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# Mountain Path



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Original ink sketch of Arunachala by Sri Ramana Maharshi, from Kunju Swami's notebook

# Mountain Path

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**The aim of this journal will be to set forth the traditional wisdom of *sanatana dharma* with emphasis on Vedanta, as testified and taught by the great sage Sri Ramana Maharshi, and to clarify his path for seekers in the conditions of our modern world.**

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# Divine Names of Arunachala

34. ॐ त्रिनेत्राय नमः

Om trinetrāya namaḥ

‘Tri’ means ‘three’ and ‘netra’ means ‘eye’.

According to the *Mahabharata*, the third eye burst forth from Siva’s forehead with a great flame when his wife placed her hands, playfully, over his eyes after he had been engaged in austerities in the Himalayas. The frontal eye, the eye of fire, looks mainly inward. Directed outward, it burns all that appears before it. With it, Siva reduced Kama, the god of love, to ashes when he dared to inspire amorous thoughts of Parvati while he was engaged in penance.

The eye of fire can also destroy thoughts. This has been experienced and documented by countless devotees who have received silent initiation from Sri Ramana Maharshi. Arthur Osborne, one of the foremost devotees of Bhagavan during his lifetime, gives his own account:

*“Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row before it. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me, penetrating, intimate, with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said: ‘You have been told; why have you not realised?’ And then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness. Thereafter love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. I did not at first realise that it was the initiation by look that had vitalized me and changed my attitude of mind. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had had such an experience, and that with them also it had marked the beginning of active sadhana (quest) under Bhagavan’s guidance.”<sup>1</sup>*

How blessed we are by those eyes of fire!

— BKC

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<sup>1</sup> *My Life and Quest*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2001, p. 90-91.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# Bhagavan's Living Presence

Dear Devotees and Seekers,

In the three years since I assumed the role of President at our Ashram, devotees from around the world have shared their concerns and queries with me. Taking these seriously, I plan to dedicate my initial editorials to addressing the most prominent themes. In this edition, I will address the crucial question that consistently arises: Is Sri Ramana Maharshi a living Guru?

In the invocation verses of His Tamil translation of *Dakshinamurti Stotram* and *Atma Bodha*, Bhagavan declares that Dakshinamurti and Adi Shankara are manifestations of the One Self. He asserts that it is Shankara himself, abiding in Him as Ramana Maharshi, who composed the Tamil translation of His Sanskrit works. In verse 8 of His devotional hymn *Arunachala Navamanimalai*, Bhagavan articulates the purpose of His incarnation in chaste Tamil, stating that Lord Arunachala raised him to His state so that Shiva, as Absolute Consciousness, may flourish.

Bhagavan's descent on earth is aimed to guide us away from seeking God and Guru externally. Instead, he urged us to realise God and Guru as Absolute Consciousness within us through the practice of *Atma-Vichara* or Self-Enquiry. While Bhagavan emphasised the necessity of a Guru, he constantly reiterated that God, Guru, and Self are one and can be found within ourselves. In His words, "The Guru

is both ‘external’ and ‘internal’. From the ‘exterior’, he gives a push to the mind to turn inward; from the ‘interior’, He pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in the quieting of the mind. That is *guru kripa* (grace). There is no difference between God, Guru, and the Self.”

Even when Bhagavan was in the body, He never identified Himself with it. He consistently directed devotees to turn inward and find Him as their inner Guru. During His last sickness, when devotees spoke as if He was forsaking them and pleaded their weakness and continued need for Him, He retorted, “You attach too much importance to the body.” In this simple yet profound response, Ramana Maharshi redirected the focus of His devotees from the physical form to the formless Self, emphasising the timeless nature of the Self beyond the transient existence of the body. The statement encapsulates the core teaching of Advaita Vedanta — the recognition of one’s true identity as the eternal, unchanging consciousness.

Ramana Maharshi’s response serves as a reminder that the Guru is not confined to the physical form and that the true essence of guidance lies in the formless, eternal Self. It echoes the Advaitic understanding that the ultimate reality is beyond birth and death, and the Guru’s presence is always available in the Heart of the sincere seeker.

Bhagavan was not one to promise future returns or appointed successors. Instead, Sri Bhagavan firmly declared, “I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here.” This assertion transcends the limitations of time, reflecting the Sadguru’s realisation of the eternal ‘Now’ and becomes an invitation to turn inward and recognise the eternal presence within, as guided by the sage’s timeless teachings. The concept of ‘here and now’ in Advaita Vedanta emphasises the timeless and eternal nature of the ultimate reality, Brahman. It encourages individuals to recognise the illusory nature of time, live fully in the present moment, and realise the true nature of the Self beyond the limitations of past and future. The teachings also give an assurance that Bhagavan is ever available to guide us in all these endeavours.

Can we not all testify to this? Do we not feel His radiant presence at His Ashram and within us? Soon after His *Mahasamadhi* in 1950, devotees shared that they felt even deeper peace and joy at His *samadhi* and in their spiritual practice. Arthur Osborne, the founder editor of Mountain Path, says, “More than ever He has become the Inner Guru.

Those who depended on Him feel His guidance more actively, more potently now. Their thoughts are riveted on Him more constantly. The *vichara*, leading to the Inner Guru, has grown easier and more accessible. Meditation brings a more immediate flow of Grace.”

Bhagavan, who is compassion incarnate, has left us His Ashram and His beloved Arunachala as external spiritual reinforcements. A visit to His Ashram and performing Girivalam around the sacred hill fill us with enthusiasm and devotion to strengthen our sadhana. He has also left us His precious teachings, condensing all that is needed for the seeker in simple language with utmost clarity. ‘*Who am I?*’, the small booklet, contains the essence of His teaching. The brevity and clarity of each response to the 28 questions in the book are so refreshing that repeated study of this one work will alone suffice. Bhagavan has therefore left behind all that we need for external support — His Ashram, the Arunachala Hill, and His precious teachings.

Once we take refuge in Bhagavan and surrender ourselves to Him, we experience profound joy, as if we have come home. The deep sense of peace eradicates any remaining desire to seek another teacher, whether alive or otherwise. A feeling of completeness inspires us to earnestly practise His teachings, as we have full faith that this alone will lead us to the goal. The gradual elimination of the urge to seek external help is, in itself, a significant gain for sincere devotees. I often meet devotees who express their gratitude to Bhagavan for rescuing them from financial and emotional distress involved in searching for and following other teachers — individuals who are gifted, charismatic and learned but are not Sadgurus like Bhagavan. Frequently, such teachers make extensive demands on devotees in the name of ‘service,’ encompassing both physical and material obligations, thereby affecting their personal relationships and domestic peace. In stark contrast, Bhagavan demands nothing of us. He only wishes us to follow His teachings and strive sincerely in our practice. Following Bhagavan’s teachings brings unmatched clarity into our lives. His grace takes care of our external circumstances, making them harmonious and conducive to our spiritual practice.

As administrators of His Ashram, we are the beneficiaries of our staunch faith in His living presence. We know that He runs the Ashram, and we are simply His instruments. This is not a sentimental theory; we experience this every moment of each day.

Our role is to be sincere caretakers of His Ashram and His teachings. By strictly focusing on administration and not acting as intermediaries between devotees and Bhagavan, we strive to ensure that all devotees, irrespective of gender, caste, race, or nationality, can feel Bhagavan's living presence directly without any intervention. That is why there are no human teachers at the Ashram.

We are dedicated to preserving the teachings in all their purity. We will make them available in the principal languages of India and across the globe, in both print and digital formats. The publications team leverages the power of social media to reach devotees in every corner of the world and deliver the essence of Bhagavan's teachings to their digital devices.

The truth is that no one can give us liberation. The way can be pointed out, directions can be given. In His response to the question, 'Is it not possible for God and the Guru to effect the release of a soul?' in '*Who am I?*,' Bhagavan says clearly, "God and the Guru will only show the way to release; they will not by themselves take the soul to the state of release. In truth, God and the Guru are not different. Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru's gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost; yet, each one should by His own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release. One can know oneself only with one's own eye of knowledge, and not with somebody else's. Does he who is Rama require the help of a mirror to know that he is Rama?" Only a Sadguru like Bhagavan can respond with such unambiguity. Our intense earnestness and total dedication to the goal are the most essential factors. We simply need to attend to making ourselves ready, and the rest is automatic. Sri Ramana Maharshi did not live for His time alone. His presence and guidance can be experienced now, just as when He was physically present. Those who turn to Him with sincere aspiration and longing, those who try their best to apply His teachings, will feel His grace and guidance. There is no doubt about this.

In humility and devotion,

**Venkat S. Ramanan**



# Upadesa Undiyar In Our Daily Life

S. RAM MOHAN

In our daily life, we go through the state of waking, dream, and sleep. Our true nature of 'I am' is 'how we remain in our sleep' (blissful, *sugam* in Tamil) *Jagrat Shusupti*. Why? In sleep, we lose our identity due to the shutdown of our senses and mind; yet the subtle awareness 'I am' (*unarvu* in Tamil) remains. Thus on waking up, we could say, if we had a good sleep or not.

The true nature of 'I am' is the Self and it is blissful. In both dream and waking states, the mind becomes active and falsely identifies 'I am' as an individual body; leading us to have both physical and mental experiences involving both the body and worldly objects. Furthermore, such a false identification of 'I am' with an 'individual body' makes us lose our inherent state of bliss.

During the dream state, our mind is not capable of regulating our experiences. Thus both enjoyable and miserable experiences are inevitable. However, when we are in the waking state, such dream experiences generally are forgotten or ignored, which means the dream experience is not carried further.

Dr. S. Ram Mohan is the author of numerous articles on Bhagavan's teachings and is currently the editor of *Ramanodhayam*, the Tamil magazine of the Ramana Kendra in Chennai.

During the waking state, our mind is capable of regulating our experiences through study of the mind and its control and being alert, etc. To attain a blissful life, we must hold firmly onto a single thought ‘I am the Self’, which is our true identity; and should lead our lives accordingly. This attitude will enable us to face any challenges in our life that happen due to our *prarabdha*, without losing our peace and happiness.

Based on the essence, from the verses of ‘*Upadesa Undiyar*’, the explanations for the above observations are provided in a question and answer form.

**Question:** Could you briefly describe an individual’s life?

**Answer:** An individual’s life is a collection of daily occurring events between birth and death. The daily life of each individual is unique but comprises the three states. Waking state, dream state and sleep state.<sup>1</sup> The ever present true nature of an individual being ‘I am’ is ‘how an individual remains in sleep’. The reason being that although in sleep an individual loses the identification with the body due to the shutdown of one’s senses and mind the subtle awareness ‘I am’ remains (based on verse 21).<sup>2</sup> Thus an individual on waking up could say whether he had a good sleep or not.

*Unarvu* is subtler than thought. *Unarvu* is omnipresent, that is during waking, dream and sleep and it is ‘I am’. As *Unarvu* is self-evident, it can be felt by all. It is beyond description and it is not demonstrable (based on verse 23).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> About waking, dream, and sleep states: When we go to bed, we experience our physical body and physical world such as the mattress, the pillow etc. Subsequently we become unconscious of everything including our physical body. We later regain our experience of both the physical body and the world, thereby we understand that we had a sleep and we are now awake. Thus sleep means free from the act of experiencing, full unconsciousness.

The time period between the sleep and the waking state, is called dream time, where we experience different things except the physical body and the physical world.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 21: நான் என்னும் சொற்பொருளாம் அது, நாளுமே; நான் அற்ற தூக்கத்தும் உந்தீபற. நமது இன்மை நீக்கத்தால் உந்தீபற.

<sup>3</sup> Verse 23: உள்ளது உணர், உணர்வு வேறு இன்மையின், உள்ளது உணர்வு ஆகும் உந்தீபற. உணர்வே நாமாய் உளம் உந்தீபற.

*Unarvu* is neither conscious nor unconscious. It is beyond comprehension (based on verse 27).<sup>4</sup> For more details about *unarvu*, please refer to the footnote 7, 'Self'. Immediately on waking up, while still in bed, one should not let the thoughts of the world rushing, remaining in a state of 'No thoughts'. Thereby, an individual can understand the true nature of 'I am' (*unarvu*), which is present during deep sleep.<sup>5</sup> After waking up, an individual mind becomes active and starts to experience both the physical body and the physical environment (world), causing the bliss to fade away.

**Question:** If the true nature of an individual is 'I am' and is the state of 'how an individual remains in sleep'; then what about during both dream and waking states?

**Answer:** The true nature of the Self is 'I am' and it is a state of bliss. In both the dream and waking states, the mind becomes active and falsely identifies 'I am' with the individual body; leading an individual to have physical and mental experiences, involving both the body and the worldly objects. The inherent bliss is thus lost. Thus an individual's experience relying on the false identification of 'I am' with 'an individual body'; leads to the loss of our inherent state of 'Ananda'. Such a false identification of the mind happens automatically for each individual unless one is vigilant.

The nature of experiences distinguish the human life from any other earthly life.

**Question:** Is it possible for an individual to be in bliss during both dream and waking states?

**Answer:** During the dream state, an individual mind is not capable of regulating the experiences. Thus, for an individual, both enjoyable and miserable experiences are inevitable. However, an individual is

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<sup>4</sup> Verse 27: அறிவு அறியாமையும் அற்ற அறிவே, அறிவாகும் உண்மை ஈது உந்தீபற. அறிவதற்கு ஒன்று இலை உந்தீபற.

<sup>5</sup> Sleep is an empty space, neither light nor darkness and hence is the nature of 'I am'. Sleep (nature of 'I am') is blissful, free from the experiences such as, body tiredness, body sickness, worries about the relationship and the world, weird imaginations, etc. Note: During sleep, the individual life-force is operational and the mind is suspended.

able to recover easily from the dream experience, once the individual switches to the waking state. In the waking state, an individual simply forgets or ignores the dream experience as it is only a dream and the experience is fully within an individual.

During the waking state, an individual mind is capable of regulating the experience through the study of the mind, mind control and following spiritual practices.

To experience bliss during the waking state, an individual should investigate the mind first; not to worry about investigating either the body or the world. Why?

It is true for all that the experience of an individual body and world disappears during the sleep state as the active state of the mind is suspended; the experience appears only during the waking and dream states as the mind becomes active.

Thus we can infer that an individual mind is the cause for all our experiences. Causing the individual to experience both the body and the world. Therefore to regulate an individual experience, one should first investigate the mind, its source, its reality.

This is the correct approach to attain our true nature (based on verse 16).<sup>6</sup>

**Question:** What is the nature of mind? How to deal with the mind in the waking state?

**Answer:** The following are based on the verses 18, 19 and 17: The mind consists of a multitude of linked thoughts. Of the linked thoughts, the root thought is 'I', a thought about 'I am'. The other names for 'I am' are: the Self,<sup>7</sup> *Unarvu*, *Atman*, Brahman, Ishvara, the Creator, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Verse 16: வெளி விடயங்களை விட்டு, மனம் தன் ஒளி உரு ஓர்தலை உந்தீபற. உண்மை உணர்ச்சியாம் உந்தீபற.

<sup>7</sup> Self is 'I am'. The Self exists even when we are devoid of the mind (experiences) such as, during the sleep. However, during the waking and dream states; in the presence of the Self, the mind causes the experience to an individual. Thus the Self is free from the experience, yet it is the source of the experience. How? Please explain.

For example, the sunlight is free from colour, though it contains all the colours. It is a transparent illumination. The primary colours are RGB, RYB, etc. Using the primary colours, one can create any of the colours.

Similarly, the Self is free from the experience; though it contains all the life experiences such as, the waking state experiences, the dream state experiences and

With the root thought ‘I’, the next thought of ‘individual body’ is generated automatically and linked.<sup>8</sup> Thus the combined thoughts represent ‘I am the body’ and is called mind (based on verse 18).<sup>9</sup>

Why is such an enactment of the mind not appropriate?

‘I am’ is the sentient object. ‘Individual body’ is an inert object. ‘I am the body’ is called mind. It is made of linking the thoughts of sentient and inert objects. It is like covering the chocolate with a wrapper.<sup>10</sup>

Hence the thought ‘I am the body’ is called the ego-mind,<sup>11</sup> or the impure mind (based on verse 19).<sup>12</sup>

Note: The thought ‘I am the body’ is just the beginning of the experience. For an experience to happen, using the thought ‘I am the body’, the mind generates various thoughts, based on the individual’s *vasanas* and links them. Thus the mind is the multitude of linked thoughts.<sup>13</sup>

the feeling of being refreshed due to the good sleep. The primary senses are the five senses which is a thought. Using the thought, the mind along with life-force creates all the life experiences of both senses and mental.

Note: The five senses with the corresponding (sense organs) are: the sense of touch, heat . . . (body), the sense of taste (mouth), the sense of sight (eye), the sense of smell (nose) and the sense of sound (ear).

<sup>8</sup> From the verse 24 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, one can understand that the next thought is ‘individual body’. When the next thought of ‘physical body’ is linked then an individual gets into the waking state. When the next thought of ‘subtle body’ is linked then an individual gets into the dream state.

<sup>9</sup> Verse 18: எண்ணங்களை மனம்; யாவினும், நான் எனும் எண்ணமே மூலமாம் உந்தீபற. நானாம் மனம் எனல் உந்தீபற.

<sup>10</sup> As such, the chocolate is edible and the wrapper is not edible. People cannot eat and enjoy a chocolate with the wrapper. Thus the wrapped chocolate should be handled properly. The wrapper should be discarded and only the chocolate should be eaten and enjoyed. Any other way would fail. Similarly, an individual should know how to handle the life experiences.

<sup>11</sup> For an individual’s waking and dream states, God ordains the *prarabdha karma* — fruits through the ego-mind. Thereby an individual has experience in life for the *prarabdha karma* (effortless body action). The normal tendency is, an individual too will react to the *prarabdha* happenings through the ego-mind.

<sup>12</sup> Verse 19: நான் என்று எழும் இடம், ஏது என நாட உள்; நான் தலை சாய்ந்திடும் உந்தீபற. ஞான விசாரம் இது உந்தீபற.

<sup>13</sup> The mind (*antahkarana*) is a wondrous power in the Self and is made of thought. When all the thoughts are eliminated from the mind, one will find that there is

## MOUNTAIN PATH

As an individual's waking state experience is based on the ego mind (false identity) and it blocks the inherent bliss, an individual should simply ignore the waking state experience like the dream experience. That is, an individual should ignore both enjoyable and miserable experiences of the waking state and maintain a state of equanimity. This equanimity can be achieved only through the unconditional acceptance<sup>14</sup> of the happenings in one's life. Indeed, this is the direct way to attain the blissful life during the waking state (based on verse 17).<sup>15</sup>

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no such thing as the mind. The five senses are experienced through the mind in the form of thoughts, being an individual's mental experience. The mind coupled with the life-force causes the five senses (physical experience). Thus the mind is a must for any experience.

The mind has four sub-functions which are interrelated, arranged as:

*Citta*: manages an individual's rule book in life (the list of conclusive actions for a situation, arrived through *Buddhi*) in the form of memory;

*Manas*: manages an individual's thoughts upon a situation;

*Ahamkara*: manages an individual's identities; and

*Buddhi*: helps an individual to arrive at conclusive actions for a situation based on discrimination, either good or bad.

Based on a situation, the *Ahamkara* establishes an individual identity. Thereby, using the *Citta*, *Buddhi* and *Manas*, the individual assumes the responsibility, arrives at the list of do's and don'ts, etc.

An individual's root identity is 'I am the body'. The sub-identities are: I am a male/female, I am a son/daughter of so and so, I am a brother/sister of so and so, I am educated/uneducated, I am a clerk/carpenter/ . . . etc. Since the root identity is false, the rest of the sub-identities are also false.

Note: The world is unique to an individual and it is ever created and managed by the mind through the individual body in the form of experience, both sensory and mental. Although an individual body and world are in a frame of an individual current view, the root identity 'I am the body' divides the view into: an individual body as first person entity, the visible part of world as second person entity and the invisible part of world as third person entity. Thus the mind's functions are based on an individual identity.

<sup>14</sup>During the waking state, accept the happenings by remembering that the Lord only ordains an individual's experiences based on his *prarabdha karma*. Further like the dream experiences are within an individual, the waking state experiences are also within an individual. An individual Heart is the source for both the dream and waking state experiences.

<sup>15</sup>Verse 17: மனத்தின் உருவை மறவாது உசாவ; மனம் என ஒன்று இலை உந்தீபற. மார்க்கம் நேர் ஆர்க்கும் இது உந்தீபற.

However in social life, it is hard for an individual to simply ignore the waking state experiences like the dream experiences. An individual is expected to react and deal with the people around appropriately, as a part of normal living. To experience bliss during the waking state, an individual has to develop a pure mind to overcome the natural ego-mind.

A pure mind means holding firmly on to a single thought 'I am the Self' (the true identity of an individual, the thought 'I - I', *aham spurippu*) and should lead life accordingly (based on verse 20).<sup>16</sup> To keep the pure mind firmly and lead the life accordingly, an individual should study the Self and know the nature of the Self clearly.

**Question:** What is the nature of the Self? How to keep the pure mind firmly and lead life accordingly?

**Answer:** The following are based on the verses 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29: 'I am' (the Self)<sup>17</sup> is permanent and never changes.

The life-force, mind, body, world and experience are momentary, constantly changing. However 'I am' is permanent. (based on verse 22).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Verse 20: நான் ஒன்று தானத்து, 'நான் நான்' என்று ஒன்று; அது, தானாகத் தோன்றுமே உந்தீபற. தான் அது பூன்றமாம் உந்தீபற.

<sup>17</sup> The following are more details about the Self. It is the continuation of the earlier footnote 7.

An individual Heart consists of two entities namely, the Self and the causal body. Out of them, the causal body is symbolic, inert. The causal body is something similar to a tuned antenna, link-address, key, Identity card, etc.

In the Heart, the Self is ever 'I am' and the causal body performs: takes birth, live and dies. In other words based on the causal body, the Heart releases the individual life energy which is unique for everyone. The Self, 'I am' is the same for everyone. The individual life energy is the composite of the life-force and mind. During the waking state, the life-force and mind manifest as the physical body, world and experiences.

Since the causal body is only a dummy, the source of the life-force, mind, body, world and experience are within the Self.

An individual Heart means the spiritual Heart, which resides at the right side of the chest. The physical heart, which pumps the blood is residing at the left side of the chest.

<sup>18</sup> Verse 22: உடல், பொறி, உள்ளம், உயிர், இருள் எல்லாம் சடமசத்து; ஆனதால் உந்தீபற. சத்தான நான் அல்ல உந்தீபற.

Heart exists as a single unit, having both the Self and the causal body. The Self (Brahman) is ever free from any thought. In the presence of the Self, the causal body (jiva, ignorance) always functions through the mind and always thinks (based on *upadhi*).<sup>19</sup>

When the jiva realises that the functions of the mind are due to the presence of the Self and have nothing to do with the body, it understands and accepts the idea 'I am the Self' instead of 'I am the body'. Thus with the firm conviction 'I am the Self', the jiva comprehends the life happenings and leads the life as it is led (based on verse 25).<sup>20</sup>

The comprehension 'I am the Self' is true. The comprehension 'I am the body' is false. Thus during the waking state, the jiva should comprehend the happenings in life through the pure mind ('I am the Self') and live accordingly (based on verse 26).<sup>21</sup>

The jiva knows that one's Heart is the cause for the individual life experiences of both the body and world. Hence the jiva comprehends and deals with the *prarabdha* happenings in life accordingly.

For example, during the day:

The jiva, with its ego-mind, believes that the sun is the cause for the individual's experience of light. The jiva believes, that the sun reaches an individual's eyes through its rays.

The jiva, having the pure mind knows that the individual's Heart is the cause for the individual's experience of light. Further the variation of an individual's light experience is the cause for the experience of the sun's rays and the sun.

The true nature of 'I am' is free from all experiences, in the sleep state. Thus the jiva knows clearly the individual's true nature, the differences between the pure mind's way of living and the ego-mind's way of living. Hence during the waking state, the jiva should stay established firmly in a steady state of bliss. (based on verse 28).<sup>22</sup>

Please stop ruminating with thoughts such as, 'I am ignorant and I

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<sup>19</sup> Verse 24: இருக்கும் இயற்கையால், ஈச சீவர்கள் ஒரு பொருளே யாவர் உந்தீபற. உபாதி உணர்வே வேறு உந்தீபற.

<sup>20</sup> Verse 25: தன்னை, உபாதி விட்டு ஓர்வது தான் ஈசன் தன்னை உணர்வதாம் உந்தீபற. தானாய் ஒளிர்வதால் உந்தீபற.

<sup>21</sup> Verse 26: தானாய் இருத்தலே, தன்னை அறிதலாம்; தான் இரண்டு அற்றதால் உந்தீபற. தன்மய நிட்டை ஈது உந்தீபற.

<sup>22</sup> Verse 28: தனாது இயல் யாது? என, தான் தெரிகில் பின், அனாதி அனந்த சத்து உந்தீபற. அகண்ட சிதானந்தம் உந்தீபற.



have to find a path to liberation' etc. Stay always with your true nature, which is bliss, peace, happiness, etc. Indeed, this is called staying at the feet of the Lord, great tapas, service to the Lord, etc. (based on verse 29).<sup>23</sup>

**Question:** During the waking state, how does an individual act and deal with situations harmoniously?

**Answer:** During the waking state, an individual's *prarabdha* decides the happenings in the individual's life. Such happenings are automatic and are beyond an individual's control.

With effort, an individual can react to *prarabdha* happenings. Such reaction is called *akamyā karma*.

Note: An individual action (*karma*), on its own cannot bestow its fruit to the individual; as the action (*karma*) is inert. Only the Lord ordains the fruit of an individual's action to the individual (based on verse 1).<sup>24</sup>

*Akamyā karma* can be either checked through the thought process (enquiry) or unchecked (instinct). Unchecked *akamyā karma* could lead to expansion of reactions like an ocean (based on verse 2).<sup>25</sup> Checked *akamyā karma* can be regulated either for good or bad.

When *akamyā karma* is performed through the pure mind (the firm conviction 'I am the Self'), it is called *nishkamya karma*. Thus *nishkamya karma* is devoted to the Lord as the Self and the Lord are the same. For an individual, such *nishkamya karma* will show the way to liberation (based on verse 3).<sup>26</sup>

An individual with a cultivated pure mind, having the firm conviction 'I am the Self', treats all the living beings (people, animals, birds, plants...) and non-living beings with equanimity. The pure mind is called *sattva guna*, *sat-bhavana* and is the same as *para bhakti* (based on verse 9).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Verse 29: பந்த வீடு அற்ற, பர சுகம் உற்றவாறு; இந்த நிலை நின்றால் உந்தீபற. இறை பணி நின்றலாம் உந்தீபற.

<sup>24</sup> Verse 1: கன்மம் பயன் தரல், கர்த்தனது ஆணையால்; கன்மம் கடவுளோ? உந்தீபற. கன்மம் சடம் அதால் உந்தீபற.

<sup>25</sup> Verse 2: வினையின் விளைவு, விளிவு உற்று வித்தாய், வினைக்கடல் வீழ்த்திடும் உந்தீபற. வீடு தரல் இலை உந்தீபற.

<sup>26</sup> Verse 3: கருத்தனுக்கு ஆக்கும் நடிகாமிய கன்மம், கருத்தைத் திருத்தி அஃது உந்தீபற. கதிவழி காண்பிக்கும் உந்தீபற.

<sup>27</sup> Verse 9: பாவ பலத்தினால், பாவனாதீத சற் பாவத்து இருத்தலே உந்தீபற. பர பத்தி தத்துவம் உந்தீபற.

An individual having a disturbed mind, can quieten the mind through breath control (based on verse 11).<sup>28</sup> The reason is that the Self is the source for both breath and mind (based on verse 12).<sup>29</sup> Once the mind is settled through breath control, release the mind with the firm conviction 'I am the Self'. Such practice eventually will overcome the ego-mind (based on verse 14).<sup>30</sup>

Note: The adopted texts from the book '*Who am I?*' follow:

In order to realise the inherent and untainted happiness, which indeed an individual daily experiences when the mind is subdued in sleep, it is essential that an individual should know 'I am the Self' during the waking state and lead his life accordingly.

During waking state, the thought 'I am the Self' will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise Liberation<sup>31</sup> (Self-realisation); due to the Lord's Grace. ▲

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<sup>28</sup> Verse 11: வளி உள் அடக்க, வலைபடு புட்போல் உளமும் ஒடுங்குறும் உந்தீபற. ஒடுக்க உபாயம் இது உந்தீபற. For more detail, please refer to chapter 9 and 10 of the section 'Self Enquiry' of the book 'Words of Grace' ([http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Words\\_of\\_Grace.pdf](http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Words_of_Grace.pdf)).

<sup>29</sup> Verse 12: உளமும் உயிரும், உணர்வும் செயலும் உளவாம் கிளை இரண்டு உந்தீபற. ஒன்று அவற்றின் மூலம் உந்தீபற.

<sup>30</sup> Verse 14: ஒடுக்க வளியை, ஒடுங்கும் உளத்தை விடுக்கவே ஓர் வழி உந்தீபற. வீயும் அதன் உரு உந்தீபற.

<sup>31</sup> Liberation (Self-realisation) means the individual mind is extinguished while living. That is, there is neither an ego-mind nor a pure mind. The Lord extinguishes the individual mind permanently at the appropriate time. When this happens, an individual's life becomes like that of a baby, a life with no thought.

For example, observe a baby's life. During the waking state, babies appear to watch the TV show seriously. Yet babies neither have a mind to differentiate the movie characters nor understand the story behind the show. The mind is necessary to split the show into scenes, to split each scene into various characters, later to link each character properly to arrive at the theme of the show, hero, heroine, comedian, etc. Similarly babies appear to watch the world (environment) but they do not experience the happenings around them. Further a mother knows the experience of giving birth to the baby and recollects that experience at any time. But the baby neither knows its birth nor is it able to recollect it in life, as the baby has no mind when born.

# Essence of Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad

## Part 1 – End of Suffering

ANNOTATED BY V. KRITHIVASAN

### Background

Lakshmana Sarma, the author of this great work on Bhagavan's quintessential teachings, was a lawyer by profession. He was also an erudite Sanskrit scholar and well-versed in the literature associated with Advaita Vedanta. He came to know about Bhagavan Ramana in the late 1920s and paid a visit to him. He was greatly impressed by Bhagavan's spiritual stature and without any second thoughts, took him as his Guru. He was fortunate to spend more than twenty years in close association with Bhagavan. He spent the remainder of his life translating Bhagavan's teachings into Sanskrit and commenting on them in English and Tamil. Lakshmana Sarma has explained

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how translating Bhagavan's teachings into Sanskrit poetry became a passion for him:

Once when he was sitting in the holy presence of Bhagavan, Bhagavan asked Sarma, "Have you not read *Ulladu Narpadu*?" Sarma replied, "No Bhagavan, I am unable to understand the Tamil". Though his mother tongue was Tamil, Sarma was not familiar with the classical Tamil used by Bhagavan in his verses. But clever as he was, he saw a golden opportunity presenting itself and said, "If Bhagavan teaches me, I shall learn it."<sup>1</sup> Bhagavan agreed to give him private lessons on literary Tamil, along with detailed explanations of his verses. The lessons began with a thorough study of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* (supplementary verses to the main work of *Ulladu Narpadu*). This consisted of mostly translations that Bhagavan had made of verses from other well-known Sanskrit works like *Yoga Vasishtam*, *Devikalottaram*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* etc. *Anubandham* provided an interesting background information to Bhagavan's teachings and Sarma was starting with an area he was already familiar with, namely, traditional Advaita Vedanta.

As the lessons progressed, to make sure that he fully understood what Bhagavan had taught him, he started composing verses in Sanskrit embodying the teachings of Bhagavan. He would submit these verses to Bhagavan to ascertain that his translations faithfully reproduced what Bhagavan taught. Until Bhagavan approved his Sanskrit translation, he went on re-casting and correcting his verses. In this manner, he finished translating all the 42 verses of *Ulladu Narpadu*. Even after the first translation, he felt impelled to go on revising his Sanskrit translation again and again. In his own words, "It seemed to me that no amount of time and labour would be too much for achieving the end I had in mind: the preparation of an almost perfect and faithful rendering into Sanskrit of this holy text". (Observing this, Bhagavan commented that this was like *tapas* to Lakshmana Sarma). Sarma gave the title *Sat Darshana* to his Sanskrit translation of *Ulladu Narpadu*.

At a certain stage of Sarma's translation activity, Sri Kapali Sastry, a great Sanskrit scholar and a disciple of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, visited the Ashram. On coming to know of the Sanskrit translation of

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<sup>1</sup> *Power Of The Presence, Vol.3*, David Godman.

Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu*, he asked Bhagavan if the translation could be submitted to Kavyakantha who was at that time staying in Karnataka, for his study and revision, if any. Bhagavan agreed to this. Kavyakantha went through the translation rendered by Lakshmana Sarma and instead of merely revising it, he composed an independent rendering, retaining the title *Sat Darshana*. Bhagavan received this and handed it over to Lakshmana Sarma.

Sarma saw the composition of Kavyakantha and was greatly impressed with the polished style of the poetry. He told Bhagavan with utmost humility that Kavyakantha's version was better than his own, and so he would stop revising and improving his translation. But Bhagavan did not accept this decision of Lakshmana Sarma's and strongly suggested that Sarma's own efforts should continue parallelly. He told Sarma that he could consider employing a longer metre, which would enable him to accurately incorporate the different shades of meaning that Bhagavan brought out in his Tamil verses of *Ulladu Narpadu*. Bhagavan also encouraged Sarma to write a Tamil commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*. Greatly moved by Bhagavan's encouragement, Sarma continued his efforts. When his Tamil commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu* was completed, Bhagavan was very appreciative of the substance, style and the full understanding that Sarma exhibited in conveying Bhagavan's essential teachings. He asked the Ashram management to take up the publication of Sarma's Tamil commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, saying that everyone felt that this was the best commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*.

Sarma's deep understanding of Bhagavan's teachings resulted in yet another book in English by name *Maha Yoga*, which had a huge reception from Bhagavan's devotees all over the world. It was translated into many languages. Lakshmana Sarma's Sanskrit rendering of *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Anubandham* was published under the title *Revelations*.

In 1950, after Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, Lakshmana Sarma decided to translate the notes he had taken during Bhagavan's tutorials also into Sanskrit verses. These are 701 in number, and they form a systematic presentation of Bhagavan's teachings, much like the *Prakarana Granthams* (simplified texts of Advaita Vedanta for propagation) of Adi Sankara, the most noteworthy being *Vivekachudamani*. He gave

this Sanskrit work the title *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad*, meaning, ‘The Supreme Science as taught by Sri Ramana’. As Bhagavan’s teachings are expressions of his own *svanubhuti* (permanent inherence in the Self), they are fit to be called as an Upanishad. In Sanatana Dharma, knowledge about the world (objective knowledge) is named as *apara vidya*. Knowledge of the Self is called as *para vidya*. In this sense, *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad* is the Supreme Knowledge (or Science) of the Self as taught by Bhagavan Ramana. These were published in *Call Divine* between 1954 and 1957, with translation in English by Lakshmana Sarma.

In this series of articles, a few selected verses that cover the essential teachings of Bhagavan Ramana will be taken up for a deeper study.

### **Benedictory Verse – *Mangala Sloka***

अहंस्वरूपेण समस्तजन्तोर्विभान्तं अन्तर्विभुमप्रमेयम्।  
गुरुं गुरुणामजमादिदेवं वन्दामहे श्रीरमणं दयाब्धिम्॥

*aham̐svarūpeṇa samastajantorvibhāntaṁ antarvibhumaprameyam  
guruṁ gurūṇāmajamādidevaṁ vandāmahe śrīramaṇaṁ dayābḍhim*

*We bow down to Sri Ramana, the Ocean of Grace, the Infinite,  
Immeasurable, Unborn Primal Divinity, Guru of all Gurus,  
shining in the Hearts of all creatures as ‘I’.*

It is the tradition to begin works of this nature with an auspicious word. Lakshmana Sarma begins with the word *aham*, ‘I’. *Aham* is an auspicious word because it is the first name of God according to Bhagavan.<sup>2</sup> Bhagavan quotes from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: *ātmaivedamagra āsī puruṣavidhaḥ, so ’nuvīkṣya nānyadātmano ’paśyat, so ’hamasmītyagre vyāharat, tato ’hamnāmā-bhavat*. “In the beginning, the Universe was verily the Self, in the form of a person. He pondered and beheld nothing else but himself. He first said, ‘I am he.’ Therefore, he got the name ‘I’. (Br. U. 1-4-1). The understanding that ‘I’ is the first name of the Supreme Being is central to an understanding of Bhagavan’s teachings on the nature of God or the Self as well as the means to gain the ultimate state of deliverance.

<sup>2</sup> *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, Munagala Venkataramiah, Talk 518.

Bhagavan Ramana shines in the Hearts of all creatures as ‘I’, says Lakshmana Sarma. Bhagavan himself says the same in his answer to Amritanatha Yogi, who wanted to know who Ramana was:

*“In the recesses of the lotus-shaped Hearts of all, beginning with Vishnu, there shines as pure intellect (Absolute Consciousness) the Paramatman, who is the same as Arunachala Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him, and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart wherein He dwells as the beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as Pure Consciousness.”*

When Lakshmana Sarma calls Bhagavan as *gurum gurūṇām*, Guru of Gurus, it is not merely praise. Renowned masters and acharyas of the land visited Bhagavan and bowed down in reverence — Mahan Seshadri Swami, Achyuta Dasa the Hata Yogi, Kavyakantha Ganapati the great *tapasvin*, Sri Narayana Guru of Kerala, Shankaracharya Bharati Krishna Tirtha of Puri, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Swami Chinmayananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swamis of Ramakrishna Mission and many more. We are reminded of Suka, an *atyasrami* like Bhagavan, who was referred to as *Yoginam Paramam Guru*, Supreme Master of Yogis, in *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

Bhagavan is *Aprameya*, incomparable; the manner of his Realisation, his permanent inherence in the Self, his absolute lack of body consciousness, his unique method of teaching through *Mauna*, his utter humility — all these and more, make him a unique, incomparable Guru.

### Obeisance to the Guru

ईश्वरो गुरुरात्मेति मूर्तिभेद विभागिने।

व्योमवद् व्याप्तदेहाय दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः॥

(1)

*īśvaro gururātmeti mūrtibheda vibhāgine*

*vyomavad vyāptadehāya dakṣiṇāmūrtaye namaḥ*

*Obeisance to Sri Dakshinamurti, manifest in the three forms as God, the Guru and the Self, whose form is infinite as the Space.*

Lakshmana Sarma begins *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad* with the famous verse of Sureshvaracharya (one of the four disciples of Adi Shankara) which brings out the unity of the three apparently

distinct entities, namely, God, the Guru and the Self. Sureshvaracharya composed this as the invocatory verse of his commentary on Adi Sankara's *Dakshinamurti Stotram*. Bhagavan Ramana has said that these are the three stages of Divine Grace:

*“At some time a man grows dissatisfied with his life and, not content with what he has, seeks the satisfaction of his desires through prayer to God. His mind is gradually purified until he longs to know God, more to obtain His Grace than to satisfy worldly desires. Then God's grace begins to manifest. God takes the form of a Guru and appears to the devotee, teaches him the Truth and, moreover, purifies his mind by association with him. The devotee's mind thus gains strength and is then able to turn inward. By meditation it is further purified until it remains calm without the least ripple. That calm expanse is the Self. The Guru is both outer and inner. From outside he gives a push to the mind to turn inward while from inside he pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in quieting it. That is the Grace of the Guru. There is no difference between God, Guru and the Self.”<sup>3</sup>*

### Natural State

माण्डूक्यमुख्योपनिषत्सु दिष्टा ज्ञानाभिधा या सहजात्म निष्ठा।  
ससाधना तेन निजानुभूत्या सन्दर्शिता सा प्रतिपाद्यतेऽत्र॥ (2)

*māṇḍūkya mukhyopaniṣatsu diṣṭā jñānābhidhā yā sahajātma niṣṭhā  
sasādhanā tena nijānubhūtyā sandarśitā sā pratipādyate'tra*

*Herein is expounded the teaching about the Natural State of the Self, which is Pure Awareness. The same teaching which was revealed in the ancient scriptures like Mandukya and other principal Upanishads, is imparted again (by our divine Guru) based on his own experience, along with the means to reach that State.*

Lakshmana Sarma makes the intent or purpose of this book known at the outset – it is to systematically explain the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana, which are the expressions of his own experience. These teachings happen to be in total conformity with ancient scriptures, the Upanishads. Sarma is implying that the Divine Guru is One, who

<sup>3</sup> *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1. VII., Maurice Frydman, Sri Ramanasramam.



manifests again and again from the ancient to the modern times, to lead the ignorant masses to the supreme goal of abiding in the Natural State of pure Awareness.

Lakshmana Sarma picks out *Mandukya Upanishad* for a reason – the emphasis on *mano nasa* (the destruction of the mind) as the ultimate goal is notable in Bhagavan’s teachings as well as in *Mandukya Upanishad*. This Upanishad uses a different word, viz., *prapanchopasamam* which means: cessation of the world (which implies cessation of the mind that sees the world). This occurs in the seventh *mantra* of this shortest of all Upanishads. Just as Bhagavan refutes the relative Consciousness associated with the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep as unreal and illusory, the first part of this *mantra* negates all relative states of Consciousness and in the second half brings out the real nature of Atman.

*“That which does not cognise either internal objects, or external objects, which is not a mass of Consciousness, which is neither cognitive nor non-cognitive; that which cannot be seen, which cannot be described, which cannot be grasped, which has no distinctive marks, which cannot be thought of, which cannot be designated, that which is of the essence of oneness of the Self, that in which the world ceases to exist, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, such is the state of turiya (the fourth state). This is the Atman. That is to be known.” (Mandukya Upanishad, v.7)*

Permanent abidance in *Turiya* (the term used by *Mandukya Upanishad*) is the same as *sahaja sthiti* or Natural State, the term used by Bhagavan.

In Muruganar’s *Ramana Paada Maalai*, there is this beautiful description of the Natural State:

விவகாரம் தன்னிலும் மெய்ப்பரத்து ஞானந்  
தவறா திருக்கை சகஜமெனும் பாதம் (679)

*vivakaaram tannilumam meypparaththu jnanam  
tavaratirukkai sahajam enum paadam*

*Sahaja is that state where one does not slip out of the pure awareness of the Supreme State even while engaged in worldly activities. So says paadam (Sri Bhagavan).*

Giving an illustration about the Natural State (*Sahaja Samadhi*), Bhagavan says “Those who are in the *Sahaja* State are like a light in windless place, or the ocean without waves; that is, there is no movement. They cannot find anything which is different from themselves. But for those who do not reach that state, everything appears to be different from themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

Bhagavan also says, “There is no creation in the state of Realisation. When one sees the world, one does not see oneself. When one sees the Self, the world is not seen. So see the Self and realise there has been no creation.”<sup>5</sup> This extraordinary statement about non-creation of the world is another similarity between Bhagavan’s teachings and the teachings of Gaudapada, the commentator on *Mandukya Upanishad*. Bhagavan had always been an uncompromising Advaitin in his teachings and this work brings this out in all its grandeur. Sarma says that the *sadhana*, the method that Bhagavan teaches for gaining the Natural state is the same that he himself followed and became enlightened. Therefore, Bhagavan recommended Self-enquiry as a primary means for Self-Realisation.

### **If you know yourself, there will be no suffering**

Our spiritual journey begins with an acute awareness of imperfection in the world around us or with a sense of discontent or mental suffering. When the realisation dawns that there is no scope of obtaining perfect happiness unmixed with miseries from this world, one becomes fit for discipleship. Such an aspirant should approach a Guru who has freed himself totally from the shackles of *samsara* and who is peaceful. Such a Guru, on being approached with reverence, will reveal the secret of happiness thus:

ब्रूयात् स बुद्धः परमं रहस्यं समस्तबुद्धानुभवप्रसिद्धम्।  
जानासि चेत् स्वं न तवास्ति दुःखं दुःखी भवेस्त्वं यदि वेत्सि न स्वम्॥ (4)

*brūyāt sa buddhaḥ paramaṁ rahasyam*

*samastabuddhānubhavaprasiddham*

*jānāsi cet svaṁ na tavāsti duḥkhaṁ duḥkhī bhavestvaṁ yadi vetsi*

*na svam*

<sup>4</sup> *Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, 30th October 1947.

<sup>5</sup> *Be As You Are*, David Godman, p. 179.

*The Sage will reveal the Supreme Secret, confirmed by the experience of all the Sages: "If you know yourself, there is no suffering for you. If you suffer it only means that you do not know yourself."*

According to Advaita Vedanta, suffering is caused by ignorance of one's real nature which is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. This ignorance takes the form of ego which has put limitations on itself. Bhagavan says, "The cause of the misery is not in the life outside you; it is in you as the ego. You impose limitations on yourself and then make a vain struggle to transcend them. All unhappiness is due to the ego. If you deny the ego and scorch it by ignoring it, you would be free. To be the Self that you really are is the only means to realise the bliss that is ever yours."<sup>6</sup>

Whenever we are assailed by unhappiness, we must remember that unhappiness is not natural to us and turn our attention away from this mind-identified state towards the I-sense, in an effort at Self-enquiry. Moreover, our daily experience of freedom from suffering offers a great clue, as is brought out in the next verse.

यतः सुषुप्तौ न तवास्ति दुःखं त्वदीयमारोपितमेव नान्यत्।  
जिज्ञासया स्वं समवेत्य सत्यं निजस्वरूपे सुखरूप आस्व ॥ (5)

*yataḥ susuptau na tavāsti duḥkham tvadīyamāropitameva nānyat  
jijñāsayā svaṁ samavetya satyaṁ nijasvarūpe sukharūpa āssva*

*"Since you have no suffering in deep sleep, this suffering is only falsely ascribed to your Self. Realise the Truth of yourself by the resolve to know it and remain in that state which is bliss itself."*

Suffering belongs to the mind alone. Only when the mind operates, suffering is felt. In the state of deep sleep, where the mind is absent, suffering is not experienced. Bhagavan would repeatedly draw the attention of seekers to this everyday experience of everyone. In fact, as one goes through 'Talks with Ramana Maharshi', one cannot help but notice that Bhagavan took this line of approach to explain Reality most of the times. Just as 'Who Am I?', 'What was your experience

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

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in deep sleep?’ (or a variation of this), was a powerful weapon in Bhagavan’s arsenal. Here is a typical conversation:

Q: Worries of worldly life trouble me much and I do not find happiness anywhere.

M: Do these worries trouble you in sleep?

Q: No.

M: Are you the same person now as you were in sleep, or are you not?

Q: Yes.

M: So it proves that the worries do not belong to you.<sup>7</sup>

Bhagavan is pointing out that whenever the mind becomes still, as it does in deep sleep, one will be able to transcend suffering. Deep sleep state is temporary and the mind emerges from it after some time. Moreover, the stillness and the consequent freedom from worries and suffering is experienced unconsciously in deep sleep. When the stillness of sleep is experienced with full awareness, it will be *samadhi* or *turiya*. The Jnani abides permanently in the state of *turiya*, by destroying the mind. In this way, he has freed himself once and for all from suffering of all kinds. ▲

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<sup>7</sup> *Maha Yoga*, by ‘Who’.

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# Fulfilment of Desires

M.R. KODHANDRAM

We have created numerous desires in our life right from our childhood. Some have been fulfilled and the rest still remain in us awaiting fulfilment. There are also the unfulfilled desires carried forward from the previous births. The desires that exist in us (in our soul in the Heart) rise up every now and then in our mind urging us to fulfil them. Till they are fulfilled, the mind will be restless and we cannot concentrate on other matters. The more the intensity of the desire, the greater its pressure on us. What happens when the desire is fulfilled? There will be satisfaction and the mind will get peace. For instance, I have a strong desire to eat ice cream. It will keep rising in my mind as a thought and will gather intensity until I fulfil it. As soon as I eat the ice cream, the desire ends and I feel happy and satisfied for the time being. Why do I feel happy on fulfilling the desire? Bhagavan says that the mind after fulfilling a desire goes back to its source and experiences the happiness of the Self. But due to ignorance, we think that we obtained this happiness by eating the ice cream. The happiness we get through the objects of the world is

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known as pleasure. Thus an imprint of pleasure gets stored on our soul for ice cream. This causes the desire for ice cream to keep rising every now and then and we try to fulfil it.

Supposing we eat two or three ice creams, thinking about the pleasure we got, it may result in an upset stomach or a throat infection, which will give us pain. If pleasure were to really exist in the ice cream, then eating three ice creams should give us three units of pleasure. But the pleasure we get in eating the second ice cream is less than that of the first one. Eating the third ice cream will give us even lesser pleasure. This is the Law of Diminishing Marginal Returns in economics. After the third ice cream, we no longer wish to eat more ice cream as we suffer health consequences. Thus, all pleasures eventually lead to pain. This is the plan of Nature so that we may outgrow our desires and develop contentment. Having no desires is the best state of mind! We should realise that the pleasure is not in the object but in the intensity of our desire. See how a dog derives pleasure even from a dry bone. It soon enjoys tasting its own blood as the bone pricks its mouth. Thus, when the desires are eradicated, no one will find the objects of the world pleasurable.

Thus we should realise that there is NO inherent happiness or pleasure in any object of enjoyment. Bhagavan says that we imagine, through our ignorance, that we derive happiness from objects. Actually, when the mind goes out towards the objects of the world, it only experiences misery as we are going away from the Self. When an object of desire is obtained, the mind goes back to its source and experiences the happiness of the Self. Bhagavan says that this is like a person who goes out into the hot sun in search of some object of desire. After obtaining this object, he comes back to the cool shade and rests there in happiness. Again and again, desire makes him leave the cool shade and venture out into the hot sun. In contrast, Bhagavan says, a wise man stays in the shade. Thus *desirelessness is wisdom*. The mind of the wise does not go out towards any object of desire and his happiness is not dependent on external things. Only when we attain this *vairagya*m (desirelessness or detachment), will we be able to internalise the mind and take it to its source within to realise our true Self.

This teaching of Bhagavan's is very relevant in today's world because we find most people running after material things in order

to gain happiness. As the Buddha said, “The more we get, the more we want.” People who want more and more will never be satisfied in life. We should realise that the true and lasting happiness lies only in the Self.

Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Tirukkural*<sup>1</sup> #363, “There is no wealth as great as desirelessness; there is nothing equivalent to it (in merit) anywhere in the world.” In *Kural* #361, he says, “For all beings, desire is the seed for the never-ending cycle of births.” Therefore, in the next *Kural* (#362), he says, “If one desires, let it be the desire for not being born again; and that comes about only by seeking desirelessness.”

Thus, desirelessness is the greatest wealth one may wish to acquire as it will pave the way for the attainment of the imperishable wealth of jnana or Self-Realisation. The wealth of money, property or children is transient. The wealth of desirelessness or *vairagyam* is more precious than any other wealth, because, with this attainment, you will be able to progress on the spiritual path and attain Self-Realisation which will end your birth cycle itself as mentioned in the *Kural*. If you are desireless you will be contented with what comes to you of its own accord as per your *prarabdha*. Bhagavan told Devaraja Mudaliar,<sup>2</sup> “Do not seek anything unnecessarily. If it comes of its own accord, I do not object to your enjoying it.” In the great scripture *Yoga Vāsishtha*, it is said that contentment is the greatest gain. When you seek nothing in this world, you will get everything you need for your life from Nature and you will be peaceful too. Thus, there is no wealth richer than desirelessness.

Desire is like a fire; the more we feed it (with the oil of acquisition and gratification), the stronger it burns and there will be no end to our desires. In the olden days, people were happier because their desires were few and they were content with simple things. Thus, their minds were calmer. Such a mind contributes to good health and success in life.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavan was fond of *Tirukkural*, an ancient Tamil Scripture considered as the Tamil Vedas. *Kural* is a short couplet that has four words in the first line and three words in the second line.

<sup>2</sup> “நாமாப்போய் ஒன்றும் செய்து கொள்ளக்கூடாது. அதுவா வந்தா அனுபவிச்சுக்கோ, நான் வேணாங்கலே.” — *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana* by Devaraja Mudaliar, Chapter 3.

Let us take an example: suppose we want to go to a movie that has been just released. The mind will be restless till we see the movie. After seeing the movie, the desire is temporarily satisfied and the mind goes back to its source and experiences the happiness of the Self. We then feel happy that we have seen the movie. But ignorance and delusion make us think that our happiness was derived from the movie and hence our desire for movies gets strengthened. There is really no happiness inherent in the movie. *It was the absence of desire at the end of watching the movie that actually gave us happiness!* Thus desirelessness is the highest happiness. It is found by abiding in the Self. When we realise that happiness rests in the Self, the desire for the objects of the world ceases. Desires arise only because of the wrong understanding that objects contain happiness. When we realise the truth about happiness, the objects of the world cease to attract us. This was how Bhagavan lived his life in Tiruvannamalai, never seeking anything and satisfied with whatever came to him on its own accord.

The great Siddha Tirumular says in his famous work *Tirumandiram*:

ஆசை யறுமின்கள் ஆசை யறுமின்கள்  
ஈசனோ டாயினும் ஆசை யறுமின்கள்  
ஆசை படப்பட ஆய்வருந் துன்பங்கள்  
ஆசை விடவிட ஆனந்த மாமே. — #2615

It means,

“Cut off desires, cut off desires!

Except for God, one should cut off all other desires;

The more the desires, the more your sorrows;

The more you give up, the more your happiness shall be.”

[Generally, the second line is misinterpreted by many. In the second line, ஆயின் means but, except, தவிர; உம் is அசை, an expletive. Thus the second line of the verse means: except for ஈசன் or God, one should cut off all other desires!]

As long as the mind is deluded, it runs after the fleeting joys of the world. Once it tastes the joy ‘in’ an object or person, it gets attracted to it again and again. Thus the desire for an object or person becomes an attachment leading to bondage. Then the mind will cling to the object or person whom it is fond of or who gives joy to it. If the person



goes away or the object of desire is lost, then misery will arise as the attachment has externalised the mind. Until the desire is fulfilled there will be sorrow. Attachment is therefore very troublesome. So is our addiction to various enjoyments. We cannot easily give them up, and as the mind seeks to fulfil them, misery arises. Simple desires do not give so much trouble as they rise sporadically and once they are fulfilled, they will go away for a long time.

Simple wishing is like the stroke of a pencil; it can be erased easily. But if we go on deepening the stroke of the pencil by repeatedly writing with the pencil on the same line, the line will get dark and deep. Then you cannot erase it easily. *Sankalpas* (strong desires) are similar. If you go on wishing for the same thing, the wish becomes strong and you cannot erase it easily. Later on, the wish may possibly be fulfilled, but it will give us pain when the wish is not fulfilled. This is the way Nature makes us outgrow our desires. Thus we have to be very careful about what we wish for. If we cannot fulfil our desires in this lifetime, they will lead to more *janmas* for us. Thus, our *Mukti* will be delayed.

How do we overcome our desires? For example, we have the desire to purchase an independent house in a gated community. We had been thinking about this for a long time because some of our friends have purchased such houses. But when we enquire about them in the market, we may find that we cannot afford to buy them. We therefore decide that it is enough to buy a small flat and we settle for that. Thus our desire for an independent house comes to an end. In a similar manner, we can end all our inordinate desires by asking ourselves whether we really need those objects of our desire, what are the pros and cons like whether we have the means to afford, maintain or protect them etc., then we will be able to get the right understanding to decide whether to pursue the desire or let it go. Thus, only a thorough enquiry will take the mind to its roots to destroy the *vasanas* causing the desire.

Suppose, we are fond of buying clothes and we have not been able to fulfil this desire for a long time because of financial constraints. Then, whenever we get some money, we will go and buy new clothes. Initially, we will thank Bhagavan for giving us the money to buy new clothes. But after a few purchases, Bhagavan's Grace will make us enquire why we need to constantly buy more clothes when we already have enough

clothes. And if we still buy them, our conscience will start pricking us and we will pray to Bhagavan to help us overcome this desire. So the next time we go to buy clothes we will restrict our purchase. If we are used to buying 4 or 5 clothes, we will buy only one or two due to our timely enquiry. If we persist with our enquiry, we will be able to progressively weaken the desire and end it. Then we will buy clothes not out of desire, but only out of necessity. And when we buy new clothes, we will give away some of our old clothes to some needy person. In this manner, we will be able to overcome our desire through enquiry and prayers. Only then will we be able to make our mind subtle, making it suitable for practicing Atma Vichara or Self-Enquiry as taught by Bhagavan. This practice leads us to the discovery of our true Self within, ultimately uniting with it and guiding us towards our supreme goal of liberation.

Thus our desires can be ended only through an understanding based on investigation/enquiry and not through their suppression. A desire does not end merely by renouncing the object of desire. The desire itself has to be rooted out by destroying the *vasanas* through *sadhana* and enquiry. Thus rejecting the object of enjoyment is the first step and renouncing the desire is the final step.

As we enjoy the object of desire, if we enquire into the desire in a thorough manner — we should see whether we require it and how it lowers our mind etc. — the desire will automatically weaken. If we persist with this enquiry each time a desire manifests, the *vasanas* or seeds of our desires will get progressively weakened and, eventually, destroyed. This is the power of enquiry which Bhagavan has taught us. But, if we do not enquire in our mind at the time of fulfilling a desire, the desire will get strengthened, and it will keep rising again and again. In *Upadesa Saram*, verse 2, Bhagavan says, “The result of action (performed for the fulfilment of a desire) will on completion, leave seeds that would push you into an ocean of (similar) actions (in the future), and (this) will not fetch you Liberation (as *vasanas* strengthened will lead to rebirth).”

Thus, we should try to overcome all our desires through timely enquiry, prayers and surrender to Bhagavan. Does it mean that we should never enjoy anything in life? Bhagavan says, “As a general rule, there is no harm in satisfying a desire where the satisfaction will not lead to further desires by creating *vasanas* in the mind.” In this

aspect, Bhagavan also says, “Small desires such as the desire to eat, drink and sleep and attend to calls of nature, though these may also be classed among desires, you can safely satisfy. They will not create new *vasanas* in your mind, necessitating further birth.”<sup>3</sup>

Why do some of the desires refuse to end, even on repeated enquiry while some end on enquiry? What is the rule? If the desires are strong and deep-rooted, they will not go away by just an enquiry. They are probably there over the *janmas*. However, we must keep praying strongly and enquiring as and when we are affected by them. Our regular prayers and enquiry will put an end to our desires *after we fulfil them to some extent*. Then the *vasanas* would have weakened and we will be able to overcome them.

The purpose of prayer is also to help us remember not to indulge in the desire when we are faced with a situation wherein we are likely to get tempted. The prayer will give us the strength of mind to let go. Thus, through enquiry and prayers, we have to overcome all our desires and attachments. There are no shortcuts. We should realise that there is no unalloyed joy in the objects of the world. Pleasure always ends in pain. The mind realises this fact after repeated suffering over *janmas*. Then it will turn away from all pleasure-seeking and seek the path of steady peace that lies within, away from the world of dualities. This is the state of *vairagyam* (non-attachment) which comes through discrimination or *vivekam*. In order to progress on the Spiritual Path, we should start giving up our desires one by one with sense control and understanding, and develop some *vairagyam*. Otherwise, we cannot progress on the Path. Worldly desires will only take us back to the world and not to God who is 180° away, at the level of substratum. Any unfulfilled desire will also lead to future births. In some temples, *tulabaram* is done for material benefits. But in Arunachala, the desire is for Egolessness. Having no desires and ego are the highest objectives of life.

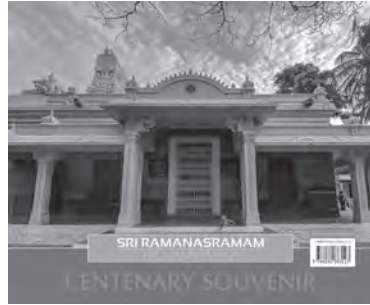
Thus, those who have set their minds on the goal of liberation should start controlling their desires and attachments and strive to end them through enquiry and prayers. They should not allow their senses to run freely in the world but check them. They must also overcome all their faults, bad habits and negative emotions through

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<sup>3</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12-4-1946, Devaraja Mudaliar, Sri Ramanasramam.

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enquiry and strive to make themselves pure and perfect. Only then, one will be able to make one's mind subtle, fit for doing *Atma Vichara* or Self-Enquiry as taught by Bhagavan, which will take one to the discovery of the true Self within and uniting with it leading to the supreme goal of liberation. May Bhagavan help us at every step so that we may attain the purpose of life in this very birth! ▲



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# Self-Enquiry: Some Objections Answered

D.E. HARDING

*Every issue, we will select one article from the issue of Mountain Path that began publication in 1964 i.e., 60 years ago. This is an article that appeared in April 1964.*

**H**ow is it that we need all this prodding, all these warnings and earnest invitations and promises of immense rewards, to persuade us to take a close look at ourselves? Why don't all intelligent and serious people make it their chief business in life to find out what they really are?

Surely, if such comparatively trivial questions as whether one is good-looking or not, popular or not, a 'success' or not, excite the keenest interest in us, the rather more important questions whether one is mortal or immortal, a body or spirit, created or Creator, should be that much more fascinating. Or so one would have supposed. To exist at all, somehow to have arrived on the scene — what astounding luck! — an intelligent something-or-other, and yet to remain uninterested in the nature of that something-or-other! It's incredible. Letting slip such an opportunity, foregoing (whether out of fear, laziness, or just negligence) the supreme privilege of discovering oneself, is more than unenterprising: it's a kind of madness, and none the less pitiful for being almost universal.

Thoughtful people, when challenged on this subject, are apt to excuse themselves by raising a number of objections to this inward search: they aren't at all sure it's a good thing. Of course (all agree) we need a working knowledge of our nature in order to make the best of ourselves and get on with others, but the probing can thrust too deep and go on too long. 'Know thyself' is all right up to a point, but shouldn't become an obsession, an end in itself, and certainly not our life's work: such introspection (they say) is likely to do more harm than good. And so: it's a selfish diversion of our energies from the service of others to preoccupation with ourselves; or it's a morbid introversion resulting in self-consciousness (in the bad sense) if not actually in mental illness; or it's time-consuming and unpractical, making us unfit for our jobs and even for family life; or it's depressing and dull, a dreadful bore, a dead end terminating in a mental blank; or it kills spontaneity and all natural, gay, out-going enjoyment; or it's a wonderful excuse for idleness and sponging; or it's coldly indifferent to art and to nature, to the beauty and wonder of the universe and the rich variety of the human scene, or it's a stupefying drug which reduces words to gibberish, stops thought, numbs the mind itself, exchanging our most highly-evolved human function for the nonhuman or subhuman Inane. More briefly, it's suspected that habitual looking within becomes selfish, unhealthy, futile, unnatural, idle, world-despising, retrogressive. In short, an escape. And the alternative? Apparently, it's that we should plunge right into the thick of things and find out what we are by living as fully as possible, becoming thoroughly involved in the turbulent and dangerous life-stream instead of sitting down quietly and letting it flow by.

Of course, these doubts and criticisms aren't the whole story: underlying them lurk deeper fears and less conscious obstacles. All the same, there's something in them: they deserve to be taken seriously, and that is the purpose of this article. Its aim is to show that, in fact, the seeming weaknesses of this prolonged looking at oneself are its strength, and so far from being a retreat from reality it renounces that retreat. It's turning round and facing the central fact at last instead of running in all directions away from it. Indeed it's the true panacea, and ultimately the only way to full life, happiness, sanity, and even the effective service of others. Not that these statements are to be accepted on trust. The didactic tone of this article is merely for the sake of brevity: the fruits

of true discovery are for tasting and not for dogmatising about. In this field, nothing's valid that we haven't tried out for ourselves.

First, then, take the accusation of selfishness. The typical Christian view is that we're not here to discover ourselves but to forget ourselves, concentrating on others and exchanging our natural self-centredness for the other-centredness of loving service.

But how can we really do very much good to others till we know ourselves profoundly? How much of our so-called help is in fact working off our guilt-feelings on the world, trying to resolve our conscious conflicts regardless of the real need; and how often our short-term help ends in long-term hindrance? It's notorious that material and even psychological aid, in solving one problem, is apt to create two more. Only the highest spiritual aid, given by one who really knows himself, and others through himself, can be guaranteed altogether beneficent and free from those unfortunate side-effects which go on and on so incalculably; and then the gift is probably a secret one, unexpressed and inexpressible. The truth is that helping oneself (which means finding oneself) is helping others, though the influence may be altogether subterranean. It goes without saying that we must be as kind as we can, but until we see clearly who is being kind we're working in the dark, with the hit-or-miss consequences that might be expected.

One of the troubles with this would-be forgetfulness of self in the service of others is that it's practically impossible: deliberate virtue rarely forgets to pat itself on the back a little. Goodness aimed at directly cannot avoid self-congratulation, and then its odour becomes unpleasant. But if, on the other hand, it's a mere by-product, arising naturally out of true knowledge of oneself, then it's quite indifferent to itself and any incidental merit or demerit, and so continues to smell sweet. Unfortunately, wrong effort to become a saint, or even a Sage, is a self-defeating (or rather, Self-defeating) enterprise ending in its opposite—an inflated ego. Whenever it's not a question of *discovering* the present facts but of somehow altering them, of achieving something in the future, then the ego is at work. The ego can't be defeated on its own ground. The only way to get rid of it is to turn from the time-ridden, ever changing outer scene where it thrives to the changeless Centre where it can never penetrate: in other words, the ego vanishes when one is oneself quite simply. Not only

does the inward search promise to restrain or reduce our egotism: in the end, it's the only way of abolishing it. Truly speaking, there's nothing whatever to do—except clearly to realise that wonderful fact. All that's necessary is to examine the spot one occupies; here, always, lies Perfection. Here, the egoless, universal Self shines with utmost brilliance, alone. Only disinterested Self-enquiry succeeds, and then quite incidentally, in rectifying our attitude to others, because it alone unites us to them, demonstrating that in truth there *are* no others.

To call this enquiry selfish is to confuse the self or ego with our true Self. The genuine, liberating Self-enquiry is concerned with our essence, not our accidents or peculiarities. Unlike the ordinary man, the one who's engaged in this enquiry isn't at all interested in what marks him off from other men (his personal characteristics, history, destiny, merits, faults) but only in what he shares with all. Therefore his researches can never be for himself as an individual human: they're a universal enterprise on behalf of all creatures. No-one and nothing's left out. This way works, but the merely human way of laboriously overcoming self-centredness, by trying to centre oneself on other people (feeling for them, seeing things from their viewpoint, etc.) doesn't work in the end. The total and permanent cure is to find one's true Centre within, to become altogether present and Self-contained.

Can such an enquiry be morbid, nevertheless? What is mental illness, in the last resort, but alienation from others and therefore from oneself? It's the shame and misery of the part trying to be a whole (which it can never be) instead of the whole (which it always is). We are all insane, more or less, till we find by Self-enquiry our absolute identity with everyone else.

Self-enquiry is also suspected of being, if not actually unhealthy, at least impractical. Some colour is given to this objection by the fact (painfully evident to anyone who gets mixed up with religious movements) that 'spiritual' people are quite often cranks, misfits, or inclined to be neurotic. Actually, this isn't surprising. Contented (not to say self-satisfied) people, fairly 'normal' and well adjusted and good at being human, aren't driven to finding out what else they may be. It's those who *need* to find out who they are, the fortunately desperate ones, who are at all likely to take up the enterprise of Self-discovery. A sound instinct tells them where their cure lies, though few find it.



So it is that the wordling may appear (and often actually be) a far better man than the spiritually inclined. Looking within doesn't transform the personality overnight. All the same, it's a sigh of success in this supreme enterprise that it altogether 'normalises' a man, fitting him at last for life and correcting awkwardnesses and weaknesses and uglinesses. Now he's truly adjusted: he knows how to live, prosper and be happy. Paradoxically, it's by discovering that he isn't a man at all that he becomes a wholly satisfactory man. Naturally so: once he sees who he really is, his needs, and his demands on others, rapidly dwindle; his ability to concentrate on any chosen task is remarkable; his detachment provides the cool objectivity necessary for practical wisdom: for the first time he sees people as they are; he takes in everything and is not himself taken in. At the start, Self-enquiry may not be the best recipe for making friends and influencing people, but in the end it's the only way to be at home in the world. Nothing else is quite *practical*. Sages are immensely effectual men, not a lot of dreamy incompetents.

Ah (say those who don't know), but their life is so dull, so monotonous. How is it possible, attending for months and years on end to what is admittedly featureless, without any content whatever, mere clarity, to avoid a terrible boredom? Discovering our North Pole may be fine, but do we then have to live there in the icy darkness where nothing ever happens?

Now the extraordinary truth is that, contrary to all expectations, this seemingly bleak and dreary Centre of our being is in fact endlessly satisfying, sheer joy, absolutely fascinating: there's not a dull moment here. It's our periphery, the world where things happen, which bores and depresses. Why should the colourless, shapeless, unchanging, empty, nameless Source prove (in actual practice not theory) so astonishingly interesting, while all its products, in spite of their inexhaustible richness, prove a great weariness in the end? Well, this curious fact just has to be accepted — thankfully. It can hardly be a matter of serious complaint that everything lets us down till we find out who's being let down. If we would only allow them, all things push us Self-wards.

They do so naturally. In fact, the whole business of Self-discovery (though so rarely concluded) is our normal function, our natural development, failing which we remain stunted, if not perverse or

freakish. Again, this is a surprising discovery. One would have imagined that any protracted inward gaze would have made a man rather less human, probably giving him a withdrawn look, an odd, self-occupied, and maybe forbidding manner. Actually, the reverse is true: only the Self-seeing man has the grace and charm of one who is perfectly free. To find the Source is to tap it. Take the case of the man who is morbidly self-conscious: there are two things he can do about it, the one a mere amelioration (if that) the other a true cure. The false cure for his shyness is to lose himself by moving out towards the world; the true cure is to find himself by moving in, till one day his self-consciousness becomes Self-consciousness, and therefore perfectly at ease everywhere. Nobody can, by any technique of self-forgetting, regain the naturalness, the simple spontaneity of the small child or the animal; but by the opposite process of Self-recollection he can gain something like that blessed state, though at a much higher level. Then he will know, as if by superior instinct, what to do and how to do it; and, rather more often, what not to do. Short of this goal, we are all more or less awkward and artificial, more or less bogus.

Is this an easy way out—out of the hell of responsibility and involvement and constant danger into a safe and unstreuous heaven? To look at the enquirer you might think so, but you couldn't be more mistaken. In a sense, admittedly, it's the easiest thing in the world to see what nobody else can see, namely what it's like to be oneself, what it's like *here*: the Light is blazingly obvious, the clarity transparently clear and unmistakable. But in another sense, alas, it's the most difficult thing in the world to see this Spot from this Spot: this mysterious Place one occupies, where one supposed there was some solid thing, a body or a brain, and where in fact is only the Seer Himself, is *too* wide open to inspection, *too* plain to catch our attention. All our arrows of attention point outwards; and they might be made of steel, so hard it is to bend them round to point in to the Centre, and still harder to prevent them springing back again immediately. Of all ambitions this is the most far-reaching, and no other adventure is anything like so daring or so difficult. This task, though clear and simple and natural, is also the one that requires more courage and persistence than most men have any idea of. The Sage has taken on an immense job: alongside him, Napoleon is a weakling. And this work,

which makes all other work seem like irresponsible pottering, is his perfect realisation that there's nothing whatever to do!

Is the result worth the trouble? Is there nothing of value out there, nothing worthy of our attention and love? Turning our backs on a universe so magnificent and so teeming, and on all the treasures of art and of thought, and above all on our fellow beings, is surely a huge loss. The Sage — so it's reported — isn't interested in these matters: the world consists of things he doesn't wish to know: for him, knowledge of particular things is only ignorance. Is his achievement, after all, so difficult and so rare only because it's fundamentally wrong to despise the world?

Once more, the boot's on the other foot. Oddly enough, it's the man who attends only to the outer scene, ignoring what lies at its Centre, who's more or less blind to that scene. For the world is a curious phenomenon that, like a faint star, can be clearly observed only when it isn't directly looked at. It's an object that will not fully reveal itself till we look in the opposite direction, catching sight of it in the mirror of the Self. Like the Gorgons, it won't bear straight inspection. This isn't a dogma, but a startling practical fact. For example, though the world is sometimes beautiful when directly viewed as quite real and self-supporting, it's always beautiful when indirectly viewed as a product or accident of the Self. When you see who's here you see what's there, as a sort of bonus. And this bonus is a delightful surprise: the universe is altogether transformed. Colours almost sing, so brilliant and glowing they are; shapes and planes and textures arrange themselves into charming compositions; nothing's repulsive or despicable or out of place. Every random patterning of objects — treetops and cloud banks, leaves and stones on the ground, human figures and cars and shop windows, stains and tattered posters on old walls, litter of all kinds — each is seen to be inevitable and perfect in its own unique way. And this is the very opposite of human imagination: it's divine realism, the clearing of that imaginative, wordy smoke-screen which increasingly hides the world from us as we grow older and more knowing.

Indeed the path of Self-enquiry is no escape route: it's the shortest way in, our highroad to the keenest enjoyment of the world. Yet, seemingly, it's incompatible with any other serious creative endeavour,

whether artistic or intellectual or practical. If so, this is surely a considerable drawback.

It's true that Self-enquiry will never succeed till we put our whole heart into it, and consequently the dedicated Artist-Philosopher-Scientist is an unpromising subject. Actually this is not, however, because he is too devoted to his calling, but because he's not yet devoted enough, not yet absolutely serious about it: he needs to deepen and widen his field till it includes both himself and the whole world. For the only consistent genius, the only complete Artist-Philosopher-Scientist, is the Sage, who is fully conscious of being the painter of the entire World-picture, the thinker of all thought, the Universe-inventor, Knowledge itself. This doesn't mean, of course, that he has all the details at his fingertips, but he does see what they all amount to in their innermost essence and outermost sum, namely his true Self. And whenever a question of detail does arise, his response is the correct one. His mind-lessness is the indispensable basis of a smoothly functioning mind: his Self-information includes all the other information he needs. In short, he's sage, which means wise: not clever and learned and with a head full of ideas, but altogether simple and — literally — clear-headed.

Even in ordinary life we find hints of this vital connection between Self-awareness and creativity. Don't our very best moments always include a heightened consciousness of ourselves, so that we aren't really 'lost' in admiration or creative fervour or love, but newly found? At its finest, doesn't the opaque object over there point unmistakably back to the transparent subject here? It may even happen that the transparency comes first: we attend, our idiotic inner chatter dies down, we consciously become nothing but an alert, expectant void — and presently the required tune or picture, the key notion, the true answer, arrives ready-made in that void, from that void. With luck (or grace) and some practice, we may occasionally and imperfectly enjoy this insight into the process of Creation itself. It is the life of the fully Self-aware.

The result of observing only the universe is that one ends as a kind of one-man resistance movement in it. Anxiety mounts to cosmic proportions. Only observing the observer of the universe will finally put a stop to a man's worrying and fussing and scheming. When his interest is diverted inwards he naturally relaxes his hold — his strangle-hold —

on the outer world. Having withdrawn his capital and paid it into his own Central Bank (where it immediately appreciates to infinity) he has nothing to lose out there and no reason for interfering. He knows how to let things be, and work out in their own time. He's in no hurry. Knowing the Self, he can hardly fail to trust its products: whatever occurs is agreeable to him, because even if it weren't it could never touch his real Being. In Christian terms, he has no will but God's; what he wants is what happens, and what happens is what he wants. Paradoxically, his obedience to the nature of things is his rule over them: his weakness is all-powerful. And the secret of his power is that he isn't concerned with events at all these things shall be added unto you.' Seek ye first these things, and even they shall be taken away.

This perfect obedience isn't just lining oneself up with God's will, or imitating it, or even becoming part of it: it's that very will itself in full operation. If we wish to find out exactly what it's like to make the world, we have only to desire nothing and pay attention. But total acceptance is very hard. It's precisely the opposite of the lazy indifference that merely lets things slide. It springs from inner strength, not weakness, and is the result of concentration, not weakness, and is the result of concentration, not slackness. Why is the world so troublesome, so frightful? Is it like that by nature, or because we make it seem so by our negligence? Is it perhaps so terrible a place because we take the easy way of fighting it instead of the difficult way of fitting in with it? We have to find out for ourselves the truth of the Sage's demonstration that even in the smallest things the way of non-interference, of giving up all self-will, of 'disappearing', is astonishingly practical, the wisdom that works. Not only in the long run, but from moment to moment, *consciously* getting out of the Light, giving place to whatever things present themselves in it, instantly puts them right. We do too much and therefore remain ineffectual; we talk far too much and therefore say nothing; we think far, far too much and therefore prevent the facts from speaking for themselves — so say those who know the power of emptiness. It's for us to make our own tests, not — repeat *not* — by the direct method of trying to be inactive and quiet and mindless (it just won't work) but by the indirect method of seeing who was trying to be like that. No man becomes Godlike except by seeing he isn't a man anyway.

His experience of deification has no content whatever, no details:

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it's not merely indescribable, but non-mental or non-psychological, and in the truest sense non-human. Thinking or talking about it destroys it at once, by complicating what is simplicity and obviousness itself. It's rather like tasting sugar or seeing green: the more you reflect on it the further you get from the actuality. But there the resemblance ends. Seeing green is an ineffable experience because it's a prehuman or infra-human one; seeing the Seer of green is an ineffable experience because it's a post-human or superhuman one. The Sage's rejection of the concept-ridden, word-clouded mind is poles apart from the sensualist's or the beatnik's: Self enquiry isn't retrogression, but the next evolutionary step beyond man, or rather the whole path from him to the goal. And though the goal is beyond thought, pure limpidity, void even of voidness, it's also nothing but the Honest Truth at last. For only the Self can be *known*: everything else is partly guesswork, partly false. Only Self-awareness is wide-awake and fully observant: all other awareness is mind-wandering. Total alertness *is* the Self.

And so, every fault we could find with Self-enquiry has turned out to be only a merit, disguised by its very perfection. Certainly there are kinds of introspection which are harmful, but they're concerned with the ego or empirical self and the very opposite of the true enquiry, which is pre-eminently healthy and sane, creative, natural life-enhancing, intensely practical, and altruistic. Though obviously we're not all ready for it yet, and some of us have left it terribly late, it's what we're here for. To neglect it is in every sense a shame.

It would still be shameful neglect, unworthy of our energy and intelligence, even if Self-enquiry promised no pay-off at all. And in any case its benefits are purely coincidental; the only way to have them is to care nothing for them, but only for the unvarnished Truth about ourselves, no matter how unedifying it might prove. *If all we want is to see who we are, nothing can stop our doing so this very instant.* But if our plan is to use that vision to buy happiness or liberation or any other goods, we might as well abandon the very idea of Self-enquiry. Our Light is for lighting up itself alone. ▲

# Muruganar in His Own Words

## Part One

HARI MOORTHY

In over three thousand years of known Tamil history, there have been only a few poets who reached the exalted status of being a devotee-poet yearning for the divine Grace. Objectively speaking, there are roughly about a few hundred or so scholarly Tamil devotee-poets whose poems are still widely available for us to read and enjoy. However, the present day reader does not know many of their life stories through their own words, for humility is a hallmark of many of these devotees. The reader is, therefore, often left with legends and parables. No matter how one slices and dices, Muruganar belongs to that elite group of poets whose poems will last for another two thousand years and beyond. It wouldn't be surprising if, in 4043 AD, a devotee might struggle to place Muruganar alongside Manickavasagar on the time-scale and fail to appreciate the circumstances under which Muruganar composed

Hari Moorthy is well-versed in the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana with special emphasis on the poetry of Muruganar.

his poetry. This is much the same way readers currently may fail to appreciate how Appar or Nammazhwar composed their respective verses on their favorite deities, as the reader could only read their legacies through legends.

An unsuspecting commoner who walked into Sri Ramanasramam in the early 1930s would not have recognised Muruganar as one of the best poets that mother Tamil ever gave birth to over her long and illustrious history. It would have been impossible for that commoner to know such a great poet who stood with folded hands far from the center with unkempt hair, humble body language, and absolute surrender to his magnificent Sadguru, whose physical form attracted many devotees from far and wide. Muruganar, for his part, did not care for recognition; nor would he seek fame of any kind beyond what his own Sadguru would bestow upon him, as a recognition of his exalted status as a poet, by comparing him to Manickavasagar.<sup>1</sup> Even then, Muruganar had to struggle to publish a book of poems,<sup>2</sup> which could only be compared to the best of what Tamil could produce dating back to the seventh century. At that time, only a few could even fathom where Muruganar's status belonged in the annals of Tamil history. The chief among them was our beloved Bhagavan, who, at every turn, encouraged Muruganar to keep going with his poetic work. A divine force, a physical manifestation of what could only be described as God, was supporting Muruganar. The real greatness of Muruganar lies in recognising this aspect very early in his poetic career and subsequently making himself an instrument of this divine will to allow poetry to flow out of him. In other words, his humility is justifiably understandable and absolutely necessary because that divine force used Muruganar's vocabulary and intellect to create whatever poems it desired. This absolute surrender serves as the best inspiration and the most sophisticated spiritual education for Bhagavan's devotees for generations to come. It stands as the best example of total surrender to one's Sadguru. Bhagavan, when explaining about surrender, said, "If one has entirely surrendered

<sup>1</sup> In a verse composed by Bhagavan, attributed to Viswanatha Swami; This verse is placed at the beginning of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*.

<sup>2</sup> As described in the October 1968 edition of *The Mountain Path*.



oneself is there any part left to ask for Grace? He is swallowed up by Grace.”<sup>3</sup>

Would Muruganar, or even Bhagavan, concur with these statements and the thesis of Muruganar’s surrender? What would Muruganar say? Is it possible to hear from him directly?

While Muruganar’s writings were predominantly centered on Bhagavan, his teachings, and the divine grace that transformed a devoted soul like himself, it is evident that Muruganar was not primarily focused on composing autobiographical accounts. However, he did leave behind numerous verses that offer glimpses into his own spiritual journey, thoughts, and emotions. These autobiographical verses provide a unique opportunity for readers to trace Muruganar’s evolution as a devotee and understand the depths of his devotion.

As for whether Muruganar and Bhagavan would concur with the interpretations and the thesis of his surrender, one can only speculate. While Bhagavan Sri Ramana was known for his humility and spreading peace through silence, he often emphasized that he saw no difference between himself and others. Therefore, he rarely commented on individuals’ writings about him or their personal experiences. The beauty of Muruganar’s writings lies in their heartfelt authenticity. Even if we cannot hear directly from him, his verses provide invaluable insights into his spiritual journey and the profound impact of Bhagavan Ramana on his life. It is through these verses that the reader can attempt to understand the depth of his devotion and his perpetual surrender.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana said, “If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently.”<sup>4</sup> Muruganar, as a totally surrendered devotee of Bhagavan, was never the one to deviate from his Sadguru’s words; he abided in the light of the guru’s holy feet. Bhagavan, on his part, took care of Muruganar’s needs in his own natural way as things unfolded in Muruganar’s life. ▲

(To be continued)

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<sup>3</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanasramam, Talk 319.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Talk 42.



## KEYWORD

# Na Saṁśayaḥ: The end of doubt

## Part Five

B.K. CROISSANT

When Sri Ramana Maharshi was in Virupaksha Cave, he translated into Tamil Sanskrit verses from a chapter of *Devikālottaram*, an ancient text from the Saiva *āgamas* on the subject of the means for attaining liberation and the appropriate conduct for aspirants, on his own initiative and without any prompting whatsoever. Later, in 1933, he translated *Ātma Sākṣātkāra Prakaraṇam* (*Chapter on Self Realisation or Direct Perception*) from the *Sarva Jñānottaram* (*The Pinnacle of All Knowledge*), another ancient text from the *āgamas*, at the request of a devotee.<sup>1</sup> The subject was essentially the same, and in both cases the narrator was Siva himself, addressing his beloved consort in the first instance and his son Guha in the second. The earlier translation was the subject of a series of articles, based on

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<sup>1</sup> In 1998 Sri Ramanasramam published *Jñānācāra Vicāra* (contained in *Devikālottaram*) with Sanskrit and Tamil text and, in 1999, *Ātma Sākṣātkāram* with original Sanskrit text in Bhagavan's own handwriting. Both are currently unavailable.

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.

keywords, that attempted to show how Bhagavan shed light on the original Sanskrit verses by comparing them to his version in Tamil.<sup>2</sup> This is the first of three articles on the second translation that will attempt to demonstrate, again with the use of keywords, how *ātma vicāra*, which includes *bhakti* or complete surrender, greatly heightens and intensifies ancient texts in general. In that way, Bhagavan gives mature devotees a discrete but giant push forward in their practice.

Both *Devikālottaram* and *Ātma Sākṣātkāram* are perfect for those of us who have lingering doubts and feel in a rut. Studying them and putting them into practice, with Bhagavan’s support, could inspire us to begin a fresh chapter in our spiritual growth! See how lovingly Kanakammal depicts their beauty.

“These delightful translations provide the cream of the *Upanishads* — the crown of the *Vedas* — and those who have no knowledge of Sanskrit need have no regrets for this single work provides all there is to know by the study of them. Listening to or singing them, coupled with the endeavours to practise its teachings, will definitely lead one to the land of the Self. It is the experience of many that a mere listening of it lulls one into the hushed silence of the mind, a peep into which is provided for a very brief period at the conclusion of *Pārāyaṇa* every evening in his holy shrine.”<sup>3</sup>

Now onto the keyword *na samśayaḥ*. Etymologically speaking, *samśayaḥ* comes from the prefix *sam* plus the verbal root *śī* meaning ‘to grow languid, become feeble; to waver, be uncertain or doubtful, hesitate; to lie down for a rest; to differ in opinion or disagree about’. The masculine noun denotes ‘lying down to rest or sleep; uncertainty, irresolution, hesitation, doubt in or of’. The words *na samśayaḥ*, *nāsti samśayaḥ*, *nātra samśayaḥ* or *nāsty atra samśayaḥ* all mean ‘there is no doubt’ or ‘without doubt’. In philosophical terms, *samśayaḥ* is one of the sixteen categories of the Nyāya school. It can be cognition of conflicting notions regarding the same object, and some say there are five types.

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<sup>2</sup> The keyword of the first two articles, which appeared in the April-June and July-September 2023 issues of the *Mountain Path*, was *ālamba*. *Cal*, *cañc* is treated in the October-December 2023 issue and *sūnyam* in the January-March 2024 issue.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume I, T.R. Kanakammal, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2011, p. ix.

Finally, doubt can be considered neither true nor false.<sup>4</sup> That said, none of the philosophical uses are the subject of this article! Rather, it is the notion that doubt is the enemy of Silence and must be eradicated.

So what is doubt? Doubt consists of thoughts imagined by the mind or ego. When aspirants earnestly commit to the path of *jñāna*, they read sacred texts and listen (*śravaṇa*) to a trusted guru, deeply contemplate (*manana*) the meaning, and ask questions in order to clear their doubts. It is a necessary process that is mental and conceptual but, through intense meditative practice (*nididhyāsana*), leads to experiential knowledge without which we can never attain Sivahood. In her commentary on *Ātma Sākṣātkāram*, Kanakammal succinctly expresses the contrast between *parokṣa*, indirect knowledge, and *aparokṣa*, direct knowledge.

“Preparation for a headlong plunge into the practice after observing *śravaṇa* and *manana* with great faith is called *parōkṣa jñāna*. The mind, due to nescience, has become impregnated with *vāsanās*. When all these *vāsanās* are burnt up by intense *sādhanā* what remains is the condensed essence of *jñāna* in the form of simple awareness of pure ‘Being’. But for the realisation that it is this awareness of the Self that remains within the Intellect, illumines and activates it, the *aparōkṣa jñāna* cannot come about. Real knowledge dawns only when, with the knowledge that can be comprehended by the intellect, the awareness that activates the intellect, is known. This knowledge of the Self is beyond the scope of denotative knowledge or objective knowledge which can be objectified and pointed out specifically as ‘that’ or ‘this’. This is the experience of the Self by the Self and is called *aparōkṣa jñāna*.”<sup>5</sup>

Now let’s turn to the text. It opens with a benedictory verse in which Bhagavan states that the subject of the treatise is direct awareness of the Self told by Siva to his son Guha, this time told in Tamil by the *ātman* seated in Bhagavan’s Heart.<sup>6</sup> In the first verse Lord Siva

<sup>4</sup> *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, John Grimes, State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume I, T.R. Kanakammal, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2011, p. 246.

<sup>6</sup> In the benedictory verses to his translations of the *Ātma Bodha* and *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram*, Bhagavan also states that the *ātman* seated in his Heart is speaking through him in Tamil. The *ātman* in him is the same *ātman* in Shankara, speaking different

tells Guha he will teach him a different way to reach Reality which pervades everything but is too subtle to be grasped by the mind. This method, by which direct perception is attained, leads the knower to become Siva Himself. The teaching, which is beyond the ken of logicians, has been passed down through the lineage of gurus, and its purpose is liberation from the birth and death cycle. It involves the most exalted knowledge and shines at all times in all places. In verses 4 and 5 the method itself is revealed. It is not more rituals to perform with body, speech, and mind! Quite simply, it is meditating ceaselessly on Siva as ‘He am I’ with the mind devoid of thoughts. Because there are no thoughts, it is not meditation on an object but rather merely being, which constitutes direct perception and is the highest state. That’s it. And that is the subject of the entire treatise of 62 verses! Bhagavan beautifully expresses the method in verses 8 and 9 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, here translated by Sadhu Om.

*Rather than anya-bhava, ananya-bhava (done with the conviction) ‘He is I’, is indeed the best among all (the various kinds of meditation).*

*By the strength of meditation (that is, by the strength of such ananya-bhava or Self-attention), abiding in the state of being, which transcends meditation, alone is the truth of supreme devotion (para-bhakti-tattva).*

Michael James wrote the following commentary largely based on explanations from Sadhu Om.

“*Anyabhava* means meditation upon God as other than oneself, while *ananya-bhava* means meditation upon Him as not other than oneself. In order to meditate upon God as not other than oneself, it is necessary to have the firm conviction that He is that which exists and shines within one as ‘I’. When an aspirant is endowed with such a firm conviction, he will clearly understand that the best way to meditate upon God is to meditate upon Him merely as ‘I’, the reality of the first person.

Therefore, it should be understood that the words *avan ahan ahum* (He is ‘I’), which Sri Bhagavan has used in this verse in apposition to the words *ananya-bhava*, are not intended to indicate that one should

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languages in different manifestations. In her commentary on the benedictory verse to *Ātma Sākṣātkāram*, Kanakammal treats in great detail various identities ascribed to Bhagavan, including Lord Guha, and discusses their meanings for devotees. See pages 238-241 in her *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume I.

meditate upon the thought ‘He is I’, but are merely intended to denote the conviction with which one should meditate upon the Self. That is, since the Self alone is *ananya* (that which is not other than oneself) and since all thoughts, including the thought ‘He is I’, are *anya* (other than oneself), the *ananya-bhava* recommended in this verse should be understood to mean meditation upon the Self or Self-attention rather than mere meditation upon the thought ‘He is I’.

Having gained the firm conviction that God is that which shines in him as ‘I’, the meditator will try to meditate upon ‘I’, which alone is *ananya* or not other than himself. But since the meditator can remain as an individual only so long as he attends to what is *anya* or other than himself, he will automatically subside in his source when he completely withdraws his attention from what is *anya* and tries to fix it upon ‘I’. Therefore what results from such *ananya-bhava* — the effort made to attend to ‘I’ — is that the meditator himself becomes non-existent by merging in the state of being (*sat-bhava*). When the meditator thus becomes non-existent, no meditation can take place, and hence that state is here said to be *bhavanatita*, that which transcends meditation. And since God is in truth nothing but the real Self, which is the state of being (*sat-bhava*), abiding in that state without ever leaving it, is itself the supreme devotion to God.”<sup>7</sup>

So the firm conviction that ‘He is I’ is a prerequisite to experiencing direct awareness. To encourage that conviction, ‘He am I’ or a version of it is repeated over and over again in the opening verses of *Ātma Sākṣātkāram*, and in two instances, verses 7 and 16, ‘*na samśayaḥ*’ strengthens it.

अलिङ्गमक्षरं शान्तं विषयातीतगोचरम् |  
अविभाव्यमसंदेहं तदहं नात्र संशयः ||

aliṅgam akṣaram śāntaṁ viṣayāṭīta-gocaram  
avibhāvyaṁ asaṁdehaṁ tad ahaṁ nātra saṁśayaḥ

<sup>7</sup> *Upadesa Undiyar of Bhagavan Sri Ramana* with introduction, word-for-word English translation and notes, Sri Sadhu Om and Michael James, Sri Ramana Kshetra Kanvashrama Trust, Tiruvannamalai, 2004, pp. 23-25. It is important to note that although verses 8 and 9 lead to Self-attention and the highest knowledge, they do not describe *ātma vicāra* (Self-enquiry), which is the subject of the last half of the composition in thirty verses.





*Devoid of any identifiable features, indestructible, serene, outside the realm of senses, beyond thoughts and uncertainty, That I am without any doubt whatsoever.<sup>8</sup>*

योऽसौ सर्वेषु शास्त्रेषु पठ्यते ह्यज ईश्वरः |  
अकायो निर्गुणो ह्यात्मा सोऽहमस्मि न संशयः ||

yo'sau sarveṣu śāstreṣu paṭhyate hyaja īśvaraḥ  
akāyo nirguṇo hyātmā so'ham asmi na saṁśayaḥ

*That one who is invoked in all the scriptures as the birthless Isvara, the ātman alone, formless and devoid of attributes, He am I without any doubt.*

The word *na saṁśayaḥ* also appears in verse 14 but this time in a different context. Once the meditator or the false 'I' as ego is experienced as non-existent, all that remains is the *ātman*. In that state, all that is seen is pure consciousness.

अद्वैतभावनायुक्तः सर्वत्रात्मनि संस्थितः |  
सर्वगं सर्वदेहस्थं पश्यत्यत्र न संशयः ||

advaita-bhāvanā-yuktaḥ sarvatrātmani saṁsthitaḥ  
sarvagaṁ sarva-dehasthaṁ paśyatyatra na saṁśayaḥ

*Established in the conviction of non-duality, everywhere fixed in the ātman within, he sees the Lord in all embodied beings. There is no doubt about that.*

Notice the differences between the original Sanskrit verse and Bhagavan's translation in Kanakammal's paraphrase:

*That yogī of ceaseless practise of this non-dual attitude with an awareness of non-difference abiding as Ātman forever and in all places, beholds only Siva, the Supreme Self, in all perceivable objects and in all physical frames.<sup>9</sup>*

In verse 17, *na saṁśayaḥ* makes firm the certainty that living in the world of thoughts is *saṁsāra*, while abiding in Siva, the *ātman*, is eternal bliss.

<sup>8</sup> Translations from the original Sanskrit verses are by the author.

<sup>9</sup> *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmalai*, Volume I, T.R. Kanakammal, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2011, pp. 278-279.

अविज्ञातः पशुः स हि सृष्टिधर्म समाश्रितः |  
विज्ञातः शाश्वतः शुद्धः स शिवो नात्र संशयः ||

avijñātaḥ paśuḥ sa hi sṛṣṭi-dharmaṁ samāśritaḥ  
vijñātaḥ śāśvataḥ śuddhaḥ sa śivo nātra saṁśayaḥ

*The one who does not know his true nature is indeed a paśu subject to dharma beginning with creation. The one who knows his true nature is Siva, everlasting and pure, without any doubt whatsoever.*

In Sanskrit ‘paśu’ has many meanings, such as ‘cattle (collectively), an animal in general, a being, a brute, beast.’ The *jīva* can be likened to a tethered beast or a beast of burden. Here is the translation by Michael James:

*He who does not know his own reality [which is Self] is indeed a paśu [a soul bound by pāsa or attachment] who is subject to the dharma [the established law] beginning with creation [sustenance, destruction, veiling and Grace]. Whoever knows his own reality will ever exist and is perfectly pure (visuddha); he himself is Siva. Know that there is no doubt [about this].<sup>10</sup>*

Bhagavan ends his translation of the verse with the question, referring to the one who knows his own reality, ‘Where then is rebirth for him?’.

Finally, *na saṁśayaḥ* takes another form, *asaṁdehāt*, in verse 21.

धर्माः सन्त्यात्मनः सर्वे यदेव परिकल्पयेत् |  
तत्तद्भवत्यसदेहात् सदा तद्भावभावतः ||

dharmāḥ santyātmanaḥ sarve yad eva parikalpayet  
tattad bhavatyasaṁdehāt sadā tad bhāva-bhāvataḥ

*The source of all qualities is ātman. Whichever qualities the jīva may wish to bring about, he always becomes each of them. This is beyond doubt because that is the way it is.*

Bhagavan’s version, translated by Kanakammal, is truly inspiring!  
*All dharmas like virtuous qualities, conduct and deeds, repose in and are supported by the Self. Whatever the jīva resolves to create, thinking of it by a single-pointed mind persistently and repeatedly, he*

<sup>10</sup> *Collected Works*, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1996, p. 173.

*attains the object so thought of. There is no doubt in this. Therefore think of this True Content persistently and attain It.*<sup>11</sup>

How do we get rid of doubts? By killing the doubter, turning inward and attending only to the *ātman*. Then all thoughts, including all doubts, cease to exist. It is worthy of note that in Bhagavan's translation of *Ātma Sākṣātkāram*, he repeatedly and compassionately adds at the end of almost 20 verses, short but powerful words, like *tēr* (investigate, examine, know, understand), *ōr* (consider attentively, examine, investigate, know), *ari* (know, be aware, experience, recognise, understand), *uṅar* (be aware, know, understand) and *pār* (see, look, observe, scrutinise, examine, know). They are in the imperative, causing pause and encouraging us directly to counter doubt with surrender.

There is an amazing account of Dakshinamurti that says it all. In this case, the youthful Siva takes his disciples from doubt to silence, the message being that the bridge must be crossed, the leap must be made from *parokṣa* to *aparokṣa*! Bhagavan told the following story to Muruganar who told it to Sadhu Om.

“When the four aged Sanakadi Rishis first saw the sixteen-year-old Sri Dakshinamurti sitting under the banyan tree, they were at once attracted by him, understanding him to be the real Sadguru. They approached him, did three *pradakshinas* (circumambulations) around him, prostrated before him, sat at his feet and began to ask very shrewd and pertinent questions about the nature of reality and the means of attaining it. Because of the great compassion and fatherly love (*vātsalya*) which he felt for his aged disciples, the young Sri Dakshinamurti was overjoyed to see their earnestness, wisdom and maturity, and hence he gave apt replies to each of their questions. But as he answered each consecutive question, further doubts rose in their minds and they asked further apt questions. Thus they continued to question Sri Dakshinamurti for one whole year, and he continued to clear their doubts through his compassionate answers. Finally, however, Sri Dakshinamurti understood that if he gave more answers to their questions, more doubts would rise in their minds and hence there would never be an end to their ignorance (*ajnana*). Therefore, suppressing even the feeling of compassion and fatherly love which

<sup>11</sup> *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, Volume I, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2011, pp. 301-302.

was welling up within him, he merged himself into the supreme silence. Because of their great maturity (which had been ripened to perfection through their year-long association with the Sadguru), as soon as Sri Dakshinamurti thus merged himself, they too were automatically merged within into silence, the state of Self.”

Wonderstruck on hearing Sri Bhagavan narrating the story in this manner, Sri Muruganar remarked that in no book is it mentioned that Sri Dakshinamurti ever spoke anything. “But this is what actually happened”, replied Sri Bhagavan. From the authoritative way in which Sri Bhagavan thus replied and from the clear and descriptive way in which he had told the story, Sri Muruganar understood that Sri Bhagavan was none but Sri Dakshinamurti himself.”<sup>12</sup>

Great truths are in the end quite simple, but to know them we must, with purified minds, dive deeply, letting go of old habits in favour of new ones. At that point, the only truly useful doubt is doubting the reality of the doubter. Why hesitate? Why hold back? Why be consumed by obstructing doubts when the goal is so close at hand and the method so simple? Here Bhagavan succinctly makes *aparokṣa* abundantly clear.

“Each one knows the Self but is yet ignorant. The person is enabled to realise only after hearing the *mahavakya*. Hence the Upanishadic text is the eternal Truth to which everyone who has realised owes his experience. After hearing the Self to be the Brahman the person finds the true import of the Self and reverts to it whenever he is diverted from it. Here is the whole process of Realisation.”<sup>13</sup>

The more you feel and experience the clarity of awareness that comes from *ātma vicāra*, the easier detachment from the ego becomes. Eventually the clarity will swallow the false ‘I’ entirely. Be done with doubt (*na samśayah*)! Open your heart to the peace and bliss within! Muruganar states it beautifully:

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<sup>12</sup> This account was published in the January 1982 issue of the *Mountain Path*, pages 7-12, in an article on the *kalivenbā* version of *Ekātma Vivekam* that consists of a translation by Sadhu Om and Michael James as well as explanatory notes by Sadhu Om. In our own time, devotees have described silent initiation as an extraordinarily intense look from Bhagavan’s eyes of fire. When it occurs, there is often an unmistakable physical manifestation of some sort, and all doubts are removed.

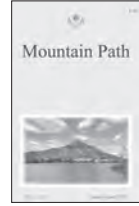
<sup>13</sup> *Talks*, #647.

*When, through investigation, one comes to know the heart, the place of one's arising, the ego, 'I', which till now has been appearing as if it were itself the underlying reality, will bow its head and be destroyed. As that 'I', the bogus source subsides more and more into the place of its arising, the ātman, the true underlying reality, will shine forth, directly apprehended (aparokṣa).<sup>14</sup>*

*Śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ*

(to be continued) ▲

<sup>14</sup> Verse 362. See *Guru Vāchaka Kōvai*, Composed by Sri Muruganar, Prose paraphrase by Sri Sadhu Om, Translated by Robert Butler, Sri Ramana Center of Houston, 2023, p. 82.



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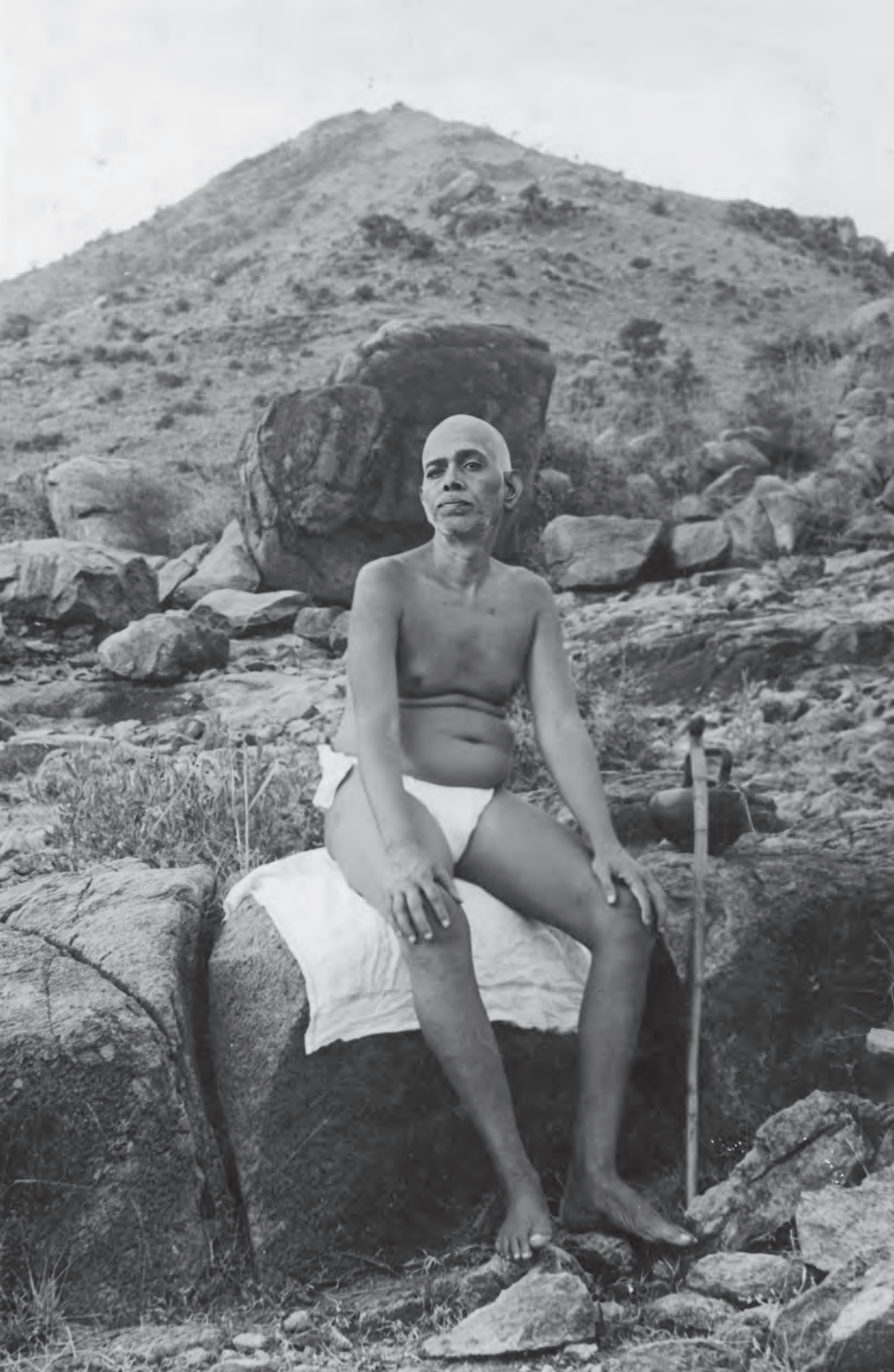
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## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's Darshan

UMA SHANKAR

**M**y father P.S. Sitapati who had the fortune of having the blessings of great gurus whom he revered, was fortunate to have Bhagavan's darshan just a few days before Bhagavan attained Nirvana. He would have narrated to us a innumerable times this auspicious anecdote and each time while narrating he would become emotional and moved to tears. He was elated to have got Maharshi's darshan but was sad that he could not spend days or months in his proximity. It was April 2, Sunday, 1950 which was indeed the memorable day. Though my father was living with his family at Madras, he found himself physically present at Ramanasramam at 10.30 a.m. on that day. It was all Bhagavan's grace that he could be in the ashram.

On the day he visited there was not much crowd in the ashram. He was very eager to see him at the earliest. It was a hot summer day and knowing that Bhagavan was ailing for the last few months, many came for darshan and spent a few minutes in his presence and felt blessed. My father entered and saw the Maharshi reclining in his sofa in the usual manner i.e., stretching his long legs and his knees resting in the pillow, with his back resting on the sofa and his head erect. The

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sofa was placed on the outer veranda so that he could continuously give darshan to his devotees.

The arrangement was very meticulously made for devotees to come near Bhagavan and offer their respects. There was a small gate on the western side which allowed the public to get into a small garden and reach the veranda, and thus could go near Bhagavan. There was a watchman at the gate to regulate the public. On that day, when my father entered the premises, there was no one in the garden and the watchman also was not to be seen. My father took some plantain fruits and entered the garden through the gate and came near Bhagavan to offer. He couldn't believe his eyes and just stood still. He saw him fully and since Bhagavan was reading the newspaper he did not see my father. Meanwhile, the watchman appeared from nowhere and asked him to leave. So my father left with tears in his eyes for not being able to get Bhagavan's direct vision on him. Darshan is a two way process — one who sees the person or deity and the other too sees the devotee. Meeting of mahatmas become fulfilled when eyes meet and thus darshan gets complete. It is with this faith that we visit temples not to just see gods or deities but certainly to be seen by them! Thus we become dhanya!

So my father decided to come again as darshan was not fulfilled and so hurriedly went out and bought again a bunch of plantains and entered the garden and came near the veranda to get Bhagavan's darshan. There was not much crowd, yet he was restless, and with fervent prayer came near Bhagavan and placed the fruits at his feet and looked up to get his attention. Again, he was engaged in reading the newspaper and did not see him. As before, the watchman came and asked my father to leave. He simply broke down. Tears swelled and he wondered why complete darshan was not happening. He asked himself why Bhagavan did not look at him.

For the third time he went out and purchased some fruits and entered the garden with a heavy heart and trepidation. Lack of crowd gave him enough courage to try again. So he entered the garden and stood near the sofa. The garden was at a lower level and the sofa on the veranda was at a higher level — at one's shoulder's height. At best, one could go near the sofa to look up, as Bhagavan was seated on the higher level. This time also he offered the fruits at his feet and



looked up. What a marvel! He was actually looking at him placing the fruits and doing his namaskarams. It looked as if he had accepted in full. When he looked at Bhagavan's face, that sparkling, powerful and graceful eyes were on him. The penetrating gaze on my father made him forget himself for a moment. The Maharshi smiled and nodded by way of blessing. The attendant came out of the room and gave him one fruit as Bhagavan's prasad. While Bhagavan was watching this, my father offered again his salutations and left as he was unable to control himself. It became very evident to my father that it was His plan to get him to his presence and give darshan this way. What a blessing and grace! It was just one glance and one moment that etched indelibly in his mind. Time stood still for my father. This incident was absolutely unplanned as my father had landed at Tiruvannamalai by change. My father cherished it till his last breath.

In the past my father had many visions and experiences with sadhus and sannyasis which were like unbelievable miracles. He never got carried away. Meeting of Bhagavan changed this. His attitude changed and finally he came to understand all the happenings including miracles or meeting of great souls and so on were Bhagavan's way of making him qualified for the final goal. It has to be noted that Bhagavan attained his Maha Samadhi on Friday on April 14 at 8.47 p.m. and at that instant from his room a meteor sprang forth travelling from south and entering the Arunachala hill. This was witnessed by many all over India. This anecdote of having received Bhagavan's grace just before he attained Samadhi was narrated to us so many times which in turn made me and my siblings feel blessed.

My father breathed his last in Mumbai in July 2010. Though he was ailing due to old age, he never complained about his pitiable condition. Finally keeping his eyes fixed on Bhagavan whose picture adorned the room, in the wee hours he merged with Bhagavan. There was no other thought that occupied his mind than Bhagavan in spite of bodily pain and suffering amidst getting admitted to the hospital almost every week.

We were drawn to Bhagavan because of my father. Through his darshan of Bhagavan in 1950, we could imagine the sequential three attempts of his visit on that day in order to have Bhagavan's full darshan. It is perseverance and faith that day which drew appa

towards Bhagavan. We too feel his gracious presence in our lives till date. As Bhagavan assured that he shall go nowhere but be present here in the Ashram which we really experience and it's so TRUE! Our regular visits to the ashram is a kind of reassurance and recharging of our spiritual energy. His WILL alone takes the lead in our lives. Obeisance to Bhagavan! Salutations to my father!

Later my father visited Tiruchuzhi and Tiruvannamalai as he was drawn to Bhagavan. He narrated his visits and I vividly remember some of them. We are aware that Sri Bhagavan as Venkataraman was born here in Tiruchuzhi on December 30th 1889 on Arudra darshan day with his star as Punarvasu. As usual, my father's thirst to visit Ramana's birthplace became stronger during his stay at Tuticorin where my elder sister Karpagam was living with her family. He made bold and earnest attempt to go to Tiruchuzhi which is nearer to Tuticorin. One fine morning, he left at 7 a.m without informing anybody and reached Aruppukottai bus stand by 10 a.m. Tiruchuzhi is 7 kms from Aruppukottai. So appa waited at the bus station. And an empty bus entered after some time it was to pass through Tiruchuzhi. The whole crowd got into the bus and there was not even standing space in the bus. So he could not get into the bus which was the only bus going via Tiruchuzhi. He was standing alone rather disappointed. The driver of the bus came and when he was about to start the bus, a Brahmin of about 50 years of age with robust body came to the bus stand and asked appa where he was planning to go. Knowing that appa was heading to Tiruchuzhi, he exclaimed "oh, come with me, I am also going to Tiruchuzhi," so saying he took my appa's hand and entered through the front entrance of the bus. Thus both of them entered. To his great surprise, the front seat was found vacant and these two occupied it. Though the huge crowd in the bus were struggling to stand, he wondered why none ever dared to sit in this vacant seat. Perhaps that was reserved for VIPs like these two! Appa came to know that the Brahmin was the cousin of Bhagavan (atthan) now taking care of his birthplace. They got down at Tiruchuzhi and straight entered Ramana's abode. The house has 2 entrances, one to the main abode and the other to the front hall where Bhagavan was born. Appa was feeling very grateful for this wonderful way of Bhagavan to personally take him to this blessed place. The house

was small and airy and now they have constructed 2 or 3 extra rooms for the public to stay. Appa saw opposite to the home, a tank full of water which is situated in front of the village Shiva temple which has been praised in songs and by some Nayanmars. Appa visited the Shiva temple with his bus friend.

The temple was quite big and both Shiva and Parvati had separate sanctums plus 63 Nayanmars and with huge *prākārams* (corridors around the main sanctum). Appa recalled that here Ramana as a boy used to play with his friends and in this temple tank they swam with great mirth. It is said many a time during the hide and seek game Ramana to avoid being caught by his friends used to enter Ambal's temple and hide himself behind the idol of Devi in the *prākāram*. The friends afraid to enter the dark *prākāram* of Devi would search Ramana outside. After some time when the game would be abandoned, unable to trace Ramana, in the evening the temple priest would notice Ramana still in deep meditation behind the deity as though unconscious. His parents and friends were surprised of this behaviour when narrated.

Appa after the darshan of the deities was immensely happy to be at the very place where Ramana tread. The friend took him to the front hall of the house, named Sundara Mandiram, which had been kept open for public darshan. What a blessing to be in the very spot where Bhagavan was born. My father reminded us that at the time of birth, an experienced lady (who was born blind) was actually attending as a midwife to Alagammal, and to her great wonder she saw a very bright light as the child was born. A remarkable phenomenon experienced only to show and confirm that it was the birth of a great Jnani, a Maharshi, and the rest is all history. My father remembered all these and did namaskarams after the puja and aarti. He saw many photos of the young Venkataraman and his parents in the hall. With a heart full of gratitude and happiness, appa returned to Tuticorin via Aruppukottai.

I always wondered what penance Alagammal must have done to be called 'amma' by this Supreme entity, a Divine Being! Papanasam Sivan's immortal song "*enna tavam seidanai yasoda...*" echoes the same sentiment and prayer. Is it not? What tapas had Yasoda done in order to make the Parabrahman Krishna call her 'amma'!

### **Appa's second visit to Tiruchuzhi**

Appa narrated to us his next visit to Sundara Mandiram during Bhagavan's Aradhana. It was the 29th Aradhana day of Bhagavan Ramana and by his grace appa was able to visit Tiruchuzhi that morning. The Aradhana function and puja were fixed at 12 noon. Meanwhile he visited the temple and returned to the hall by 11.30 a.m. A small crowd had gathered and also some priests were engaged in the puja. An elderly man and a retired magistrate of the town were also present. After prayers and recitations, prasad was distributed to the public. It was a very satisfying day and he felt blessed to be at Tiruchuzhi again. Grace at work!! Appa again visited Tiruchuzhi a few years later. We realised that Bhagavan has been regularly guiding us on the right path and showering us with blessings and grace. Every narration about his visits to temples and holy places increased our faith and devotion. I too visited Tiruchuzhi a few times and each time appa's words that it is Bhagavan's call resonated within me.

### **Appa's continued visits and spiritual experiences at Tiruvannamalai**

Appa had visited the ashram very often and brought many family members and distant cousins to get acquainted with Bhagavan. Many are truly indebted to him. A few anecdotes are shared here.

Appa observed that during one of his earlier visits to Tiruvannamalai, there was no accommodation available inside Ramanasramam. Once his friend Sri Srinivasan who was in charge of allotting rooms to visitors felt sorry for not being able to provide one. He asked appa whether he would like to stay with Sri Kunju Swamigal. Appa told him this would be a blessing indeed! He spent a few days and nights with this Mahatma who was an attendant to Bhagavan for more than a decade. Kunju swamigal as we know was one of the earliest devotees who served Bhagavan. Kunju swamigal was very happy to have appa in his room. So appa had a blissful stay, as during the nights the Swami narrated many incidents which occurred at the ashram and also some experiences he had with Bhagavan. This visit of appa to the ashram was doubly blessed! When I visited the ashram after my marriage in 86, we were indeed fortunate to have the darshan of Kunju swamigal and had a small conversation with him. When I asked him about

Bhagavan, he was so emotionally charged that he simply looked lost and said “what can I say about IT?” In Tamil to refer to Bhagavan as ‘athu’ (that) sounded new but he was indeed a phenomenon!

Appa narrated a strange incident that happened during one of his later visits to the ashram. One pradosham day he landed at the ashram and Mr. Srinivasan whom appa was familiar with, gave the keys to a boy to accompany appa to room number 11. The boy expressed his inability to show the room and handed over the keys to appa to proceed. As soon as he stepped down from the veranda and started moving towards the room, a peacock descended from the tree top and started moving in the direction of the room. The peacock slowly walked in the pathway and turned left and walked and stopped exactly at room 11! Appa followed the peacock and opened the door of room 11, but before he could get in, the peacock got into the room. As he entered – the peacock spread its feathers and appa bewitched by its beauty. Appa offered a fruit and made humble prostration to it. The peacock ate the fruit and left the room. The peacock on its own accord arrived to escort him to room 11. What a divine display of Sri Ramana’s grace! Appa always said Ramana is an incarnation of Muruga. Peacock being his vahana, whenever we see peacock we are reminded of Lord Muruga. That visit to the ashram was indeed very special to appa.

After a few years, appa along with my mother took a bus from Chennai to the ashram. On the way there was breakdown of the bus and all passengers were asked to get down and wait till it got repaired. My parents resigned to the will of God and sat under a banyan tree while the other passengers visited nearby shops and so on. Within a few minutes a black ambassador car came and stopped in front of them. The driver of the car stepped out and called my parents and said “Swami get into the car, I will take you to Tiruvannamalai”. They were surprised and hesitated to enter the car but the driver again insisted as the car was going to Tiruvannamalai only. Taking it as divine intervention my parents got into the car and arrived at Tiruvannamalai by 12. On enquiry the name of the driver was found to be Arunachalam. Indeed God and Guru are ever with us. Why doubt? ▲



# Exploring Your 'Self'

S. MADHUSUDHANAN

Once upon a time, in a town called *Manomayakosham*, lived a Great Wise man, called Manolaya. He was well-respected by everyone in the town. Many people used to come to him when they were in trouble to get solutions for their problems. His wisdom was so matchless that at times even the Mayor of the town used to consult him before making any decisions. He was always calm and always sweet. This made him feel proud, though outwardly he never showed it.

Once in that village came a nomad man named Manonasana. He heard about this Manolaya and sat just opposite his home, to observe him. He saw that many people were coming, meeting Manolaya day in and out. Manolaya also entertained them patiently by listening to their needs and giving his valuable suggestions, advice on the issues and problems that they faced.

One day, a Sanskrit Pandit came with a text to clear his doubt from Manolaya. As Manolaya was a little busy with his work, the Sanskrit Pandit waited for him on the porch. While the Pandit was waiting, Manonasana started singing in pure Sanskrit,

This story is based on Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's teaching. The author is based in Delhi.

“अहो मनः, किमर्थं इतस्ततः विस्मयमानात्मनि तिष्ठति; आत्मनः अन्वेषणं कुरुत, भवन्तः ज्ञास्यन्ति यत् भवन्तः किं ज्ञातुम् इच्छन्ति स्म। अन्तः गभीरं निमज्जन्तु तदा सर्वं ज्ञायते”

These lines of the song attracted the Sanskrit Pandit, and he eventually went to Manonasana, and asked him about the meaning of those lines. Manonasana smiled and said “One who abides in the Self will eventually know what is to be known” and sang again in simple language for the pandit to understand.

“Oh My mind, why wandering hither and thither to abide in the Self? Explore the Self, you will know what you wanted to be known. Dive deep within then everything is known...”

After hearing the song again the Sanskrit Pandit asked Manonasana, “Revered Sir, who are you? And why are you lying down here before the house of Manolaya for many days?”

Manonasana replied with a big smile and answered,

“What is the use of knowing about it? You, find out who you are? You will know everything. And recited the line (from Shankaracharya’s *Bhaja govindam*) “*Sampraapte sannihite kaale nahi nahi rakshati dukrun karane*” (Rules of grammar will not save you at the time of your death).”

This shocked the Sanskrit Pandit, as he came to Manolaya only to clear his doubts on the grammar of the texts. Meanwhile, Manolaya came out to the porch and saw that the Sanskrit Pandit was talking to Manonasana, and was hearing their conversation from his porch.

Manonasana continued,

“Is there any use of knowing non-essential things? Is it a wise thing to do, not knowing what is to be known? Ponder over it and leave me alone now.”

The Sanskrit Pandit started pondering over it, did a salutation (*pranam*) and left Manonasana slowly. Seeing the Sanskrit Pandit going, Manolaya tried to call him but the Sanskrit Pandit didn’t even bother to see Manolaya and he left the place.

Manolaya felt hurt about this, so he decided to confront Manonasana and went to him to ask (though he hesitated to do so for some time). Manolaya went to Manonasana and asked “Hey nomad, I heard you saying to the Sanskrit pandit, but I didn’t understand what made him leave the place. What does it mean when you say “Is it a wise thing to do, not knowing what is to be known?”



Manonasana laughed and said, “Oh revered man of all in town, you are asking this question? Is it you, who is asking this question?”

Manolaya felt a little embarrassed and thought to himself “Did I ask something wrong – Is it not the question to be asked?” But couldn't figure out what Manonasana meant, as his ego was already hurt a little and now it is hurt more. But, still, he wanted to know what it was, so he humbled his ego a little and said, “Yes Sir, Consider me as your disciple and explain to me the same?”

Saying this he eagerly waited for Manonasana to continue, “Oh, you want to be my disciple? A man who is revered by all in the town, and even by the mayor of the town - wants to be the disciple of this Nomad. Wow, am I hearing this? Manonasana said.

Manolaya said, “Yes sir, it is me who is asking it.”

Manonasana said, “Is this a way a disciple approaches a master, without any reverence?”

Hearing this Manolaya felt very hurt and ashamed of himself. Now, his ego was broken completely and he fell at his (Manonasana's) feet as a sign of complete surrender. Many people who were around there at that time were astonished to see Manolaya doing such an act to a Nomad, which normally people do to him.

Manonasana lifted him with full of compassion and love and asked him to sit. Then Manonasana said, “Who is the master and who is the pupil? There is no master and there is no disciple.”

He continued “Do you know, what is that one thing to be known by which everything is known? Have you ever pondered over it?”

Manolaya said, “No Master, I do not know and also never pondered about it. Kindly throw some light for me to know, what is that one thing which is to be known, by which everything is known?”

Manonasana smiled and said, “Oh Manolaya, revered one, you said I do not know and I never pondered over it. Who is that I, which you refer to? Your body or Your 'Self'? Explore Your 'Self' and know Your 'Self'; by knowing it one knows everything.”

Thus saying, Manonasana blessed him and left the place. Now, Manolaya started pondering over this and speaking to himself, “I never thought about this – I assumed myself as a man with greatest wisdom, assuming myself to be this Body. I cannot be the body, because this

body is inert and perishable. I cannot be the mind because it constantly wanders with various thoughts; this leaves the question Who Am I? The moment he put the question to himself the cloud of ignorance vanished and he realised his Self.

Thoughts from the story and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi:

The story which happens in *Manomayakosham* town is the Mental Sheath of our Mind. *Manolaya* is a temporary Stilling of the Mind. *Manonasa* is *Manonasa* which means the Destruction of mind.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stated that<sup>1</sup> “*Sadhakas* (seekers) rarely understand the difference between this temporary stilling of the mind (*manolaya*) and permanent destruction of thoughts (*manonasa*). In *manolaya* there is a temporary subsidence of thought-waves, and, though this temporary period may even last for a thousand years, thoughts, which are thus temporarily stilled, rise up as soon as the *manolaya* ceases. One must, therefore, watch one’s spiritual progress carefully. One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought; the moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness and enquire as to who it is who experiences this stillness.”

He further stated that “..... The easy way, the direct way, the shortest cut to salvation is the Enquiry method. By such enquiry, you will drive the thought force deeper till it reaches its source and merges therein. It is then that you will have the response from within and find that you rest there, destroying all thoughts, once and for all.”

Bhagavan says that constant enquiry is the easiest and quickest way to realise the ‘Self’. Therefore, let us follow Bhagavan’s teachings to the core and realise the ‘Self’ with his blessings. ▲

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<sup>1</sup> *Crumbs from his Table* – Page No. 21-23.

# Vedanta in a Nutshell: Śankara's Vedānta Dīṇḍima

I.S. MADUGULA

Tucked neatly in the vast philosophical output of Śankara is his somewhat overlooked short classic *Vedānta Dīṇḍimaḥ* (Thus Proclaims Vedanta), usually translated as *The Drumbeat of Vedanta*.

It is a priceless gem of 94 refrained verses encapsulating the teachings of the preceptor par excellence. All that anyone wanting to understand the unique features of *advaita* quickly, fully, and directly has to do is study these verses and internalise their purport. They will be rewarded with a knowledge of what their existence is, what its primary goals are, and how to accomplish them—all in one place. They will be firmly placed on the way to enlightenment and eventual liberation from the ceaseless and self-inflicted turmoil of quotidian life.

In short, the powerful poem answers once and for all the perennial question, ‘What is the meaning of life?’ One of the ways Śankara accomplishes his objective is to employ the refrain *iti vedānta dīṇḍimaḥ*, ‘thus proclaims Vedanta,’ imparting an irrefutable authority to it. The meaning of life becomes clear when its ultimate goal is revealed.

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This essay is an aggregation of the import of the *Diṇḍima* verses, as reaffirmed by Bhagavan, under a select few categories. The Śankara tenets are first presented, followed under each category by Bhagavan's teachings relative to those concepts. The numerals in parentheses refer to the verses in the text. Repetitions and near-repetitions are skipped. Bhagavan's teachings are referenced by the Talk number in the book *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*.

Let us note at the outset that Śankara pays a tribute to the youthful arch-preceptor, the 'south-facing' Dakshinamurti who, sitting under a banyan tree, enlightens his much older disciples through utter silence. Through utter silence?! Yes. How else would you talk about the Supreme Self which is beyond mind and speech *manovācām agocaram* (*Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, 240)? Silence is the most eloquent form of communication. In the words of Bhagavan:

Guru's silence is the loudest *upadesa*. It is also Grace in its highest form. All other *dikshas* (initiations) e.g. *sparsa*, *chakshus* are derived from *mowna* (silence). They are therefore secondary. *Mouna* is the primary form. If the Guru is silent the seekers's mind gets purified by itself (*Talk #518*).

Śankara then gets a few preliminaries out of the way before dealing with the central themes of Vedanta. In preparing the groundwork for Vedanta, he distinguishes between a set of disparate pairs of entities: the Self (*ātman*) and the non-Self (*anatman*) (2); spiritual knowledge (*jñāna*) and ignorance (*ajñāna*) (3); *jñātā* (the knower) and *jñeya* (that which is known, the world) (4); *sukha* (happiness) and *duḥkha* (misery) (5); and the Whole (the Supreme) and the part (the individual) (6).

Using a different parameter, additional distinct pairs are included: *jñāna* (knowledge grounded in Reality) and karma (action dependent upon the individual agent); only the former leading to liberation (7); things that are worth listening to, the only worthwhile subject being Brahman, and those that are a waste of time (8); and things that are worthy of meditation and contemplation and those that are not (9). Brahman is the only entity worthy of meditation and contemplation, because other things contemplated will result in distraction and a perturbed mind (10).

This is Bhagavan's take on these and related preliminaries:

The thinker is all the while the Real. He ultimately realises the

fact. Sometimes we forget our identities, as in sleep and dreams. But God is perpetual consciousness (Talk #31). Moksha is to know that you were not born. Be still and know that I am God. To be still is not to think. Know, and not think is the word... Only the quest 'Who am I?' is necessary. What remains in deep sleep and waking is the same. But in waking there is unhappiness and the effort to remove it (Talk #131).

## Liberation

It is by means of the knowledge of Brahman, yogis, pleasure-seekers, renunciates, and worldly folk will qualify for liberation (11). There is no liberation through the observation of the prescribed rites or works or religious observances (12). The world is unreal and deluding, so it should be ignored, and knowledge of Brahman should be cultivated in its place (13). Only those will attain liberation who perceive that the *jīva* is Brahman and that Brahman dwells in the *jīva*, recognising their essential identity (15). The *jīva*, though identical with the Universal Soul, operates under the limitation of ignorance. Īśvara is beyond that limitation (31).

Of the two available approaches to liberation, the subtle (*advaita*) one fosters a unified vision and the gross one (*dvaita*) results in division. Liberation is possible only through the practise of the unified approach to life (19). One who seeks liberation should get rid of the six foes (*ari ṣaḍvarga*), the three attributes (*guṇa traya*), the notion of duality, and be established in the one and only *Brahman* (41).

One who desires liberation should not yield to sorrow, delusion, anxiety about old age and death, and hunger and thirst; to sense pleasures; the modifications of the mind, such as emotion and ego; attachment to the family, wealth, and children; and the tendency to duality, but should firmly seek refuge in the one Reality (42). He who has the conviction that he is not the body but the indwelling Spirit that witnesses the functions of the body will surely attain liberation (43). One will be delivered from physical wants like hunger and thirst, if one has the conviction that he is not the *prāṇa* (life breath) but is the witness thereof, being the Spirit (44). One is not the mind but is the witness thereof and the Spirit; such a one is free from misery and delusion (45).

By thinking that one is not the *buddhi* (intellect) but its *sākṣi* (witness, seer), one's sense of agency will disappear. That is, whatever one does, the person who performs the action is only its witness and not the agent who actually performs it. Similarly, one is not the ignorance but its witness as it is manifested in life. Such a conviction removes all misery (47). The wise one understands that he is not *maya* or its manifestation. He is beyond the state of even being a witness. He is truly a liberated person (49).

One needs the grace of the Lord to attain liberation. No desire-fuelled action or cessation of prohibited action will be of any use (73). The realised person does not do anything or try to understand anything, as he is ever merged in Brahman consciousness (89).

Bhagavan renders these thoughts in the following way:

For liberation, nothing new remains to be gained. It is the original state and continues unchanged too (Talk #139). Everyone is the Self by his own experience. Still he is not aware, he identifies the Self with the body and feels miserable. This is the greatest of all mysteries. One is the Self. Why not abide as the Self and be done with miseries?...He must first discern consciousness from insentience and be the consciousness only. Later let him realise that insentience is not apart from consciousness (Talk #192). In reality there is no bondage or *mukti* for himself or for others from the *jñāni*'s standpoint (Talk #264)...*Mukti* is synonymous with the Self...The *jñāni* is not conscious of *mukti* or *bandha* (bondage). Bondage, liberation, and orders of *mukti* are all said in order that ignorance might be shaken off. There is only *mukti* and nothing else (Talk #266)...*Mukti* i.e., liberation, is not to be gained hereafter. It is there forever, here and now (Talk #359)...All questions relating to *mukti* are inadmissible; because *mukti* means release from bondage, which implies that the present existence is bondage. There is no bondage and therefore no *mukti* either (Talk #362).

## Reality

Recognising the Reality is not difficult because the Supreme resides within the person who listens to Vedanta (17). If one has Self-knowledge, one does not need to study the Vedas or the scriptures,

or the epics. For one who has realised the identity of *jīvātman* and *paramātman*, there is no need of the *Rk*, *Yajus*, or the *Sāmaveda* (25).

In Bhagavan's words, Reality is:

a. Existence without beginning or end—eternal. b. Existence everywhere, endless, infinite. c. Existence underlying all forms, all changes, all forces, all matter and all spirit. d. The one displacing the triads, i.e., the knower, the knowledge, and the known. The triads are only appearances in time and space, whereas the Reality lies beyond and behind them. They are like a mirage over the Reality. They are the result of delusion (Talk #28).

### **Action**

One should give up useless works, debates, and discussions and strive to acquire the knowledge of Brahman (14). The performers of action are born again and again, as do those who practise rituals. Only seekers of the knowledge of Brahman have no rebirth (20). Action will only yield indirect and unsatisfactory results, while *jñāna* produces direct and immediate results (21). Without acquiring the knowledge of Brahman, learning and actions are a waste of time (22). For one who possesses Self-knowledge, there is no need of sacrifices, sense enjoyments, or great wealth (23). Works are only meant to purify the mind, and rituals to practise concentration. It is the knowledge of Brahman alone that can lead to liberation (26). The effects of accumulated past actions and possible future actions are annihilated by knowledge; by enduring the consequences already in operation, one attains Brahman (27). Those who have knowledge of Brahman are unaffected by good or bad actions. They forever enjoy the bliss of the Self (28). Knowledge of the Self destroys the sin of evil deeds performed wittingly or unwittingly (29). A brahmin is one who is endowed with the knowledge of the Self; one who merely performs rituals is a *dvija* (twice-born), and the one who is well-versed in the Veda is only a *vipra* (well-spoken, *vip* = *vāk*) (33).

Now, this is Bhagavan on action:

*Atman* acts through the ego. All actions are due to the efforts only...the *jñāni* acts unawares. Others see him act, but he doesn't know it himself (Talk #467). The *jñāni* is fully aware

that the true state of Being remains fixed and stationary and that all actions go on around him. His nature does not change and his state is not affected in the least. He looks on everything with unconcern and remains blissful himself (Talk #607). Karma will go on automatically. Or Karma will drop away from you. If Karma be your lot according to prarabdha, it will surely be done whether you will it or not; if Karma be not your lot, it will not be done even if you intently engage in it (Talk #41)... man should act as an actor on the stage (Talk #113). There is no karma without a *karta* (doer). On seeking the doer he disappears. Where is karma then? (Talk #628). The seer sees the mind and the senses as within the Self and not apart from it. The agent, remaining unaffected by the actions, gets more purified until he realises the Self (Talk #444). Whatever one does after the ego has vanished is *akarma* (#375).

## **Brahman**

The seer and the seen are two disparate things, of which the seer is Brahman and the seen is the world of maya. Brahman is beyond ignorance and the three attributes of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (30). The Supreme Self manifests itself as having form and as formless, and having attributes and being without attributes. In reality, Brahman is beyond form and the *gunas* (32). Brahman is everything and everyone, and everyone and everything is Brahman, since the effect cannot be different from the cause (34). Everything exists, manifests itself, and is blissful, and so all is pervaded by Brahman (35). Know that it is Brahman that is present in all three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep (36). That which exists in the beginning, during, and after the end of creation, namely Brahman, is real (38). Just as the pot, the wall, etc., being made of dirt are dirt, so, too, the universe whose source is Brahman is nothing other than Brahman (40). Contained within the five sheaths (*kośas*) is the *Atman*; there is no question about it (51). The sense of being we experience through the five elements is the Supreme Self and nothing else (54), as is the consciousness we experience through them (55) and the happiness (56). Because of the nature of existence and bliss, Brahman and *Atman* are one and the same (60). Transcending name and form, Brahman permeates everything as Consciousness (68).



Do not pay attention to the objects as they are seen, but delve beyond into the Brahman that pervades them all (76). Those who are involved in the world may enjoy a little pleasure, but they are subject to a lot of misery. Infinite bliss belongs to those who see Brahman everywhere (77). Realising that death is never too far from people, one should contemplate Brahman (80).

In Bhagavan's unique exposition, Brahman seems easier to access within oneself:

The bestower of bliss must be Bliss itself and also Infinite. Therefore, *Ishvara* is the Personal God of infinite power and bliss. Brahman is Bliss, impersonal and absolute. The finite egos, deriving their source from Brahman and *Ishvara*, are in their spiritual nature bliss only (#28). *Aham* ('I') is known to everyone. Brahman abides as *Aham* in everyone. Find out the 'I.' The 'I' is already Brahman. You need not think so. Simply find out the 'I' (Talk #266). 'I' is eternal. It would vanish if it were anything particular. It is Perfection. So it is not found as an object (Talk #290). For all that exists is only Brahman. There is nothing besides Brahman (Talk #310). Sri Śankara must be understood in the light of both the illustrations.

The world is a myth. Even after knowing it, it continues to appear. It must be known to be Brahman and not apart (Talk #315). Life and all else are in Brahman alone. Investigate (Talk #367). *Jñāna* is beyond knowledge and nescience. There can be no question about that state. It is the Self (Talk #432). So the fact is that Brahman is all and remains indivisible. He is ever realised... Knowledge means the overcoming of obstacles which obstruct the revelation of the Eternal Truth that the Self is the same as Brahman (Talk #649).

## The World

That which was not in the beginning and will not be at the end cannot be real. The world therefore is unreal (37). Those who are deeply entangled in the pursuit of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* are truly ignorant like beasts. Only those who are committed to the pursuit of liberation are the loftiest among men (39). Name and form are fickle; only that which has neither is real (61). When one refers to another as

young, old, etc., one is ignoring the Reality and unity of beings (69). The wise know that the world consisting of names and forms is like a magic show. It cannot be said to reflect the Reality (70). If we are involved in the phenomenal world, we develop attachments like ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ But if we focus on *sacchidānanda*, we attain liberation (86). What is the use of the world to the man who has realised that the world of names and forms is unreal? (87).

Bhagavan has the final word:

The world is ‘sensed’ in the waking and dream states or is the subject of perception and thought, both being mental activities. If there were no such activities as waking and dreaming thought, there would be no ‘perception’ or inference of a ‘world.’ In sleep there is no such activity and ‘objects and world’ do not exist for us in sleep. Hence ‘reality of the world’ may be created by the ego by its act of emergence from sleep; and that reality may be swallowed up or disappear by the soul resuming its nature in sleep (Talk #25)...the world mocks at you also for knowing it without knowing yourself. The world is the result of your mind. Know your mind. Then see the world. You will realise that it is not different from the Self (Talk #53). When I seek the Self and abide as the Self there is no world to be seen. What is the Reality of the world then? The seer only and certainly not the world (Talk #442).

The reverberations of Self-knowledge are dinned into our inner being, proclaiming that one’s *Atman* is non-different from Brahman (94). Śankara boldly and unequivocally summed up the essence of the Vedanta canon in a half-śloka:

*brahma satyaṃ jagan mithyā*  
*jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ* — (*Brahmajñānavaliṃāla*, 20)

Applying it to the individual seeker, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi declared that abiding in the Self is being the very Self, for there are no two Selves. There is only Brahman.

*ātma samsthitiḥ svātma darśanam*  
*ātma nirdvayād ātma niṣṭhatā* — (*Upadeśasāra*, 26) ▲

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Forty Nine

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**27th February 1979 (continued)**

**Sadhu Om:** When we sing in praise of *guru* or repeat his name, it is we alone who gain satisfaction and benefit thereby. *Guru* is not affected in the least. He is neither pleased with praise nor displeased with abuse.

This is the state that Bhagavan refers to in verse 38 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham*:

When oneself always stands without departing in the state of oneself [the state in which one exists and shines eternally as one actually is, without ever rising as ego], without knowing [any distinction] as ‘oneself’ and ‘others’, who is there besides oneself? If whoever says whatever about oneself [whether they praise or disparage oneself], [so] what? Even if oneself praises oneself, or even if [oneself] disparages [oneself], so what?

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, [happinessofbeing.com](http://happinessofbeing.com).

If we recognise that such is the greatness of *guru* and if we often dwell upon such greatness, our love for him and for following the path he has shown us will grow and flourish.

On the other hand, if we sing in praise of God or repeat his name, he will be pleased with us (at least in our view) and will bless us by granting our prayers. This can be seen from the lives of great saints, who were protected by God and saved from various kinds of trouble. It is the duty of God to be pleased with his true devotees, to protect them and to do as they ask. This is why it is said that *guru* is greater than God, because *guru* has no such duty. *Guru* is not obliged to give us what we ask for, but only to give us what is truly good for us.

Of course, as Bhagavan says in the first sentence of the twelfth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*: ‘God and *guru* are in truth not different’. However, though they are one in their real nature, their functions differ in accordance with our outlook and desires. If we want Bhagavan to play the role of *guru*, he will do so, because that is the primary reason why he appeared in human form, but if we want him to play the role of God, he will do so, because he is not only *guru* but also God. That is, he is Lord Arunachala Siva in human form, so he is both God and *guru*.

Though Rama was a *jñāni*, he was to play the role of God, upholding *dharma* [righteousness] in this world, so Vasishtha taught him, as translated by Bhagavan in verses 26 and 27 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham*:

Having investigated [or carefully considered] all states, which are of many kinds, what one [state] exists devoid of falsity [deceit or deception], [namely] *paramapadam* [the supreme state, which is the one real state of *sat-cit*, pure existence-awareness, shining eternally in the heart as ‘I am’], incessantly holding only that firmly by heart, play in the world, hero. What exists in the heart as the reality for all kinds of appearances [namely *sat-cit*, pure existence-awareness, which alone is what actually exists, and which is therefore the one fundamental reality that underlies and supports the appearance or seeming existence of all other things], since you have known that [the one underlying reality], without ever abandoning that view [namely that clear awareness of the one infinite, indivisible

and immutable reality that underlies all appearances], play in the world, hero, as if [having] desire [appropriate to whatever role you play in life, namely the desire to uphold *dharma* or righteousness, which is the duty of a prince or king].

Being one who seemingly has rising of mind and delight [joy or pleasure in worldly matters], being one who seemingly has agitation [anxiety or impatience] of mind and aversion [dislike, disgust, hatred or enmity], [and] being one who seemingly has effortful initiative [that is, one who seemingly initiates and strives with persistent effort in worldly undertakings], [but nevertheless] being one who is [actually] devoid of [all such] defects, play in the world, hero. Being one who is freed from the many ties called delusion [that is, the many ties, attachments or bondages that give rise to delusion, confusion, darkness (lack of clarity of mind and heart) and consequently desire], [and] being one who is steadily [permanently] equanimous [equal, impartial, even, calm, tranquil or dispassionate] in all circumstances, [but nevertheless] doing actions on the outside to suit the disguise [that is, outwardly engaging in activities appropriate to your disguise or external roles in this life], play in the world as required [in accordance with each situation], hero.

Though God seems outwardly to have a certain role to play in this world, he plays that role just by being as he is, without ever rising to do anything, so he is eternally untouched by the role he seems to play, as Bhagavan explains in the fifteenth paragraph of *Nān Ār?*:

Just like in the mere presence of the sun, which rose without *icchā* [liking, wish or desire], *saṁkalpa* [desire, volition or intention] [or] *yatna* [effort or exertion], a sun-stone [*sūryakānta*, a gem that is supposed to emit fire or heat when exposed to the sun] emitting fire, a lotus blooming, water evaporating, and people of the world commencing [or becoming engaged in] their respective *kāryas* [activities], doing [those *kāryas*] and ceasing [or subsiding], and [just like] in front of a magnet a needle moving, *jīvas* [sentient beings], who are subject to [or ensnared in] *muttoril* [the threefold function of God, namely the creation, sustenance and dissolution

of the world] or *pañcakṛtyas* [the five functions of God, namely creation, sustenance, dissolution, concealment and grace], which happen by just [or nothing more than] the special nature of the presence of God, who is *saṁkalpa rahitar* [one who is devoid of any volition or intention], move [exert or engage in activity] and subside [cease being active, become still or sleep] in accordance with their respective *karmas* [that is, in accordance not only with their *prārabdha karma* or destiny, which impels them to do whatever actions are necessary in order for them to experience all the pleasant and unpleasant things that they are destined to experience, but also with their *karma-vāsanās*, their inclinations to think, speak and act in particular ways, which dispose them to make effort to experience pleasant things and to avoid experiencing unpleasant things]. Nevertheless, he [God] is not *saṁkalpa sahitā* [one who is connected with or possesses any volition or intention]; even one *karma* does not adhere to him [that is, he is not bound or affected in any way by any *karma* or action whatsoever]. That is like world-actions [the actions happening here on earth] not adhering to [or affecting] the sun, and [like] the qualities and defects of the other four elements [earth, water, air and fire] not adhering to the all-pervading space.

Since the four Sanakadi rishis were seeking to know the reality behind all appearances, Lord Siva appeared before them as *guru* in the form of Dakshinamurti, and by remaining silent he turned their minds inwards to merge in the light of pure awareness. Having thereby dispelled their ignorance, he remained absorbed in the silence of pure being. However, according to the divine plan, the time for his marriage was drawing near, so knowing that he was absorbed in silence, the devas became worried, fearing that he might not resume his role as God. Even Brahma and Vishnu were afraid to disturb him, because they knew that as *guru* he would do them no harm, but as God he could show his wrath. It was finally decided, therefore, that Kama should try to sow the seed of carnal desire in his heart, but when he tried to do so, Lord Siva opened his third eye, the eye of *jñāna*, and burnt him to ashes.

However, though Kama had failed in his attempt to arouse carnal desire in the heart of Lord Siva, the devas were happy, because the

fact that Lord Siva had responded angrily by burning Kama indicated that he had set aside his role as *guru* and resumed his role as God. As *guru* he could not be pleased, made angry or be affected in any way whatsoever, no matter what anyone may do to him, but as God he must feign delight, wrath and other such passions appropriate to the circumstances, as Vasishtha taught Rama to do.

Because the four Sanakadi rishis were seeking the guidance of *guru*, Lord Siva acted as *guru* for them, and because the devas wanted God, he acted as God for them. Likewise, it is up to us to choose whether we want to take Arunachala and Bhagavan as *guru* or as God. If we take him as *guru* and accordingly strive to follow the path of self-investigation and self-surrender that he has taught us, he will consume us in the clear light of pure awareness (*jñāna*), whereas if we take him as God and accordingly pray to him for this or that, he will answer our prayers in an appropriate manner.

Once Bhagavan was asked whether Arunachala would fulfil the worldly desires of his devotees, to which he replied: ‘Why not? When he can give the supreme gift of *mukti* to those who merely think of him, can he not give anything else that we may ask for?’

However, though Bhagavan can give us whatever we want, it would be foolish on our part to ask him for anything other than wholehearted love to surrender ourself entirely to him, because he knows what is truly good for us better than we do. It is our supreme good fortune that he has entered our life and attracted us to him, so we should not waste this precious opportunity by asking him for anything other than love to follow the path to salvation that he has so graciously revealed to us.

To emphasise that the role of *guru* is much greater than the role of God, in verse 39 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham* he cautioned us:

May you always experience [or cherish] *advaita* [non-duality] in [your] heart, [but] do not even once perform [display or parade] *advaita* in action. O son, *advaita* is appropriate in the three worlds, [but] *advaita* is not appropriate with *guru*. Know [this clearly].

*Advaita* is the real state in which nothing other than oneself exists, so it can never be put in action. Action is possible only in the state of duality, in which we have risen as ego and consequently experience

the appearance of things other than ourself. Therefore when he says ‘*advaita* is appropriate in the three worlds’, that is a concession to the ignorance of those who do not understand the true implications of *advaita*.

However, he makes this concession in order to emphasise the greatness of *guru*. That is, the ‘three worlds’ referred to here are the worlds of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, so ‘*advaita* is appropriate in the three worlds; *advaita* is not appropriate with *guru*’ implies that even though it may be appropriate for one to claim a non-dual status with any of these three Gods in their respective worlds by asserting ‘You and I are one’, it is never appropriate for one to claim a non-dual status with *guru*. In the presence of *guru*, the only appropriate ‘action’ is for us to turn back within and thereby subside and dissolve forever in the source from which we have risen. ▲

(To be continued)

## On Freedom

Suresh Kailash

“Sunlight shining  
through a pinhole  
on a leaf  
or a paper sheet,  
seems confined,  
but is always  
boundless and free.”

So said my Ramana,  
giving me the key  
to the prison  
that I call ‘me.’



# Tamil Siddhas

## Part Twelve

### Konganar: The Siddha who extracted copper out of herbs

P. RAJA

The word 'Konganar' brings before our mind's eye, the beautiful story of an egocentric siddha who gave up his ego, once and for all, before a woman of great virtue. The Tamil phrase '*kokku enru ninaitthayo konganare*', meaning "Oh! Should you mistake me for a stork, Konganar!" is so popular that every common person knows the truth of the matter. It is a single short idiom being said over and over again, to denote the stupidity of egoists.

It is popularly believed that Konganar belonged to Kongu country. Hence 'Konganar' means a man from Kongu. His parents made a living by melting iron and moulding it into kitchen utensils. They were poor but they fed the needy saints and sadhus who sought their help. Konganar followed the business of his parents. He knew the tricks of his trade and became extremely rich. To add to his wealth, he married a wealthy girl of his choice. The wealth thus accumulated did not deter his interest in spiritual beings. Family and spirituality became his two eyes and he cared for them meticulously.

Konganar staunchly believed that one should care for one's body and asserted, like Siddha Tirumular, that it is the walking temple

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of God. Like the several other siddhas who belittled the body by comparing it to a food container and dustbin, he never said a word against the body wherein the soul lives:

Never ever compare the body to a dustbin,  
Never ever, say that it is a container of food.  
Only the realised souls will understand  
The importance of the body. So do care for it.<sup>1</sup>

Konganar's friendship with spiritual beings became a turning point in his life and slowly he was moving away from his family. Soon he realised that he was no more attached to his wife. Saints and sadhus pleased with his friendly nature taught him true knowledge. Realisation came to him and through his mentors, he learnt the *ashtama* (eight) siddhis and became a perfect siddha. But the knowledge he gained made him an egoist.

As a siddha, Konganar began to search for the rare herbs that gave immortality. During one such venture, he came across the Palingar

<sup>1</sup> *Konganar Vaalai Kummi*. Verse 24.

tribal community inside a dense forest on the hills. They were crying and weeping over the death of a young man. Something in him said that he should put his siddha knowledge to proper use by helping the poor parents who depended much on the departed man for a living.

Konganar, out of compassion, left his body and crept into the corpse of the young man. To the surprise of the mountain-forest dwellers, the dead young man sprang to life. Someone in the astonished crowd, suspected some mystery behind the second coming of the dead man. He searched the region for a clue. He found a corpse in a sitting posture inside a hollow of a dead tree trunk. The cunning man wasted no time in burning the tree. The dead tree was burnt to ashes. Ashes to ashes became the corpse. Poor Konganar had no way but to live with the Palingar community.

He was living in an alien body, of course, but continued to spend many summers in the vigorous pursuit of herbs. It was during such a quest, a couple of incidents played with his ego. One bloated his ego and the other punctured it. Once he was in deep meditation, offering his prayers with cupped palms. As if the Lord Himself was granting his wish, something from the heavens fell in his hands. It was so chill that he opened his eyes to know what it was. He realised that his palms were covered with the dropping of a flying bird. Eaten up with conceit, violent egomania, he raised his eyes in utter fury and looked daggers at the fast-moving stork in the sky. His eyes were red with anger and the flying bird was in flames. It turned to ashes before its carcass reached the ground. Konganar was proud of his powers of a near miraculous perfection.

Konganar would have never even dreamt that his well-nourished ego would have its great fall soon. He was in meditation for such a long time that his belly pinched and craved for some food. He moved to a nearby hut, stood before it and cried for food. The woman inside the hut was serving food to her husband and so made him wait for some time. When her husband finished eating and went to bed to enjoy his siesta, the woman came out of the house carrying a plate filled with delicious food. Konganar became furious. He was so sure of burning the woman to ashes as punishment to her late coming. He flared up and uttered words in a tizzy. The woman didn't care a bit and went back into her hut saying, "You mistook me for a stork, O Konganar".

On hearing her words, he felt ashamed. His powers have lost their virility before a virtuous woman, who was no other than Vasuki, the spouse of the bard of wisdom, Tiruvalluvar.

Konganar had learnt his lessons. He became ego-free. Bereft of ego, his quest for spiritual knowledge became most intense, when Tirumular, the arch siddha made fun of him by saying, “Your powers may work with a stork, but not with a virtuous woman. Ask yourself why and realise”.<sup>2</sup>

Tirumular’s words impelled to Konganar to probe further. He decided to perform a yaga or sacrifice in order to cleanse his mind and invigorate his powers. While he was preparing himself for the yaga, he came across a tomb. He prayed. To his great shock and surprise, the tomb split open and out came Maharishi Gouthamar.

Konganar paid his respects to the Maharishi, opened his mind to him, and talked of his wanderings in search of sages and yogis and other siddha purushas. Gouthamar blessed him and pointed out to him a place to do his *tapasya*. Konganar followed his words. It is said that while doing his *tapasya*, he moved into the state of Samadhi for twelve long years and came out of it only to remember the yaga that remained yet to be performed. Wasting no time, for twelve years had already gone by, he began the yaga.

Half way through the ritual, Konganar was stopped abruptly. All of a sudden Maharishi Gouthamar appeared from nowhere and bawled, “What right have you to perform this yaga? Only Maharishis like me are permitted to do it. You are cursed for your impertinence.”

Konganar shivered at the Maharshi’s angry words. He cringed before him for a pardon. Gouthamar took pity on him and told him, “Go to Thillaivanam and pray to the Lord for a pardon. He might help you”.

Konganar reached Thillaivanam, the present Chidambaram, and began to pray to the Lord for the removal of the curse that deformed him. While he was meditating upon the Lord, he came across Sage Parasar and did obeisance to the sage who inwardly saw the nature of Konganar’ problem and found for him a solution. The curse got

<sup>2</sup> Acharya. P.S. *Agathiyar Mudhal Variar varai Siddhargal 60 peir: Vaazhvum vaakkum*. 2012. Narmada Pathippagam, Chennai.

lifted. As a bonus, Konganar was permitted to go ahead with the half-completed yaga.

All that happens in one's life is for the good. At a time when Konganar completed his yaga, Maharishi Gouthamar stood before him, applauded his perseverance, blessed him and preached the divine knowledge.

Fully equipped with such a knowledge, Konganar travelled widely and guided more than five hundred disciples to attain spiritual knowledge. Having performed his duty very well, he began to proceed to Tirupati for preach to the masses. On his way to the holy shrine, he stopped at Tiruttani, moved into the temple to seek the blessings of the Lord seated there. As he was carrying a 'kuligai'<sup>3</sup> along with him, he wanted to place it somewhere before joining his palms in prayer, and inadvertently placed it on the head of the Lord, who playfully sucked it inside him. After prayer, when Konganar opened his eyes, he found to his dismay that the kuligai was missing. Panic-stricken Konganar prayed to the playful Lord to give him back his kuligai, without which he would be stranded. The lord took pity on him and gave back the siddha's only asset.

With great relief, Konganar moved up the hill of Tirupati, where he was given a grand gala welcome. A chieftain by name Vanendran (also called Valavendran) soon became his ardent admirer and disciple. The siddha spent his time in composing verses of wisdom to educate the chieftain and his subjects.

Konganar began to write his verses only after reaching Tirupati and that too for his devotee. His works numbering nineteen are still extant in Tamil language, but remain to be translated into other languages for proper use. His works not only give us spiritual knowledge but also the folklore of medicine. True to the saying, "Literature is the mirror of the Age", his six thousand five hundred and forty one verses, a staggering number indeed, speak at length of the society he lived in and the herbs he used to cure sickness.

His faith in the five letters (in English they have to be counted as syllables) SI-VA-YA-NA-MA made him preach that we should go

<sup>3</sup> Kuligai, also known as siddhar kuligai, is a magical pill by which one is supposed to be enabled to fly where he may please, and perform supernatural feats (Winslow.M. *A Comprehensive Tamil-English Dictionary*. 2011. Asian Educational services, New Delhi. p.338).

to the source and get the blessings of the Lord before taking up any venture. In one of his verses, he writes:

What if you follow the Shastras?  
What if you follow the Vedas?  
Seek the feet of the Lord and utter the five letters  
Before you take up any venture.<sup>4</sup>

A jnani and a yogi are not one but different in their own way. He asserts that the one who had succeeded in discovering the source of all things becomes a jnani. And the one who gains complete control over his breathing system is a yogi. Most of his verses speak of the importance of the body and tells the many ways of keeping it healthy, so as to lead a disease-free life. He talks a lot about the Kundalini force and tells us of the easy ways to gain control over it, all to prepare oneself for the opening of the third eye. His verses are a must for any yoga practitioner and also for anyone who wants to have a sound knowledge of the herbs. For any common reader, his verses may be a puzzle, for they are written in a language only siddhas could understand.

Konganar taught his disciples the art of extracting copper from the juice of herbs, which still remains unknown to scientists. To know more about his scientific achievements one can read his 'Vadha kaviyam' which still remains a poser to the scientists.

When Konganar felt that the purpose of his sojourn in the world got fulfilled, he decided to attain yoga Samadhi. It is believed that Konganar rests in peace under the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati.

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(All references to verse numbers are to A. Arivoli's edition of *Siddhar Padalgal, Vol.2*. Pub: Varthamanan Pathipagam, Chennai, 2006. All the translations from the songs of Konganar quoted in this essay are free renderings done by the author.) ▲

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<sup>4</sup> Konganar Vaalai Kummi. Verse 16.

# The Blessed Life of Sant Jayadeva

## Chapter Ten

### The Lord Comes in the Guise of a Brahmin

NABAJI SIDDHA

After completing his new Sanskrit composition along the lines of *Bhagavatam*, the Swami carried it to the royal court. Vedic scholars, erudite brahmins and sadhus were always present in the court. After receiving the Sant with due honours, the king said, "I am indeed blessed that your holiness thought it fit to visit me. If you had sent word, I would have come running to do your bidding."

The Sant said smilingly, "O king! I have composed a new work as instructed by my Lord. I brought it here to be read in this august assembly filled with learned and wise people. Is there any Vedic scholar here who can recite this?"

At that moment, the Lord assuming the form of a brahmin arrived there and felicitated the king. The king welcomed him warmly and said with bowed head, "O noble brahmin! I am sanctified by your presence here. Where have you come from? What can I do for you and thus redeem myself?"



The brahmin replied, “I reside in Vrindavan. I have been studying Sanskrit, the language of the gods and have attained great facility in it. I am well-versed in the grammar, poetic style and nuances of the language. My mastery over the language is the envy of all. I have defeated many scholars in different lands. I have come to Jagannath Puri to meet Jayadeva who is considered a great expert. I have come to check if he is my equal in poetic genius.”



As soon as these words fell on the ears of Jayadeva Swami, he hastened to offer his respects at the feet of the brahmin. After making obeisance, Jayadeva Swami said, "I am no expert. I offer myself at your service."

The brahmin said sarcastically, "Oho..! you are the great Jayadeva of Jagannath Puri! You are the one who hymned the Lord to restore life to your woman who gives sensual pleasures to you who acts as if you have transcended worldly pleasures. When the woman died, didn't you fall on her body, roll on the ground and lament like a madman? Like a full-fledged idiot revering the half idiot, the king who is steeped in ignorance reveres you, a semi-literate and a sensualist, as a great Mahatma!"

Ridiculing the king and the Sant, the Lord in disguise showered further abuses, "Let me expose your pretensions before the world. Let me trample underfoot your false reputation."

Jayadeva Swami said meekly, "O Swami, I am indeed ignorant. I know neither grammar nor scriptures. Your scholarship is comparable to the towering elephant whereas I am merely a mewling kitten before you. I am the dust of your feet. I do not even know the meaning of Hari Om. Please take pity on me, make me your servant and explain its meaning to me."

As if incensed by his words, the brahmin jumped up in anger and said, "You crafty fellow! You want to trap me like Kartikeya who imprisoned Lord Brahma when he couldn't explain the meaning of Om, the Pranava. This is how you have been defeating the pandits on the sly and earned for yourself the reputation of an eminent scholar. Pretending to be humble, you are trying to establish a pride of place for yourself. You have roused my ire by your devious ways. Now, swear that you will engage in a debate with me and if defeated you will surrender your head at my feet to be cut off."

The brahmin was raising a hue and cry over nothing. Jayadeva Swami was taken aback by the eccentric behaviour of the brahmin. "Why has he taken offence for no reason whatever? It is better for me to keep quiet." He stood in a corner with his palms joined in a reverential attitude.

This certainly didn't pacify the new arrival. "Now, you are standing at a distance with exaggerated humility. I will not let you get off the

hook so easily. Now, let me expound on the secret of Hari Om. Hey! Jayadeva! You took me for a pseudo-pandit and dared to ask me to interpret Hari Om. You will be dazed when I am finished with my exposition.

“The Lord wears out the sins of devotees, so he is called Hari. He is also the form of Om (Omkar) or the *Pranava*. *Pranava* is made of three syllables A-U-M. Only the perfect beings know the esoteric meaning of AUM. Vedas declare that Brahman itself is the AUM. He who has no knowledge of this syllable is verily an idiot even if he has mastered all scriptures. Such persons are under the sway of delusion. It is indeed a rare accomplishment to comprehend the *Pranava*. Without the grace of an exalted Sadguru who is well-established in Brahman, one cannot grasp its depth. The *agamas* and *nigamas* shine by virtue of *Pranava*. It is the essence of Vedas. It is the substratum of all creation. It is the primordial syllable, the primeval sound. One who knows the secret of *Pranava* truly attains the summit of Knowledge. Without comprehending the primordial sound, whatever austerity, japa, yoga and dhyana are performed, they become futile.

“Om or Omkar is like the ocean, the Vedas are like the foam. As the salt is to food so is Omkar to the vast body of knowledge. All the ills of transmigration, doubts, and perverted ideas are set to naught by the knowledge of Omkar. It is Omkar which lends power to the mantras like *panchakshari* and *ashtakshari*. He who has the experience that he is Brahman and the world is Brahman alone knows the secret of Omkar. In him, dawns the wisdom and in him does it remain steadfast. It is the base that sustains all mantras, just as water is to the trees, chastity to the women, discrimination to the human beings, and foundation to the stage. He who knows Omkar is verily a siddha, *mukta*, *bhakta*, *mumukshu*, *pandita* and *shreshtha*. One who has the real knowledge of Omkar is a true brahmin and all others are the abject slaves of maya.

He who knows not the Brahman which pervades all like butter in milk or oil in sesame seed and perceives only the world is indeed equal to a vile sinner having committed *Brahmahatya*. Just as a son who denounces his parents remains an orphan without any support, he who denies the Brahman and is steeped in ‘I and mine’ becomes the enemy of all gods and rishis and is bereft of the support of favourable influences. Such a person becomes inimical to the Guru who alone

can rescue the struggling souls from the ocean of worldliness. He, embodying anger and other evil attributes, goes on revolving in the wheel of transmigration without redemption. He remains tossed by the waves of Karma hither and thither for the entertainment of Maya and unable to see the direction of light, he is drowned in darkness. His condition is pitiable like cotton separated from the fruit and tossed by the wind or like a bird caught inescapably in the hunter's trap or like ants trapped in fire without any avenue of escape.

“O assembly of men! It is said that the ‘A’ of AUM signifies the waking state, or Brahma or creation; ‘U’ signifies the dream state, or Vishnu or sustenance; and M that of sleep or Rudra or dissolution.

“The dot in ॐ is the state beyond the three, i.e. the *turiya* which is the state of Pure Knowledge.

Alternatively, the A-U-M is said to indicate the following three aspects:

Powers of *iccha*, *kriya* and *jnana*, i.e. will, action and knowledge;

Attributes of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*;

Subtle mystic nerves of *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna*;

Thought, word and deed;

Karmas - *agamiya*, *sanchita* and *prarabdha*;

Forces of *adhyatma*, *bhoutika* and *daivika*;

Luminaries of sun, moon and fire.

Therefore, whatever is not contained in the Omkar does not exist at any time and anywhere.

“The three syllables also represent the gross, subtle and causal bodies. That which is the Cause and the Witness of these three bodies is the Atma. This transcendental state is the primal Cause, the great Bliss and grants the final merger to all. It is Eternal, Truth, Liberation. That which revels in the company of the queen *turiya* is known as the *Atma-Rama*, *Paratpara*, *Paripoorna*.

“From the primordial silence arose the Omkar. Then, Omkar gave rise to sound, letters, words, scriptures and hymns. While scriptures expound on the goal, Omkar indicates the experience of the goal. Just as a scholar does not have experience of the words, the three ignorant states of waking, dream and sleep cannot impart the experience of *turiya*. The scriptures aver that it is very rare to attain direct experience of the Self which is the state of *Brahmajnanis*.

“From the sound AUM emanated the human beings, demi-gods and demons. From the dot or *bindu* of AUM originated the Wise Ones. One who takes to the practice of Omkar addresses all the powers. Can one easily express the glory of Omkar in words? The head is the principal part of the body, as Brahma created the head first as the form of Omkar. He created the other parts later.

“O Jayadeva! Can you add anything more to the glory of Omkar? Come on! I challenge you. If you have the skill and erudition, then expound it further and defeat me.”

Jayadeva Swami paying obeisance to the brahmin said in a self-effacing tone, “O Swami! Can the light of an oil lamp be compared to the effulgence of the sun, or the glory of Ahalya to Arundati; or can a puddle compete with the ocean, or a droplet of water with the mass of rain-clouds or a prostitute with a radiant chaste woman? I am like a straw. How can you impute any importance to a lowly person like me and throw a challenge? All my accomplishments and my composition, I offer to you. This is the *Bhagavatam* that I have composed at the Lord’s behest. Please deign to bless it with the stamp of your approval.” Jayadeva Swami placed his Sanskrit composition before the brahmin and stood back with folded hands.

Scanning the *Bhagavatam* for a moment, he caught hold of the Swami’s hand and dragging him to the middle of the assembly spoke indignantly, “You are a fraud! This is an ancient composition and you are flaunting it as a product of your genius! Is this how you have earned royal favour and move around pompously like a Mahatma among the innocent citizens?”

At this point, the king interceded and said amicably, “O learned brahmin! This work has not been composed by any one earlier. This is the new composition of our revered Guru Jayadeva Swami. I swear by it.”

The brahmin burst into a loud guffaw and sneering at Jayadeva Swami said, “Oho..! you have passed it on as a new composition to the king! You are very smart indeed! I am going to expose your plagiarism. Now, while I recite the verses from the ancient text, you compare them with your *Bhagavatam*.”

Thrusting back into Jayadeva Swami’s hands his work, the Lord started reciting the verses in His nectarine voice.

On hearing the brahmin recite exactly the same verses as he had composed in his *Bhagavatam*, Jayadeva Swami was utterly confused and flabbergasted. He was breathless with shock. As the Lord-in-disguise started on the verses written in His praise, clothed in great beauty and devotion, He was overwhelmed by waves of love and in His absorption forgot His disguise. In that moment of forgetfulness, the Lord's true form became revealed to all.

In great jubilation, showers of flowers and gold-dust were rained from heaven. What an amazing spectacle it was! Unconscious of His true form being revealed to all, the Lord was joyfully reciting Jayadeva Swami's verses and dancing with rhythmic steps. This unbounded joy on His part attracted the attention of all celestial beings and drew them to the court. They sang ecstatically and played on their melodious instruments. The court-hall shone in full splendour owing to the presence of rishis, siddhas, kinnaras and demi-gods losing themselves in the resplendent form of the Lord who, in the ecstasy of singing and dancing, was unaware that His disguise was undone.

Gradually, all joined in the divine celebration. This festivity continued till midnight when Lord Shiva and Parvati also arrived there. Lord Mahadeva catching hold of Lord Hari's hands said, "O Janardana! What a wondrous display is this! You are unaware of Your own Maya deserting You and exposing Your true form. This is also Your leela that You have lost Yourself in the bliss of Jayadeva's hymns!"

When Sri Hari heard these words, He regained normalcy and looked at Himself in surprise! He stopped the recitation, rushed forward and held Jayadeva Swami close in His loving embrace and uttered the loving words, "O my beloved! O dispassionate one! It was My wish to read your hymns Myself and accord My recognition. Hence I came in the form of a brahmin. I forgot Myself in the sweet devotion expressed in your verses which exude your unparalleled love for Me. I proclaim here, "The fruit of reciting even one chapter from this unique composition is equal to the benefit gained by reading the entire *Bhagavatam* rendered by Vyasa." The entire assembly raised shouts of victory and glorified Jayadeva Swami. ▲



# Advaita Primer

## Part Eight

### *Analogies - I*

M. GIRIDHAR

In the first article of this series, we examined why we should study Advaita Vedanta. In the subsequent articles, we have examined the concepts of *jiva*, *nirguṇa* (without attributes) *Brahman*, *jagat* (world), and *saguṇa* Brahman (*ishvara*) and the relations between them. Various analogies are employed within Advaita Vedanta to elucidate these profound and complex metaphysical ideas.

One of the most prevalent analogies is the wave and ocean metaphor. Just as waves are transient and distinct forms that arise from the ocean, yet are fundamentally made of the same water, Advaita Vedanta suggests that individual entities (*jivas*) are like waves emerging from the infinite ocean of Brahman. This analogy helps illustrate the interconnectedness of all existence and the underlying unity in the apparent diversity.

Another analogy frequently used is the dream metaphor. In a dream, various characters and scenarios seem distinct and real while dreaming, but upon waking, they are recognised as mere illusions created by the dreamer's mind. Similarly, Advaita Vedanta asserts that the multiplicity of the waking world is an illusion, and the correct understanding involves recognising the underlying unity of Brahman.

The mirror analogy is employed to illustrate the relationship between Atman and Brahman. Just as a mirror reflects the image without being affected by it, the individual soul reflects the infinite consciousness without undergoing any change. The mirror represents the pure, unblemished nature of the Atman.

The clay and pot analogy is used to explain the relationship between the material world and the ultimate reality. Just as various pots are made

from the same clay, Advaita Vedanta suggests that the entire universe is a manifestation of Brahman. This analogy underscores the concept of non-duality and reinforces the idea that everything in existence is fundamentally grounded in the same divine reality.

The gold and ornaments metaphor is employed to elucidate the relationship between the ultimate reality (Brahman) and the diverse manifestations in the world. Just as various ornaments like rings, necklaces, and bracelets are made of gold, Advaita Vedanta posits that the entire universe is a manifestation of Brahman.

The rope and the snake (*rajju-sarpa-nyaya*) analogy is a classic metaphor used in Advaita Vedanta. Imagine someone walking in dim light and seeing a coiled object on the ground. Due to the low visibility, he mistakes the rope for a snake and experiences fear. However, when he brings a lamp and illuminates the object, he realises that there was never a snake; it was just a misperception caused due to ignorance (*avidya*).

The rope symbolizes the ultimate reality (Brahman), which is formless, eternal, and beyond attributes. The snake represents the world of appearances, characterized by diversity, change, and multiplicity. The dim light stands for ignorance (*avidya*), which veils the true nature of reality, leading to the misperception of the world as separate from Brahman.

The analogy serves to convey several key philosophical points. It explains *maya*. Just as the appearance of the snake was an illusion caused by insufficient light, the phenomenal world is considered an illusion created by ignorance. *Maya* is the power that veils the true nature of Brahman, leading individuals to perceive a world of multiplicity and diversity, which leads to ignorance. The dim light represents ignorance, which prevents individuals from recognising the underlying unity of all existence. Self-realization involves dispelling this ignorance to realize the oneness of the Self (Atman) with Brahman. The rope symbolizes the ultimate reality, Brahman, which is unchanging, eternal, and the source of all existence. Just as the rope is unaffected by the perception of the snake, Brahman remains untouched by the illusion of the phenomenal world. The analogy underscores the importance of discrimination (*viveka*). Just as the person needs a lamp to discriminate between the rope and the snake, individuals require spiritual insight and knowledge from a Guru to discern the true nature of reality and overcome ignorance.



The lack of awareness regarding the rope is timeless, as there was no prior knowledge of the rope before the perception of the snake and the snake did not exist before it was observed. If the ignorance of the rope had a beginning, there would have been a preceding awareness of the rope, which is not the case. The snake cannot be attributed to the rope, neither within it, nor upon it, nor as originating from it, since the rope itself remains unknown (yet encompasses all that truly exists). Ignorance is entirely unrelated to the rope, and it persists only as long as the lack of awareness endures. Sankara unequivocally states<sup>1</sup> “Ignorance belongs to the one who sees it,” highlighting that the absence of knowledge is contingent upon the observer. Thus, though the ignorance has no beginning, it can be ended by attaining knowledge.

All that is cognised is the snake (accompanied by fear) and the snake is erroneously projected or superimposed onto the situation (not onto the rope, which, until illuminated, remains concealed, essentially unmanifest, and is not the cause of fear). This misperception arises because whatever truly exists is not being perceived accurately and is seemingly displaced by the unreal entity—the *mithya* snake—and the subsequent unfounded fear. Awareness alone is the nature of reality. Just as the snake is a superimposition on the rope, so is the world merely a superimposition on attributeless awareness. Unaware of this, one mistakenly attributes absolute reality to things seen, heard, smelled, touched and tasted. In truth, they are merely modifications of awareness. Ramana Maharshi teaches that the Self is pure being, a subjective awareness of ‘I am’ that is completely devoid of the feeling ‘I’ with adjuncts. There are no subjects nor objects in the Self; there is only an awareness of being. The direct experience of this awareness has three aspects – being, consciousness and bliss – that are experienced as a unitary whole and not as separate attributes of the Self. They are inseparable just like wetness, transparency and liquidity are inseparable properties of water.

Shankara says<sup>2</sup>, “That in which something is imagined to exist through error, is, when rightly discriminated, that thing itself, and not distinct from it. When the error is gone, the reality about the snake falsely perceived becomes the rope. Similarly the universe is in reality the Atman.” The snake-rope analogy is found in many *puranas* such

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<sup>1</sup> *Upadesa Sahasri*, 17.20.

<sup>2</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, verse 387.

as the *Devi Bhagavatam* (11.18), *Vayu purana* (4.103), *Shiva purana* (7.13), and *Skanda purana* (2.2.27). In *Srimad Bhagavatam* (10.14), it is asked, “Can you realise the truth unless you negated the wrong superimposition of a serpent over that rope (through ignorance)?” The analogy is mentioned in Upanishads such as *Niralamba Upanishad* (14.25), *Tejobindu Upanishad* (5.76-98), *Atma Upanishad* (1.26-28), *Atmabodha Upanishad* (2.1.11-13).

Bhagavan mentions this analogy<sup>3</sup>, “The seer and the object seen are like the rope and the snake. Just as the knowledge of the rope which is the substrate will not arise unless the false knowledge of the illusory serpent goes, so the realization of the Self which is the substrate will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real is removed.” Realisation is the opposite of ignorance and the removal of *avidya* is the primary focus of the teaching. Self-Realisation is of the nature of direct experience transcending all perceptions and notions, and will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real ceases. There is complete absence of the delusion of duality, which manifests as the notions of an ego, a mind, a body and an objective world. As Bhagavan clarifies<sup>4</sup>, “There is no alternative for you but to accept the world as unreal, if you are seeking the Truth and the Truth alone... unless you give up the idea that the world is real, your mind will always be after it. If you take the appearance to be real you will never know the reality itself, although it is the reality alone that exists. This point is illustrated by the analogy of the ‘snake in the rope’. As long as you see the snake you cannot see the rope as such. The non-existent snake becomes real to you, while the real rope seems wholly non-existent as such.” In Talks,<sup>5</sup> Bhagavan explains “When a rope is mistaken for a snake, it is enough to remove the erroneous perception of the snake for the truth to be revealed.” A detailed polemic discussion of the analogy is provided by Bhagavan.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the rope and the snake are not distinct objects, the Self and the ego are not two separate ‘I’s. The rope remains a rope, even when mistaken for a snake, and the snake is nothing more than the rope.

<sup>3</sup> *Who Am I?*, Bhagavan’s reply to Q. 6, Sri Ramanasramam.

<sup>4</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book 2, Ch. 3, Maurice Frydman, Sri Ramanasramam.

<sup>5</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 25, Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanasramam.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Talk 332.

Similarly, the Self always IS, even when mistaken as an ego, making the ego nothing other than the Self. The Self represents the singular and exclusive 'I', and during the practice of *atma-vicara* (Self-enquiry), where we investigate the 'I' by attempting to focus solely on its essence, the 'I' being scrutinized is only the Self. Though this practice gives the impression that we are investigating the ego, persistent enquiry reveals that only the Self is. In the rope-snake analogy, we examine the snake but in scrutinizing it closely, are we investigating the snake or the rope? One could argue for either. Initially, it may seem like we are observing a snake, but with careful scrutiny, we recognise that it is only a rope. Similarly, initially, it may appear as if we are investigating this limited entity called the ego, but with diligent examination, we realize it is, in truth, the one infinite reality — the Self. Only the rope exists, whereas the snake is a phenomenon that seems real but is not what it appears to be. Therefore, investigating the apparent snake reveals its non-existence because what seemed like a snake is, in fact, only a rope. Similarly, only our Self truly exists, whereas the ego is a phenomenon that seems real but is not what it seems.

Mind constantly swings like a pendulum between the reality and the appearance, i.e., between consciousness and inertness. When the mind contemplates the inert objects for a considerable time, it assumes the characteristic of such inertness. When the same mind is devoted to enquiry and investigates the 'I', it shakes off all conditioning and returns to its original nature as Self. Therefore, observing only the 'I', allows the observer to merge back into its source, recognising it as a false appearance, much like the illusory snake merging back into its source, the rope, upon careful observation.

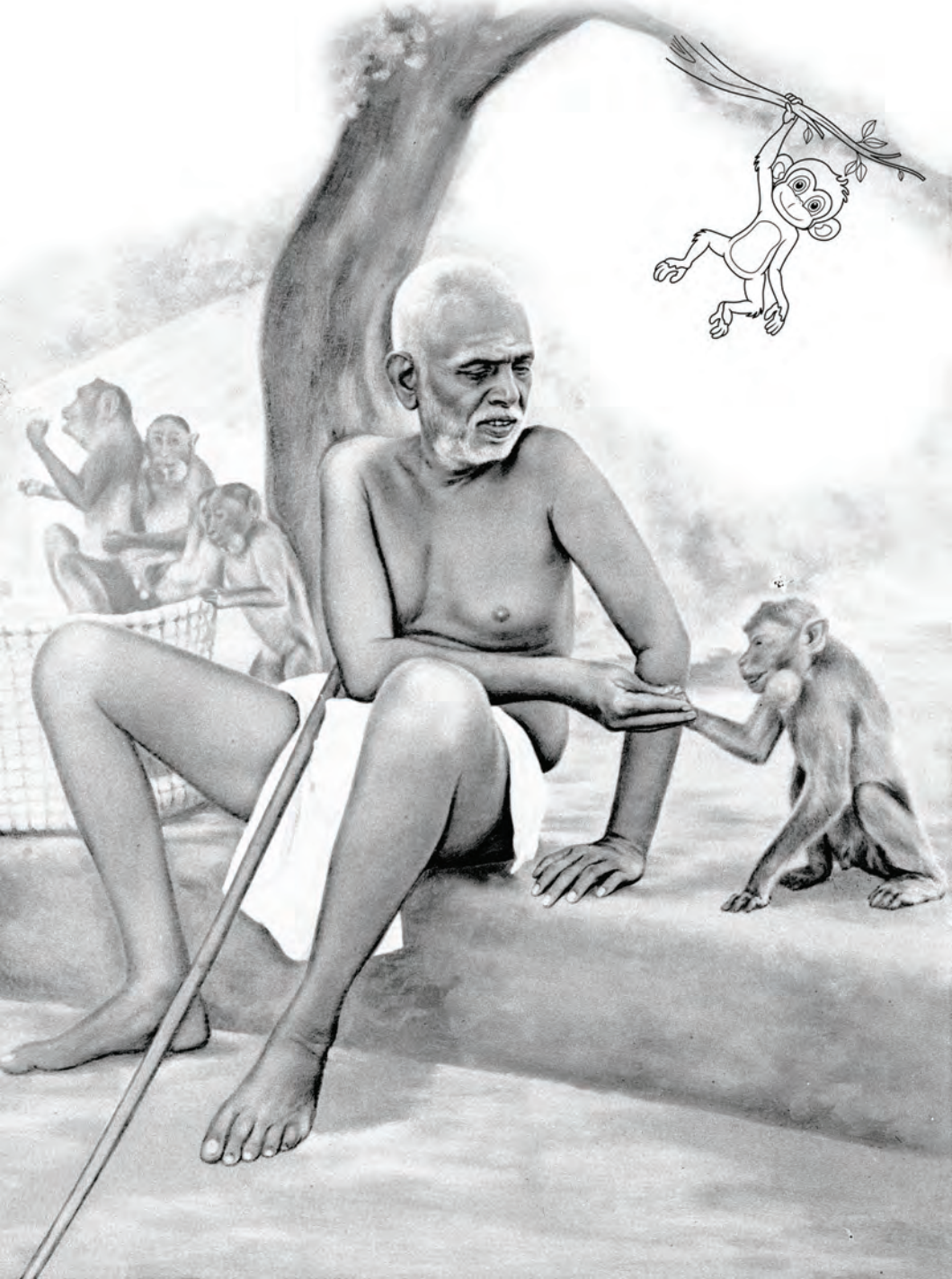
In summary, the analogies such as the rope and the snake analogy serve as a powerful tool to elucidate the concepts of *maya*, *avidya*, Brahman, and the transformative process of Self-realization. Each analogy provides a unique perspective on the fundamental teachings of non-duality and aid in making abstract concepts more accessible, allowing us to understand and grasp the essence of Advaita Vedanta. In the next parts of the articles, we will discuss around 25 analogies taken from various books on Advaita literature, such as *Aparokshanubhuti*, *Sata Sloki* and *Dakshinamurthi stotra*.





D. Thiyagarajan

# Nondi's Corner



## **Hello young adults and children!**

This is Nondi, a monkey devotee of Bhagavan. Welcome to the April 2024 edition of the children/youth corner. In this section, I will share stories, anecdotes, puzzles and interesting facts that offer you spiritual nourishment every quarter. The aim is to inspire you and help you blossom into kind, brave and decisive adults.

I look forward to engaging with all of you, all over the world, in the years to come. Please share your queries, feedback and articles with me at

[mountainpath@gururamana.org](mailto:mountainpath@gururamana.org).

Sincerely,  
**Your friend,**  
**“Nondi”**



## **Rishabha Vahanam: The importance of not getting distracted from the essential**

Here's a beautiful anecdote from T.R. Kanakammal's "Cherished Memories", that drives home the importance of staying focused on that which is important and essential, and not falling for distractions, no matter how dazzling they are.

During the Deepam Festival days, the deity is beautifully decorated and brought out in procession through the four streets around the temple. Each day, Lord Arunachala rides on different mounts. Among these, the great silver Rishabha (sacred bull) that bears the Lord on the fifth day of the festival is very special. This silver Rishabha is gigantic in size and unmatched in beauty. The temple priests seem to have a special love for this particular ceremonial mount, decorating it with evident pride in their own artistic creativity. The flower garlands and the huge flower umbrella are made with great attention to detail.

Once, Venkataratnam, Bhagavan's attendant, went to the temple to see the Rishabha Vahanam. The procession was magnificent, with nagaswaram experts playing sweet music and spectacular firework displays at every street corner. By the time the procession had covered the entire route and returned to the temple, it was quite late. So Venkataratnam did not go back to the Ashram but spent the rest of the night in a friend's house. The next morning, he went to the Ashram and resumed his regular duties. As soon as Bhagavan saw him, he asked, "You were not here last night. Did you go to the temple?" Venkataratnam said, "Yes, Bhagavan." He would have stopped with that had Bhagavan not exclaimed, "Is not the Rishabha Vahanam a grand sight!" This encouraged Venkataratnam to give a more detailed account of his experiences.



He enthusiastically described the Rishabha and the elaborate decorations. “Bhagavan! The Rishabha is so huge, and its appearance is so majestic! Oh, what lovely garlands it wore on its neck! And what a grand flower-umbrella it bore! Even the bulls that drew the carriage were beautifully decorated. What colourful garlands they had on their necks! They even had multi-coloured balloons tied to their horns!”

Bhagavan said, “Yes! Yes! Everything would have been very grand yesterday. There must have been an extraordinarily large garland of flowers also. Did you notice that?” Venkataratnam replied, “Yes, Bhagavan! It was enormous! They say that it is made especially for the Lord to wear on the fifth day of the festival. Do you know, Bhagavan, the priests had to climb up a ladder just to place the garland around the deity? In addition to all this, there were coloured bulbs strung around the head and the sides of the Rishabha. With the twinkling lights and the colourful garlands, not to mention the glittering ornaments, the Rishabha Vahanam was indeed a grand sight!”

Bhagavan interrupted the excited flow of words with a question: “Where were you standing? Could you see everything clearly from where you stood?”

Venkataratnam said, “It was terribly crowded, Bhagavan. It would have been impossible to see everything from the same spot. At first, I watched from within the mandapam. Then I moved to the corner beside the peanut stall. When the Rishabha came out of the temple and turned the corner, I had a clear view. What a splendid sight it was! And the fireworks were superb. What dazzling brilliance and what ear-splitting explosions! It is impossible to describe it all in words. No wonder that it is famous all over India! No wonder such a huge crowd had gathered to witness it! The crowd was like a surging sea. It was so difficult to get out of it in one piece!”

Having listened to all this, Bhagavan asked, “You have said so much about the crowd and the decorations and everything else. But you have not said a single word about Arunachala Himself. Well, how was He?”

Venkataratnam replied, “All the elaborate preparations and the spectacular arrangements were for Him, were they not? Everything is for Him alone!” Bhagavan said, “You said that the garland was huge, you said so much about the intricate patterns on the flower umbrella, you said the carriage was drawn by bulls and you even described the garlands around the bulls’ necks. But you have not talked about Arunachala at all! That is why I asked. Maybe you feel that it is not necessary to talk about Him. After all, He is always the same, is He not? Perhaps that is why you did not mention Him at all!”

Only then did poor Venkataratnam realise that Bhagavan had been teasing him deliberately. Bhagavan had encouraged, questioned, and provoked him into giving such an impassioned account of the previous night’s experiences. Venkataratnam had obligingly talked at length about all the other details but had forgotten all about Arunachala! Bhagavan’s query jolted Venkataratnam out of his absorption in the inessential details and made him realise that he had allowed the inessential details to take up all his attention, thus distracting him from the essential. Even though Bhagavan appeared to be just having some fun at Venkataratnam’s expense, there was actually a very important lesson underlying it all. It is a lesson all of us should learn because every one of us, at some time or the other, makes the same mistake as Venkataratnam. We often allow the inessential and the ephemeral to take up all our attention, thereby losing sight of the One Everlasting Truth. Bhagavan often taught the most profound truths through apparently light-hearted remarks. ▲

# Youth Corner

*Here's a personal account from our young friend Mukil Narayanan about how he came to Bhagavan and what Bhagavan means to him. Mukil is a high school student in California. He aspires to study music in college.*

A western classical music composer often looks at a blank score on a page before creating an original music composition, filled with notes, rhythms, ornaments, articulations, and much more. Similarly, our life is usually an empty score. God, who is the composer of our lives fills the score, i.e., our hearts with the music that will become our lives. I recently stumbled upon this personal thought while composing a reflective piece of music. But I am fortunate to have had introductions to multiple spiritual saints such as Pūjya Gurudev Swāmi Chinmayānanda and Bhagavān Śri Ramaṇa Maharṣi to guide me on my own spiritual yātrā (journey). The following is a brief description of that yātrā.

The saint Kabir (c. 15th century AD) says in his famous couplet, “गुरु गोविन्द दोऊ खड़े, काके लागू पाय | बलिहारी गुरु आपने, गोविन्द दियो बताय |” (guru govinda dou khड़े, kāke lāgū pāya | balihārī guru āpane, govinda diyo batāya) meaning, that “Guru and Govind both stand before me. Whose feet should I touch first? The Guru because thou art the one who will show me God.” The primary spiritual figure who introduced God to me, other than my parents, was Pūjya Gurudev Swāmi Chinmayānanda. At a young age, around the age of 8, I watched a biopic about Pūjya Gurudev and was very inspired by his own spiritual yātrā (journey).

I have been attending the local Bāla Vihār in San Jose, California since the age of 5 and have also been an active

member of my local Chinmaya Mission for the past 12 years. I remember learning about various saints and sages as part of the sixth-grade Bāla-Vihār curriculum. One of these saints and sages was Bhagavān Śrī Ramaṇa Maharṣi. That was the first time I heard about Bhagavan Ramana's life and teachings.

Around the same time, one of my Bala Vihar teachers, Sunitā Aunty, informed my parents about the weekly satsaṅg on Bhagavān Ramaṇa; our family started attending the local Bay Area Ramaṇa Satsaṅg since then. The Ramaṇa satsaṅga group observes Bhagavān's Jayanti, Arādhanā and Advent regularly. I participate actively in these events - I play music with my brother and my parents, act in plays, and have also been blessed to tell stories on Bhagavan in Sanskrit. The group has provided a platform for me to develop confidence and build leadership skills, while at the same time, being engrossed in Bhagavan. I am grateful to my parents and Sunita Aunty for the exposure.

What draws me to Bhagavan is his silence (maunam). I am a person who is hypersensitive to sound. Silence is something that I cherish and I found that deep maunam in the serene atmosphere of Srī Ramaṇāśramam. When I visited Sri Ramaṇāśramam, I felt extreme śānti (inner peace) when entering the āśram setting. The serene atmosphere instantly blew me away. I was also amazed at the beautiful peacocks and enjoyed the sumptuous food that the Ashram had such as the idlis, sambār, and much more. I particularly loved the delicious nārekela (coconut) chutney and idlis. It was inspiring to taste food that was cooked with the love of Bhagavān!

Eventually, my parents, my brother, and I got immersed more and more in Bhagavān. During the pandemic, I took part in online satsaṅg events, narrating and speaking about

Bhagavān's grace that really captivated me. Towards the end of 2023, our whole family was involved in the project of Śri Ramaṇa Thiruthondar Thogai, a set of 20 prayer verses composed by my father that celebrates the lives of 108 of Bhagavan's devotees. I narrated an introduction for this project. This experience made me feel very humbled. During the end of 2023, I attended the Jayanti retreat in Tampa, Florida. I had the unique opportunity to plant a plum tree along with the other children at the retreat to commemorate the 100th year celebrations of Śri Ramaṇāśramam.

Thinking ahead, spiritual figures like Bhagavān Ramaṇa and Pūjya Gurudev have always been an inspiration or margadarśakanetā ("leader who show the spiritual path for the seeker") for me to be continuously engaged in spirituality, throughout my life. I plan to continue on this spiritual journey by doing sevā (service). I hope that one day Bhagavān and Gurudev will show me my own path to follow to reach God, the ultimate composer.

My humble prostrations to the entire Guru-Śiṣya Parampara!

Om Namo Bhagavate Śri Ramaṇāya!



## HERE'S THIS ISSUE'S FUN CORNER

### Word Search Puzzle

Find and mark 15 devotees of Bhagavan in this word grid.

I	J	M	Y	F	K	E	L	E	I	T	G	Q	S	S
J	M	R	A	X	N	A	X	M	W	A	O	N	U	Y
N	S	H	L	J	M	A	A	P	N	K	E	X	R	E
J	H	A	S	M	O	W	T	A	S	H	O	D	I	R
Q	G	U	A	K	S	R	P	S	O	K	O	O	N	H
X	F	H	L	U	A	A	C	C	A	C	A	I	A	P
S	C	R	J	T	T	L	S	H	D	M	I	W	G	M
E	C	N	Y	I	U	S	W	G	A	X	N	Z	A	U
L	U	M	M	D	Z	V	M	O	U	D	G	H	M	H
K	C	U	G	S	M	C	R	I	C	J	W	U	M	E
I	N	L	A	M	M	A	N	T	A	R	K	I	A	P
I	Y	Z	A	J	M	S	N	E	E	X	N	V	C	Y
M	U	R	U	G	A	N	A	R	W	M	T	F	V	K
J	A	N	A	K	I	M	A	T	H	A	R	Y	J	F
H	I	T	A	A	P	R	A	I	L	A	D	U	M	N

### Ponder the significance

What do you take away from the incident below? Please share your thoughts with us at

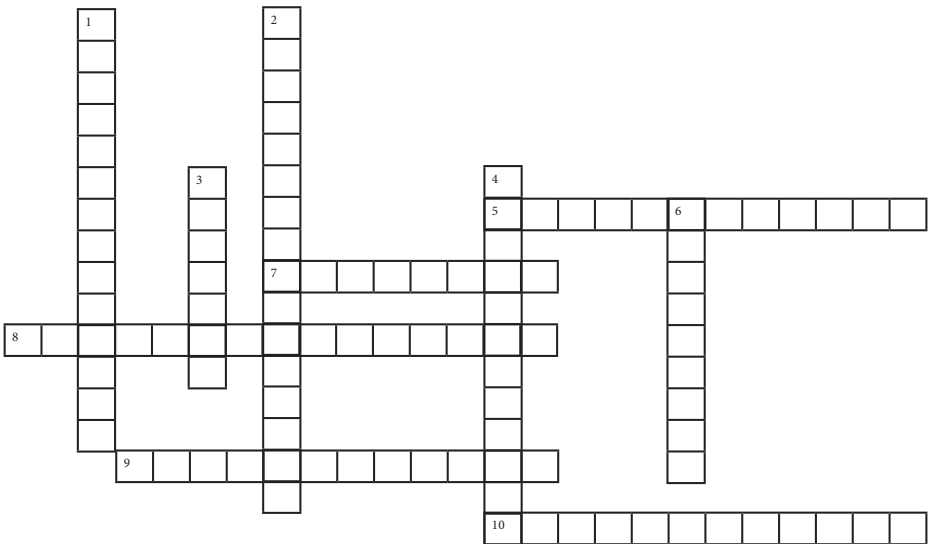
[mountainpath@gururamana.org](mailto:mountainpath@gururamana.org)

Poovan, a shepherd, claims to have known Sri Bhagavan for thirty years, dating back to the days of the Virupaksha cave. During that time, he used to occasionally supply milk to visitors. About six years ago, he experienced the loss of

a pregnant sheep, and despite searching for three days, he had given up hope, assuming the sheep had fallen prey to wild animals. One day, while passing by the Asramam, Sri Bhagavan noticed him and inquired about his well-being. Poovan shared his search for the lost sheep. Sri Bhagavan, in his usual quiet manner, then asked the shepherd to assist in lifting some stones, a task Poovan gladly undertook. Upon completing the work, Sri Bhagavan directed him, saying, "Go this way," pointing towards the footpath leading to the town. Following the path, Poovan discovered the stray sheep along with two little lambs.

**Crossword Puzzle:**

Find 10 compositions of Bhagavan



**ACROSS**

5. Composed first in Sanskrit in the Arya Metre
7. Bhagavan's autobiography
8. Last original composition first composed in Telugu (2 words)
9. Sanskrit version of Ulladu Narpadu (2 words)
10. Composed at the request of Muruganar to explain Lord Shiva's teachings to the rishis of the Daruka forest (2 words)

**DOWN**

1. Tamil translation in venpa metre of Lord Shiva's instructions to Parvati
2. Composed at the request of devotees setting out on bhiksha
3. Composed when the word "karunaiyaal" throbbed spontaneously in Bhagavan's heart
4. Song composed for Bhagavan's mother in the kitchen (2 words)
6. Composed based on Gopalakrishna Bharati's song on Nandanar (2 words)

**Shloka: Sri Ramana Ashtottaram**

Let us continue to memorise this wonderful composition by Sri Viswanatha Swami. These are 108 names of Bhagavan used to worship him. As each name is uttered by way of invocation, a flower is offered in worship. Let's memorise one name at a time and understand its meaning. Here's Name 2:

ॐ श्रीरमणाय नमः ।

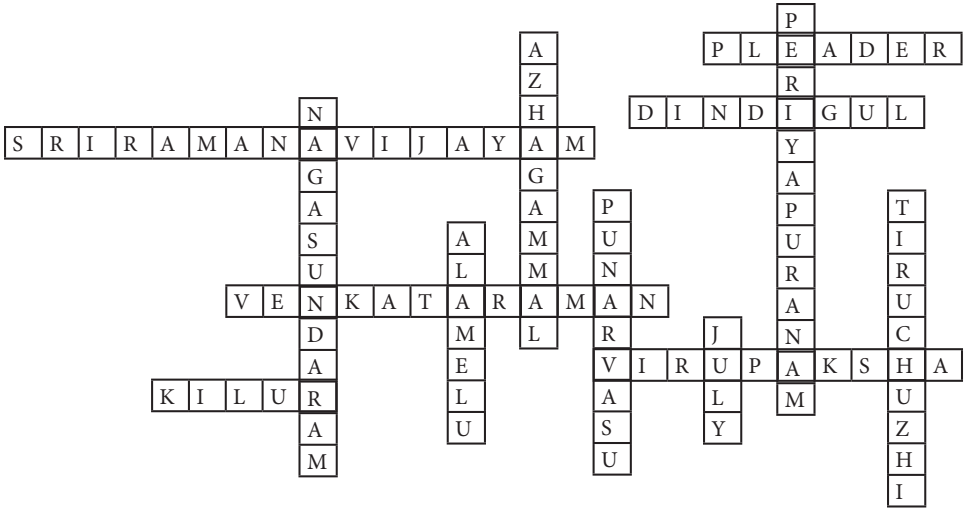
Om Śri ramaṇāya namaḥ ।

Meaning: Obeisance to Śri Ramana.

The Name Śri Ramaṇa Mahaṛṣi, conferred on the young ascetic by Ganapati Muni and now universally accepted, reminds us that Bhagavan rejoiced in the Self of pure awareness and that his message is *Ramaṇīya*, the experience of bliss or beauty, inherent in good but not in evil, in the true but not in the false, in love but not in hatred, in peace but not in conflict.



Solutions to January 2024 crossword puzzle and anagram



HAVSRAPIUK

TIZUCHIUHR

TRGUHRMMUAU

DGNDUIIL

AUIDMAR

NGAOM ERTE EACV

UVALNMAARINAIT

LATPAA ALGNIM

LDO ALLH

PDKHAUANURAVZ

HUGAI IVNASAMHYAA

CMIAAAPHANM LKIO

MSRNKSDHAAA

EELJUIB LLHA

VIRUPAKSHA

TIRUCHUZI

GURUMURTHAM

DINDIGUL

MADURAI

MANGO TREE CAVE

TIRUVANNAMALAI

PATALA LINGAM

OLD HALL

PAVAZHAKUNDRU

GUHAI NAMASHIVAYA TEMPLE

PACHAIAMMAN KOIL

SKANDASHRAM

JUBILEE HALL



# QUESTION & ANSWER

*Question: I quickly want to check about how to recognise a saint, and what you think at the ashram. How is a Self-realised person described by Saints like Ramana Maharshi? How does it compare to the teaching in Bhagavad Gita? How to recognise Saints and Sages?*

Thank you for your question. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, a Self-realised person, often referred to as a “*sthitaprajna*,” exhibits several characteristics:

- 1. Equanimity:** They remain undisturbed by joy or sorrow, maintaining inner balance in all circumstances.
- 2. Detachment:** They act without attachment to the results of their actions, understanding that outcomes are not within their control.
- 3. Wisdom:** A Self-realised person possesses deep spiritual insight and understanding of the true nature of reality.
- 4. Compassion:** They harbour compassion for all beings, recognising the interconnectedness of all life.
- 5. Self-discipline:** Such individuals exhibit strong self-control and discipline in their thoughts, words, and actions.
- 6. Fearlessness:** They are free from fear, having transcended worldly anxieties and concerns.
- 7. Non-egoistic:** Self-realised individuals are humble and free from ego, recognising the divine presence in all.

These qualities collectively contribute to the state of Self-realisation, as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Ramana Maharshi has described the characteristics of a Self-realised person in line with the Advaita Vedanta philosophy:

- 1. Self-awareness:** A Self-realised person is constantly aware of their true nature, the eternal Self (Atman).
- 2. Abiding inner peace:** They experience a profound and unshakable inner peace, irrespective of the external circumstances.

**3. Detached observer:** Such an individual remains a detached observer of the world, understanding the transient nature of the material realm.

**4. Ego dissolution:** A Self-realised person has transcended the ego, recognising it as an illusion, and identifies with the unchanging Self.

**5. Universal love:** They emanate a sense of universal love and compassion for all beings, seeing the oneness in all of creation.

**6. Silence as communication:** Often, a Self-realised person communicates through silence, as their inner realisation goes beyond the limitations of words.

**7. Effortless spontaneity:** Actions flow effortlessly from them, as they act in accordance with the divine will, without personal desires or attachments.

These characteristics, according to Ramana Maharshi, reflect the profound transformation that occurs in an individual upon attaining Self-realisation.

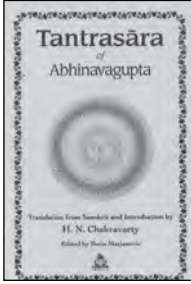
The *jñāni* is devoid of ego and does not experience any differences such as ‘myself’ and ‘others’ (as Bhagavan says in verse 38 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham*), as a general rule of thumb we can expect the *jñāni* to act with perfect humility and not to claim that he or she (the person who seems to be a *jñāni*) is in any way special or different to anyone else.

In *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Talk #426), Bhagavan answers as follows:

D.: What are the fundamental tests for discovering men of great spirituality, since some are reported to behave like insane people?

M.: The *jñāni*’s mind is known only to the *jñāni*. One must be a *jñāni* oneself in order to understand another *jñāni*. However the peace of mind which permeates the saint’s atmosphere is the only means by which the seeker understands the greatness of the saint. His words or actions or appearance are no indications of his greatness, for they are ordinarily beyond the comprehension of common people. ▲

# BOOK REVIEW



*TANTRASARA OF ABHINAVAGUPTA: Translation from Sanskrit and Introduction by H.N. Chakravarty.* Text. Indica Books, Varanasi, 2023. PB. Rs.875. pp.272.

ISBN-13: 978-93-81120-34-7.

<https://www.indicabooks.in/product/tantrasara-of-abhinavagupta/>

email: [indicabooks@gmail.com](mailto:indicabooks@gmail.com)

*Tantrasara* by Abhinavagupta stands as a pinnacle in the domain of tantric literature, particularly within the philosophical framework of Kashmir Shaivism. In this comprehensive work, Abhinavagupta delves into the intricacies of tantric practices, offering profound insights into the nature of consciousness, the dynamics of energy, and the profound connection between the individual and the divine. This summary aims to provide a detailed exploration of the key themes and teachings found in this seminal text.

## **Philosophical Foundations:**

At the heart of *Tantrasara* lies a robust philosophical foundation rooted in the tenets of Kashmir Shaivism. Abhinavagupta, a revered figure in this tradition, expounds on the nature of reality, asserting that the ultimate reality is a dynamic, pulsating consciousness known as Shiva. This divine consciousness is not separate from the individual soul (atman), but rather, it is the essence of every being.

The text navigates the intricate concepts of *Prakriti* (the cosmic energy or creative principle) and *Purusha* (the transcendent consciousness). Abhinavagupta elucidates the interplay between these two fundamental forces, emphasising that the entire universe is an expression of their eternal dance. The practitioner, through tantric practices, seeks to understand and experience this cosmic dance within their own being.

## **Tantra as a Path to Liberation:**

*Tantrasara* outlines Tantra as a systematic path to spiritual liberation. Unlike some mainstream philosophical traditions that

advocate renunciation, tantra embraces the world and its experiences as a means to realise the divine. Abhinavagupta emphasises that the material world is not an obstacle but a manifestation of the divine energy, and by engaging with it consciously, one can attain spiritual enlightenment.

The practitioner is guided through a series of rituals, meditations, and contemplative practices designed to awaken the dormant divine energy within. Tantric practices are seen as a method to harness and elevate individual consciousness, leading to a direct experience of the divine reality.

### **Rituals and Worship:**

A significant portion of *Tantrasara* is dedicated to elucidating various rituals and worship practices. Abhinavagupta emphasises the transformative power of rituals when performed with a deep understanding and devotion. Rituals are not mere external actions but are designed to evoke inner transformations, aligning the practitioner with higher states of consciousness.

The use of mantras (sacred sounds), mudras (gestures), and yantras (symbolic diagrams) is intricately explained. These elements are considered potent tools to connect with the divine forces and channel their energies for spiritual upliftment. Abhinavagupta elucidates the significance of sound, stating that the vibrations produced by mantras resonate with the cosmic energies, facilitating a harmonious alignment with the universal consciousness.

### **The Role of Guru:**

In the tantric tradition, the guidance of a qualified guru is deemed essential. Abhinavagupta underscores the importance of a spiritual teacher who has traversed the path and can impart not only knowledge but also transmit the transformative energy to the disciple. The guru-disciple relationship is portrayed as a sacred bond, crucial for the successful navigation of the tantric path.

The guru serves as a beacon of light, illuminating the esoteric teachings and guiding the disciple through the labyrinth of spiritual practices. *Tantrasara* emphasises the humility and surrender required on the part of the disciple, acknowledging the guru as the embodiment of divine wisdom.

### **Mantra and Sound:**

A central theme in *Tantrasara* is the profound significance attributed to sound, specifically the chanting of mantras. Abhinavagupta explores the vibrational nature of sound and its direct impact on consciousness. Mantras are viewed not only as linguistic constructs but as potent vehicles of divine energy.

The repetition of mantras is considered a means to purify the mind, elevate consciousness, and establish a resonance with higher states of reality. Abhinavagupta introduces the concept of “spanda,” the primal throb or pulsation of consciousness, underlying all of creation. Mantras are seen as a way to attune oneself to this cosmic pulsation, leading to a direct experience of the divine.

### **The Three Malas:**

*Tantrasara* introduces the concept of the three *malas*, which are impurities or limitations that veil the true nature of the self. These *malas* are *Avidya* (ignorance), *Kala* (time-limited individuality), and *Raga* (attachment). The practitioner engages in various tantric practices to overcome these malas and unveil the inherent divinity within.

*Avidya* represents the fundamental ignorance that veils the true nature of reality. Through knowledge and Self-inquiry, the practitioner aims to dispel this ignorance and realise the non-dual nature of existence. *Kala*, representing limited individuality, is transcended through the recognition of the divine essence present in all beings. *Raga*, attachment to the transient aspects of existence, is overcome through detachment and devotion to the ultimate reality.

### **The Concept of Shakti:**

*Tantrasara* places significant emphasis on Shakti, the divine feminine energy that underlies the entire cosmos. Shakti is considered the dynamic aspect of Shiva, the creative force that manifests in various forms and energies. The practitioner seeks to awaken and unite with this Shakti within, recognising it as the key to spiritual realisation.

The worship of the divine feminine is a prevalent theme in tantric practices, symbolising the creative and nurturing aspects of the cosmos. Abhinavagupta elaborates on the different forms of Shakti and their corresponding mantras and rituals, providing a holistic approach to the integration of feminine energy in the spiritual journey.

### **Kundalini and Chakras:**

*Tantrasara* delves into the esoteric aspects of Kundalini, the coiled serpent energy residing at the base of the spine. The awakening of Kundalini is seen as a crucial step in the tantric path, leading to the expansion of consciousness and the realisation of one's true nature.

The text describes the ascent of Kundalini through the central energy channels, known as *nadis*, and its passage through the various chakras. Each chakra represents a different aspect of consciousness, and the harmonisation of these energy centres is essential for spiritual evolution. *Tantrasara* provides detailed guidance on practices to awaken and balance the Kundalini energy, facilitating the ascent towards higher states of awareness.

### **The Integration of Dualities:**

One of the distinctive features of Kashmir Shaivism is its embrace of dualities as a means to transcend them. *Tantrasara* expounds on the concept of *Pratyabhijna*, the recognition of the divine within the dualities of life. Rather than rejecting the material world, the practitioner is encouraged to perceive it as an expression of the divine consciousness.

Abhinavagupta emphasises the integration of opposites, recognising the unity underlying apparent distinctions. By embracing both pleasure and pain, success and failure, the practitioner transcends the limitations of duality and attains a state of equanimity. This integration is seen as a pathway to the direct realisation of the non-dual nature of reality.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, *Tantrasara* by Abhinavagupta is a profound exploration of the tantric path within the framework of Kashmir Shaivism. This book is a faithful and deep translation of the work and the book covers all the aspects of *tantrasara* remaining true to the original. It is a required reading for all aspirants not only in Kashmir Shaivism but also Advaita Vedanta.

— M. Giridhar





# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## 144th Ramana Jayanti

The 144th Jayanti of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was celebrated with grandeur on December 28, 2023. It was held in an exemplary fashion with recitals from early morning. There were special pujas, Mahanyasa Rudra japam, chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*, *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, etc. This was followed by *abhishekam* and special decoration. The final aarti was held around 10:30 a.m. after the dedication of various songs. This was followed by a special feast wherein more than five thousand people took *prasadam*.

## Swami Ramanananda Aradhana

The Aradhana of Swami Ramanananda was held in a grand fashion on 29th December 2023 at his samadhi that lies opposite the Mother's shrine. Swami Ramanananda, formerly known as Sri T.N. Venkataraman, peacefully passed away on the evening of Wednesday, December 26th, 2007.

## Sivaprakasam Pillai Day

Sivaprakasam Pillai (1875-1948), first met Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1902. He is best remembered for his role in getting Sri Ramana Maharshi write down his teachings, which were later published as the book *Who am I?* His Aradhana was celebrated on January 12, 2024, with devotees chanting his compositions on Bhagavan.

## Mattu Pongal

Mattu Pongal was celebrated in a special way at the Ashram in honour of the cows. Mattu Pongal, specifically, is dedicated to expressing gratitude and honouring cattle, particularly cows and bulls, for their role in agriculture and farming.

## Maha Sivaratri

Sivaratri was celebrated at the Ashram on Krishna Paksha Chaturdasi, the 8th of March, with jagaran, the traditional all-night vigil sustained by puja, recitation and meditation. The first kala puja was followed by the lighting of the ceremonial bonfire (of cow dung)

at the Ashram gosala generating the upcoming year's supply of sacred ash. This was followed by three more kala pujas throughout the night.

## Obituary

Smt. Kalyani Kapali, aged 92, daughter of Sub-Registrar R. Narayana Iyer, attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan on 3rd November 2023. She breathed her last moments while in meditation and prayers. She grew up in Ramana Nagar and was well-known in the ashram circles between 1931 and 1950. She would often sing the song Saranagati, a song of absolute surrender to the divine, in the presence of Bhagavan. Her expression of deep sorrow was conspicuous in the Indian news reel on Sri Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi. ▲



Facebook serves as a platform for sharing updates about all major functions at Ramanasramam. Extensive discussions and photographs of the above events can be found in our Facebook pages in multiple languages. Facebook content is available in eleven languages, including Tamil, French, Hindi, Telugu, Czech, Spanish, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi and Gujarati.

Major functions such as Jayanti, Aradhana, Maha Puja, Navaratri, Sri Vidya Havan etc., are telecast live on the Ashram's YouTube channel. In addition, Tamil Parayana and Vedaparayana are telecast live from Monday to Saturday from 5 p.m. to 6.45 p.m. IST. Please visit <https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos>.



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