain that the most inclusive modes of knowing and levels of reality reside.

The premise of ‘scientism’ is that sensory experience and the faculty of human reason are the sole arbiters of truth and that they alone can access the truths of the cosmos on their own terms. This predicament has persisted since the Enlightenment project, or the “Age of Reason,” from the 17th–18th centuries onwards. In the traditional world, reason was understood to be a bridge between the two realms of logic and transcendence. Modern science has its place if it does not stray beyond the proper confines of its epistemological competence by claiming a monopoly on knowledge to which it is not entitled. It is worth recalling that “science” comes from the Latin word scientia, which literally means “knowledge.”

Rationalism has levelled the faculty of the Intellect (Intellectus) and, at the same time, elevated reason (ratio) as the principal faculty of knowledge. Due to the severance of the faculty of reason from higher levels of reality, its scope is radically limited and it cannot lend itself to a holistic understanding of reality. What is often overlooked is that the faculty of reason is unable to guarantee, within itself, its own truth claims and requires an assurance from a level higher than itself. As Maimonides (1138–1204) confirms: “A boundary is undoubtedly set to the human mind which it cannot pass.”12

Similarly, there is a Qur’ānic passage that affirms this same truth: “He knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind—the Great One, the One far above anything that is or could ever be!” (13:9).

The human psyche, according to the perennial psychology, consists of distinct faculties as noted by Boethius (480–525), who presented four levels of intelligence in descending order: Intellect (Intellectus), reason (ratio), imagination (imaginalis), and sense (sensus).13

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Similar interpretations can be found among the spiritual traditions, remembering that the Intellect is above the soul and that it alone is metaphysical. The human faculties are mind or reason, imagination, sentiment, memory and will;\textsuperscript{14} or, alternatively, reason, intuition, imagination and memory; “intuition” here refers to Intellect which is the only faculty that can directly apprehend metaphysical truths.\textsuperscript{15} Each human faculty corresponds to an interrelated level or degree of reality. In fact, there are multiple degrees of being or reality in both human beings and the cosmos.

The Intellect, as traditionally understood, is a transpersonal faculty that grasps things in themselves. Accordingly, “the Intellect … is the ‘eye of the heart’ or the organ of direct [supra-formal] knowledge.”\textsuperscript{16}

St. John of the Cross (1542–1591), describes it in this way, “the intellect can see objects spiritually just as the eyes can corporally.”\textsuperscript{17} It relies on \textit{unmediated} intuition, not on the senses or rationality, which are much more restricted in their capacity to discern reality as it is. The Platonic doctrine of \textit{anamnesis} or “recollection” is conceivably the clearest example of this notion in the pre-modern West, and corresponds to similar epistemologies in all the religions. \textit{Anamnesis} is the faculty of Intellect synonymous with what is widely understood as Spirit (lesser known as “intellection” or “intellectual intuition”).

It is through such recollection that we can apprehend what is integrally human in the context of our place in the cosmos at large. Beyond the Cartesian bifurcation lies transpersonal knowing. Medieval epistemology defined knowledge as “\textit{adaequatio rei et

intellectus—the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known.”18

The Intellect has been described as ‘naturally supernatural’ and 'supernaturally natural,’19 since “the Intellect [can know] everything that is knowable.”20 That the heart-intellect is the centre of the human psyche is taught by Meister Eckhart (1260–1328): “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable ... [and] this is the intellect.”21

St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) provides a similar teaching: “Search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside.”22 Maimonides recognised the noetic faculty of the Intellect when he stated: “God is the intellectus.”23

Correspondingly, Rūmī (1207–1273) affirms that “the Universal Intellect is the founder of every thing.”24 We recall the Prophet Muhammad’s words: “The first thing that God created was the Intellect” or “The first thing God created was the Spirit.” This conveys that the Intellect (al-‘aql) and the Spirit (ar-Rūḥ) refer ultimately to the same reality. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the Spirit or Intellect is known by the Sanskrit term Buddhi.

References made to the three-fold constitution of the human being can be found in St Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians: “May the

God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

This tripartite structure of Spirit/Intellect, soul, and body is known in Latin as Spiritus/Intellectus, anima, and corpus; in Greek as Pneuma/Nous, psyche, and soma; and in Arabic as روح/عقل, نفس، and جسم. The Arabic term ‘عقل is used to denote both reason and intellect, although the distinction and interrelation between them (the first being horizontal and the second vertical) is always recognised. روح and عقل are found to be synonymous with Spirit and Intellect. The نفس (soul, self or ego) is often conflated with روح or Spirit, as is evidenced by these terms being used interchangeably; however, they represent two very different ontological functions of the self. The ‘heart’ and the ‘intellect’, in the traditional context, are also both synonymous with Spirit; for this reason, they are sometimes referred to as the ‘heart-intellect’.

In the Islamic tradition, the Spirit (ارروح), while transcendent, is also immanent within the soul (نفس) of the human being (الإنسان), and it is when the faculty of the Intellect (العقل) is restored in the heart (القلب) that our primordial nature (فتنة) can be fully realised at the highest level.

In the Hindu tradition, the heart (هريديا) contains both the individual soul (اجيواتما) and the Self (أتما) or Supreme Self (Paramатما). Spiritual deliverance (مكش) or mukti) requires the reintegration of the individual soul (اجيواتما) in the unconditioned Self (أتما). From the perspective of the Absolute, this distinction only applies at the level of manifestation and individuality, and is ultimately an illusion (ميايا) because of one’s limited understanding or ignorance (أيديا) of the nature of things.

The heart-intellect is the metaphysical centre of the human microcosm. Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984) writes: “Amongst [the human] faculties, the heart (القلب) is central, for it is the ‘place’ where the Transcendent Realities enter into contact with man; it is the organ of the intuition and Divine revelation (اتتاجل).”

Likewise, Martin Lings (1909–2005) touches upon the spiritual dimension of this faculty “in attributing vision to the heart and in using this word to indicate not only the bodily organ of that name but also what this corporeal centre gives access to, namely the centre of the soul, which itself is the gateway to a higher ‘heart’, namely the Spirit.”

The saints and sages of sundry spiritual traditions inform us that the heart is the dwelling place of the Divine. This is noted by Angelus Silesius (1624–1677): “My heart the shrine” and “My heart is the high throne.”

Turkish poet and Sufi mystic Yūnus Emre (1238–1320) avows: “The heart is God’s own throne.” In the well-known hadīth qudsī it is expressed as follows: “The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of my believing servant does contain Me.”

In the Hindu tradition, it is written “I am the Self … seated in the heart of all beings” (Bhagavad Gītā 10:20). In the Lotus Sūtra (Sanskrit: Saddharma Puṇḍarīka) of Buddhism there is almost a verbatim correlate: “The abode of the Tathāgata is the great compassionate heart within all living beings.” This is akin to the Christian tradition when it is written: “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

The inseparable connection between the heart and the realisation of human identity in the Self (Ātmā) is underscored by Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) who said: “The Heart is the only Reality. The mind is only a transient phase. To remain as one’s Self is to enter the Heart.”

This Ātmā [the Self], which dwells in the heart, is smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a
grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the
germ which is in the grain of millet; this Ātmā [the Self], which
dwells in the heart, is also greater than the earth [the sphere of
gross manifestation], greater than the atmosphere [the sphere of
subtle manifestation], greater than the sky [the sphere of formless
manifestation], greater than all the worlds together [that is,
beyond all manifestation, being the unconditioned].

Myōan Eisai (1141–1215), the founder of the Rinzai sect of
Buddhism, instructed us to: “Find Buddha in your own heart, whose
essential nature is the Buddha himself.”

Through the spiritual practice of “remembrance,” we allow the
Divine to take a seat upon our own heart, which then becomes God’s
throne. St. Makarios of Egypt (c. 300–c. 390) explains:

If you become God’s throne and He Himself takes His seat on
it; if your whole soul is a spiritual eye, all light; if you nourish
yourself on the sustenance of the Spirit and drink living water
and the spiritual wine that rejoices the heart; if you clothe your
soul in ineffable light—if inwardly you attain experience and
full assurance of all these things, then you will live the truly
eternal life, reposing in Christ while still in this present world.

The transformative and healing power of opening the heart-intellect
is expressed by St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359):

He who participates in the divine energy, himself becomes, to
some extent, light; he is united to the light, and by that light he
sees in full awareness all that remains hidden to those who have
not this grace; thus, he transcends not only the bodily senses,
but also all that can be known by the intellect … for the pure in

31 Chāndogya Upanishad, 3.14.3, quoted in René Guénon, Man and His Becoming
Perennis, 2001), pp. 33-34.
32 Myōan Eisai, quoted in Honen, the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching, trans.
Harper Havelock Coates and Ryugaku Ishizuka (Kyoto: Chionin, 1925), p. vi.
The Complete Text; Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St.
heart see God … who, being Light, dwells in them and reveals Himself to those who love Him, to His beloved.\textsuperscript{34}

We are told that “The heart is deep” (Psalm 64:6) or, as St. Makarios states, “the heart is an immeasurable abyss.”\textsuperscript{35} The heart is, as St. Philotheos of Sinai (9th or 10th century) states, the “place of God” which, when the Divine dwells within it, becomes “the heaven of the heart.”\textsuperscript{36}

In the Jewish tradition, the Divine Intellect will then dwell in its proper abode, within the spiritual heart of the human being, where it becomes the ‘eye of the heart’ (‘ein ha-lev): “In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted, I have put wisdom” (Exodus 31:6). The Gospel refers to this “heart-intellect” here: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

The Lakota holy man Hehaka Sapa, more commonly known as Black Elk (1863–1950), provides a stunning passage outlining the “eye of the heart”:

I am blind and do not see the things of this world; but when the Light comes from Above, it enlightens my heart and I can see, for the Eye of my heart (Chante Ista) sees everything. The heart is a sanctuary at the centre of which there is a little space, wherein the Great Spirit dwells, and this is the Eye (Ista). This is the Eye of the Great Spirit by which He sees all things and through which we see Him. If the heart is not pure, the Great Spirit cannot be seen, and if you should die in this ignorance, your soul cannot return immediately to the Great Spirit, but it must be purified by wandering about in the world. In order to know the centre of the heart where the Great Spirit dwells you must be pure and good,


and live in the manner that the Great Spirit has taught us. The man who is thus pure contains the Universe in the pocket of his heart (Chante Ognaka).37

Within the Christian tradition, we find the idea of a ‘single eye’ in the Gospel: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (6:22). Correspondingly, the opposite is also the case: “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (6:23). It is the Divine that illuminates “the eyes of [one’s] understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:8).

Eckhart writes: “The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one eye.”38 Silesius adds that “The heart is like the eye.”39 The person needs to be pure for the ‘eye of the heart’ to open – “if your eye is simple, the whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:22). Likewise, as St. Hesychios the Priest (d. c. 433) declared: “The Heart sees the God of gods in its own depths.”40

Another example is found in the Sufi Maṣūr al-Ḥallāj (858–922), when he poetically writes: “I see my Lord with my heart’s eye / And I say to Him ‘Who are You?’ He tells me ‘You!’”41 Rūmī expressed a similar viewpoint: “I gazed into my own heart; / There I saw Him.”42

The eighth-century sage Śaṅkara speaks of this ‘third eye’, the ‘eye of knowledge’ (*jñāna-chakṣus*), within the Hindu tradition: “The yogi, whose intellect is perfect, contemplates all things as abiding in himself and thus, by the eye of Knowledge [*jñāna-chakṣus*], he perceives that everything is Ātmā [the Self]”43 or “The eye of Knowledge contemplates Brahma as It is in Itself, abounding in Bliss ... but the eye of ignorance discovers It not, discerns It not, even as a blind man perceives not the sensible light.”44

The Sage of Arunachala notes this as well: “The seeing Self is the Eye, and that Eye is the Eye of Infinity.”45

Marco Pallis (1895–1989) presents this idea from a Buddhist perspective: “Knowledge is only possible inasmuch as the ‘eye of bodhi’ (the pure intellect), in the subject, perceives, in the object, the ‘bodhic message.’”46

The Diamond Sutra (Sanskrit: *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) relates the notion of “the Buddha’s five eyes”:

What do you think, Subhuti, does the fleshly eye of the Tathagata exist?—Subhuti replied: So it is, O Lord, the fleshly eye of the Tathagata does exist.—The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, does the Tathagata’s heavenly eye exist, his wisdom eye, his Dharma-eye, his Buddha-eye?—Subhuti replied: So it is, O Lord, the heavenly eye of the Tathagata does exist, and so does his wisdom eye, his Dharma-eye, and his Buddha-eye.47

According to Zen or Ch’an Buddhism, Buddha Shakyamuni stated: “I have the secret of the right Dharma-Eye, the ineffably subtle insight into Nirvana which opens the door of mystic vision of the Formless

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Form, not depending upon words and letters, but transmitted outside of all scriptures.”

This perspective informs a very different understanding of religion, yet it is necessary to recall anew that the etymological root of the English word ‘religion’ is the Latin *religare*, meaning to ‘to rebind’ or ‘to bind back’ – by implication, to the Divine that is at once transcendent and immanent. This is exemplified by numerous saints and sages, and by what has been termed the “religion of the heart” which Rūmī expresses thus: “The religion of Love is apart from all religions: for lovers, the (only) religion and creed is – God.”

This is also captured in the often-cited passage of Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240), also known as ‘the Greatest Master’ (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*): “My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka’ba, and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take, that is my religion and my faith.”

Our gradual forgetfulness of the Divine, being none other than the loss of the sense of the sacred, has caused the Intellect or the “eye of the heart” to become veiled, leading to a plethora of individual and collective problems for humanity. It is only through the faculty of the heart-intellect, as Plato (429–347) points out, that we can know and identify with the Real: “There is an eye of the soul which ... is far more precious than ten thousand bodily eyes, for by it alone is truth seen.”

As the Prophet of Islam said, “My eyes sleep, but my heart is awake” or as we find in the Song of Solomon, “I sleep, but my heart waketh” (5:2). What is ‘awake’ is the inward eye of the heart, which can see the fullness of reality as it truly is. The human being is called

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to “Lift up your eyes on high and behold who has created these [things]” (Isaiah 40:26); which occurs through what the English poet William Blake (1757–1827) has famously termed the “cleansed doors of perception.”52

Unless we have become pure, our spiritual vision is obstructed as Eckhart says: “However small a thing it is which sticks to the soul, we shall not see God.”53 What is often missing here is the fact that we cannot enact the Psalmist’s injunction to “take off the veil from mine eyes …” (119:18) without first adhering to an authentic spiritual form. The veil that obscures the heart-intellect exists for the protection of the nescient individual and cannot be lifted prematurely without doing harm, and this is taught in many of the world’s sacred scriptures.

Through the awakening of the ‘eye of the heart’, the human psyche may be able to abide in a state that approximates our primordial nature. The active polishing of the heart and its subsequent healing allows for our faculties to be reintegrated in order restore a sense of the sacred which is to see the Divine or transpersonal Self everywhere.

This is made evident in the Hindu tradition where it refers to one “who sees me everywhere and sees all things in me” (Bhagavad Gītā 6:30) or, in the Islamic tradition, “Wherever you turn, there is the face of God” (Qur’ān 2:115) or “The seven heavens and the earth, and everyone within them, glorify Him. There is nothing that does not glorify Him in praise” (Qur’ān 17:44). To be fully human is to recognise our fundamental relationship with the Divine; which is to say that our true identity in divinis is the primordial nature (fitrah), the “image of God” (imago Dei), Buddha-nature (Buddha-dhātu), or the Self (Ātmā).

A false identification with the empirical ego creates an unstable mind and unpredictable behaviour. As the ego cannot know itself or what lies beyond it, the human soul requires a transpersonal dimension to help raise its vision and to recover its intuition. The perennial psychology includes the categories of Spirit, soul, and body, along

52 “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.” (William Blake, ‘A Memorable Fancy’, in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell [Boston, MA: John W. Luce and Company, 1906], p. 26).
with their corresponding degrees and modes of reality. Although the “eye of the heart” does not require therapy, as it pertains to the metaphysical order, it is the hardening of our heart and the darkening of the human psyche that needs to be reversed so that we can truly see once again. It is through active participation and commitment to one of the religious traditions of the world that wayfarers can awaken the heart-intellect through remedies offered by a ‘science of the soul’.

The mental health benefits of this alchemical process are immeasurable, for we come to be granted “the peace ... which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) or, as Black Elk stated, “peace … comes within the souls of men when they realise their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its Powers.” When the “eye of the heart” is recovered, we “realise that at the center of the universe dwells Wankan-Tanka [the Great Spirit], and that this centre is really everywhere, it is within each of us.”54 Accordingly, an authentic sacred psychology must be informed by a traditional understanding of the Intellect; otherwise, we cut off any prospects of “restor[ing] to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen.”55


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A Few Advaitic And Zen Hi-Coo  III

Kevan Myers

No words can convey
what I see and touch
each moment of each day

Why am I surprised to find
the day is new
each time I look outside

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The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Forty Two

Sadhu Om
As recorded by Michael James

15th January 1979

Sadhu Om [in reply to a visitor who asked him how he got his name]: It is not just my name, it is everyone’s name. Om is the name of brahman. I have no name of my own.

16th January 1979

Sadhu Om: The whole of our life as this body is one dream. This dream is interrupted by periods of sleep, and sleep is interrupted by other dreams, so such dreams are dreams within this dream. For each dream there is a prārabdha, so what we experience in each dream is determined by whatever prārabdha Bhagavan has allotted for it. Since the dreams that interrupt our sleep are parts of the dream of our present life, the prārabdha of each such dream is a part of the prārabdha of this life.

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.
People often ask whether Bhagavan can change the prārabdha of our present life, and some even expect that, since he is guru, he should change our prārabdha after we come to take refuge at his feet. Yes, he can certainly change it, because he is the one who has allotted it. For example, he may choose to exhaust some more fruit from our sañcita by allotting it to be experienced by us in dream, or he may even allot the fruit of some āgāmya done in this lifetime to be experienced in this life itself. However, he would very rarely make such changes, because the prārabdha that he has allotted for the dream of our present life is the one that is most conducive to our spiritual development, so why would he decide to change it? And even if he does decide to change it, we can never know that he has done so, because we know what our prārabdha is only when we experience it, which would be after any change had been made by him.

However, why should we want or expect him to change our prārabdha? He has already allotted whatever prārabdha is best for us, so we should accept it wholeheartedly as his sweet will, and should not even think that it requires any change. If we think that he should change it, or wonder whether he might change it, that shows that we are not yet willing to surrender our will and accept his will wholeheartedly. And how can we surrender ourself to him if we are not even willing to surrender our will to him? The path of surrender begins with our surrendering our will, because we will be willing to surrender ourself only to the extent that we are willing to surrender our will.

Since we cannot free ourself from the bondage of karma without surrendering ourself entirely to him, we must be willing to wholeheartedly and joyfully accept whatever prārabdha he has allotted for us, so we should not give even the slightest room in our heart to any desire or thought that he should change it in any way. Therefore we should follow the example that he has set us in verse 2 of Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam: ‘niṉ iṭṭam eṉ iṭṭam; iṉbu adu eṟku, eṉ uyir iṟaiyē’, ‘Your will is my will; that is happiness for me, Lord of my soul’.

Sadhu Om [in reply to someone who asked him to explain what Bhagavan said about krama mukti (gradual liberation) as recorded in section 513 of Talks]: When the Vedas explain creation, they sometimes say that the world is created from the mind of Brahma,
and this is further explained by saying that Brahma slept, and while sleeping he projected this world as a dream. Whenever we dream, we mistake ourself to be a body in that dream, and we do so because we have forgotten our identity as the body that is then supposedly asleep. Likewise, if Brahma is dreaming this world, he must have forgotten his identity as Brahma, who is then asleep, and mistaken himself to be a body in this dream, through which he is seeing this dream world.

If we ask, ‘Who in this world is the dreaming Brahma?’, the answer is whoever is now seeing this world, because the dreamer of any dream is the ego who sees it. In other words, we who see this world are the dreamer, so we ourself are the Brahma who has created this world. Therefore instead of attending to this dream or anything in it, we should attend only to ourself in order to see who am I, the dreamer who is dreaming this dream.

If we attend keenly to the first person in a dream, we will thereby separate ourself from the dream body, so the dream will end and we will wake up. Likewise, if we attend to the first person keenly enough in the dream of this waking state, the false awareness ‘I am this body’ will be dissolved forever and we will wake up in our real state of pure awareness. Since pure awareness is brahman, this state in which we remain as pure awareness is called brahma-sākṣātākāra, direct experience of brahman. This alone is real liberation, and it is attained instantaneously, as soon as ego is swallowed in the light of pure awareness.

Those who believe in krama mukti (gradual liberation), however, say that pure souls who are free of desire do not attain liberation immediately but only gradually, because after leaving this world they go to brahma-lōka, the world of Brahma, from which there is no return, and only after living there for a long time do they finally attain liberation. That is, they believe that brahma-lōka is real, and that it exists so long as Brahma lives, so they say that souls who live there will finally attain liberation only when Brahma dies and this world ceases to exist.

Bhagavan teaches us, however, that all such beliefs are false, because in order to experience any world we must identify ourself as a body in that world, so experiencing brahma-lōka would be just another dream. Whatever world we may experience is just a dream, and so long as the dreamer exists, when one dream comes to an end...
another will sooner or later begin, because the nature of the dreamer is to dream, so it will not stop dreaming until it ceases to exist. Even if we dream that we are in brahma-lōka, after that dream ends we will continue to dream other dreams. We cannot attain liberation merely because one of our dreams has come to an end. As he says in verse 40 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu, ‘The ego-form perishing [or being destroyed] is mukti [liberation], so since ego is the dreamer of all dreams, liberation can be attained only by eradicating the dreamer.

Saying that this world is Brahma’s dream is just a metaphorical way of saying that it is ego’s dream. If it were true that this is Brahma’s dream, then whoever is now seeing this world, namely ego, is Brahma, so if ego turns its attention inwards to see who am I, it may thereby wake up as Brahma in brahma-lōka, but even that would be just another dream. Therefore if ego experiences itself as ‘I am Brahma’, that is just another false identification, so it should again turn its attention back within to see what it actually is. Only when we attend to ourself so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of ourself as anything other than ourself, I will we wake up into our real state of pure awareness.

So long as we are aware of any world, we are not aware of ourself as we actually are, because we can perceive a world only when we take ourself to be a body within that world. This is why Bhagavan says in the third paragraph of Nāṉ Ār?, ‘Just as unless awareness of the imaginary snake goes, awareness of the rope, [which is] the adhiṣṭhāna [basis, base or foundation], will not arise; unless perception of the world, which is kalpita [a mental fabrication], departs, darśana [seeing] of svarūpa [one’s own real nature], [which is] the adhiṣṭhāna, will not arise’, and in the fourth paragraph, ‘When the mind comes out from ātma-svarūpa [the real nature of oneself], the world appears. Therefore when the world appears, svarūpa does not appear; when svarūpa appears (shines), the world does not appear’.

All ideas about brahma-lōka or any other world are unnecessary distractions, because all worlds are equally unreal. Since any world seems to exist only in the view of ego, it cannot be any more real than the ego who sees it, so we need to investigate the reality of ego by focusing our entire attention on ourself, the one who now seems to be ego. That is, any world is just a collection of ever-changing objects or phenomena, which are what are otherwise called second and third
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

persons, and as Bhagavan points out in the fifth paragraph of Nāṇ Ār?, ‘Only after the first person [namely ego] appears do second and third persons [all other things] appear; without the first person, second and third persons do not exist’. Since we seem to be ego only so long as we do not attend to ourself keenly enough, if we attend to ourself keenly enough to see what we actually are, ego will thereby cease to exist, and all worlds will cease to exist along with it, as he implies in verse 14 of Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu:

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 [or reality] that shines as one [undivided by the appearance of these three persons] alone is oneself, the [real] state [or nature] of oneself.

The first person is the adjunct-mixed awareness ‘I am this body’, and the reality of the first person is the pure awareness ‘I am’. Therefore, if we keenly attend to our fundamental awareness ‘I am’, the adjunct ‘this body’ will drop off and we will thereby remain as ‘I am’ alone. This is why he says that if we investigate the reality of the person, the first person will cease to exist. That is, if we keenly attend only to the essential ‘I am’ in the mixed awareness ‘I am this body’, we will see that ‘I am’ alone is real and the adjunct ‘this body’ is just an illusory appearance, so ego as such was never real. In other words, if we keenly investigate ego, we will find that ego as such is ever non-existent, and what actually exists is only the pure awareness ‘I am’, which is ātma-svarūpa, the real nature of ourself.

Even if we fail to see clearly that our fundamental awareness ‘I am’ alone is what actually exists, and instead wake up as Brahma in brahma-lōka, we should just continue the same investigation until we see ourself as we actually are. That is, we should investigate ourself, the ‘I’ who is aware of itself as ‘I am Brahma’ and who is consequently aware of brahma-lōka. This is the only means by which even Brahma can attain liberation.

If we consider it carefully, the very idea of krama mukti is absurd, because ego, the false awareness ‘I am this body’, is itself bondage, so as long as we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’ we cannot be partially liberated. Destruction of ego alone is real liberation, so
there is no such thing as partial or gradual liberation. Ego is either dead or alive. It cannot be partially dead and partially alive.

If we try to jump over a well, we will either land safely on the other side or fall in the well. Likewise, we are either liberated or in bondage. Whether we jump 50% or 99% across the width of the well, we would still fall in the well, so to be safe we need to jump across its full width. Likewise, if we say that ego is partially dead, that means it is still alive, so to be safe we need to eradicate it entirely. Since ego itself is bondage, there can be no such thing as a partially liberated ego. It is liberated only when it is dead.

(To be continued)

The Anonymity Paradox

Poornima Ashok

The goal is clear; this form and name,
To be erased, is the end game.
To be present, and yet unseen,
In all, and any part of the scene.

By His Grace, I can see it unfold,
No more a part, in some stories told.
No credits to take, for the tasks complete,
No debits to affect or balance deplete.

But as I am stating this, I discover,
The hidden force of my ego’s power.
I seem to want my anonymity known,
Behind the scenes, my actions shown.

What a feeling, oh so strange,
Recognition needed, not out of range.
Much more questioning yet to be done,
Till no shadow left, before the sun.
The Search

“Y es, indeed! It is just as difficult for a spiritual master to find an equivalent truth-seeking disciple as it is for an earnest disciple to find a true master.” Uttering this, a brahmin young man, his face radiant with spirituality, strolled in the hot summer sun in search of a disciple, like a cow in search of its missing calf. He was Guru Govinda Bhatta, a well-known saint and siddha.

A staunch worshipper of mother Goddess Kali, who never yielded to worldly and religious formalities but always acknowledged the unique truth. Though a brahmin by caste he revoked it’s traditional formalities and devoted himself explicitly to the spiritual path. The village folk respected him for his devotion to Banni Mahankali and believed that he had occult powers bestowed on him by the goddess in reward for his hard penance. He could not only foretell the fate of a person just by looking at them, but also had the power to change their future.

It was this saintly person, Guru Govinda Bhatta, who went on a quest for a sincere disciple who had the potential to realise his inner

Shilpi Virupaksha Davangere is a civil engineer, who recieved a doctarate from Mysore University for his Kannada literary research works on Allama Prabhu and Shishunāla Sherief. He presently resides at Arunachala.
spiritual nature. On his way to a neighbouring village, he saw several boys engaged in the game of flying pigeons. A boy with a bright look about him happened to pass in front of the master, as he called his pigeon to come back. The master caught hold of the boy’s hand and seeing the unusual, otherworldly features on his face, stopped him. Focussing his sharp gaze on the boy, the master questioned him, “Alright, tell me, who is your father?” The boy was astonished and could not utter anything in his embarrassment, but after a while, he spontaneously spoke out, “Your father is my father.” The sharp reply rejoiced the master’s longing heart and he was satisfied to have found at last his disciple in this boy.

He took hold of the boy’s hand and asked to be taken to his father. Guru Govinda Bhatta was well known in the surrounding villages for his divine tejas (light or brilliance). The master on reaching the boy’s house entered with a complaining tone, “Look, I asked your son who was his father? Do you know what he replied! Your father himself is my father. What a wonderful answer!” So saying, the master laughed.

The boy’s father apologised to the master saying, “Forgive him as he is a small boy and does not know how to speak to a noble person like you. Unknowingly he has spoken to you arrogantly. Kindly excuse him considering him as your own son.”

With a smile the master said, “Your son is a small boy but he spoke like a mature wise man. Yes, he has told the ultimate truth. He did not commit any mistakes. He has spoken the words of eternal reality.” While praising the boy he said, “Is not the Lord the father of everyone? Marvelous!” Thus, he hugged the boy with affection. Thereafter, Guru Govinda Bhatta took complete responsibility for the boy’s education and brought the boy to his home village ‘Kalasa’ with the father’s permission.

The boy who was thus graced by the great master was none other than the one is who now fondly known as the ‘Kabir of Karnataka’. He was the saint, a mystic poet, a śivayogi named ‘Shishunāla Sheriefa’. A Muslim disciple to a Hindu Vaidic brahmin Guru! This revolutionary event took place approximately in the year 1827, at Shishunāla.

**The Village of Shishunāla**

Shishunāla is a small village with a beautiful temple dedicated to Lord Nandeesha, situated in Shiggoan taluk of Haveri district, Karnataka.
state. Passing through the national highway number 4 from Bangalore to Pune, crossing places like Davangere and Haveri we reach a place called Shiggaon, some 340 km from Bangalore. Turning to the right from the highway we reach a place called Hulagoor around 20 km from Shiggaon, which is the divine abode of the great saint Hazrath Khader Shāvali.\(^1\) This enlightened saint well known for Hindu Muslim unity was called ‘Khadar Linga’.\(^2\) Sherief\(^3\) was born by the grace and blessings of this notable saint.

**Sri Khader Linga**
Saint Shishunāla Sherief was born on 3rd July 1819 as the only son of Imam Sab and Hajjuma in Devakar family. The Muslim couple had no children for a long period, so they prayed and served Sri Khader Linga of Hulgoor wholeheartedly with intense perseverance and devotion for many years. Their penance bore fruit and Sri Khadar Linga blessed them with a child who would prosper spiritually. Master Khader Linga himself named the child Mohammed Sherief and blessed him saying, “Be a servant of the world.”

Master Khader Linga was a guru for both Hindus and Muslims. Once he initiated Hindu Lingayath devotees by giving them the \(iṣṭa\text{-}liṅga\), by tying it around the neck, but many traditional swamis opposed this and would re-initiate the person with a new \(liṅga\). Astonishingly, however many \(liṅga\)-s they tied to the person, all vanished! At last, the initiated \(liṅga\) of the master Khader Shāvali alone remained. From that day onwards, he was named as ‘Khader Linga’.

Since Sherief was born by the grace of the divine master who was a bridge between Hindus and Muslims, and he too grew into adulthood on the same path of harmony and cooperation.

People in the countryside usually live together in amity, irrespective of their caste, creed, and religion. Understanding the uniqueness of nature where there can be no room for differences in religions and traditions, people lead a peaceful cooperative life. Innocent villagers are aware of the fact that the beauty of nature lies in its diversities.

\(^1\) Also known as Hazrath Sayed Hazrathsha Qadri.
\(^2\) Khader means King or powerful.
\(^3\) Sherief means noble or high born.
They understand by basic common sense that all fingers of one hand are naturally unequal in size.

Imaam Sab, father of Sherief was a country *hakeem* (doctor) who served patients by giving medicines extracted out of herbs, plants, roots, etc. At the same time, he attended group prayers, *bhajans*, *namaz*, and *urus* as a sincere service to the lord. He served people with full dedication to finding God in them.

The lad Sherief loved playing the game of flying pigeons. He also took part in the folk dances of the village and was creative in composing songs for dances and plays. He loved listening to the *purana*-s or stories of the 63 Śaivite saints (*nāyaṉmār*-s). He never missed the *purana* of Sri Prabhuilinga Leela that was organised at the nearby Śaivite ashram, Hiremutt. He served the swamijis in the ashram who also accepted Sherief as an ardent devotee of the mutt.

**Guru Govinda Bhatta**

Travelling from Bangalore towards Hubli by train, we come across stations such as Davangere, Haveri, Savanur and then Kalasa in Kundgol taluk of Dharwad district, near Hubli. Kalasa is the village of Sherief’s master Guru Govinda Bhatta. He was a worshipper of mother Goddess Banashankari and Banni Mahankali, a pure spiritualist, a real philosopher, and a mystic as well. He never had any interest in either mundane worldly pleasures nor in the wish for fame. He had achieved the ultimate self-realisation by the grace of Jaganmatha! He forgot himself while worshipping the mother Goddess. Since childhood, he was indifferent to regular worldly life and grew as a budding saint. Right from boyhood, he possessed *vāksiddhi*. That is, whatever he said would happen, did happen. He was a *siddhapuruṣa* endowed with the knowledge of astrology, Vedic hymns, and *siddhaushada* (medicines).

Once some of the hostile youngsters of the village gathered to test Govinda Bhatta’s knowledge of astrology. They planned and directed a person to sit over the verandah of a house and make sounds like a lizard. They had an idea of making fun of the scene and humiliating Guru Govinda Bhatta. They called him to their house. As per the plans, the man made sounds like a lizard from the roof. The ignorant

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*Urus* or *Urs* literal meaning wedding, is the death anniversary of a Sufi saint, usually held at the saint's *dargah* (shrine or tomb).
youngsters in a sarcastic voice asked him, “What says your lizard astrology?” With a serious tone, Guru Govinda replied, “It says death, death” and left the house. Immediately, the youngster on the roof lifted his head and stood up jubilantly saying, “See, we succeeded in misleading him. He is a cheat. Whatever he says is absolutely false.” As he lifted his head trying to get up, his scalp got injured deeply by a nail protruding out from the roof. The nail had pierced his head, blood oozed out...he fell down and soon died.

Many such supernatural events made Govinda Bhatta a famous mystic in the village. People feared taunting Guru Govinda Bhatta, as they had discerned his spiritual powers. People respected him out of faith or fear. Even though he was a brahmin, he never adhered to the staunch rituals of the caste. He was a self-realised enlightened soul. He used to smoke and drink. He never feared society. How can a common man understand the ways of enlightened yogis? Saints can be hungry even after having their fill and can be ascetic householders! All his typical mystic mannerisms helped him stay away from the religious brahmans of the village.

It was into this environment that Govinda Bhatta brought Sherief to live and study under his tutelage. In the beginning, the children of traditional brahmans who were also students of master Govinda Bhatta harassed Sherief and tried to push him away but could not succeed because the master himself had chosen, accepted, and graced him as his beloved disciple. Sherief was an innocent, pure-hearted boy. He served his master wholeheartedly and won his heart.

Once, all the orthodox brahmans who disliked Sherief’s presence in Guru Govinda’s house gathered and planned to chase Sherief somehow out of the village. They came with a huge crowd to the house of Guru Govinda. The leader argued against the teaching of the Vedas to a non-Hindu boy. He said in a raised voice, “It is a great sin to teach our Vedas to a Muslim. It is against the tenets of our ancient religion. It is a great offense. It leads to *dharma glāni*.\(^5\) We shall stop this religious disaster by chasing away Sherief from our village.”

Guru Govinda dismissed the accusation in a firm tone, He said, “You mean Vedas are the monopoly of the brahmans? Veda is the

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\(^5\) Deterioration or decay of the religion.
Statues of Shishunala Sherief with Guru Govinda Bhatta at the Samadhi of Shishunala Sherief.
knowledge of the Self. Everyone has the right to acquire it. Who is a brahmin? Brahmin is the one who has realised brahma jñāna (Self-knowledge). A realised brahmin can never have any differences in caste, creed and religion. What is janivāra or yagñopavita⁶? It is not just wearing the sacred thread...He should be able to cross the bonds of the birth cycle. Janana (birth), nivar (eradication) is janivāra. A yagñopavita is worn by the one who is ready to cross the limits of time and space by sacrificing himself to the yagña of his life. A real brahmin is one who has realised the brahman! You all are not at all brahmins. You practise brahmanya (supreme godhead) for the sake of your belly, chanting hymns and performing rituals.”

Even though the senior ritualistic brahmins felt ashamed, they did not give up their ways. They continued arguing, “Alright, if we are not real brahmins from your viewpoint, is your Sherief a real brahmin? We have at least worn the janivāra (sacred thread) as the outer significance of brahmanya. Has he been initiated with a janivār? Without initiation how do you teach him our ancient Veda? Your Sherief has had no janivār or munji (rescuer or saviour). Are you bold enough to initiate and put janivār to a Muslim boy?”

Guru Govinda hearing it immediately went in and got the sacred thread. He called his disciple Sherief, stretched the thread, closed his eyes, repeated the yagñopavita hymns, and initiated him with gayathri mantra placing the janivāra around his shoulders and blessed Sherief with his sacred hand placed over his head. The event happened in a few moments without any of the usual fanfare of an initiation ceremony in front of the caste proud orthodox brahmins. They all stood dumbfounded and quietly returned to their homes.

Sherief stood there with tears of gratitude for the master. He prostrated to the great Guru and sang his praises, “hākida janivārava sadgurunatha, nookida bhava bhārava....” Sadgurunatha initiated me with the sacred thread and pushed away my worldly burdens so that I could gain brahma jñāna in this world.

On another occasion, the master along with his disciples went to the countryside to visit the Banni Mahankali temple situated in the

⁶ A sacred cord on the body worn by a brahmin without which a yagña (a sacred ritual) cannot be performed.
middle of the fields. The path was rough with thorns and stones. The beloved Sherief followed his master in his footsteps. On the way, there were thorny bushes marking the fence, which was difficult to cross with bare feet. Except for the master, all were barefooted. The master crossed the fence and throwing his footwear over said, “Wear these and cross over soon. It’s getting late. Let us finish the pūjā and return back.” All the disciples were scared to step on the footwear of the master. Neither did they obey the master’s orders nor did they cross the fence. Understanding their confusion the master ordered, “Do you respect my words or my lifeless footwear? Will you come with me or not, tell me quickly?” None opened their mouths.

It so happened that it was a special day, Guru Poornima. After performing Devi’s pūjā at the temple, the master wanted to give dīkṣā to his disciples. For this reason, the master was in a hurry. None of them moved forward. At last, the master looked to Sherief and said, “Will you be coming with me? Wear those slippers and cross the fence.”

Without a second thought, Sherief obeyed his master’s order, put on the footwear, and crossed the thorny fence. He then politely bowed to the master, placing the footwear in front of him. The master was pleased. Turning towards the other disciples who remained on the other side of the fence he said, “You cannot cross a thorny fence, how can you dare cross the fence of samsāra?” Holding Sherief’s hand, the master walked towards the temple.

The Samādhi of Sherief

Shishunāla, the birthplace of saint Sherief, is a small village in Shiggaon taluk, Haveri district of Karnataka state. As we enter the village it feels like any one of the numerous common villages of our nation. It lies in north Karnataka. At the entrance, we come across a pond with large stones supporting its banks, with steps down to the water and a huge banyan tree on its bank.

To the right, is situated a temple without a roof having high compound walls all around. In the middle of a quadrangle, there is a stone platform and over that, stands an octagonal stone pillar. At the top of the stone pillar, is installed a beautiful idol of Nandi or Basavanna, the vehicle of Lord Śiva. This is Lord Shishunāladheesha,
MOUNTAIN PATH

the beloved God or ishta daiva of Sherief! It is identified as ankitha nāma in Sherief’s philosophical poems. ‘Shishu-nāla’ (shishu – infant or tender; and nāla – nerve) literally means Sushumna-nāla, the divine subtle nerve connecting the six chakras from mooladhara to sahasrara that leads to enlightenment as explained in Patanjali’s Yoga Sūtra.

From Shishunāla village, as we walk further and take a right turn, we are confronted with a huge double arched entrance. As we cross the arch, at a distance of around one km from it, we find a raised platform and a gopuram behind it. This is where there is the samādhi-s of Shishunāla Sherief and his parents. This is popularly known as Sherief Giri. On this wide platform, are placed two idols of Guru Govinda Bhatta and Santa Shishunāla Sharief carved in marble. A huge neem tree planted by Sherief himself stands just beside the samādhi sheltering it along with a jasmine creeper entwining it which showers its flowers on the samādhi. It is a magnificent sight.

The universal master is manifest here and as exclaimed by true devotees, “Sheriefa is the lord of Shishunāla.” Sherief, a Śivayogi is manifesting here in his full divine vigour with innumerable līlā-s just like Lord Śiva in Kailash! People at different levels of understanding and maturity approach him and get all their needs fulfilled, including salvation.

The samādhi platform is roughly 90 by 90 feet raised about 5 feet from the ground level. It is guarded by a parapet of marble balusters and railings on a dwarf wall. In the middle of the wide open platform, there is a small raised marbled platform around 40 by 40 feet, 3 feet above the floor level. Around this shrine, stainless steel railings of around 3 feet high are fixed with an inner pradakshinā path.

On this open small platform are placed two marble idols of the guru and śiṣyā that are about 4 feet high with an idol of Nandisha (the Lord of the bulls, that is, Lord Śiva) in the middle with the huge old neem tree the only roof for the samādhi.

A few yards behind the samādhi is a big hall called the Bhavaikya Mandir with a high gopuram that has statues symbolising the life history of these mystics. On either side of this hall at the entrance are two small temples for Guru Govinda and Saint Sherief. There are adult-sized idols of both guru and śiṣyā in the temples made of white
marble, which look completely lifelike with eyes that are looking right at us.

As we enter the main hall, one can view the paintings of the various divine incidents that occurred in the life of these two mystic saints and a few of the well-known songs of saint Sherief.

There is an Anna Dasoha Bhavan wherein food is served free for all visitors. Surrounding the main samādhi, there are various other structures such as the Guru Bhavana, Dhyana Mandir, Yathri Nivas, an art gallery, a cowshed, a small pond, etc. In the evening hours, the whole Sherief Giri meditates each sitting alone in silence, pervaded by the subtle presence of Guru Govinda and Guru Sherif Śivayogi.

Thousands of devotees gather here for the annual car festival ceremony. One heart-touching truth is that almost all the devotees are poor, innocent, illiterate country folk who have staunch faith in the Guru. They visit the shrine every Thursday and new moon day with bare feet, dressed in torn, faded clothes. Hindus and Muslims equally congregate here and offer their prayers as per their respective religious rituals. On one side of the samādhi, Muslims offer sugar, scented sticks, and flowers, while on the other side, Hindus offer coconuts, bananas, garlands etc. Poor farmers unfailingly bring the first yield of whatever they grow in their fields and offer it to Guru Sherief the grandfather of their hearts. They bring handfuls and bagfuls of cotton, chillies, vegetables, pumpkins, homemade rotis with curry and chutney, flowers, fruits, groundnut, onion, garlic, etc.

We can feel the true devotion, complete surrendering, and unswerving faith of the innocent country cultivators, and their knowledge and understanding of the Guru melts our hearts. When our sight fixes on the dusty, cracked, rough feet of the farmers standing in front of the raised platform saluting, gazing, and murmuring words of love to their master with closed hands and with inexplicable emotions and tears, we are sure to feel that they know intuitively what we are still searching for.
Na Kiñcit

Nothing at All

B.K. Croissant

Songs are wonderful! Some epic poetry was cast as a song. Take, for example, *The Song of Roland*, which was written in the late Eleventh or early Twelfth Centuries, AD. Historians would say it was perhaps the first instance of literature in the French language, conveying the trials of mighty heroes, embodying shared values and portraying the human condition with pathos. It takes your heart away and inspires! Various versions, molded to fit changing circumstances, were sung generation after generation for entertainment by the fire at night by troubadours with amazing memories. The *Bhagavad Gītā* was itself embedded in, some would say, the greatest epic poem ever created, the immortal *Mahābhārata*. Like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, countless divinely inspired songs, including the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* have been composed through the ages in many Indian languages to convey spiritual truths. Some songs are simply hymns to divinity. Many songs were written in Ramana Maharshi’s Court that are still sung to His

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006 after serving as a senior administrator in the arts and humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then *sādhana* has been her highest priority and greatest joy.
glory today, and His own mystic hymns to Arunachala are unsurpassed in import and beauty. Songs vary, however, not only in length and quality but also intent. Listen to what Swami Chinmayananda has to say about that:

“Historically Aṣṭāvakra-gītā has been attributed to a period soon after the Bhagavad-gītā. That was perhaps the main reason that these twenty chapters are together called as Aṣṭāvakra-saṁhitā, to make a subtle contrast with the content, theme and style of the Gītā. Lord Kṛṣṇa’s Bhagavad-gītā addresses dynamic men of action of the order of Arjuna. Aṣṭāvakra-saṁhitā whispers to only meditators of the Janaka order. Kṛṣṇa’s eighteen chapters are songs sung to quieten the agitations in the deluded man of action, the despondent Arjuna on the battlefield, while the twenty chapters here are the thunderous roars whispered in the ears of the intelligent seeker in his seat of meditation.”¹

Why ‘thunderous roars’? Because Aṣṭāvakra the poet is trying to wake us up. To what? To Nothingness, of course, the highest vantage point on the mountain! Until you let go of your mind, you will not see God, you will not merge with Pure Consciousness nor discover the Bliss and true freedom that is within. Everything, all your past memories, all of the anxieties your mind has created and nurtured, all of your concerns about duty, your pride, all of your desires, all of your non-desires, all of the books in your library, the notions of liberation and bondage, the whole world, so that NOTHING is left. It’s that simple. To make the case, na kiñcit and na kiñcana, both containing the interrogative element ‘kim’ plus the particles ‘cit’ or ‘cana’ and ‘na’ and meaning no-thing at all, occur over and over again in the 298 verses of Aṣṭāvakra’s Gītā. They negate or they assert, depending on the context. Now let’s look at some examples. First, negation.

There are four verses in the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā where na kiñcit or na kiñcana are used like neti neti (not this, not this), a common method in Advaita Vedanta to point the disciple away from a conditioned response, like ‘I am the body’, and to teach discrimination between the real and the unreal. In the first example, the negation of the unreal is followed by a question used to provoke and shock the disciple into a higher state of consciousness. The royal Sage Janaka, disciple

of Aṣṭāvakra in the Gītā, is the ‘I’. “I have known for certain that
the body and the universe are nothing (na kiñcit) and that the Self
is pure Consciousness alone. So, on what is it now possible to base
imagination?” (II, 19)2 When the mind is gone, who can go on
thinking and on what?

In another verse, the poet questions duality when the world, created
by the mind, is seen as non-existent. “How should a strong-minded
person, who knows that what he sees is by its very nature nothing
(na kiñcana), consider one thing to be grasped and another to be
rejected?” (III, 13)3

Later in the Song, he questions our incessant desire for knowledge
of the unreal rather than simply abiding in the bliss of the real. “You
are one, conscious and pure, while all this is just inert non-being.
Ignorance itself is nothing (na kiñcit), so what need have you of desire
to understand?” (X, 5)4

In the final verse of the four examples, it is stated unequivocally
that the Self will always be real and the world unreal. This universe
is but a state of consciousness. In reality it is nothing (na kiñcit).
The existent and the non-existent do not lose their inherent nature.
(XVIII, 4)5 This implies, of course, that the unreal has no existence
independent of the Self.

Don’t underestimate Chapter II! It’s a powerful expression of
spiritual illumination from direct experience. King Janaka has just
heard the Truth expounded by Aṣṭāvakra in Chapter I, and it works!
He takes off and speaks from the perspective of the Absolute, first
affirming the reality of the universe when seen as pervaded by the
Self, then dismissing it as a mere unreal appearance in the Oneness
of the Self. It’s an intriguing paradox, namely ‘All belongs to Me or
nothing’. “As I alone give light to this body, so I do to the world. As a
result the whole world is mine, or alternatively nothing (na kiñcana)
is.” (II, 2).6

4 Ibid., p. 37.
Aṣṭāvakra again serves us that same paradox later in Chapter II as a finale to a suite of four magnificent verses (11-14) that constitute a hymn to Pure Consciousness. “How wonderful I am! Glory be to me! I who possess nothing at all (na kiñcana), or alternatively possess everything that speech and mind can refer to.” (II, 14)⁷

Na kiñcita can also simply negate its opposite. The duality between existence and non-existence or anything or nothing are viewed by the poet as obstacles on the path to Self-realisation, philosophical musings that needlessly divert the disciple’s attention from the Oneness of the Self. “Some think that something exists, and others that nothing (na kiñcita) does. Rare is the man who does not think either, and is thereby free from distraction.” (verse XVIII, 42)⁸

The following verse is spoken by Janaka in the highest state of ecstasy. “Where is the knower, the means to knowledge, the object of knowledge, or knowledge itself; where is anything, and where is nothing (na kiñcita) for me who am ever pure?” (verse XX, 8)⁹

Assertion is a higher calling for na kiñcita. Instead of negating or highlighting opposites, it points directly to the indescribable Self and settles there. Although Aṣṭāvakra uses contradictions and paradoxes freely throughout the Gītā, this use of na kiñcita is stunning and meant to wrest us from where we are to where we want to be. In other words, there are many verses with na kiñcita or na kiñcana that state unequivocally the paradox ‘Nothing is Everything’.

In about 1902 Sri M. Sivaprakasam Pillai put questions to Ramana Maharshi, who was then a young man, and received answers that were later published as Nan Yar or Who Am I?. At one point the dialogue makes it clear that the Self cannot be perceived until the absolute non-existence of the world has been experienced through self-enquiry.

“Question: When will the realisation of the Self be gained?

Answer: When the world which is what-is-seen has been removed, there will be realisation of the Self which is the seer.

Q.: Will there not be realisation of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)?

A.: There will not be.

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Q.: Why?
A.: The seer and the object seen are like the rope and the snake. Just as knowledge of the rope which is the substratum will not arise unless the false knowledge of the illusory snake goes, so the realisation of the Self which is the substratum will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real is removed.

Q.: When will the world which is the object seen be removed?
A.: When the mind, which is the cause of all cognition and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.

Q.: What is the nature of the mind?
A.: What is called ‘mind’ is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind. Therefore, thought is the nature of the mind. Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world. In deep sleep there are no thoughts, and there is no world. In the states of waking and dream, there are thoughts, and there is a world also. Just as the spider emits the thread (of the web) out of itself and again withdraws it into itself, likewise the mind projects the world out of itself and again resolves it into itself. When the mind comes out of the Self, the world appears. Therefore, when the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; and when the Self appears (shines) the world does not appear. When one persistently inquires into the nature of the mind, the mind will end leaving the Self (as the residue).”

Verse 8, the last verse of Chapter XI, is the culmination of a series of verses meant to inspire the reader to a higher level of consciousness through the practice of contemplation. In it na kiñcit appears twice, first to negate the world as real, which is necessary for realisation to occur, then to assert the indescribable bliss experienced by the jñānī. The second time, na kiñcit is the residue, the Self.

\[ \text{nānāścaryam idaṁ viśvaṁ na kiñcid iti niścayī, nirvāsanaḥ sphūrtimātro na kiñcid iva śāmyati.} \]

Firmly convinced that the varied and wondrous world is nothing at all (na kiñcit), free of desire and Consciousness itself, he abides in the peace of nothing at all (na kiñcit).\textsuperscript{11}

[Here na kiñcit is placed in clear opposition to two joined words, nānā and āścaryam, that are both potent and beautiful to pronounce. Niścayī (firmly convinced) is an unswerving anchor at the end of the second pāda. It is also the pounding one-word refrain that occurs in the other seven verses of Chapter XI. The long vowels in nirvāsanaḥ sphūrtimātro (free of desire and Consciousness itself) slow the reader down, putting emphasis on the sheer emptiness (or fullness) of the Self with no possible flaws or divisions. The long vowel and nasal sound in śāmyati (abides in the peace) also slows one down and ends the verse with a healing calmness.]

Lo and behold, this same verse from Chapter XI with na kiñcit doubled is repeated word for word, except for a slight modification in the first pāda, in Chapter XV, which is a magnificent and extremely inspiring summary of Aṣṭāvakra’s teachings. “Firmly convinced that this world is a mere illusion and is nothing (na kiñcit), free of desire and Consciousness itself, he abides in the peace of nothing at all (na kiñcit).” (verse 17)\textsuperscript{12}

‘Nothing at all exists’ is a mantram, and it appears many times in the final chapters of the Gītā. Enjoy and savour these verses! The Peace of na kiñcit is within. The poet is inviting you to find it as a direct, indescribable experience that is beyond the mind. It’s your real nature, always there and waiting to be revealed.

Knowing with absolute certainty that nothing at all (na kiñcit) exists, free of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and all desires within, he acts not even when acting. (XVII, 19)

\textsuperscript{11} All translations with devanāgarī are by the author.
\textsuperscript{12} Author's translation.
Here again niścayī at the end of the second pāda states a precondition, namely absolute certainty, without which enlightenment would not occur. Nirmamo (free of mine-ness) and nirahaṅkāro (free of ‘I’-ness), each with the same prefix nir, underline the negative aspect of na kiñcit. So does antar-galita-sarvāṣaḥ (free of all desires within). Antar (within), with its two strong syllables, calls our attention to the source of desires. The last pāda refers to an important paradox, namely ‘he acts not even when acting’, that is stated beautifully with two verbal forms (kurvan and karoti) from the same root and a strong guttural consonant occurring twice.]

The pure one attains the peace of his true nature when he has perceived the invisible, knowing without doubt that nothing at all exists (kiñcin nāsti) and that all this is only illusion. (XVIII, 70)

[Niścayī appears again occupying the usual place at the end of the second pada. Śāmyati (he attains peace) comes at the end of the last pāda, just as it does in verse 8, Chapter XI. In between the certitude that the world is an illusion and true happiness comes the direct experience of Knowledge, the fruit of pure souls who are beyond all delusion and even all spiritual practices that were once necessary but that have since been transcended.]

For one who possesses knowledge, beyond fear and detached under all circumstances, where is darkness, where is light and where is renunciation? Nothing at all (na kiñcana) exists. (XVIII, 78)

[Repetition of kva, nir and asya make this an exceptionally beautiful verse. After kva tamaḥ, kva prakāśo and kva hānaṁ comes the mighty na kiñcana, the truth that negates everything else. The verse ends with
sarvadā (under all circumstances), embodying perfectly the state of one who has merged with the Absolute and become unwavering.]

From the mountain top nothing at all exists (na kiñcana) but Consciousness. No heaven, no hell, no freedom or bondage. (XVIII, 80)

[Na kiñcana, placed at the end of the last pāda, gives this verse particular power. Jīvan-muktir occupies almost the entire second pāda, giving it special emphasis.]

Finally, there are two additional instances of na kiñcit to consider. The first is a call to empty your mind and stop thinking. Even meditation, which has an object, must be dropped, not in the beginning but at the higher stages. “Give up the practice of concentration completely and hold nothing (mā kiñcit) in your mind. You are free in your very nature, so what will you achieve by working your brain?” (XV, 20) 13 The second instance is the very last verse of the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā, spoken by Janaka. “There is no being or non-being, no unity or dualism. What more is there to say? Nothing (na kiñcit) arises out of me.” (XX, 14) 14 He has completely quieted his mind so that nothing, absolutely nothing emanates from him, and in that Nothing, there is Everything. The Silence of Everything. The end of sorrow. The Heart of Awareness. Listen to Swami Nityaswarupananda’s commentary on that verse.

“Aṣṭāvakra concludes his teaching in this verse and presents his philosophy in a nutshell. He accepts the reality of the Self alone. There is no world. Nothing exists besides the Self. There is no appearance even, for appearance is brought about by ignorance; and the negation of appearance can only take place in ignorance. Yet Aṣṭāvakra does not recognise ignorance either, for the assertion of ignorance implies the existence of something other than the Self. He does not recognise

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either bondage or liberation. Thought creates bondage, and liberation is consequent on the thought of bondage. But true knowledge transcends this cobweb of thought. In truth there is neither bondage nor liberation: these are only states of mind. The Self is ever free, unaffected by any state of mind. Thus, according to Aṣṭāvakra, there is but One Reality, the infinite, indivisible Self which is Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. The realisation of the Self is the only summum bonum and in this alone does life find its fulfilment.”

Poems like the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā are not just intellectual exercises. They are words divinely strung together from enlightened souls that have come to us down through the ages. Discover their relevance and make them a part of your daily life. Let them inspire you! ‘You are That’ and that will never change, whoever, wherever and whenever you are. Feel the mystery and ineffable beauty of na kiñcit when you are cooking, driving to work or sitting by yourself in silence. Believe and have faith that, with persistence, you can blossom beyond your wildest dreams!

\[\textit{Om, śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.} \]

\(\text{(To be continued)}\)

\[\textbf{Pearls} \]

\textbf{Suressh Kailash}

When I search for a way to be free, with your eyes you erase me.

When I look for a path that is easy, you show me your feet.

The way your grace grants release is wonderful indeed!

Ramana, I comb for shells on the beach, and you give me pearls from the sea.

BOOK EXCERPT

Sri Mahaswami
The Sage with Eyes of Light

SERGE DEMETRIAN

Śrī Mahāswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī, which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

The book is available at Indica Books, Varanasi. The price for PB ₹1,095/- & HB ₹1,500/-; pp.816. ISBN: 978-93-81120-20-0. The book is available in Amazon and other webpages. If Indica Books is emailed at indicabooksindia@gmail.com they will send the book by post.

Pandharpur, Wednesday, 11th November 1981

The Truth in human form

This morning the noise of the neighbours woke me up by 3.50 am and stopped me from going to sleep again. The morning program dragged while the mind floundered on some Western subjects in the unclear water of a dreamy state, then an insect, a large one, jumped from the folds of a towel and bit me deeply on the right palm. Was it an ant, a wasp? It was a sign, certainly as these sorts of warnings are often sent to me when the mind is not filled by the image of Shri Mahaswami.
It was *vāpana* day. At the camp, where I reached somewhat late, Shri Mahaswami, who had already finished the ritual shaving, came out for the bath just at the moment when I arrived in the inner courtyard. He quickly reached the bank of the river, entered the water and was immersed up to the waist. I followed him and, as usual, stood downstream so that the water touched by him, considered as very efficacious for purification, should cleanse me. This time I was some three metres from him with nobody in between. The bathing procedure lasted a long time, with four clods of Ganges silt used as soap. I had the feeling that the stream allowed him to come nearer to me. The waves that had touched him were brought to me with a type of electric current.

A second bath took place, this time with some Ganges water, while Shri Mahaswami gripped his *daṇḍa*. Then he came onto the bank, dried himself with a towel and started changing his loin-cloth, a gesture I attentively followed. He doubtlessly knew it, as he was delaying the procedure while staying turned towards me; he remained a few seconds without loincloth for a clear *nirvāṇa-darśanam*. I received the gift with gratitude.

Once dressed, he rubbed *vibhūti* on his body and then accepted the prostrations by the devotees present. I was also there, and the last in the line. As he squatted exactly at the limit of the water, one had to do the prostration facing east with one’s feet in the mud. I did not hesitate and stretched out full length. I observed how at that very moment he took his *kamaṇḍalu* in hand. It is a quite frequent gesture when he receives certain prostrations, not only mine. Often he tilts the water-jug so that a few drops of water should fall on his fingers: a self-purification gesture? It is possible if not probable that he ‘washes’ himself of the impurities he has accepted from his devotee. I stood a few steps farther away and adored him for some five minutes. What a fine figure! He would have been able to dismantle and then reassemble the entire Universe in no time. For me, he possessed an absolute force, based on the knowledge of all the wheels of the world, and of the capacity to give to them the impetus of life!

I noticed how he dipped two roses into his *kamaṇḍalu* and dropped one of them on the ground, then got up and left. I hurried and picked up the flower, placed it successively on my head, my neck, and my
chest, and then fixed it under my shawl. I followed him up to the camp’s building, some three hundred metres away, and there I found him again, alone, in the *darśan* room. He stood with the *daṇḍa* in hand, just as the emperors in ancient times, sovereign of all they surveyed. He remained perfectly aware of his force but was so modest. I saw how he attentively tied the little flag to his monk’s staff. Absolute Master, severe, precise, total… nothing could escape his sight. I noticed then the forceful contraction of his jaws with an extreme concentration on a single point. With his eyes half closed, he fixed me four times, always for a few seconds. The force of his sight started from afar, then it approached nearer and nearer. During each of these operations, the visitors who thronged in between spontaneously moved aside every time he raised his face towards his devotee!

By midday, Shri Mahaswami retired behind the door and I understood that I had to leave.

I passed in front of the old awning used for the ritual shaving and I noticed on its roof an orange towel, of the type utilised by Shri Mahaswami. I came nearer and waited for the permission in my heart, which said, “You can take it.” I grasped it slowly, folded it and placed it on my chest. While doing so I noticed that the rose under my shawl had disappeared. The towel was new, clean, and had a border with… roses!

In the afternoon, I dragged my feet to the camp, like a schoolchild fearing a difficult lesson, as if the repetition of today’s morning *darśan* was in store for me. I thought that I would not be able to stand it once again!

As soon as I arrived, I had a place of choice. One minute after, Shri Mahaswami opened the door of his room and, in order to search for me, leaned over a long table that blocked the door. This piece of furniture has been placed in parallel with a second one, with the intention of controlling the flow of visitors. He now stood and fixed me with his look of Light; this time he had immense golden eyes. I contemplated him as much as my forces would allow me, and tried to enlarge my own eyes to the maximum. He stood for 20 minutes keeping his eyes rigorously on the same plane as mine. During this time I twice became Swamiji, each time for two or three seconds. He possessed the nature of an ocean of light. Then he withdrew behind
the door from where he showed only the left eye to me. He remained like this for five minutes or so. I noticed clearly how he bent his head and performed small lateral movements. I am sure that he looked for the opening of my pupils. In addition, as a proof, I perceived twice, every time for two seconds, a brilliant lightning that shot out of his left eye. Then Shri Mahaswami sat down for a few minutes. As for myself, I stretched over the nearest of the two tables and I looked at his eyes from another angle. For the next twenty minutes I kept focused on his eyes without pause. At the end, I felt as if the head was totally ‘trans-illuminated’ and the eyes seemed so large that they extended up to the ears, even up to the nape!

Shri Mahaswami retired to his room, but soon came out and went into the large hall. I obtained an excellent place that was protected by the rickshaw. I looked at him for one muhūrta through a grill embedded in a wall of this vehicle. He shaped, fortified, rendered plain and simple whatever he had impregnated in the head of ‘this one’ during the twenty minutes of this darśan and of the previous twenty minutes at the door of his room. Although he glanced at me only once I could feel how he worked. The brilliance of his eye replaced totally and for a long time the glow of the eyes of ‘this one’. It is hard to explain, but this was the reality. The Light of his eyes saw without any doubt through the eyes of ‘this one’!

I was about to prostrate before leaving, when I learnt that a fragment of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad was to be chanted. There were eight youngsters, in two opposing groups, who would reply to each other. As the evening light dimmed in the large hall, the hesitant light of minute wicks that swam in the oil of the antiquated earthen lamps were able to give some illumination only to the group of those who chanted. An attentive and inquisitive person could see that Shri Mahaswami enlightened the youngsters from the inside. I observed him during the entire recitation — for four or five minutes. He conducted the chanting with his mind and by his hand. One could have said that it was He, Shri Mahaswami, the Soul of the Universe, who poured his own message into the words of the Upaniṣad, and now listened anew to it and made it alive!

The superb verses, pure, powerful, brightly shone as at the moment of their birth, millennia ago, beautiful as they were true, true as they
were the emanation of Shri Mahaswami, who is Truth shaped in human form. It was impossible at that moment not to be convinced!

How could these gentle young brahmins simply repeat these eternal ślokas? They did not seemed too much impressed. Well, it is their way of life...

I left the place with a light headache.

This morning I thought that I had received enough for the rest of my life. I pass from one marvel to another.

I should positively not do anything else than japa with the image of Shri Mahaswami in my heart, but then again is there something possible without Shri Mahaswami willing it?

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**Invitation**

*Upahar*

When the heart’s bemused, and roots decline to flower, and, all along the way, no bells ring out from misty shrines, their sacred fires untended, come to me.

Come.

Speak your unbroken Word, at the edge of knowing.

Your sound in me is love, and moves to silence;

your dance in me is joy, and whirls to stillness.

Rise in me.

Sing.

The waiting is your gift, a timeless honour, your absence, as your presence, fathomless.

Moon in the lake is smiling. Spirit, come!

Be with me.

Be.
Buddha had his enlightenment under a Bodhi tree. He was a prince who renounced the title, his kingdom and wealth, forgot all about his beautiful wife and baby boy, and went in search of the true meaning of life. He achieved what he was after. This achievement brought Emperor Ashoka, after the war of Kalinga, to patronize Buddhism.

That had happened in the northern part of India. In the south, a wealthy diamond merchant received his wisdom through an eyeless needle, which only amounts to saying that the great creator gives everyone the knowledge and wisdom they deserve, only at the right time and place through some means or other. Waiting is voluntary. Patience is mandatory. The wealthy man was Pattinathar, variously known as Pattinathu Adigal and Pattinathu Pillai. Call him a saint, a *siddha*, an ascetic, and a mystic. He is all rolled into one. A great devotee of Śiva, he glorified the Lord in all His various forms, through his poetical works. King Bhadragiri of Ujjain followed his footsteps and attained enlightenment through him.
Literal historians and linguists speak of three different Pattinathars, who lived at different ages. Leaving the controversy aside, popular tradition has it that the Siddha Pattinathar was born in Kaveripoom-Pattinam of the Chola country, to one Sivanesa Chettiar and his wife Gnana Kalai. It is said that he lived sometime in the tenth century C.E.

Given the name Swetharanyan (after as epithet of Lord Śiva of Swetharanyeswarar Temple), he showed great interest in all that was divine.\(^1\) In fact, he saw the divine in everything under the sun and the moon. When he was quite young, an ascetic honoured him with a casket. It contained statuettes of Sivalingam and pot-bellied Lord Pillaiyar. Swetharanyan added both the statuettes to his gallery of gods and goddesses in his pūjā room. Wealth began to pour in and Swetharanyan began to be known as Pattinathar, a term of respect that affluence brings in.

Another legend speaks of Kuberan, god of wealth, who loved to be born on Planet Earth just to enjoy the pleasures it could afford. Lord Śiva granted his request and so he was born as Pattinathar so that he could indulge in wealth. Pattinathar was broad-minded and never said ‘no’ to anyone who approached him for financial help. He fed the poor and magnanimously parted with his gold for the welfare of Śiva’s devotees.

To all those ignoramuses he came across, he said, “Ignorance is our chief enemy. Love is wealth. Seek the path that leads you towards enlightenment. Find company with the calm and the quiet. Every effort is tapasyā. And bliss blesses you when you shun the word ‘I’.” That actually makes the essential philosophy of Pattinathar.

When he was mature enough to lead a family life, the young and beautiful Sivakalai became his wife. She was the daughter of Sivachidambaram Chettiar and Sivakami Ammai. Like-minded they were, they became model for any would-be couple. Yet they were not blessed with a child. Pattinathar was already thirty-five. Who would take care of his business and wealth when old age assails him?

Sad at heart, Pattinathar and Sivakalai spent much of their time in temples, praying and praying, all for a child. When prayers are not

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\(^1\) He was also called as Thiruvenkadar by his mother and others.
answered and produce fruit, humankind chooses its own path, leaving the rest to the Lord. Hence, they adopted a baby, whose parents were ready to give him away as per a divine command.

The baby changed hands. A voice from the Heaven named the boy Marudhavanan, another name of Lord Śiva, the presiding deity of Thiruvidaimarudhur. The baby boy’s new parents gave him all the love he needed and took utmost care to bring him up. Even as a boy, he performed miracles to the awe of his parents and his playmates. The local people invariably believed that Marudhavanan was a divine child. They were not in the least aware that he was the Lord Himself.

While he was in his teens, he playfully jumped into a boat along with his friends and set sail. When they were very far from the shore, a huge whale attacked the boat and gobbled up a close friend of Marudhavanan. The others became panicky, but Marudhavanan kept himself cool. In fact, he was waiting for the time to avenge the death of his friend. A few minutes later, the very same whale returned perhaps with the intention of gobbling up two or three more. Many of the boys in the boat swooned at the sight of the ferocious animal. But the undaunted Marudhavanan gave a heavy kick to the whale, and to the surprise of everyone it dropped down dead.

Marudhavanan then jumped on to the carcass, opened its mouth with ease, and released his friend. The friend too came out with joy-filled eyes, wearing garlands made of precious gems. The friends, who regained consciousness, were surprised to see their whale-eaten friend alive and the whale itself floating dead. They realised that some miracle had taken place. When they too desired for the garland of gems, Marudhavanan allowed them to go into the whale and search for them. They went and came back with their great treasure hunt. They magnanimously presented several of the most precious gems to their hero-friend.

Along with them, came out a divine soul who said to Marudhavanan: “I am Manickreevan, a gandarva. Once I insulted a siddha who cursed me to lead the life of a whale in the sea. Heartbroken, I requested for a cure. The Siddha said, only when Lord Śiva’s foot graces you, you will regain your form! And Lord you have released me from the whale cage.”
He then left for his heavenly abode. When they reached the shore, Marudhavananan gave his father all that were presented to him. Both father and son gave away all the precious stones that came to them unexpectedly, to the needy and the devotees of Lord Śiva.

That particular incident impressed Pattinathar who gave his son permission to go on the wide seas in search of a new life, and Marudhavananan boarded a ship along with his friends.

They returned before they were expected. While others made their parents proud by showing them the gold and precious metals, and several measures of gems and pearls, Marudhavananan gave his parents sacks filled with sacks of cow-dung cakes, pressed rice and peanuts. That was all he had bartered for the goods he had.

Cow-dung cakes, pressed rice and peanuts, my god! What businessman would appreciate such progeny? Pattinathar too was angry with what Marudhavananan had brought with him. He could not make any head or tail of his son’s deeds. His blood pressure shot up. He howled at his son, who disappeared from the place, to avoid his father’s wrath.

Pattinathar in his fury pulled out a cow-dung cake from one of the sacks, and dashed it against the wall. The cake broke to pieces and out jumped precious pearls. He could not believe his eyes. He pushed his hand into a sack of pressed rice. When he pulled it out, he was amazed to find a handful of gold dust. With unbelieving eyes, he opened a sack of peanuts, took one, and broke open its shell. There were no nuts inside, but only rubies and rubies. He jumped for joy even while cursing himself for calling his son crazy.

Beside with joy, Pattinathar ran hither and thither in his palatial house in search of his son. He wanted to hug him, kiss him and take back the words he had uttered against him. All his efforts proved futile. Finally, he asked his wife Sivakalai to tell him the whereabouts of Marudhavananan.

Sivakalai with all smiles gave him a small casket which Marudhavananan wished to be handed over to him. Pattinathar took the casket from her hand and opened it gently, imagining many precious tiny things inside. But all that he could see was a needle without an eye. It was quite sharp and thick. Next to the eyeless needle sat a small cadjan leaf. There were letters inscribed on it. He anxiously took it

When he became conscious, the awful truth dawned upon him. Now he could turn his eyes inward and when he did, he saw Lord Śiva himself seated in his heart. It took little time for Pattinathar to know of the divine nature of his son. Who could he be if not the Lord Himself? Wasting no time Pattinathar decided to lead the life of an ascetic. Giving away his immeasurable wealth to the poor, he renounced life and wandered wherever his legs could carry him, visiting all the Śiva temples on his way, and meditating upon the Divine.

Just a loincloth
to cover my nudity.
Any pyal to sleep peacefully.
Areca nut & betel leaf to munch,
Enough water to drink.
Muttering the many names
of the Lord riding a bull
is good company.
And so to the moon
riding in the sky,
What difference does it make
if the northern side
of the world waxes or
the southern side wanes?

That was the nature of a true Siddha. The ascetic life Pattinathar led became an eyesore to his elder sister, who one day saw her brother begging for alms in front of her house. She prepared an appam, added poison to it and gave it to him. He being a Siddha saw the food with his third eye and found it polluted. The next instant, he threw the appam on the roof of his sister’s house, and cursed: “The evil that men do boomerangs and the poisoned appam should torch this house.”

The house was burnt to ashes. Pattinathar moved from one place to the other shunning the evil eyes. In the meanwhile, his mother died of old age. Hearing a divine voice, he rushed back to his place only

2 Kādaṭṭra ūsiyum vārādu kāṇ kaḍaivazhikkē. Not even a broken and therefore useless needle will accompany you on your final journey.
to see his mother’s body that was being laid to rest. The onlookers were surprised to see Pattinathar in the cremation ground. While they were wondering how he managed to come at the right time, Pattinathar told them to remove the heavy firewood and cow-dung cake that were covering the corpse, and to replace them with the soft barks of a plantain tree.

They were green barks and yet caught fire when Pattinathar sang a song, and inspired the god of fire to do his work. It was at this time that he sang ten lovely songs, all in praise of motherhood. They also talk symbolically of the ephemeral value of the body.

Oh, it’s mine, it’s mine,
flares up the fire.
The slinking worm too
says, it’s mine.
It’s mine, it’s mine
howls the greedy Earth.
It’s mine, says the kite.
It’s mine, howls the fox.
The cur too says, it’s mine.
They want to devour the dead.
Oh, is it this stinking body
I cherished with love?
Now of what use is this?

Pattinathar after cremating his mother walked to a nearby temple and sat, his eyes brimming with tears. News reached the king and he came to the temple to see him. Pattinathar spoke no word but kept his cool. The king asked him: “What have you achieved by renouncing your family and wealth and leading the life of an ascetic?” Pattinathar gave a fitting reply: “You are a king. Yet you stand while I sit.” The king too daring to ask, quickly moved away without disturbing him with further questions.

After bringing a dead youth back to life, he went on performing miracles. Once Pattinathar found shelter in a dilapidated temple. While he was meditating, a robber gang that stole many precious ornaments from the royal treasury threw a necklace of pearls into the temple, as an offering of share to the divine. It was unfortunate that it fell on the head of the mediating Pattinathar, and then slipped down to adorn his neck. Poor man! He was unaware of it.
Next morning, several royal guards were on the hunt for the stolen royal treasure. They found one with Pattinathar and so dragged him to the court. The king without any enquiry sentenced him to die on a pointed stake. When the punishment was about to be carried out, he sang a song saying that there is nothing in his hands and all that happens is the result of what one has performed earlier in life. The poor stake meant for impaling him caught fire. The king felt sad for his action. He understood the unquestionable powers of a Siddha, more powerful than those of a king. He too renounced life, and followed his master Pattinathar’s footsteps. He was King Bhadragiri of Ujjain.

Like Jesus Christ, Pattinathar and later Swami Ramalingam performed innumerable miracles that were all recorded on paper and archived. Pattinathar’s works propounding the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta, are recognised for the glory of their truths and have become one of *Panniru Thirumarai* (Twelve holy texts).

Among the texts included in the eleventh *Thirumarai* are as follows:

1. *Koil Naanmanimaalai* (40 lyrics sung in praise of Lord Nataraja in his temple at Chidambaram).

2. *Thirukazhumala Mummanikovai* (30 lyrics composed in the temple of Kazhumalam (Sirkazhi), all glorifying the place. These lyrics refer to Thiru Gnana Sambhandar’s vision of God as Ardhanari).

3. *Thiruvidai Marudhur Mummanikovai* (30 songs, elaborately describing the Lord as Ardhanari. It also describes in detail King Varaguna Pandian’s spiritual faith and religiosity).

4. *Thiru Egambar Thiruvandhathi* (100 songs sung in Kancheepuram. This work makes a mention of almost all Siva temples in Tamilnadu).

5. *Thiruvotriyur oru pa orupatthu* (10 songs all in celebration of Lord Siva and Saiva Siddhantha philosophy).

These texts apart, Pattinathar is also credited with the following works:

1. *Koil Thiru Agaval* (47 songs)
2. *Kachithiru Agaval* (70 songs)
3. *Egamba Maalai* (47 songs)
4. *Podhupadalgal* (105 songs)
5. *Arul Pulambal* (377 songs), and 37 songs on sacred places.
All his songs were saved and can be found in any good edition of *Siddhar Padalgal*. A careful reading of his works is bound to speak volumes about his understanding of Lord Śiva as the only one god. In common man’s language, he has expressed lofty ideas that are bound to stand the test of time. His philosophy of life is: Humankind should discard all earthly pleasures and possessions. Only then, there is hope of salvation. Release from the tensions of life is possible only when people control their senses.

Too difficult to follow, of course, unless one wants to be a *siddha*. One is also tempted to ask what is this life worth unless we enjoy life to the hilt. Well! Everyman to his own way.

This much-revered, most popular, and most quoted Siddha, as per legend, was found playing with children in Thiruvotriyur. In his sheer playfulness, he asked the children to cover him with a huge basket when he went into a trance. The children did. A little later when they uncovered him there was no trace of Pattinathar, but only a Sivalingam made of stone, symbolic of becoming one with the Lord.

*(To be continued)*

All references to verse numbers are to Balaji S. Sendhilkumar’s *Pattinathar: Varalarum Padalgalum*. Pub: Balaji Printers and Publishers, Kumbakonam, 2013.

All the translations from the poems of Pattinathar quoted in this essay are free renderings done by the author.

Grateful acknowledgements are made to the following books in writing this essay:


In the first article of this series, we examined what is Advaita Vedanta and why we should study it. In the second article, we learned that the *jagat* (world) is classified as *mithyā*, which is neither *sat* (सत्त) nor *asat* (असत्त) but *Anirvacanīya* (अनिर्वचनीयम्) i.e., indescribable. The illusory appearance of the world is due to ignorance (*avidyā*), whose root lies in *adhyāsa*, which is the mistaking and superimposing the unreal for the real. Thus, the third article indicated that this illusion is really a delusion. Bhagavan says every religion and sect has to deal with the triad (a group or set of three different entities) namely, *jīva*, *Brahman* and *jagat*. Therefore, in this article, we will discuss the relationship between each entity i.e., *jīva* and *jagat*; *jagat* and *Brahman*; *jīva* and *Brahman*.

It is important to note that at the highest level, only Brahman exists and thus there is no relationship between these as everything is subsumed in Brahman. Bhagavan explains:

As was already said, the purpose of the whole philosophy is to indicate the underlying Reality whether of the *jagrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti* states, or the individual souls, the world and God. There are three outlooks possible:

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i. The *Vyavaharika*: The man sees the world in all its variety, surmises the creator and believes in himself as the subject. All these are thus reduced to the three fundamentals, *jagat*, *jīva* and *Īśvara*. He learns the existence of the creator and tries to reach him in order to gain immortality. If one is thus released from bondage, there are all other individuals existing as before who should work out their own salvation. He more or less admits the One Reality underlying all these phenomena. The phenomena are due to the play of *maya*. *Maya* is the *shakti* of *Īśvara* or the activity of Reality. Thus, existence of different souls, objects, etc., do not clash with the advaitic point of view.

ii. The *Pratibhasika*: The *jagat*, *jīva* and *Īśvara* are all cognised by the seer only. They do not have any existence independent of him. So there is only one *jīva*, be it the individual or God. All else is simply a myth.

iii. The *Paramarthika*: i.e., *ajata vada* (no-creation doctrine) which admits of no second. There is no reality or absence of it, no seeking or gaining, no bondage or liberation and so on.

Thus, only the *paramarthika* view that everything is One at all times is ultimately correct. Though all religions teach only the Oneness of the supreme Truth, they have to start their teachings only by conceding that these prime entities are real. This is because the mind, tossed by objective knowledge [and subjective experience] would not concede that only One exists.³

**First**, we explore the relationship between the *jīva* and *jagat*. The *srishti-drishti vada* is the view that the world is primary and gives rise to consciousness. This is the common western view and is known as the Realist view of reality. The *drishti-srishti vada* is the view that consciousness is primary and gives rise to the world appearance. In western philosophy, this is known as the idealist view of reality and is also the view of some Buddhist schools. However, the advaitic view is that the world and individual are both projected illusions that simultaneously ‘appear’ and disappear (as in sleep).

Take a dream, all objects and people appear to be real as long as we are in the dream and share the same world. While dreaming, the

³ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 115.
world within the dream seems real and separate from you the dreamer causing a duality. However, on waking up, you realise that the world in the dream was just a projection of your mind and it existed because of you (the dreamer). The *ajata vada* is the knowledge that nothing – neither the world, soul nor God – ever comes into existence, and ‘That Which Is’ ever exists as IT is.

This is the final truth and is the *paramarthika satya*. It never accepts even the appearance of any trinity but proclaims that the Brahman alone exists eternally and without modification. However, from the *vyavaharika* point, the *vivartha vada* is recommended to explain how the *jagat* came into existence simultaneously with the consciousness. Since this accepts the appearance of the *jīva* and *jagat* as ‘real’, it is only a working hypothesis to help aspirants.

Bhagavan explains:

I do not teach only the *ajata* doctrine. I approve of all schools. The same truth has to be expressed in different ways to suit the capacity of the hearer. The *ajata* doctrine says, “Nothing exists except the one reality. There is no birth or death, no projection or drawing in [of the world], no *sadhaka* [no seeker], no *mumukshu* [no one seeking liberation], no *mukta* [no liberated person], no bondage, no liberation. The one unity alone exists ever.”

‘To such as find it difficult to grasp this truth and who ask, “How can we ignore this solid world we see all around us?” The dream experience is pointed out and they are told, “All that you see depends on the seer. Apart from the seer, there is no seen.”’

‘This is called the *drishti-srishti vada*, or the argument that one first creates out of his mind and then sees what his mind itself has created.

‘To such as cannot grasp even this and who further argue, “The dream experience is so short, while the world always exists. The dream experience was limited to me. But the world is felt and seen not only by me, but by so many, and we cannot call such a world non-existent,” the argument called *srishti-drishiti vada* is addressed and they are told, “God first created such and such a thing, out of such and such an element and then something else, and so forth.” That alone will satisfy this class.

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Their mind is otherwise not satisfied and they ask themselves, “How can all geography, all maps, all sciences, stars, planets and the rules governing or relating to them and all knowledge be totally untrue?” To such it is best to say, “Yes. God created all this and so you see it.” …… ‘All these are only to suit the capacity of the learner. The absolute can only be one.’

However, Bhagavan warns against the misinterpretation of the ajata in practical life.

Ajata advaita is not meant to be used in conjunction with other philosophies. Your thinking is as follows: ‘If everything is a dream, why should I make any effort to do anything? Once I wake up, nothing of all my effort will remain; so why should I do any work? Since everything is an illusion, why should I do anything at all?’ This is flagrant misuse of ajata advaita. Ajata advaita does not recommend, suggest or put up with inactivity, slovenliness, indolence, voluptuousness or sybaritism. The dreamer is part of his dream. An illusory being works inside an illusory world so that his illusory needs may be satisfied: of course there is nothing wrong in it.

Ajata advaita does not condemn work, labour or effort at all. It is identification with the doer that is condemned. Knowing that everything is illusion, still one so destined has to perform work in the world, for if his prarabdha be that way, it cannot be avoided. It is not that only work is illusory and therefore subject to total futility; the same applies to the worker also. So, an illusory worker performs illusory work in an illusory world: how could there be anything inappropriate about this? … …

An illusory ego can have illusory duties. In a dream you might be an emperor running a vast kingdom; you would have many responsibilities, duties and functions to discharge. After you wake up in your little hut, you merrily laugh at it all; but while the dream lasted the world you experienced then was quite real to you, and thus you had to act accordingly.

Do not mistake the theoretical knowledge that the cosmos is unreal to be a license to do whatever you want. The emperor inside the dream would be committing a grave moral error if he were to be slipping from his duties as head-of-state, considering
the cosmos around him to be unreal. Yet in actual fact there never was any emperor nor any kingdom: only an impoverished rag-picker dreaming inside his little hut.

**Second**, we now explore the relationship between the *jagat* and *Brahman*. If only Brahman exists, how did it transform into the world? The *parināma vāda* involves complete transformation of one thing into another, like milk becoming yogurt. Thus one gives the product the same degree of reality as the material cause. Hence *jīva* and *jagat* become as real as Brahman from which they are formed. Vishishtadvaita, Samkhya and Kashmir Shaivism follow this model.

However, Advaita does not agree with this argument as any change means that it is not real. Thus, it proposes the *vivarta vada*, which involves a transformation of the cause into products without the cause getting destroyed during the transformation. Hence, it is called an apparent transformation. The scriptures give three examples to illustrate this transformation:

- By knowing a single lump of earth you know all objects made of earth. All changes are mere words, in name only. But earth is the reality.
- By knowing a single lump of gold you know all objects made of gold. All changes are mere words, in name only. But gold is the reality.
- By knowing a single nail-cutter you know all objects made of iron. All changes are mere words, in name only. But iron is the reality.

Śaṅkara comments on verse 6.1.4 as follows: “If you know a single thing made of clay – for instance, a pot – then you know all things made of clay. How? The word ‘pot’ is merely a name; the real object is clay, which may assume different names and forms, but it remains the same clay.” The pot, jug, vessel etc. cannot exist without clay but clay exists without these names and forms.

Another example is the rope that appears as a snake. There is no snake and disappears on the removal of *avidyā*. There are two more examples that are given: the mirage in the desert and silver in nacre.

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5 *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.1.4-6.1.6.
In both of these cases, the idea is to show that one gets attracted to the unreal (such as the water in a mirage) and even after the ignorance is removed, the water still appears but one does not get attracted to it. In all cases, the key is that the substratum is unaffected.

The statement sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma\(^6\) means all is Brahman, which is echoed in the Gita as brahmārpaṇam brahma havīḥ\(^7\) and the Brahman remains as Brahman.

Brahman expresses as existence in everything, and as consciousness and bliss. Sometimes, this description is confusing because we refer to Brahman as nirguṇa (without any attributes) but also as satchitananda. For example, ‘Brahman is Existence, Consciousness, Infinite.’\(^8\) ‘Brahman is Consciousness, Bliss’\(^9\) and also is termed as indescribable. For this, we need to understand the lakṣaṇa (attribute).

The characteristics are pointed out by three methods:

vyavartaka lakṣaṇa (by distinguishing it from others; the house is the second building from the grocery shop),

tatastha lakṣaṇa (by pointing out its apparent attributes; it is the house that has a red gate),

svarupa lakṣaṇa (by describing its inherent nature; the house is made of bricks and mortar).

The last example is the case of Brahman being satchitananda. It is an inherent and essential feature just like heat in fire.

Third, we examine the relationship between the jīva and Brahman. Advaita teaches Atman and Brahman are one. There is nothing other than Brahman. This is echoed in the four mahāvākyas (one from each veda): ayamātmā brahma (muṇḍaka); tattvamasi (chāndogya); aham brahmāsmi (bṛhadāraṇyaka); prajñānam brahma (aitareya). If so, what is the relation metaphorically between Brahman and jīva?

There are three sub-schools in advaita and they put forth different metaphors to express the relation between Brahman and jīva, as explained below.\(^{11}\)

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\(^7\) Śrī Bhagavad Gītā, 4.24.
\(^8\) Taītrīya Upaniṣad, II. 1.
\(^9\) Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, III. 9. 28.
\(^10\) Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Karika, 7.
\(^{11}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRp1mkBRBYU. Adapted from the talk of Swami Sarvapriyananda.
i. The *vivaraṇa* school is based on the commentary of Prakasatman’s *ṭīkā* (sub-commentary) on Padmapada’s *Pancapadika*, which itself is a *vārttika* (detailed commentary) on *Brahmasūtra bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara (BSBS). This school proposes *pratibimbavāda*, which is the theory of reflection.

Take several pots containing water. When kept in sunlight, the water in each pot reflects the sun and also emits some light due to this reflection. *jīva* is a reflection (*pratibimba*) of its prototype (*bimba*) i.e. of Brahman, and therefore, identical with its essence, Brahman. Thus, millions of *jīva* may seem to appear but they are mere reflections of Brahman and the reflection (*jīva*) is not *mithyā* but real.

Śaṅkara in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* verse II.iii.50 states that the *jīva* is but a reflection, an image, of the Brahman in its *upādi* (adjunct), the *antaḥkaraṇa*-s (inner organ). Thus the reflections of Brahman in different *antaḥkaraṇa*-s are different, even as the reflections of the sun in different sheets of water are different. Just as the trembling of a particular reflection of the sun does not cause the other reflections to tremble so also the experiencing of happiness and misery by a particular *jīva* is not shared by others.

ii. The *vārttika* school is based on Sureśvarācārya’s interpretation of the same verse and is called the *ābhāsavāda* (appearance) theory. The *jīva* is merely an illusory appearance of Brahman. This appearance or semblance is *mithyā*. The *jīva* is an *ābhāsa* or semblance of the supreme Self, like the semblance of the face in a mirror.

While the mirror reflects the object, it is not a true reflection, as the characteristics of the original are not transferred in the reflection. In *pratibimbavāda* of *vivaraṇa* school, the reflected consciousness is also considered real.

In *ābhāsavāda*, the reflected consciousness is considered unreal as it is only an appearance.

iii. The *bhāmatī* school is based on the commentary of Vacaspati Misra on BSBS. As reflection requires an object but Brahman is formless, it proposes the *avacchedavāda* (limitation) theory.

Consider the space in different pots. Brahman is subtle, partless and like space. *jīva*-s are existent like space in pots.
Space appears limited by the pots but all that actually is there is only space (Brahman) but is seemingly limited by the pot (jīva). jīva is a delimitation of consciousness by the antahkaraṇa-s in the jīva. Śaṅkara briefly talks about this concept in Māṇḍūkya Karika 3.3.

Though these sub-schools evolved post-Śaṅkara, one should not assume that Śaṅkara does not discuss these analogies. The origins of these vādas can be found in Śaṅkara’s own writing. He discusses avacchedavāda in the first chapter, pratibimbavāda in the third chapter and the ābhāsavāda in the fifth chapter of Upadesasahasri. Some of these analogies are also discussed by him simultaneously in Śrī Daksināmūrti Stotram and Manisha Panchakam.

For example, Śaṅkara asks12 “Is there any difference between the reflection of the sun in Ganga water and ditch water? Is there any difference between the space between a mud pot and gold pot?”

Thus, the analogies of both reflection and space are included in a single verse. In Who Am I? Bhagavan said, “Atman alone exists and is real. The threefold reality of world, individual soul and God is like the illusory appearance of silver in the mother of pearl, an imaginary creation in the Atman. They appear and disappear simultaneously. All that exists is the Self.”

Let us end with the practical advice given by Bhagavan in Ulladu Narpadu (verse 2)13

These statements clearly indicate that while the theoretical knowledge is useful and can be gained, it is important to practise the teachings and not misuse it. Thus the purpose of the teaching is to present a logical system convincing the aspirant to practise for the removal of avidyā. He shall not dwell too much on the triad but instead take refuge at the lotus feet of Arunachala Ramana.

12 Manīṣā Pañcakam, 2.2

13 Each philosophy accepts three fundamentals. The contentions such as ‘Only one fundamental stands as three fundamentals’ or ‘Three fundamentals are always actually three fundamentals’, last only so long as ego exists. The Supreme state is to lose the ‘I’, the ego, and stay in the Self.
Children are a sign of hope, love, renewal and joy. This is true of every child, be it human, animal, or any other. This is the story of a very special child who lived in the sea off the coast of Mahabalipuram. Wah-tai was her name. She was beautiful, bright and very lively! She was restless, looking everywhere with curiosity, and always reaching out to others in friendship... Her bubbly chatter still echoes in my mind.

The child Wah-tai was a beautiful wave in the Ocean. Rarely has there been a wave as curious and expressive as her. She chatted merrily with her companions as they frolicked together. “Did you know that the land on the horizon is called India? Do you know humans walk on two legs like folding sticks? D’you know Indian people believe everything in the world is made up of five elements… Can you believe that? A million zillion things, and they are only different mixtures of...
one, or two, maximum five elements. These five elements are space, air, earth, fire and water.

Each thing in the world is just a different mixture and combination of these five… Wow! Five can become infinity…

Wah-tai pulled the hand of her friend, and said: “I know space. Look up! See! That is vast monotonous endless space.

“I know naughty air: it gives me a cold kiss as I leap up, and makes my skin shiver.

“I know the earth, that flat motionless dark lumpy line to one side that only the top of me can see. The place they call India…

“Ah yes, I know fire too. That ball of fire that turns from red to yellow to white as it goes up and up, getting hotter and hotter. When it gets too hot and too tired from climbing way too high, it starts to go down, and cools, becoming orange and then red and dark again.

“But water… what is water? That most mysterious and most interesting of the elements!”

“Water! What is water?” Wah-tai’s friends chorused. “Let’s go search for water!” and the friends held hands and skipped along searching for water.

“Where are you off to, my pretty young maids?” sang a seagull sharp and shrill from over their heads.

“Searching for water!” they replied.

“Look at yourself!” cried the seagull.

“You too!” they replied, thinking this was a customary seagull greeting. “Look out for yourself too!”

A smooth shiny dolphin jumped up between them and smiled. Dolphin was a cheerful soul, always smiling. “Do you know water?” the waves asked him. “Sure!” he replied as he did a graceful back flip. “Here! Here’s water for you!” and his tail scattered waves on them as Dolphin swam away.

“That sure was rude, turning his back and making a mess! Surprising behaviour, especially for such a sweetly smiling creature,” thought the waves as they rolled along, trying to smile just the way Dolphin did.

“Look, look! There’s a big wave. She’ll surely know. Let’s go ask her.” So the little friends, holding each other’s hands even tighter, pushed their way closer to the big wave. Strangely, as they neared the
big wave, they had to make less effort to push, but more to hold on to each other. It was as though they were growing huge themselves, and their fingers got too wide to curl around those of the others. But they held on the best they could. Some strange inner growth surged into Wah-tai. She was puzzled. For once she was silent, but her mind raced. “What is happening? I feel like I’m growing into a big wave too. Where are my friends? I can’t see them. But I can feel their hands still. Getting thinner by the second… That means they are still here. Let me ask Big Wave what we are searching for…”

“Namaste, Grand Big Wave. Do you know water?” Wah-tai asked.

“Yes, dear one,” Big Wave replied. There was something particularly loving in the way she said ‘dear one’, as though she really meant it. Wah-tai felt herself growing huge, as though her friends had merged into her. And now she herself was becoming a Big Wave. “Ah this is what they say satsang does to you! You are affected by the company you keep! As long as I was with small waves, I was small. As soon as I came to Big Wave I’m growing huge,” she thought. “I’d better ask quickly. To be big and still not know is totally not on!”

“Have you seen water?”

“Yes, dearest one.”

“Please, I am very keen to know too. Please show me water.”

Meanwhile all the little waves had climbed onto Big Wave’s back, and she had built up energy that surged from within. Roaring in a way that sounded helpless, yet at the same time also triumphant, Big Wave, Wah-tai, and all her friends went hurtling towards the earth. “What is Big Wave saying?” Such a noise Wah-tai couldn’t understand a thing! “But look at the earth!” Up close she could make out the edge was sand, beyond were plants, green spikey things reaching upwards and tall slender trees with huge crowns of different kind of green spikes on their heads. And there were some human beings too with their folding up stick legs.

“Sand,” said Wah-tai, “Please, can you show me water?”

“Sure. Just look within…”

But the wave had crashed into the shore and the last bit of sparkling wetness was fast disappearing between the grains of sand. Wah-tai missed hearing what she was told, and what she heard, she did not understand. And now it was too late. Wah-tai was gone.
Ocean had watched all this. She smiled, as she always did, at peace and in harmony, as were the dolphins, sea gulls, trees, grasses, sand and even the waves. Though unlike Ocean, they usually never knew it. Ocean sighed, “Infinite love has infinite patience.

“Infinite patience has immediate results.

“You may think it is taking forever to learn, but the answers, whenever they come, appear here and now.

“Truth is so simple that most don’t notice it. Rather, all see it yet don’t understand it. Sand had spoken correctly: Look within. Just look within.

“Wah-tai thought such an important question should have a huge and complicated answer.

“Truth is simple.

“And though she did not understand, I know and I think you know too… Wah-tai herself was water, was always water, will always be water, whether she knows it or not!”

**Just A Thought...**

Cheenu Srinivasan

Poets of paintbrush  
Explore different shades  
Wordsmiths of letters  
Chisel blank pages  
Decorators of silence  
Sing, play and dance  
All on mind’s stage  
Their bountiful legacy  
To lift us all higher  
Amidst myriad intrusions  
Of bygone failures  
And future fears  
That fails to ask  
‘Who am I?’
The Power of Associating with the Holy Trinity

T.G.K. Murthy

Frustration To Fascination

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda are divine personalities who came to uplift humanity from despondency and frustrations and reorient it on a journey towards joy and fulfillment. They made a profound impact through their lives and teachings. Millions were inspired and their lives transformed. Many a time when we hear of the transformation of someone, we feel such incidents are freakish, emotional, and irrational. But the signs of true transformations are that they are not temporary changes but are permanent in the life of the person concerned. When objectively viewed these transformations are fascinating to the intelligent observer.

Swami Vivekananda says, “We never preached our thoughts with fire and sword. If there is one word in the English language to represent the gift of India to the world, if there is one word in the English language to express the effect which the literature of India produces upon mankind, it is this one word, ‘fascination’. It is the opposite of anything that takes you suddenly; it throws on you, as it were, a charm imperceptibly. To many, Indian thought, Indian manners; Indian customs, Indian philosophy, and Indian literature

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are perplexing at the first sight; but let them persevere, let them read, let them become familiar with the great principles underlying these ideas, and it is ninety-nine to one that the charm will come over them, and fascination will be the result. Slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of the calm, patient, all-suffering spiritual race upon the world of thought.”

My life was never smooth sailing; it was always wavy and turbulent. The student life itself was erratic. However, I was fortunate to chance on Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Ma Sarada literature. Whenever I was in a dilemma that holy trinity guided me to either glean from the literature an answer or put me in contact with the revered monks of the order. As a result, the frustrating situation turned into fascination. The multiple occasions did not happen by chance.

I had the good fortune of associating with Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission sādhu-s, and my very first contact was with Pujya Tapasyanandaji Maharaj in 1969. I share with readers the positive transformation that took place in my life with the grace of The Holy Trinity.

Be Aware Of Divine With Every Breath
During the early 70s, even though I had a good job I was mentally disturbed as I could not pursue my doctoral studies due to a strange condition. I was an avid reader of books and in my random reading I went through the book *Eternal Companion, Life and Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, and the following paragraph attracted my special attention.

One morning Swami Gnaneswarananda hurried out of his room, leaving behind an unmade bed and general confusion. He met Maharaj. on the large, open field near his room. After paying his respects, he was startled to hear Maharaj say, “Take me to your room: I wish to see the place where you stay.” Swami Gnaneswarananda feeling ashamed, replied: “Maharaj, can you not come a little later? I was not expecting you and the room is not fit to receive you.” Maharaj said, “My boy, you must always


2 The Most Rev. Brahmananda Maharaj, the first president of RK Math and manasa putra of Sri Ramakrishna.
be expecting me.” Swami Gnaneswarananda understood the deep
meaning of the incident and the words of the Maharaj…. that one
must always be prepared to receive God the most honoured guest.³

After reading this my mind started churning, though neither I had
seen God nor I had seen the Holy Trinity. The episode had a profound
impact on me. From then on at home, in the office, and in every activity
the mind endeavoured to keep things in order.

As a student in Australia, my room was adjudged as the best
maintained for five consecutive years. This concern for order and
tidiness spilled over into my professional days and I was ever focused
on the meticulous execution of work. These days, my mind dwells
constantly on the preparation for the next stage in the journey of life.
The fascinating part is that the desires and attachments are dropping off
on their own, resulting in fearlessness, mental freedom, and readiness
for that next inevitable stage.

Mother And Motherland Are Precious
Swami Vivekananda was a genius with in-depth knowledge of
multi-disciplinary subjects apart from science and spirituality. The
first book I read, that related to the holy trinity was Rebuild India by
Swami Vivekananda. When India was in the clutches of imperialism,
plagued by poverty, destitution and diminishing self-confidence, he
thundered that a resurrected India would be the leader of the world.
He proclaimed that: “One vision I can see clear as life before me that
the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne –
rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim her to the entire world
with the voice of peace and benediction.”⁴

Swamiji embodied the spirit of India. When he returned home from
his travels overseas, he was asked what he thought of India. Swamiji
replied, “I loved my Motherland dearly before I went to America and
England. After my return every particle of dust of this land seems
sacred to me.”⁵ After his lecture in Chicago the entire world was at
his feet, but gazing at the skyscrapers that filled Chicago’s moonlit
skies, he wrote to a disciple, “When will India be like this?” No
wonder every revolutionary in the Independence movement drew

³ Swami Prabhavananda, The Eternal Companion, p.82.
great inspiration from Swami Vivekananda – he ignited the spark of a nation’s conscience!

These words galvanised me too and made me come back to India, even though I had a lucrative job abroad. I asked myself how can I become part and parcel of Swami Vivekananda’s vision of rebuilding India in my own humble way. My return made me instrumental in making the Indian Space Research Organization’s imaging systems one of the best in the world.

**Detached Attachment**

But this journey was never smooth and often reminded me of the words of Swami Vivekananda: “For anything, one has to undergo opposition, procrastination, and acceptance.” It was during the first couple of years of my return to India. Under quite unfavorable conditions, new technology was developed but this new development instead of bringing happiness, brought me misery as I was asked to give away the ownership of the technology. Being a young man, I was in agony and became restless and sleepless for a few days. I felt I was being sidelined and humiliated, and my professional career would be damaged.

Suddenly one night, I remembered an incident read in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Poorna, a great devotee, deeply frustrated was trying to leave this world, but on an impulse read The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna randomly for one last time. On the very page he opened he found the words that Sri Ramakrishna seemed to address to him. He was elated and gave up the negative spiral of his emotions.

Remembering this, I thought under my present condition I will open *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and will take up the content as a solution to my problem. To my greatest surprise, the following was the story on the page.

“In a certain place, the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it. The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once...
let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus, relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: ‘That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace.’

The moment the story was read a great relief came to me and I slept very happily as a heavy weight was taken away from my head. I felt the story perfectly mirrored my condition and had a perfect solution to my problem. The next morning, I went to the office and bundled all the files related to the successfully completed new work and handed over them to the then Director, with a covering note, ‘I hereby withdraw my ownership of the activity’. This setback propelled me to take up new projects. The cycle of taking up a new venture, successfully completing it, and being detached had become a habitual tendency till the date of retirement. This paved the way for me to become a humble servant in rebuilding India as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda.

“I Have A Mother”
Let me come to Mother of Mothers, Holy Mother Sarada Devi. I hail from a small village. As there was an inadequacy of schools, I hardly had any primary education. But, with private studies, through an entrance examination, I joined a high school located in a taluk near the village. But, the standard was poor. This resulted in low self-confidence and anxiety about my academic career. That was the time my mother suggested and prompted me to offer prayers and worship Sri Sarada Devi as Goddess Saraswathi. It was a divine grace for within a short time, I started getting confidence and fairly good interest in higher studies. From the college level, the extraordinary turn took place, and never from there on had any hitch in education. In fact, I became a university topper throughout and completed a doctorate in a foreign country. I strongly believe that Holy Mother is Goddess Saraswathi, who transformed and gifted this village boy with education enabling him to contribute to societal betterment.

This transformative joy was accentuated further when I came across the following anecdote.

6 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, published by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, p.453.
Sri Ramakrishna said of Holy Mother: “Sarada is an incarnation of Saraswathi [the goddess of learning]. She was born to bestow Knowledge on others. She has hidden her physical beauty lest people look upon her with impure eyes and thus commit sin.” … Surendranth Sen ... was a great follower of Swami Vivekananda. He went to Belur Math and requested initiation from Swamiji. On an auspicious day, Swamiji initiated three persons in the shrine, one after another, and then finally called Surendra. He meditated for a while and then said to Surendra: “The Master has told me that I am not your guru. He has shown me that the person, who will initiate you, is greater than I. Don’t be discouraged. You will be initiated at the right time.”

Broken-hearted, Surendra thought: “Who could be greater than Swamiji? Considering me unfit, he did not initiate me, but rather got rid of me.”

Sometime after this event, Surendra had a dream, in which he saw himself seated on the lap of Ramakrishna. The luminous form of a goddess appeared and said: “Take this mantra.”

“Who are you?” Surendra asked.

“I am Saraswathi,” replied the goddess. She then uttered the mantra and asked Surendra to repeat it at least 108 times a day. But Surendra never repeated that mantra. … He reported this to Swamiji. Swamiji explained the dream: “The Master used to say: ‘A divine dream is true’. It is called attaining perfection through a dream. Go on repeating this mantra. You will attain everything. You will not have to do anything else.”

“I don’t believe in dreams,” Surendra replied: “A dream is just a baseless thought.”

Swamiji said: “In fact, this dream is true. Go on repeating the mantra, and then you will see: the goddess, who gave the mantra, will appear before you in a physical form. She is an incarnation of Bagala7 and is now in the form of Saraswathi.”

I don’t understand what you mean,” said Surendra.

Swamiji reassured him: “You will understand in time. You will see that the external form is calm and benign, but the inner form

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7 Bagala represents one of the terrible aspects of the Divine Power, as the slayer of a fierce demon, and Saraswathi represents wisdom. Swami Chetanananda Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play, Vedanta Society of St. Louis 2015, pp.18, 485, 610.
is formidable. The form of Saraswathi is very calm and serene.”
Surendra replied: “I don’t believe all these things.”
“Whether you believe it or not, go on repeating the mantra. It will
do you good,” Swamiji advised. …
Seven years later, in 1906, Surendra and his friend Dr. Lalbihari
Sen went ...to Jayrambati. On the second day, Holy Mother
called Surendra, asked him to take initiation, and suggested that
he bring some flowers the next day, which was Lakshmi Puja, an
auspicious day.
Surendra recalled: “During the initiation, the Mother put her right
hand on my head and left hand on my chin and then imparted
the mantra. As soon as I heard the mantra, the whole episode of
my dream initiation flashed through my mind and I felt dizzy.
Momentarily I lost outer consciousness, but I felt inner bliss.
Regaining normal consciousness, I saw that the Mother’s form
and the form of the goddess in my dream were the same. As soon
as I came to I said: “Mother, I received this mantra long ago in
a dream.”
She said: “Well, my son, does it not tally? You received the right
mantra. Don’t you see the Master now and then?” …
Surendra … was amazed to discover that the dream mantra and
the Mother’s mantra were the same. He then realised the truth of
Swamiji’s words.8
It made a deep impact on my life when I read her assuring words,
“No one will suffer all time. No one will spend all his days on this
earth in suffering. Remember always you have a Mother.”
I have not seen Ma Sarada not have I read much about Her.
However these few powerful words of hers uttered to Surendra had
an immense effect on me and I believe that it was Ma Sarada who
made me achieve whatever success I did in my scientific career. When
I look back, many incidents in my life seemed to be self-organised
without much effort and they were completed successfully. In a similar
vein, I emphatically can say that many of the regretable incidents
dropped away too, without undue efforts and I felt protected at every
appropriate moment. Is it not Mother’s grace? There were many such
incidents in my life.

8 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chennai, p.428.
Have Faith In Faith
To sum up, it is a life journey starting with frustration and almost always ending up with facets of fascination. A journey from no hope of getting a proper education, to acquiring education with international accolades, contributing to the national development technologies, successively and successfully accomplishing the activities with detached attachment, and being constantly aware of the gentle presence of the holy, is highly transformative. A deeper periodic introspection emphasizes the fact that these changes are not artifacts observed momentarily but are reflected and retained throughout one’s life. A deeper introspection showed me that the three paths of *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga*, and *bhakti yoga* when followed in life to a logical end, purify one. ‘Be aware of Divine with every breath’ is the systematic approach in *jnana yoga*. ‘Mother and Mother land’ that is, detached attachment is pure *karma yoga*. Finally, ‘I have a Mother’ is *bhakti yoga*.

I found great joy in implementing these in life. The undercurrent for all this is the Holy Trinity’s grace and my sustained faith. I strongly believe that I am not the only one, that there are millions like me who have had such transformational experiences. To experience such things, one needs to have faith. Faith in oneself and faith in the grace of the Divine. Faith is the sum total of our worldview, our values, and convictions. It encompasses the whole spectrum of our thoughts since much of what we know is what we believe to be worth remembering and paying attention to. From faith comes trust, devotion, loyalty, commitment, dedication, and assurance. Faith may arise from simple observation, facts, intuition, assurance, or even simple belief. Traditionally faith is identified with the religion you practice. But faith does not necessarily mean religion only. Religious faith is just one aspect of it. We believe in many things, with or without reason. Our parents and elders, our culture and society, our education, relationships, and a host of other factors shape our beliefs and our faith is a sum total of those beliefs and convictions. Have faith in the words of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, “I have a Mother”.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji bless us all is my earnest prayer.
“O great souls! Are you listening attentively? You will be delighted to hear how the couple lived, exemplifying the householder’s life as spelt out in the scriptures!

“The noble brahmin Jayadeva was leading a happy married life with his worthy consort Padmavathy. His entire being abided in the supreme knowledge of the Self and his heart was filled with compassion for all beings. From dawn to dusk, he would go in search of Mahatmas established in their true being, noble brahmins engaged unfailingly in Gayatri japa, supreme devotees of the Lord and mendicants begging for alms. He would honour them with all his heart and make available to them whatever they asked for, if the object was on hand. He would spare nothing in pleasing them and never say, ‘No’ to anyone. In this process, he sold all his belongings and spent all his wealth in the service of the mendicants and sadhus. Though reduced to dire poverty by his incomparable generosity, the couple lived in contentment. They were left with only a few pieces of clothing.

They would stay in alms-houses and spend their time in unceasing remembrance of the Lord by uttering His glorious names ‘Achyuta,
Kesava, Narayana ..’ In order to fill their stomach, Jayadeva would beg for alms from people who were favourably disposed to them and he would give such alms to Padmavathy.

After his bath in the river, he would search for sadhus absorbed in devotional practices repeating the nectarine names of the Lord without paying heed to their hunger and thirst. He would bring them home lovingly and reverentially and share the meagre food with them. Day after day, he would seek out such sadhus who spend their time in worship of the Lord, singing His sweet names and narrating His charming life and exploits. Jayadeva would bow before them saying, ‘Hari’s name is verily nectar, the knowledge of Brahman is the highest glory’ and invite them to his residence in such glowing terms, “O lamp of knowledge, pure-minded, compassion-personified, self-effulgent light! You are the bestower of auspiciousness, bliss of Consciousness! Please deign to receive your bhiksha at our home and sanctify us.” His loving words would melt the hearts of the guests. After bringing them home, he would sing to them ever-new hymns on Lord Jagannath, the supreme Sovereign of the universe, until Padmavathy got the food ready.

Padmavathy would quickly make a variety of delicious dishes out of the alms that Jayadeva had procured. Prostrating to her husband, she would submit to him who was to her the very God and Guru, “My Beloved! The food is ready and the guests are also ready. Please come and partake of the food with the honoured sadhus.”

Jayadeva would chide her gently, “Precious one with appealing manners and a mind of perfection! Why haven’t you served the guests first? And you have come to invite me! When will the mist of ignorance and attachment leave you?”

Hastening to the guests, he would prostrate at their sacred feet and invite them reverentially. He would serve the nectar-like food to them with great love and care. Thereafter, he would apply cool sandal paste on their bodies and offer them betel-leaves with areca-nut. Addressing them in cheerful tones, “O unattached ones, abiding within!”’, he would converse with them on topics from the scriptures, subtle method of divining the inner effulgence, ways of annihilating the mind, concentrating one’s attention at a pin-point, subtly controlling breath and containing restlessness etc. and thus captivate the minds of guests. After their departure, he himself would become immersed in
the Self and subtle bliss generated thereof. Transcending everything, abiding in the unitive state of the Undivided Brahman – a state which brings to an end all sorrows, destroys the waking and dream states, he would be absorbed in nirvikalpa samadhi, the deep sleep in the waking state, his eyes filled with tears of bliss of supreme knowledge. He would remain motionless like a lamp in a windless place or like the calm sea without waves.

Padmavathy, cherishing her husband’s holy feet in her heart, would prostrate before the guests and bid farewell with reverence. Giving no thought to her parents or parental home, her mind would dwell on her husband’s glories, and she would whisper reverential endearments in her heart, “O lord! You are my only treasure! You are compassion incarnate! My precious companion! You are the Guru of gurus! lord of lords! My beloved!” Thus she spent her days serving her husband wholeheartedly, considering it as her supreme duty in life.

While they were happily living a God-centred life, the village-folk compiled together the hymns and poems composed by Jayadeva on Lord Jagannath into a book and recited them daily with great devotion and reverence and sang them joyfully. During a festival in the Jagannath temple, some of the devotees carried the collection of hymns from Kindubilvam to Puri and placed the poems, which were brimming with nine kinds of emotional rasas before the sanctum sanctorum. When they started singing the hymns, they heard an ethereal voice from within the shrine proclaiming, “I approve, I approve! I am greatly pleased, I am greatly pleased!”

On hearing this, the entire crowd gathered in the temple for the festival was drowned in waves of ecstasy. Treating the compositions of Jayadeva which had just received the stamp of approval of the Lord as the holy scripture, the devotees started singing them in chorus. Overwhelmed by ecstatic joy and with eyes cascading tears, they started dancing spontaneously.

The king of the city was a poet-scholar who had composed many novel hymns every year for the festival, but the erudite brahmins of the temple had not favoured them much when he had placed his collection before the shrine. Now, annoyed at the joyous reception accorded to Jayadeva’s poems, he questioned the Brahmins, “My poems also sing the praise of Lord Jagannath. Why do you not acknowledge them? Why do you treat them differently? Why don’t
you honour my compositions by singing them before the Lord with the same enthusiasm?”

The brahmins replied, “We will certainly chant and celebrate your compositions if they are also lauded by Lord Jagannath.” They placed the compositions of Jayadeva as well as those of the king wrapped in two separate bundles in front of the shrine.

The next day, when the temple gates were opened, they found the king’s bundle of poems thrown out. They hastened towards the remaining bundle, and to their amazement found the following words stamped on Jayadeva’s work, “I accept these hymns with joy.” The devotees were thrilled and started singing the hymns and dancing.

The king was hurt and unhappy. He gave up food and sleep and spent the days and nights berating the Lord, “O Purushothama! Now, Your feelings towards me have become clear. I don’t have enough love in my heart to please You. Strangely, You accepted all the abuses hurled at You by Hiranyaksha when You ended his life with Your own hands. Why have You thrown away my poems which are the expressions of my longing for You? You are scorching me with the fire of Your neglect. O Succour of the afflicted! Please tell me why my praises seem bitter to You. Both collections of poems extol Your glories. Can crystal sugar be sweet on one side, bitter on the other side? Is this my bad Karma or Your deceitfulness? You enjoyed the hymn of Dhruva. You have affixed Your seal of approval on Jayadeva. O Lover of devotees! What is my offence that has made You turn away from me? You are the Master of the entire universe, then how come You practise partiality? The name Jagannath certainly ill-fits You.

“You were pleased when the Gopis hit You with their churning rods and yet, my sweet hymns have hit you like sharp arrows! You proclaim that You are the same to all. At the same time, You become biased, exposing Your deceitful nature. You haven’t transcended the sense of duality! Your history is, indeed, replete with treacherous acts! Didn’t You hide the sun with Your disc, causing Jayadratha’s death? Didn’t You manipulate words and put an end to Drona’s life? You continue to be deceitful and worldly! What a pity that even now maturity and righteousness have not dawned in You!”

“O Vasudeva! Lotus-eyed One! Crown-jewel of Raghu dynasty! O God of gods! Source of all scriptures! Scion of Yadu dynasty! Friend of Pandavas! Please deign to cast Your gracious look on me.”
Thus, praising and abusing the Lord alternately, he became overwhelmed by sorrow and exhaustion and sank into deep sleep. Moved by his devotion, the Lord appeared in his dream and said, “O king! If you chant Jayadeva’s poems with devotion, I will approve of thirteen poems from your composition.”

On waking up, the king felt convinced that Jayadeva was God himself. Praising the Lord, he reached the holy presence of Jayadeva and started singing his poems. At that moment, the unearthly voice of the Lord was heard by one and all, saying, “O king! I accept the first thirteen poems composed by you on Me.” From then onwards, the devotees combined the king’s poems along with those of Jayadeva for their recitation.

Wherever Jayadeva lived, that place became blessed with an abundance of eight-fold prosperity, herds of milch cows and the company of devotees and wise people. People were amazed at such things and Jayadeva’s fame spread far and wide.

The unsullied fame of Jayadeva reached his father-in-law’s ears. Gratitude and joy enveloped his heart. He considered that his son-in-law was the Lord himself and Padmavathy was verily the divine consort. He set out eagerly to visit his daughter. She became jubilant on seeing her father. She received him with great affection, prostrated to him and chided him playfully, “O father, you have come after a very long time. Have you completely forgotten your daughter?”

While she was bantering with her father, Jayadeva emerged from his meditative state and welcomed his father-in-law with reverence and love. Offering him sandal paste, he said in happy tones, “Your daughter has enabled me to serve the sadhus to my heart’s content and attain great joy on this earth. By your blessings, I got such an agreeable companion in my life.” After uttering these pleasing words, he became absorbed within himself.

Padmavathy’s father was wonderstruck by the humility and exalted state of his son-in-law. He paid his respects to Jayadeva and praised him with auspicious words. He presented to his daughter all the gifts of fine clothes and jewels which he had brought with him. Advising and blessing her, he left. The daughter walked with him for a short distance.

Meanwhile, coming back to world consciousness, Jayadeva left for the forest to remain in solitude. He chose a place deep in the forest,
away from human habitation. The animals and birds were moving around freely in that area. At the foot of a high hill, he selected a cave. Here, he sat still in lotus pose, closed his eyes and fixing his mind on the Lord’s feet merged in the One, undifferentiated Brahman. He became oblivious of the body and the world. Transcending waking, sleep and dream states, he abided in the Self. Knowledge shining on his countenance, tears pouring down from his eyes and abiding motionless in wakeful sleep of a Jnani, he presented the picture of an unflickering flame of the lamp in windless place.

When Padmavathy returned after a while, she didn’t find her husband at home. After waiting for a long time, she grew distraught with worry and grief. She ran searching for him in all corners of the city till the evening. She became tired searching for him here and there in the bushes and in the wilderness. Her feet pricked by thorns, her hair caught in the rough nettles, her body sweating profusely and with a heart afflicted by sorrow, she lamented her misfortune, “O lord! Where have you gone leaving me behind as a destitute? My own precious life! What has become of you? You have transcended above passion and other worldly desires. Liberation is at your beck and call. You ever abide in the motionless Reality. Lo! The roar of wild animals strikes terror in my heart. In this pitch darkness, I can’t see my way. Why have you subjected me to such torment? Hasn’t your heart been moved by pity for me? Aren’t you aware that a woman dies of fear when left alone and languishes when her husband deserts her? Don’t you hear my cry of anguish?” She kept wandering, enquiring from the birds and animals of Jayadeva’s whereabouts. At sunrise, in this distressed state, she wandered into the cave where Jayadeva was seated in the samadhi state. Her heart leapt with joy and she went round him, prostrated to him and waited silently by his side. Gradually, Jayadeva Swami emerged from his Superconscious state. Beholding the plight of his wife, he realised that he had caused her terrible pain and he pacified her. Leaving the forest together, they reached home.

Some years passed by. When Padmavathy’s father visited her again, he learnt about the incident and was astonished at his son-in-law’s state of absorption and also felt sad his daughter had been subjected to the pain of separation.

(To be continued)
Eight-armed Lord, who burned
the God of Love to ash,
with the gaze that from
your third eye flashed!
Father who
all living beings preserve!
You who in cool groves
of Tillai are enthroned!
Grant to me one boon:
that, free of lust for power
and all the rest,
I may come to worship you. (37)
I did not praise you daily;  
my head I laid not down  
at the feet of those  
who with the power  
to praise you are endowed,  
nor placed myself  
at their command.  
You who flexed  
bright Mount Meru as bow,  
long days idly did I pass,  
and like a parrot  
untold holy texts did chant,  
only to be ruined [at last].

Who am I, O Rider on the bull,  
over joys and sorrows [of life] to mull?  
And when my mind to do so tries,  
like a little child it trembles [and cries].  
Was it then to me that you did give  
the burden of the world’s support,  
rather than to the Lord  
who once incarnated as a fish?

You whose throat black [poison]  
doth suffuse,  
upon whose shoulders lies  
a kondrai wreath of golden hue!  
Matchless bridegroom  
of Civakama Sundari!  
Of my clan the guardian deity!  
Grant to me your glance of grace,  
to gain my heart’s desire this day.

\[^1\text{mīṉāyiṉaṉ, literally He who became a fish is a reference to Viṣṇu’s matsya – fish avatar. In this incarnation Viṣṇu saved the world from a great flood. Manu, the first man, caught a little fish that grew to giant size. When the flood approached, Manu saved himself by tying his boat to the horn on the fish’s head.}\]
Lord, whom in a former time
both boar and swan
could not cognize!
Wicked me, here I stay,
seeking what recourse
remains to me this day.
One thing alone will cut
that troubled thought away,
and that I now do plainly say,
‘Joyfully may you in grace
grant that I may take my place
in the band of devotees
who’re united with your holy feet.’

Once you did rejoice to come
riding on a lordly bull, attended
by the lightning[-waisted] One,
putting the senses five to flight
for me who never in the least degree
practised any spiritual austerities.
But now as each day passes by,
you appear no more within my sight.
A wicked one I idly pass my days,
quite ignorant of the games you play.

My will
in ignorance lies encumbered,
and your will,
my Lord and Father,
is not to rest
until that bond be sundered.
Since such is the trait
that marks us two,
let not your anger upon me fall.
It is but the soul’s defilement
waging bitter war against the Lord.
With matchless senses standing nigh,
My soul’s Defilement
like a dark mountain [soaring high],
looked at me and bellowed loud,
‘A host of deeds I’ll make you enact,
in birth’s cruel [ocean] you I’ll cast,
and I’ll see if Civan’s power
can bring you to salvation at last.
Lord I beg you, annihilate it [now]!’

Coming to me more and more
in nescience and \textit{maya},
may you in me annihilate
deep sleep and the other states,
which my awareness obfuscate,
and raise me up, [my Lord],
to pure awareness’ unique place.
Having me thus raised on high,
pervading all that is,
abolish duality from my sight,
and when Death comes
to take my soul
gather it in [within thy fold].

Though I dwelt not
on the holy Letters Five,
nor all the base defilement
from my heart did drive,
nor recoiled from those
who no austerities complete,
to reach the shelter
of you[r] holy feet],
yet forsake me not,

\textsuperscript{2} In Siddhānta āṇavam is the masking principle which is the source of the ego and which blinds the \textit{jīva} to its true nature, making it believe that it is an independent entity, in control of its own destiny. āṇavam is pictured as a monstrous, black figure, browbeating the \textit{jīva}, attempting to convince it that it is more powerful than Lord Śiva himself.
O, do not me forsake,
You who in compassion dwell
in Avinashi’s sthala
by the Nallaru river[^3] [‘s swell].

With love, O Lord of Tillapuri,
my mind does not you seek,
nor daily your praises speak.
To the body unceasingly it clings
delighting in all the senses bring.
Knowing this I come to see
that with the mind
there can no liberation be.
The worst of sinners [I remain here]
trembling with mortal fear.

Your glory, Chidambaram’s King,
the great ones extol in their hymns.
But as for lowly me
these meagre syllables of praise,
alone, my tongue has dared
to raise unto your divine ear,
where eternally is heard the bleating
of a matchless prancing deer,
hoping only this, [my Lord]
that you’ll not find my words amiss.

Pray tell,
You who upon Kailash’s
noble peak do dwell!
should I say, ‘Rare Light!’
your holy name to speak,
or ‘Rider on the Bull!’ proclaim,
or ‘You who into my heart

[^3] avināci is a Śiva sthala, situated on the banks of the Nallāru river, 40 km to the north-east of Coimbatore. The History of Pēṟūr Ādīṉam tells us that Sāntaliṅga, on his way to found a math in Pēṟūr at the behest of his guru, stopped there for several days, paying homage to Lord Śiva as Aviṅāciyappar.
as Sivaprakasha came!’
or ‘You who in my fair palm
in the lingam’s form,\(^4\)
bestowing peace remain!’? (49)

Our Lord, refuge I seek,
refuge [at your holy feet!]
With all defilement
of mind and senses gone
so that pure awareness I become,
grant me then a life
that [from you] no separation knows,
free of both the seer and the seen,
and, henceforth I do you beseech
exercise you dominion over me. (50)

\(\text{Concluded}\)

\(^4\) \text{eṉ am kai taḷam paṟṟiya cāntaṉ} – \text{the peace[-bestowing] one, which my fair palm grasped} \text{is taken as a reference to the small Śiva lingam, carried by all Vīraśaiva initiates.}

**Medical Camps**

Medical camps with free treatment are being offered at the Ashram Dispensary. On the third Sunday of the month, the not-for-profit Sankara Eye Hospital of Coimbatore offers an eye camp with free medications and surgeries. Aravindh Herbal Labs of Rajapalayam sponsors an Ayurveda and Siddha Vaidyam camp on every last Sunday of the month with free Siddha and Ayurvedic medicine. An Orthopaedic camp is headed up by Dr. Niranjan Rao, a devotee of Guntur who makes the 10-hour drive each month to conduct the camp. A Neuro camp was held in the first week of May by Dr. Vikrant Singh of Hyderabad, supplementing regular video consultation in neurology led by Dr. Sanjay Raghav of Australia. Additional camps are being initiated to meet the various medical needs of the local population. [For information on dates and timings, please contact Madhavan at: +91-9600325724]
BOOK REVIEWS


Originally published in Dutch as Het Boek van Besef by Philip Renard in 2014, the book has been translated into English and recently published. The essence of what many teachers have taught has been reduced to a few pages in this book.

The book is around 200 pages and has 12 main chapters and a total of 77 sub-chapters. Thus, each sub-chapter is only 2-3 pages and provides the essence of non-dual view on many subjects. The first chapter is titled ‘Your real nature’ and emphasises that the real nature cannot be achieved nor realised by change. The second chapter is on emptiness and the author argues that the best starting point is to recognise what seeing is and one does not begin with the objects, but with the question: ‘Who sees this?’ Then emptiness turns out to be the opening, the openness, literally. Thus, the author says emptiness includes form.

The third chapter is titled ‘Prior to concepts’ and the author argues that by allowing yourself to momentarily linger in the non-conceptual, something in your addictive habit gets interrupted as what finally remains is the non-conceptual, which is the ground of our existence. Chapter four is on Awareness. Whatever the subject or object of this Awareness is, everything is possible thanks to That. Everything that can exist is only due to Awareness. Chapter five is titled Recognition as the author argues that when the recognition of your real nature occurs, one can no longer speak of a personal opinion or personal reality but there is only recognition. That means you realise that all those different opinions and ‘realities’ are not real at all.

Chapter six is titled Light and indicates that Light emanates from you. The next six chapters are on Attention, Life-energy, Experiencing, Freedom, Liberation and Reality. The book is full of pithy sayings on these subjects. For example, the chapter on reality says “Recognise
this Reality as Yourself. This Reality does not come from outside but it is your ‘own’ awareness of emptiness. It is still, utterly motionless. In itself, it does not move, but it makes all movement possible. You are That.”

The author has crisply presented the teachings, analysing and breaking it down to easy sentences giving a feel of the neo-advaita satsanghs. These kinds of books are excellent for providing useful practical approaches but they are short on theory and not in accord with traditional advaita.

— M. Giridhar
joy. The author provides exercises to increase our awareness of our own body and mind through conscious breathing, which can bring immediate joy and peace. He writes “Mindfulness is what brings us back in touch with what's happening in the present moment in our body, in our feelings, in our thinking, and also in our environment. It enables us to be present in the here and the now, mind and body together, aware of what's going on inside us and around us. And when we are very mindful of something, we are concentrated on it.”

This simple but powerful book explains how we can all achieve peace within ourselves, in our relationships and even with the world by simple techniques we can all do. The author elsewhere states “Don’t miss the opportunities you have to sit down, without having to worry or think about doing anything. Lay down your burdens, your worries, and your projects. Just sit and feel that you are alive.” As an example, he cites his own personal experience where he just sat and did conscious breathing when his flight was delayed by four hours. During conscious breathing, both positive and negative thoughts (especially the latter) may swell up, but it does not matter. As they say, the sky is unaffected by the type of bird that flies through it.

This book shows the reader how it is possible to practise cultivating mindfulness in each and every moment and it does not necessarily involve sitting, featuring short chapters on various everyday activities that are often routine and boring such as brushing your teeth. Past and future meet in the present moment: the past as memory, the future as thought and imagination. Any assessment of past experience, any decision regarding the future, is a mental activity that must inevitably occur in the present moment—there is no choice, it is all we have.

This book is like a manual for the mind and is one that should be included in schools to teach children how to live stress-free and rewarding compassionate lives irrespective of material success. In this pandemic world, where everybody talks about mental health and creates more anxiety, this simple book solves the problem by asking us to turn inward.

The author recently left his body and thus we end this review with an appropriate quote from the author, “I have a disciple in Vietnam who wants to build a stupa for my ashes when I die. He and others want to put a plaque with the words, ‘Here lies my beloved teacher.’ I told them not to waste the temple land...I suggested that, if they still insist on building a stupa, then have the plaque say, I am not in here.
But in case people don’t get it, they could add a second plaque, I am not out there either. If still people don’t understand, then you can write on the third and last plaque, I may be found in your way of breathing and walking.” The key is to respect the teacher not by building stupas but following the teachings. When you follow the teacher, you realise that the peace is here in the present. — M. Giridhar


Longchenpa (1308–1363), was a scholar-yogi of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. He is considered one of the Dzogchen masters of the tradition and is recognised by the major Tibetan schools as such irrespective of their differences. His own birth name was Rabjam Drimé Özer. Longchenpa is an honorific meaning ‘The Vast Expanse’. A prolific writer and commentator, there are some 270 texts in his oeuvre. He is primarily known for his exposition of Dzogchen in which he systemised and unified the various traditions of Nyingma, Sakya and Kargyu into one seamless whole. He was also a skillful poet and his writing style was precise and eloquent and is much admired by scholars of the Tibetan language. The book under review is the third in a series of immaculately translated and presented texts published by Shambhala. The importance of the series of three texts is evident in that they have been completely translated twice, while volumes two and three were also translated individually by two other scholars, A. Pearcey and K. Dowman respectively.

The first full set was done in the 1970s by the reputed and somewhat eclectic scholar Herbert Guenther, titled Kindly Bent to Ease Us. The second full set done in recent years is by the Padmakara Translation Group who are translators of many nationalities based in France under the direction of Tsétrul Pema Wangyal Rinpoche and Jigmé Khyentse Rinpoche. The quality of the translation and the presentation are of a high order, which one has come to expect from the Shambhala publishing house and the Padmakara Translation Group, which has some 40 volumes to its credit.
The earlier two volumes on the nature of mind and on meditation laid the groundwork with a systematic exposition of the doctrine of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen); the importance of a spiritual teacher; instructions on the ceremony of refuge, and instruction on practice. It is followed by an exposition of Tantra and a general introduction followed by instructions on meditation specifically in calmness and insight (śamatha and vipaśyanā).

The third volume with its additional auto-commentary text, The Chariot of Excellence, confronts the reader with the conundrum of illusion. Longchenpa emphasises the importance of non-attachment and non-clinging towards all phenomena irrespective of external or internal. He presents a way on how we can navigate our way through the seemingly contradictory world of illusion and reality. He reveals methodically and precisely on how to relate to all phenomena we experience. He does so through the use of what he calls the eight similes of illusoriness.

Within the confines of this review it is impossible to adequately critique this subtle and profound exposition. Suffice to say that the eight examples show that phenomena both inner and outer have no origin that we can identify and yet the manifestations which we experience are seemingly without end. The thoughts we apparently produce and the events in the external, over which we have no control, apparently come from nowhere and go nowhere as far as we can observe. They are not a nothingness and yet they are not permanent solid entities. They are not different in their essential individual nature and yet they are not duplicates of each other nor are they the same.

Longchenpa denies that even self-cognising awareness, the fundamental ground on which we observe all illusory appearance has an inherent permanent being, and therefore, it too is also an illusion. For if our mind were ultimately real, it would by definition be a self-existent transcendent entity in that it is unaffected by unceasing, passing phenomena. This is not the case. Our mind is in constant flux.

Longchenpa writes in a general introductory presentation of this text: “...by knowing that saṁsāra is an illusion, and by experiencing all that appears as being devoid of intrinsic being, one comes to freedom in the expanse of the illusion of utter purity... Within this nature of the mind, which is free from the conceptual elaborations of self and others, all the illusions of mistaken perception – all hallucinatory appearances and thoughts – find rest in being groundless and unsupported.”

— T.V. Ramamurthy
Ashram Bulletin

Maharudram
Sixty young purohits and pundits convened in the Granthalaya Auditorium on the morning of 29th March to lead a three-day recitation of the Rudram, which is now an annual event. The chanting culminated on the morning of the 31st with yajnam in the New Hall and a procession with the sacred kalaśa-s followed by abhishekam of Ramaneswara Mahalingam and Matrubhuteswara. Sri Rudram consists of eleven chapters in praise of Lord Śiva and is the centre portion of the fourth kanda of the Krishna Yajur Veda.

Swami Ramanananda Memorial Guest House
On the morning of the 6th April, a bhumi puja for the new Swami Ramanananda Memorial Guest House was performed by Ashram priests with Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan and Smt. Nitya Ramanan in attendance. The new complex will be constructed in Osborne Lane with 21 double rooms and will help resolve the Ashram’s accommodation shortage. The new project is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2023.

Sri Vidya Havan
After Bhagavan’s Mahāsamadhi, Alan Chadwick who was with Bhagavan when the Sri Chakra was consecrated in the Matrubhuteswara Temple, began to organise funds to initiate the Sri Chakra Puja. In March, 1953, under Chadwick’s direction, the Sri Chakra Puja commenced and Sri Vidya Havan was established as the annual rite to reconsecrate the Sri Chakra and the Mother’s Temple. This year, the Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday 8th April with Kalaśa Sthāpana, Lalitā Sahasranāman, Triśatī, and concluding with Pūrnāhuti and ārati. A procession into the Mother’s Shrine with the consecrated kalaśa-s was followed by abhishekam, alanākāram and dīpārādhana.

Sri Bhagavan’s Aradhana
Sri Bhagavan’s 72nd Aradhana was observed on Thursday the 28th April with abhishekam starting around 8 am and final ārati at 10.30 am. Some three thousand devotees received Bhagavan’s prasad from six buffet stations, two in the pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories, one in the large dining hall.
Narayana Seva prasad including all special items were served to large number of sadhus, poor, devotees and pilgrims under the Iluppai tree. Smt. Ambika Kameshwar offered a musical feature on Bhagavan in the evening. The following day, RMCL hosted the Ramana Pāda Pañcaratnam with verses from Sivaprakasam Pillai set to the five ghana raga-s of Thyagaraja’s famous Pañcaratna Kritis.

Tamil New Year
On New Year’s Day, 14th April, devotees gathered in the hall in the afternoon to hear the reading of the pañchāṅgam (Vedic astrology calendar) for the coming year. Later that evening, all gathered at Bhagavan’s Nirvana Room for the singing of Aṅkramanamālai. The gathering during this year’s Nirvana Room recitation was the largest to date.

Centenary Celebration of Mahāpuja
On 24th May 2022, the grand Ekadaśa Rudram, puja, and abhishekaṃ were performed in the Mother’s shrine with great splendour. This was followed by special decorations of the lingam and anointing ceremonies. Finally, devotional songs were sung and dīpārādhana was held at around 10.30 am. Subsequently, the devotees partook in a festive feast arranged for this occasion. The event was telecast live on YouTube, which was watched by more than five thousand people while more than thousand people attended the event physically.

The first puja at the Samadhi took place on the morning of 20th May 1922 and has continued ever since. At 7.45 pm on the evening of 20th May 2022, one hundred years since the first stone was laid at the Samadhi, devotees gathered and commenced chanting Tiruvachakam. The recitation completed at 1.30 am.

Obituaries
Born in 1948 in Berkeley, California, John Grimes was a sophomore at the University of Washington on a full tennis scholarship when he had an existential experience that led him to India. John first came to India in 1970 and met various spiritual masters and became one of the first Western devotees of Sri Satya Sai Baba. By the time of his second visit in 1972, he had a passionate, deep and abiding love of India.

John got his B.A. in Religious Studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Indian Philosophy from the Centre for Advanced Study in Indian Philosophy
at the University of Madras under the tutelage of TMP Mahadevan, PK Sundaram and R. Balasubramanian. A gifted lecturer, John taught at numerous Universities in the United States, Canada, Singapore, and India. Among his numerous publications are: *The Vivekachudamani: Sankara's Crown Jewel of Discrimination; A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy; Ganapati: Song of the Self.* A staunch advaitin, John in later years visited the ashram often. In 2015, he published *Ramana Maharshi: The Crown Jewel of Advaita.* John also wrote various articles for *The Mountain Path,* including a large number of ‘Keywords’ which are to be published soon by Indica Books, Varanasi.

In the past few years, John suffered a series of health setbacks, among them, a diabetic seizure and a small stroke. Five days before his demise, he stopped taking food, and two days later, stopped taking water. His sole occupation was japa recitation and silence.

On April 18th 2022 at 5.50 pm, with his wife Meera and son Isa lovingly at his side, John merged at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan. His son performed the cremation rites that evening and on the following morning, consigned his father’s mortal remains to the Bay of Bengal. John will be remembered for his love of life, fearless quest for truth, erudition and humility, and his gift of friendship.

**Sri M.R. Bharathan** took early retirement and came to the Ashram where he served in the Ashram library in the late 1990s, and afterward, for a time in the Ashram office. He found his place in the Ashram bookstall where he assisted in the parcel department. He was appreciated for his unassuming gentle nature. In recent years Bharathan suffered various health conditions. He fell sick during the Omicron outbreak in late January and was hospitalised with pulmonary complications. Released in February, he returned to the Ashram but continued to have lung issues and was eventually hospitalised in Pondicherry. He passed away peacefully on the 13th March 2022. He was a bachelor.

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The aim of this journal is to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.

Contributions for publication are welcome. Please address letters and submissions to The Editor. They should be in English, original and previously unpublished. Contributions not published will be returned on request. Contributors may also send articles by email attachment.

No payment is made for contributions published.

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A new edition of Revelation has been released. Sri Lakshmana Sarma (‘WHO’) was a great scholar who was personally taught Ulladu Narpadu by Bhagavan. Sarma translated each of these verses into Sanskrit over several months. He would submit each verse to Bhagavan for correction and approval. If Bhagavan’s correction and approval was not forthcoming he would rework the verse again and again till both he and Bhagavan were satisfied. Bhagavan called such dedication as tapas and indicated that this translation conveyed the correct meaning of the original Ulladu Narpadu in Tamil.

In this edition we have faithfully restored both the Sanskrit and English verses from the original 1934 edition that had been personally checked by Lakshmana Sarma himself.

Release of IPhone App
Ashram has already released the Android Application for Ashram Parayana. It contains both Tamil and Sanskrit Parayana with English Transliteration and meaning. This helps devotees chant the Parayana by using this App.
Now Ashram is releasing the Parayana with an App for Iphone users also in the Apple Store under Sri Ramanasramam. We hope this App will be useful for many Iphone users.

Available from: Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam & PO Tiruvannamalai 606603, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.
Also available online: http://bookstore.sriramanamaharshi.org
(Postage and packing charges extra).
D: How can it be said that the Heart is no other than Brahman?

M: Although the self enjoys its experiences in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, residing respectively in the eyes, throat and Heart, in reality, however, it never leaves its principal seat, the Heart. In the Heart-lotus which is of the nature of all, in other words in the mind-ether, the light of that Self shines in the form of ‘I’. As it shines thus in everybody, this very Self is referred to as the witness (sākṣī) and the transcendent (turīya, literally the fourth). The ‘I-less’ Supreme Brahman which shines in all bodies as interior to the light in the form ‘I’ is the Self-ether (or knowledge-ether): that alone is the Absolute Reality. This is the super-transcendent (turīyātīta). Therefore, it is stated that what is called the Heart is no other than Brahman. Moreover, for the reason that Brahman shines in the hearts of all souls as the Self, the name ‘Heart’ is given to Brahman. The meaning of the word hṛidayam, when split thus ‘hṛit-ayam’ (‘this is the centre’), is in fact Brahman. The adequate evidence for the fact that Brahman, which shines as the Self, resides in the Hearts of all is that all persons indicate themselves by pointing to the chest on the right side when saying ‘I’.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, Self-Enquiry, Section 9