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

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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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Mountain Path is dedicated to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

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Divine Names of Arunachala

38. ॐ भोगनायकाय नमः

OM Bhoganayakaaya namaH

Lord of Enjoyments.

In the previous issue, we discussed Arunachaleswara as Yogisah, the Lord of Yogis. Now we see him as Bhoganayakah, the Lord of Enjoyments. The question this time is what it would mean for the Lord, who is ever-aloof from this world, to "enjoy."

We believe that we know the meaning of enjoyment: we receive a piece of chocolate, or a paycheck, or affection, and we revel in the supposedly blissful feelings that result from contact with these objects. Bhagavan has described the means by which Arunachala enjoys, in a seemingly similar fashion: "[arresting] the movements of anyone who so much as thinks of It, [drawing] him face to face with It, and [fixing] him motionless like Itself, [It feeds] on his soul thus ripened."

By contemplating this imagery of Bhagavan's, we can easily arrive at an understanding of the true nature of enjoyment. Here, the Self feeds on the soul only once it has become ripe and enjoyable, i.e., motionless like Itself. Thus, it is clear that enjoyment for the Self is only Its own sweet form, Its own ecstatic being. The title "Lord of Enjoyments" should be interpreted not only as a statement of Lord Siva's possession of the means of enjoyment, but also as a declaration that He Himself is the greatest Enjoyment - in fact, the only one.

If the sustaining factor in action itself is desire for enjoyment, and if the only true enjoyment is the Lord Himself and the realization of our identity with Him, then one can say that the sustaining factor of our entire experience - the ground of our every moment - is the ever-realized nature of the Self. Thus, Arunachala, the Self, as that alone which is self-effulgent, proves Itself by Its own nature. By the very fact that enjoyment exists, we can be certain that, outside of the illusion of space-time, the Self has already been realized and can never be lost. All that is left is to investigate. ▲

— S. Lazar

Signs of Spiritual Progress:

How Do We Measure Success while following Bhagavan's Teachings?

It is human nature to measure and evaluate progress in any endeavor we undertake. As young students, our efforts are validated when we pass a competitive examination and secure admission to the college of our dreams. At work, pay raises, bonuses, and promotions serve as measures of success, proof that our efforts are recognized and rewarded, and indicators that we are advancing in our careers. At home, when our children do well and grow into successful young adults, we feel a sense of satisfaction, knowing that we were successful as parents.

In the realm of worldly endeavors, progress is often marked by tangible milestones—promotions, accolades, or achievements. But on the spiritual path, where the goal is subtler and inward, how do we discern the signs of growth? In the most important facet of our lives—as spiritual seekers following the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi—how do we recognize progress and find reassurance that we are moving in the right direction?

Bhagavan guides us with profound simplicity: "The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and concentration on a single thought are the measure of progress."[1] He elaborates, explaining, "When thoughts arise, duality is present; know it to be the ego, and seek its source. The degree of the absence of thoughts is the measure of your progress towards Self-Realisation."[2]

[1] Talk 427, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*
[2] Talk 618, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

Bhagavan further clarifies: "The Self remains always in realization. The obstacles are thoughts. Progress is measured by the degree of removal of the obstacles to understanding that the Self is always realized. So, thoughts must be checked by seeking to whom they arise. So you go to their Source, where they do not arise."[3]

This leads to a natural question: how can we function in this world without thoughts? We know that in deep sleep, we exist without thoughts, and that this thought-free state is one of bliss and fullness—which is why we so eagerly look forward to our sleep, whether we are kings or beggars. Yet, during the day, if we reflect on our actions, we see they are all guided by thoughts—whether it's planning our day, eating, working, preparing for an exam, or caring for our children. It seems counter-intuitive that we could live in this world without thinking.

Bhagavan addresses this paradox: "After tasting such bliss, even once, one will repeatedly try to regain it. Having once experienced the bliss of peace, no one would like to be out of it or engaged himself otherwise. It is as difficult for a jnani to engage in thoughts as it is for an ajnani to be free from thought."[4] For the realized being, engaging in thought becomes unnatural, while for the rest of us, silencing the mind feels equally challenging.

He has also said, "Thoughts are only vasanas (predispositions), accumulated in innumerable births before. Their annihilation is the aim. The state free from vasanas is the primal state and eternal state of purity."[5]

Thus, Bhagavan declares that a jnani can function perfectly well without engaging in thoughts. Thoughts, he explains, are merely vasanas, and the by-product of the elimination of vasanas is the natural revelation of the Self, whose nature is bliss. If we accept Bhagavan as our Guru and have complete faith in His words, it means that our entire spiritual quest is to work on quelling our vasanas. Bhagavan, who is none other than our inner Self, will take care of the rest.

Understanding Vasanas

Vasanas are deeply ingrained mental tendencies, strengthened by repeated thoughts and actions of the same nature, accumulated over

[3] Talk 618, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*
[4] Talk 141, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*
[5] Talk 80, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

several births. They represent karmic imprints that influence a person's present behavior—their mental urges, natural inclinations, character, attitudes, likes and dislikes, talents, desires, and feelings.

Bhagavan says, "there are two kinds of vasanas: (1) *bandha hetuh*, causing bondage for the ignorant, and (2) *bhoga hetuh*, giving enjoyment for the wise. The latter do not obstruct realisation."[6]

So our first step is to distinguish between vasanas that cause bondage and those that do not obstruct realization. By examining our thoughts on a typical day, we can categorize them as follows:

Category 1: Simple thoughts, free from vasanas.
Category 2: Vasana-laden thoughts driven by desires for specific results.
Category 3: Vasana-laden thoughts concerning people and events.

Category 1: Routine, Basic Vasanas – Waking up, bathing, eating, sleeping

These vasanas are typically harmless if we treat them as essential daily activities that simply need to be done. Bhagavan says:

*"*Small desires such as the desire to eat, drink, sleep, and attend to calls of nature—though they may also be classed as desires—can be safely satisfied. They will not implant vasanas in your mind, necessitating further birth. These activities are necessary to sustain life and are unlikely to develop or leave behind vasanas or tendencies. As a general rule, there is no harm in satisfying a desire if the satisfaction does not lead to further desires by creating vasanas in the mind.*"*[7]

Category 2: Vasana-laden Thoughts Tied to Specific Outcomes

These thoughts are driven by the desire to achieve particular results. Examples include: (a) Working on a project in hopes of earning a promotion, (b) Helping our children with schoolwork, hoping they will get into a top college, (c) Volunteering at an organization with the desire for recognition of our selfless service and (d) Trying to impress someone to win their affection. Craving specific foods, or insisting on a particular mattress for sleep — this attitude to the simple thoughts in Category 1 can create further vasanas.

[6] Talk 317, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*
[7] *Day by Day with Bhagavan*

Such thoughts often dominate our days, especially when we are young and are actively engaged in the world. The work that arises from these vasanas is not inherently binding. What creates bondage is the "I am the doer" attitude—when we become attached to the results, feverish about success, and entangled in relationships connected to the work. This attitude strengthens the vasana for recognition and inflates the ego.

As things go our way, we seek more of the same. Conversely, if outcomes don't meet our expectations, we may feel frustrated and adopt behaviors that hinder spiritual progress, thereby planting the seeds of fresh vasanas.

As Bhagavan explains in *Upadesa Saram,* "The fruit of action passes. But action leaves behind the seed of further action leading to an endless ocean of action and not at all to moksha."[8]

The way to avoid being bound by this category of thoughts is to perform them with detachment—free from the notions of "I" and "mine"—and to relinquish any desire for the fruits of our actions. We can cultivate this detachment by anchoring ourselves in the knowledge that we are the Self, not the mind or body. The focus is on performing our work sincerely and efficiently, to the best of our ability, without expecting anything in return.

There are many familiar examples of such work. For example, (a) becoming engrossed in a fascinating book, reading purely for the joy of it, without a sense of "I" involved, (b) Playing sports simply for the love of the game, immersed in the experience, and (c) Building a financial model or writing code from scratch, driven by the fun and challenge, not by recognition or reward.

In all these instances, we focus fully on the task at hand, doing it well without attachment to the outcome. Acquiring skills and knowledge does not conflict with Bhagavan's teachings, as long as our efforts are free from the egoic sense of "I" and the pursuit of personal gain.

Bhagavan composed all his works in this state of flow, spontaneously and without the active operation of the mind.

Adopting a devotional attitude—offering all work to God and accepting the results as His prasadam—is another powerful way to act without becoming bound. As Bhagavan explains in *Upadesa Saram*,

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[8] Verse 2: *kṛti-maho-dadhau patana-kāraṇam;phalama-śaśvataṃ gati-nirodhakam.*

"Disinterested action surrendered to the Lord purifies the mind and points the way to moksha."[9]

Category 3: Vasana-laden Thoughts About People and Events

Examples include:

Feelings of excessive love or hate toward individuals or groups.

Wanting our favorite sports team to win.

Self-pitying thoughts like "Why me?"

Excessive consumption of news.

Agitation over traffic or pollution.

Anxiety about children or parents.

This category of thoughts is unproductive for the spiritual quest. While thoughts from Categories 1 and 2 are unavoidable for maintaining the body and fulfilling societal duties, Category 3 thoughts arise from personal likes and dislikes, attachments to people, and identification with a nation, religion, or sports team. These thoughts should be minimized.

Bhagavan and Advaita Vedanta teach that there are no "others." Thus, thoughts centered on people are ultimately futile. This does not mean we neglect our duties to those around us—we should fulfill them with care and attention. For example, we can be loving and responsible parents without constantly worrying about our children. We cannot control events like elections or sports outcomes, so while it is enjoyable to follow them out of interest, obsessing over them can be counterproductive to our sadhana.

Taking practical steps—like avoiding crowded roads or using a humidifier—is far more effective than worrying about traffic or pollution. In the same way, focusing on essential news and steering clear of idle gossip supports our spiritual journey. Bhagavan read the newspaper each morning but never lingered on or discussed the contents. Likewise, we can stay informed about key events without becoming preoccupied, ensuring we function as responsible citizens without losing focus on our spiritual quest.

Conclusion

In summary, by engaging in Category 1 thoughts, cultivating the right attitude for Category 2 thoughts, and minimizing Category 3

[9] Verse 3: *īśvarārpitaṃ necchayā kṛtam; citta-śodhakaṃ mukti-sādhakam.*

thoughts, we gradually come to understand the essence of Bhagavan's guidance on spiritual progress: "The degree of the absence of thoughts is the measure of your progress towards Self-realization."

By remaining vigilant and keeping our thoughts in check throughout the day, we prevent them from creating bondage. Over time, both the thoughts and their associated vasanas weaken. Our thinking becomes restricted to what is necessary to fulfill the duties assigned to us by our *prarabdha* (destiny). This detachment enables us to fulfill our roles as parents, children, and professionals with grace, clarity, and balance.

The remaining time naturally flows into our spiritual practices—Japa (chanting), reading authentic books on our Guru's teachings, serving the Guru, and practicing self-inquiry. As we turn inward, seeking the source of the "I" thought, we gradually abide in that stillness. Far from being a dry or dull existence, this is the most vibrant and blissful way to live. We no longer depend on external people, places, or objects for happiness. Delight arises within as we begin to glimpse who we truly are.

Desire-driven actions fall away naturally. We engage in service for its own sake, not for recognition or reward, using our skills and talents to support our families and communities. Work transforms into worship, becoming a means to exhaust vasanas. This process purifies the mind (c*hitta suddhi*) and dissolves deep-seated tendencies.

When we notice thoughts colored by "I" and "mine"—signs of doership or enjoyership—we gently trace them back to their source, the place from which no thoughts arise. The more often we return to this enquiry, the deeper we go, drawing thoughts back to their origin in the heart. With this practice, meditation on the Self naturally deepens, and unnecessary thinking subsides on its own.

This is the goal we seek, by surrendering to Bhagavan's grace and following his teachings with deep devotion. As we observe our thoughts and walk the path he has shown us, the presence of Arunachala and Bhagavan gradually fills our hearts as a steady current of peace. The reward is a life of harmony—one where, even in the face of illness or loss, peace and contentment prevail. Such is the transformative power of calming our thoughts. What greater fulfillment could we seek?

In humility and devotion,

Venkat S. Ramanan

Guru In Vedic Tradition and Beyond

Dr. S. Ram Mohan

The term Guru has always held a revered position in Indian philosophical, spiritual, and cultural traditions. In the Vedic and post-Vedic contexts, the concept of a Guru transcends the role of a mere teacher. It signifies a guide, mentor, and spiritual light who dispels ignorance and illuminates the seeker with wisdom. The word Guru, in its essence, connotes heaviness, greatness, or even a paternal figure. Derived from the root *gru*, meaning "to impart learning," a Guru symbolizes the profound process of inner transformation and self-realization.

The *Advayatarka Upanishad* defines the Guru as one who removes the darkness of *avidya* (ignorance) with the resplendence of their knowledge. Sri Ramana Maharshi elaborates further on this dual role of the Guru. He explains that the external Guru manifests in a physical form to guide the aspirant, gently steering the mind inward toward the Self. Simultaneously, the inner Guru—present as the immanent Self—pulls the seeker into their own core of being, anchoring the ego in the ultimate truth of existence.

The *Guru Gita* proclaims the Guru to be none other than the embodiment of *Brahman*—the infinite Self—and the effulgent light of pure knowledge. Adi Shankaracharya, in his *Prasnottara Ratna Malika*, emphasizes that a true Guru is one who has realized the ultimate truth or attained the knowledge of *Brahman*. The prerequisite for a Guru, therefore, is not only intellectual brilliance but an unshakable realization of their oneness with the Absolute.

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Guru-Disciple Relationship in the Upanishads

The *Upanishads* are replete with narratives that highlight the sanctity of the Guru-disciple relationship. The *Prasna Upanishad* offers a poignant example. Five eminent seekers—Sukesha, Satyakama, and others, known as *Brahmaparas* (those established in *Brahman*)—approach Sage Pippalada for transcendental wisdom. Despite their spiritual stature, Pippalada tests their resolve, asking them to practice *brahmacharya* (celibacy and disciplined living) with unwavering *sraddha* (faith) for a year. Only then would he entertain their queries. This episode underscores the essential qualities of faith, humility, and discipline on the path of learning.

The *Bhagavad Gita* resonates with this sentiment. In Chapter 4, Krishna underscores the importance of seeking knowledge from a realized master. He advises aspirants to engage in *pariprasna*—a persistent and profound inquiry—and to offer *seva* (humble service) to the Guru. True wisdom, Krishna declares, is bestowed upon a disciple only when they demonstrate devotion, humility, and an unrelenting quest for truth.

An incident in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (4.10) illustrates the Guru's discerning nature in identifying a worthy disciple. Upakosala, a student of Sage Satyakama Jabala, was tasked with tending the sacred fire for twelve years rather than attending classes with other students. Despite his exclusion, Upakosala served with steadfast devotion and without complaint. Seeing his sincerity, even the elements of nature intervened to impart spiritual wisdom to him. Finally, moved by his perseverance, Satyakama imparted to him the ultimate knowledge in an instant, akin to modern-day compressed data transmission. This narrative highlights the Guru's role in nurturing inner qualities like patience and devotion before imparting esoteric truths.

The Gurukula System

In Vedic times, Gurus often functioned as *rishis* who presided over *Gurukulas*, or residential schools. These institutions provided holistic education, encompassing philosophy, sciences, and spiritual disciplines. Knowledge was transmitted orally and preserved across generations through rigorous memorization and practice. The Guru imparted wisdom selflessly, untainted by material expectations, fostering an environment where learning was a sacred exchange.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (6.2) and *Chandogya Upanishad* (5.3) recount stories that emphasize the purity of this relationship. When King Pravahana offers material wealth to Sage Gautama as recompense for teaching, Gautama declines, expressing a desire for knowledge alone. Similarly, Svetaketu, an immature seeker, initially reacts with arrogance when unable to answer King Pravahana's questions. However, his father Gautama's humility in approaching the same king for wisdom demonstrates the ideal qualities of a sincere seeker. Eventually, Svetaketu becomes the recipient of the supreme teaching, *Tat Tvam Asi* ("Thou art That").

Qualities of a Guru

The *Upanishads* emphasize that a Guru must embody both profound realization and impeccable character. According to the *Mundaka Upanishad* (1.2.12), a Guru must be both *Srotriya* (versed in the scriptures) and *Brahmanishta* (established in *Brahman*). Textual knowledge alone is insufficient; the Guru must embody the truths they teach. Those who merely parrot wisdom without internalizing it are compared to the blind leading the blind, destined to wander aimlessly in the cycle of birth and death (*Mundaka Upanishad* 1.2.8).

The term *Desika*, a synonym for Guru, derives from the root *disha* (to direct). A Guru, therefore, is a guide who leads the disciple toward the right path. The *Mooka Panchasati* describes the Guru as one who identifies the aspirant's unique disposition and prescribes a path—whether through idol worship, meditation, or direct inquiry—suited to their temperament. The Guru does not herd the disciple like sheep but works subtly, entering their psyche and transforming them through example and guidance.

The Power of Truth and the Guru's Role

The *Upanishads* extol the transformative power of *Satya* (Truth). The *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.6) proclaims, "Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood." The Guru, as a living embodiment of truth, demonstrates its power through their conduct. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.14.2) advises disciples to emulate their Guru*'s* righteous behavior, emphasizing truth, *dharma*, and the fulfillment of duties.

Sri Adi Shankaracharya, in his *Satasloki*, likens the Guru to a philosopher's stone that turns base metal into gold. However, he

asserts that the Guru surpasses even this metaphor, for the Guru can transform a disciple into another Guru, thereby perpetuating the lineage of wisdom. This idea of *Guru Parampara*—the unbroken chain of teachers and disciples—forms the cornerstone of India's spiritual heritage.

Guru: The Embodiment of Divine Grace

In Indian tradition, the Guru is not merely a teacher but a manifestation of the divine. The mantra, *Guru Sakshat Para Brahma Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah*, encapsulates this sentiment, venerating the Guru as the Supreme Being in human form. Swami Chinmayananda once remarked that while many spiritual teachers offer solutions to worldly problems, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi dissolved the very source of all problems—the mind. This dissolution marks the ultimate goal of the Guru's guidance.

Similarly, Kanchi Mahaswami Chandrasekarendra Saraswati remarked that Bhagavan Ramana transcended all institutional conventions, epitomizing the ideal of a Guru who embodies liberation itself. Such anecdotes illustrate how the Guru tradition has continually adapted to preserve its essence, ensuring the spiritual evolution of humanity.

The Guru Tradition: A Beacon of Dharma

From the Vedic era to contemporary times, the Guru tradition has been the bedrock of India's spiritual and cultural ethos. By transmitting wisdom through personal example and rigorous discipline, Gurus have ensured the survival and flourishing of dharma. The legacy of luminaries like Adi Shankaracharya, Ramana Maharshi, and modern saints continues to inspire countless seekers, reinforcing the central role of the *Guru* in guiding humanity toward liberation.

In conclusion, the *Guru* is far more than a teacher; they are the spiritual architect of the disciple's life. By embodying wisdom, truth, and selflessness, the *Guru* facilitates the seeker's journey from ignorance to enlightenment. This sacred relationship remains as relevant today as it was in the Vedic age, serving as a testament to the timeless power of spiritual mentorship.

Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Maheshwara, Guru Sakshat Para Brahma, Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah. ▲

Maharshi – Vaisvanara – The Fire

KAYS

The Sanskrit word *pāvana* blends the qualities of fire — its heat — and purification. The word Agni refers to the physical element of fire, known for its illuminating and healing properties. Beyond its physical manifestation, Agni serves as a sacred conduit in Vedic rituals, carrying offerings to the divine. Thus, the Vedic tradition clearly establishes the gnostic relationship between physical fire and purification. Agni is elevated as a symbol of purity and truth, revered as a purifying force and a supreme indicator of veracity.

The concept of *Agni pariksha*, or the trial by fire, has deep roots in cultural and religious practices, serving as a test of one's chastity, truthfulness, and purity. This ancient practice, often involving trials such as holding red-hot iron (*tapta ayapindam*), persisted into recent history. The epic tale of Sita Devi's emergence from the fire, radiant with the brilliance of her chastity, is an iconic instance of this test, immortalized in the *Ramayana*. Even today, rituals like walking on beds of fire during temple festivals symbolize the fulfillment of vows and the acknowledgment of Agni as a divine witness. Further, all marriages in the *sanatana dharma* have been conducted with Agni as the witness and thus the newly married couple are required to circumambulate the pit of Agni seven times.

Throughout history and mythology, Agni has been regarded as an eternal witness. Whether it is the sacred bond of friendship between Rama and Sugreeva, the sanctity of celestial and earthly marriages, or the performance of Vedic rituals, Agni's presence is invoked as a testament to truth and righteousness. The Upanishads extol

Vaisvanara—another form of Agni—as the essence of Being (*Sat*) and Awareness (*Chit*), manifesting externally as fire and light, and internally as the indwelling presence in all beings. The *Narayana Sukta* proclaims, "In the middle of the heart is a great fire that carries all light and looks to every side. He is the undecaying seer." This verse highlights Agni as the *jyothisham jyoti*—the Light of all luminants, the Supreme Brahman seated in the hearts of all.

This eternal truth is deeply ingrained in spiritual traditions. For instance, the *dhuni*, a sacred fire, is kept perpetually burning in the ashrams of *naga sannyasins*. One such *dhuni* was tended by Tota Puri, the guru who initiated Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa into Advaitic realization. Similarly, the *dhuni* maintained by Shirdi Sai Baba continues to burn to this day, symbolizing the eternal flame of awareness. Swami Vivekananda and his fellow monks often meditated before a sacred fire, offering their thoughts and desires into its purifying flames, and entering profound states of meditation.

Among the most awe-inspiring manifestations of Agni is the sacred Arunachala Hill, hailed in scriptures as the *jnanagni*—the Fire of Awareness. Arunachala is celebrated as a cosmic axis and a spiritual epicenter, transcending the limitations of space and time. Its divine effulgence has inspired generations of seekers to view it as a tangible embodiment of the Supreme Brahman. Vedic hymns dedicated to Agni are, in essence, hymns to Arunachala. It is described as the "spiritual center of the cosmos" and the "Heart of Earth," epitomizing both external and internal aspects of the divine.

In Arunachala's presence, one finds the profound truth: "He who recognizes, O Agni, the purifier of all as the real significance of the notion of 'I,' sees reality free from all sorrow."[1] Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi captures this idea succinctly in *Atma Vidya*: "Annamalai is truly the Self, the infinite Eye behind the eye of the mind that perceives the physical eye and all other senses." Arunachala, as the eternal flame within the heart, is the ultimate Guru, kindling the seeker's aspiration for the Divine and leading them to the all-consuming fire of Pure Awareness.

This inner flame is a spiritual vessel, ferrying the soul to the shores of liberation. It signifies the unity and identity of all forms of the Supreme

[1] *Mountain Path*, January 1975, page 4, *Agni Geetham*.

Being, reinforcing the interconnectedness of existence. Arunachala, often referred to as the "Hill of Fire," externalized itself to dispel ignorance and guide humanity toward enlightenment. In a human form, this divine fire took shape as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, whose teachings and life serve as a beacon for spiritual seekers.

All aspects of Agni were on full display in him, and one is thus inspired to sing with Sadhu OM.

> "He was the Fire of Atman,
> Fire of Yoga,
> Fire that abides as Lord,
> Fire, the Origin of all lights
> Fire Holy, sought by Devas
> Fire of Peace that protects the surrendered
> Fire that quenches desire
> Fire that burns the fruits of karma
> Fire of devotion
> Fire that springs from Love
> Fire that burns the ego
> Fire of Bliss that the ghost of world and ego cannot extinguish
> Holy Fire that permits not the ingress of defilement
> Fire of companion,
> Fire of Tapas, the Flame of Mouna
> Fire of Ramana, born of Mount of Fire."

The ancestral lineage of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi carries profound spiritual significance, as it traces back to Sage Parasara. Parasara, a revered seer, worshipped the Supreme Brahman in the form of Agni, extolling its virtues through his hymns and suktas. From this lineage emerged Bhagavan, a scion of the Hill of Fire, embodying the very essence of the divine flame. Muruganar, a devout disciple, marvels at this connection, exclaiming, "How his mother bore this fire of jnana in her womb!"[2] Bhagavan's mother indeed experienced the literal and symbolic intensity of this fire during her pregnancy, which manifested as a pervasive burning sensation that was only eased by consuming sacred vilva leaves,[3] auspicious in Shiva worship.

[2] Song of Fire.

[3] A.R. Natarajan, *Bhagavan Ramana and Mother*, p.3

At the moment of Bhagavan's birth, an extraordinary event occurred. Bhagavan, the embodiment of spiritual fire born of the Hill of Fire, blessed a blind woman with the divine vision of his effulgent form. Muruganar celebrates this miracle in *Keerthi Thiru Ahaval*,[4] when he writes, "Revealing his beautiful form of great effulgence to a blind lady."[5] This moment underscored Bhagavan's nature as an incarnation of pure awareness and divine light.

When Bhagavan's mother fell gravely ill, he prayed to Arunachala, the "blazing Fire of Jnana," to envelop her in its radiance, thereby sparing her the traditional cremation rituals. This prayer revealed his divine intent to honor her role in bearing him—the Sun of Wisdom. During her final moments, Bhagavan performed a unique spiritual act. Instead of lighting a funeral pyre, he placed his hand on her head and chest, guiding her to abide in the Fire of Jnana, thus liberating her from the cycle of rebirth. He further immortalized her by sanctifying her samadhi shrine, which continues to radiate the light of spiritual awareness.

Bhagavan's life was a testament to the transformative power of the Fire of Jnana. This divine flame, inherited from Arunachala, manifested as an intense yearning for Self-realization (*sakshatkara*). The pivotal moment in his life—the dramatic death experience—was a spiritual yagna, a consummation of his inner fire of tapas. During this event, the smoldering embers of Jnana ignited into a blazing conflagration of pure awareness, marking the beginning of his unbroken abidance in the Self. This inner fire, born from Arunachala, continued to blaze as the Fire of Ramana, spreading bliss and spiritual illumination.

Bhagavan's intense devotion to the Hill (*jnanottara bhakti*) demonstrated the interplay of Jnana and Bhakti. His fervor for the divine often manifested as a burning sensation throughout his body, symbolizing the transformative power of spiritual fire. On his journey to Tiruvannamalai, at Arakandanallur, Bhagavan experienced an intense inner light—his own Atmajyoti—that enveloped him. Upon reaching the temple of Arunachala, he felt a divine embrace that alleviated this burning sensation, solidifying his unity with the great

[4] line 269-70.

[5] விழிதெரியா ஒரு கிழவி தன் கண்ணுக்கு; எழில் வரு பேரொளி இலக்கி ஒளித்தும்
Vizhiteriyā oru kizhavi taṉ kaṇṇukku; ezhil varu pēroḷi ilakki oḷittum

effulgence of the Heart, Arunachala. As he merged with the essence of the Hill of Fire, truth revealed itself as "That which alone is," transforming him into its eternal form.

Bhagavan's tapas in the vault of Pathala Linga, the Mango Grove, and Guru Moortham exemplified the power of his spiritual fire. His profound meditation spread and "the incandescence of his severe tapas spread all over like the wild forest fire,"6 symbolizing the incandescence of his spiritual practice. Over the next five decades, his abidance in the City of Fire (Tiruvannamalai) radiated as a dense light of pure awareness, transforming the region into a sanctified space of spiritual awakening.

The miraculous nature of Bhagavan's fire was further revealed during an encounter at the Mango Grove. When his uncle Nellaiappa Iyer attempted to persuade him to return home, a relative accompanying him tried to forcibly take Bhagavan away. However, the man experienced an intense burning sensation throughout his body, forcing him to retreat. Such incidents affirmed Bhagavan's identity as none other than the living embodiment of the Fire of Arunachala.[7]

The spiritual identity of Bhagavan was further validated by Ganapati Muni, a master of Vedic lore, who renamed him "Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi." Until then, Bhagavan was known as Brahmanaswamy, a name already revered as the Fire of Effulgence that transcends the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Ganapati Muni recognized Bhagavan as the living manifestation of the Hill of Fire and assigned him a name imbued with the essence of Siva and Agni. The three syllables—Ra, Ma, and Na—symbolize fire, the moon, and the sun, respectively, representing their combined potency in dispelling ignorance and showering divine grace.

A poem by Narendra Kesari Sarma from Nepal, titled Ramana Lahari, captures the significance of Bhagavan's name. The poet, without ever meeting Bhagavan, writes[8]:

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[6] Muruganar, *Keerthi Thiru Ahaval*, line 305 (காட்டுத்தீ போல் கடும் தவக் கொழுந்து படர - *Kāṭṭuttī pōl kaḍum tavak kozhundu paḍara*).

[7] *Ramana Leela*, p. 64.

[8] रकारोऽग्निर्ब्रह्मन् दहसि सहसा सञ्जितमलं; मकारोश्चनद्रोदय हरति तमनं सिञ्चति सुधाम।
rakāro'gnirbrahman dahasi sahasā sañjitamalaṁ; makāroścanadrodaya harati tamanaṁ siñcati sudhāma |

"O Brahman! The syllable 'Ra,' in your name is the seed of Fire that burns away all accumulated tendencies in a trice, 'Ma,' the moon that cools down the heat by showering nectar, and 'Na,' is the sun that destroys the darkness of ignorance. Lord Ramana! Thy name spreads effulgence all over the world."

This underscores the potency of the name "Ramana," a synonym for Siva and Agni, which invokes the inner fire within all beings and leads them to the recognition of the Truth of their own Self. Ganapati Muni had the unshakeable conviction that the all-seeing flame in the heart, the inner guru is Lord Arunachala in the mortal guise of Ramana "whose reality is jnana, whose form is jnana and whose abode is jnana."[9]

In his work *Agni Devata Tattva Nirupanam* (Elucidation of the Truth of the Deity Agni), Muni declared, "Agni Vaisvanara, who dwells in the cave of the Heart, is indeed Ramana." He further identified Bhagavan as an incarnation of Skanda, the child of Agni,[10] known as Guha (meaning hidden), who resides in the cave of the Heart. Bhagavan's mantra, *Om Vachadbhuve Namaha*, affirms this unity, symbolizing the inseparable connection between Skanda, Agni, and the Supreme Self. This mantra means "Salutations to the fire of Brahman from which the word emerges," and has been extensively discussed by Ganapati Muni, who reveals the *bījākṣaras* (seed syllables and/or letters) which make up this special mantra.

The *Guru Gita*, a work which extols the importance and excellence of the Guru, beautifully encapsulates these many esoteric qualities of Bhagavan: "O Mind! Meditate on the lotus Feet of the Guru that are the Fire that reveals the state of non-dual identity, the lone principle, tranquil, undefiled, shining with full splendor, and the place where the sun of chaitanya (Awareness) arises."[11]

Both Arunachala and Ramana Maharshi embody the eternal light of the Supreme, presenting themselves in forms accessible to human

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[9] *Epistles of Light*, p. 28.

[10] *Agni janmane namaha*, No. 28; *Agni garbhaya namaha*, No. 54. *Subrahmanya Ashtottaram*

[11] अद्वैत स्पुरदग्नि - मेक - ममलं - पूर्णप्रभा शोभितं; शान्तं श्रीगुरूपंकजं बज मन - चैतन्य चन्द्रोदयम्॥
advaita spuradagni - meka - mamalaṁ - pūrṇaprabhā śobhitaṁ śāntaṁ śrīgurūpaṁkajaṁ baja mana - caitanya candrodayam ||

understanding. They capture the hearts of devotees, gently guiding them toward the realization of Absolute Truth. Their existence is a testament to the infinite graciousness of the divine, manifesting in tangible forms to dispel ignorance and illuminate the path of Self-realization.

In essence, Agni, as fire and purity, stands as a multifaceted symbol of the Supreme Being. From its physical form as the element fire to its spiritual essence as the inner light of awareness, it unites the material and the transcendent. Through sacred fire rituals, the light of the sacred hill, and the lives of realized sages, Agni continues to inspire, purify, and guide humanity toward the ultimate realization of the Absolute.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, as the embodiment of the Fire of Arunachala, continues to illuminate the spiritual path for seekers worldwide. His life, teachings, and presence symbolize the eternal fire of Jnana, burning away ignorance and revealing the light of Self-realization. Through his grace, the divine flame of Arunachala shines in the hearts of all, guiding them to the ultimate Truth of their own being. ▲

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D. Thiyagarajan

Siva-Lingam

T.K.S

Siva-Lingam must not be taken to mean Siva's lingam, for Siva is Himself the lingam. *Lingam* means "indicator," just as smoke is an indicator of fire. By Siva, everything is brought to consciousness and thus indicated, but nothing can indicate Siva. By His Self-revealing Consciousness, He animates all manifestations. Matter needs to be animated by Spirit, but Spirit only by Itself.

If Siva were not pure Consciousness, how could He be Siva? And if He were non-existent, the whole universe, which manifests Him, would be non-existent. There would be mere nescience. The existence of nescience cannot be established by nescience. It is Siva, as pure Consciousness and Witness of manifestation, who reminds us of manifestation; but the Siva who reminds us is not Himself reminded.

This Maheswara is Pure Light. So declare the scriptures. Through His Light, the universe is perceived. Therefore, Siva is Himself the *Lingam*, the indicator. For enlightened souls, this Siva-Lingam is indeed worthy of worship. It is He who gives life and light to all, though, when seen as Arunachala Hill, He appears to be dull and inert through the power of His Maya. The undiscriminating do not perceive the Light of Siva in the Siva-Lingam.

This article appeared 60 years ago in the April, 1965 issue of Mountain Path. The author of this article, Sri T.K.S. (T. K. Sundaresa Iyer) was a devoted follower of Sri Bhagavan for nearly fifty years and passed away in Tiruvannamalai on Friday, February 5th, at the age of 68, shortly after writing this article. His book, *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, published by Sri Ramanasramam, remains widely popular.

Some say that the *Mahavakya* (the supreme scriptural texts such as "That thou art") is the lingam or indicator of Siva; others say that *Maya*, the property of Siva, is; others again that intellect or ego-sense is; and still others say the life-force, sound, or existence is. But the great sages declare with absolute knowledge that, since Siva is Self-effulgent, there is nothing to indicate Him.

Knowledge alone is the indicator. Maheswara, abiding in all bodily vehicles, is witnessing or recollecting Himself. Some say that *alaya*, the substratum and support of all, is the indicator, but Siva Himself is the support of all. He alone is Truth or Reality. He is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). Consciousness is Being; unconsciousness can never be Being. For Him who is the support of all, there can be no support. He is unsupported, like the ether (*akasha*).

For beings in *samsara* (which is the same as *ajnana*, ignorance), a support is provided commensurate with the ripeness of their intellect for worship of the Unsupported Supreme. Some knowers of the Vedas say that everything is absorbed in the Lingam (from *lingi*, "to be absorbed"), but even so, Maheswara, the Almighty, is that Self-evident Lingam and is not absorbed. This whole universe, whose nature it is to be absorbed, is absorbed in Brahman, but Brahman is never absorbed.

Just as the illusion of silver in mother-of-pearl loses its apparent reality through knowledge (that it is not silver), so through knowledge, all that appears to be extraneous to the Supreme Lord Siva, who is Brahman, is absorbed in Him. Those who practice *kundalini-yoga* find the lingams in the *nadis* or yogic centers in the body and make these the seats for the worship of Siva.

The submergence of the thought-current in the unruffled calm of *Paramatma* is said to be the essential worship. Mere worship through mantras is not enough to destroy once and for all the tree of *samsara*, whose root is nescience. Knowledge (*jnana*) alone is the true invocation of Siva. Formal *puja* (worship) is of the gross state; the Vedas are the means to Realization; but *jnana* is the Supreme State. It is inner worship and must be carried on unremittingly to terminate the cycle of births and deaths. ▲

KEYWORD

Hṛdaya: The True State

Part One

Ramesh Iyer

For any devotee of Bhagavān, the first step into the āśram at Tiruvannamalai raises a plethora of emotions. Eyes fall on the Illuppai tree and memories of Bhagavān waiting to receive his very many guests flood in. The pace hastens, and one enters the New Hall to be engulfed in the benign glance from Bhagavān's statue and the stone sofa. The rushing thoughts begin to subside pretty much akin to the gushing river which enters the ocean.

With a plethora of feelings, the eyes lift up to find the first word हृदय (hṛdaya) of the famous śloka starting "*hṛdaya kuhara madhye*", inscribed in gold letters on the wall behind the stone sofa during Bhagavān's days that resonates as the heart of the glorious āśram today. This was the first saṃskṛta śloka by Bhagavān (who had not studied saṃskṛtam formally) composed (in 1915) out of the vision of his own anubhava for Jagadīśvara Śāstrī.

We will proceed to deliberate on how hṛdaya's role in self-knowledge has been dealt within the teachings of Bhagavān and also in the Veda. This would be a multi-part series with the first part focusing on introducing hṛdaya and elaborating its vital importance in spiritual life.

Secretive topics like hṛdaya have been debated in various upaniṣads with some similarities and some differences. Few vedic texts provide detailed explanations on how to meditate on hṛdaya. Let us first look at what is meant by Hṛdaya.

Meaning of hṛdaya

Hṛdaya is a saṃskṛta word with its constituent letters as: h, ṛ, da, and ya (ह्, ऋ, द, and य). The phonetic equivalent to ऋ is **ṛ** (and not ri/ru that forms part of frequently used spellings of h**ri**daya/h**ru**daya), a retroflex vowel which should be pronounced by constricting the vocal cavity with the help of the tongue, bringing it close to the roof of the mouth (palate), but making sure the tongue does not hit against the roof of the mouth completely. It should sound somewhere between the **ru** in c**ru**de and the **ri** in c**ri**cket.

The word is often used in religious scriptures and spiritual instructions with many meanings. Its meanings as per dictionary are[1]:

- heart or centre or core or essence of anything
- true or divine knowledge
- the most secret part of anything or the secret science
- soul

Unless specifically stated otherwise, we will take the meaning to be heart or centre in all parts of the series.

Hṛdaya's synonyms in Saṃskṛta language

In addition to hṛdaya, Veda uses two other popular synonyms of hṛdaya in quite a few places and they are:

- guhā (गुहा) - heart, cave, hiding place.
- Dahra (दह्र) - heart cavity

Hṛdaya's equivalents in Tamil language

Tamil language translations of hṛdaya are:

- uḷḷam (உள்ளம்) - Heart, Consciousness, Soul, etc.
- idhayam (இதயம்) - Heart.

List of works where hṛdaya is used

The list (not an exhaustive one) of works where hṛdaya is explained and/or used in the context of self-knowledge is given below.

Expositions of and on Bhagavān

Deepa Darsana Tattuvam, Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam, Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcharatnam, Uḷḷadhu nārpadhu, Uḷḷadhu nārpadhu Anubandham,

[1] *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* V.S. Apte, Page 1763

Ānma vidya kīrtanam, Śrīdevikālottaram - jñānācāra vicārapaṭalaḥ, Ātmasākṣātkāraprakaraṇam, Ānmabodham, Ramaṇa Purāṇam, Śrī Ramaṇagītā, Umāsahasram, Upadeśa ratnavali, Guru Vachaka Kovai, Śrī Ramaṇahṛdayam, Pādamālai.

Other works

Sandhyāvandanam, Nārāyaṇasūktam, Upaniṣads like taittirīya, chāndogya, bṛhadāraṇyaka, kaṭha, muṇḍaka, śvetāśvatara, praśna, māṇḍūkya to name a few

Daharavidhyā of mahanārāyaṇopaniṣad, Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

Yoga vāsiṣṭhaḥ, Vivekacūḍāmaṇi

This list is provided to emphasize the importance of hṛdaya.

Entering into hṛdaya

'Heart' is a very enigmatic word. It escapes definition because of its variegated connotations. There is a physical heart which can be operated upon and which physicians transplant, there is an emotional heart which is deeply hurt or elated when insulted or praised. Human life has two facets: material and spiritual. One is visible and the other is invisible, but possible to experience. Heart has its special relevance in both material and spiritual parlance.

In the physical body, it is in the shape of a closed fist about 250-300 gms in weight & is located left from the middle of the chest. Its critical functions include sending the pure clean blood to every part of the body and transforming the impure blood to pure with the help of the lungs. It functions continuously throughout 24 hours without any break, and is thus very vital in the life of all.

The core, the substance, the vitality, the very being of anything whatsoever is the heart of that thing and it cannot be described. When the heart speaks, everything else is hushed. The voice of the heart is often regarded as the final word in any matter. All arguments cease to function when the heart speaks, which means to say, reality operates when the heart begins to function and express itself in any manner.

The heart is the centre of the mind; it is the abode of all psychological operations. The mind goes to sleep in the heart. In meditation, in swoon, in death, in sleep, the mind is in the heart. We are predominantly intellectual in our outlook during our waking hours. We are translucently conscious when we are dreaming, and totally unconscious in the state of deep sleep.

When we speak of the spiritual significance behind the word 'heart', we have to go a little deeper than the mere physiological concept of it. The heart cannot become other than what it is and is not subject to objectivity or externalisation. The heart is the person. It is identified with the very soul of the individual.

Location of spiritual heart & Saguṇa Brahman

To ever establish in the Nirguṇa Brahman viz. the true state of the self easily, scriptures provide a symbol in the body itself for meditation. Translations of the definition that Bhagavān gave regarding location of the spiritual heart and the presiding deity (Saguṇa Brahman) of the heart in two ślokās[2] are:

Between the breasts, below the chest and above the abdomen, there are six things of varied hues. One among these, resembling a lily-bud, remaining within, two digits to the ***right*** *from the centre, is the Heart.*

The Lord who shines as the in-dweller of the cave of the Heart is extolled as ***Guheśa****. If you forever abide firmly and unceasingly, as that Guheśa, then by the sheer strength of the practice of Soham (He I am), the nescience of regarding the perishable body as 'I' will be dispelled like darkness before the red rays of sun.*

The first śloka provides the description of the spiritual heart as located on the right and distinct from the biological heart. The second one names the Lord as Guheśa (गुहेश) = guhā(गुहा)+ īśa (ईश), for He shines as the Lord of the cave of the heart.

Yad Bhāvam tad bhavati: "That on which one unceasingly contemplates, that he becomes." is a scriptural saying. If one constantly contemplates on Guheśa, the source of all, one experiences identity with the essence of It, (viz., the self) and abides as That. That very instant, the nescience of the notion of 'this perishable body I am' will disappear, never to come back again.

Spiritual Heart & Nārāyaṇasūktam

Nārāyaṇasūktam[3], a Vedic hymn on Lord Nārāyaṇa provides the same concept of spiritual heart as that of Bhagavān and addresses the

[2] *Uḷḷadhu Nārpadu Anubandham* 18 &20

[3] It is part of *Taittirīyāraṇyakam* of the Veda.

Saguṇa Brahman in the heart as Lord Nārāyaṇa. It is a devout, touching, feelingful and personal address to the creator of the universe. Any devotee visiting the āśram can feel the divine vibrations on hearing the vedic chanting of Nārāyaṇasūktam at the shrine of Bhagavān by Veda Pāṭhaśālā's students during Abhiṣeka / Pūjā daily in the evening.

This sūktam glorifies Lord Nārāyaṇa as the thousand-headed one, thousand-eyed, and thousand-limbed, not merely the Father or Creator of the cosmos, beyond creation, but also hidden in the heart of everyone. Few ślokās of Nārāyaṇasūktam with their translations are given below.

यच्च किंचित् जगत् सर्वं दृश्यते श्रूयतेऽपि वा ।
अन्तर्बहिश्च तत्सर्वं व्याप्य नारायणः स्थितः ॥

yacca kiñcit jagat sarvaṁ dṛśyate śrūyate'pi vā |
antarbahiśca tatsarvaṁ vyāpya nārāyaṇaḥ sthitaḥ ||

Whatever all this universe is—yacca kiñcit jagat sarvaṁ—seen or unseen, in its depths or merely heard of, Narayana is within and without all these, enveloping everyone.

अनन्तं अव्ययं कविं समुद्रेन्तं विश्वशंभुवम् ।
पद्म कोश प्रतीकाशं हृदयं च अपि अधोमुखम् ॥

anantaṁ avyayaṁ kaviṁ samudre'ntaṁ viśvaśambhuvam |
padma kośa pratīkāśaṁ hṛdayaṁ c api adhomukham ||

He is the limitless, imperishable, omniscient, residing in the ocean of the heart, the cause of the happiness of the universe, the supreme end of all striving, (manifesting Himself) in the ether of the heart which is comparable to an inverted bud of the lotus flower.

Like a resplendent flame in the heart of the individual, Nārāyaṇa can be visualised in deep meditation. In the lotus of the heart there is the citadel of the cosmos, the palace of the creator of the universe. Thus, the worshipper of the Supreme Nārāyaṇa need not necessarily look up to the sky to behold Him and adore Him. One can as well see the same Nārāyaṇa within himself, in his own heart.

अधो निष्ठ्या वितस्त्यान्ते नाभ्याम् उपरि तिष्ठति ।
ज्वालामालाकुलं भाती विश्वस्यायतनं महत् ॥

adho niṣṭayā vitasyānte nābhyām upari tiṣṭhati |
jvālamālākulaṁ bhāti viśvasyāyatanaṁ mahat ||

*Below the **adam's apple**, at a distance of a span, and **above the navel** (i.e., the heart which is the relative seat of the manifestation of pure consciousness in the human being), the great abode of the universe radiates, as if adorned with garlands of flames.*

The location and details of spiritual heart as defined here exactly matches with that of ślokā 18 of Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham.

सन्ततं शिलाभिस्तु लम्बत्या कोशसन्निभम् ।
तस्यान्ते सुषिरं सूक्ष्मं तस्मिन् सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

santataṁ śilābhistu lambatyā kośasannibham |
tasyānte suṣiraṁ sūkśmaṁ tasmin sarvaṁ pratiṣṭhitam ||

Surrounded on all sides by nerve-currents (or arteries), suspends the lotus-bud of the heart in an inverted position. It is in a subtle space (a narrow aperture, the sushumna-nadi), and therein is to be found the substratum of all things.

While Nārāyaṇa creates the world from outside, He also impels everyone through feeling and action from within. Through every nerve-current, life flows and vibrates. This vibration, this flow of life, is the *chaitanya*, or consciousness, of Nārāyaṇa moving in creation.

Due to the attachments and entanglements of the jīva in worldly enjoyment and suffering, the consciousness is enshrouded in potential as well as expressed objectivity, and hence it appears like a tiny streak of flame within the dark clouds of ignorance. But when the jīva rises above worldliness, the consciousness is realised as the Infinite.

Bhagavān states that "I had been saying all along that the Heart centre was on the right, notwithstanding the refutation by some learned men that physiology taught them otherwise. I speak from experience. I knew it even in my home during my trances. Again during the incident related in the book Self-Realisation I had a very clear vision and experience. All of a sudden a light came from one side, erasing the world vision in its course until it spread all round when the vision of the world was completely cut out. I felt the muscular organ on the left had stopped working, I could understand that the body was like a corpse, that the circulation of blood had stopped and the body became blue and motionless. Vasudeva Sastri embraced the body, wept over my death, but I could not speak. All the time I was feeling

that the Heart centre on the right was working as well as ever. This state continued for 15 or 20 minutes."[4]

Spiritual heart & Sandhyāvandanam

Guheśa, the Lord of the cave of the heart, shines enthroned in the spiritual heart located in the right chest of the body. Thus the universal gesture of pointing to the right side of the chest whenever one refers to himself as 'I' has come about. Whatever be the language, nationality, race or religion, this practice is universally prevalent.

In the spiritual sādhana of sandyāvandanam that is performed thrice a day (dawn, noon and dusk) by any *dvijā, twice-born* (who after his physical birth takes the birth for a second time spiritually, usually when he undergoes the rites of passage that initiates him into a school for Vedic studies)[5], one of its part, viz., aikya anusandhānam (ऐक्य अनुसन्धानम्) is to dwell on the Mahāvākya of the corresponding Veda of the aspirant (e.g. अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि, aham brahmāsmi – "I am Brahma" in the case of Yajur Veda). As the name suggests, this is done to contemplate the oneness with the Brahman, which the Mahā Vākyas proclaim. This contemplation is performed with all the ten fingers of both the hands pointing at the right chest.[6] Thus the symbol of Saguṇa Brahman in the spiritual heart is invoked here for contemplation on the true state of the self.

Hṛdaya, the true state

Out of the two hearts, the biological and spiritual, the important one is clearly spelt out by the two ślokās of Yoga vāsiṣṭhaḥ[7]:

इयत्तया परिच्छिन्ने देहे यद्वक्षसोऽन्तरम् ।
हेयं तद्धृदयं विद्धि तनावेकतटे स्थितम् ॥

संविन्मात्रं तु हृदयं उपादेयं स्थितं स्मृतम् ।
तदन्तरे च बाह्ये च न च बाह्ये न चान्तरे ॥

iyattayā paricchinne dehe yadvakṣaso'ntaram ।
heyaṃ taddhṛdayaṃ viddhi tanāvekataṭe sthitam ॥

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[4] Venkataramiah, M.,*Talks with* Śri *Ramaṇa Maharṣi,* Talk 408

[5] Manilal Bose (1998), *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India*, Page 55–56.

[6] Anna Subramaniyam, *Sandhya Vandanam (Tamil)*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, ISBN 9788178837574

[7] *Yoga vāsiṣṭhaḥ* 5.78.34 & 35

saṃvinmātraṃ tu hṛdayaṃ upādeyaṃ sthitaṃ smṛtam ।
tadantare ca bāhye ca na ca bāhye na cāntare ॥

Sage Vāsiṣṭhaḥ clarifies when asked by Lord Rāma on what is hṛdaya: One of these is worth acceptance, the other worth rejection. Listen, how they differ. The organ called the heart placed somewhere in the chest of the physical body is worth rejection. The Heart which is of the form of Pure Awareness is worth acceptance; it is both within and without – it has no inside or out.

The same has been rendered by Bhagavān in *Ulladu Nārpadu Anubandham*[8].

It is mentioned here that the physical heart is to be rejected and the spiritual heart in the form of awareness is to be accepted. Thus hṛdaya always means the spiritual heart.

Bhagavān once explained why a location is given to hṛdaya. "Where are you? You are in the body and not out of it; yet not the whole body. Though you pervade the whole body, still you admit of a centre where all thoughts start and wherein they subside. Even when the limbs are amputated, you are still there, and with defective senses you are still there. So a centre of consciousness must be admitted. That is called the Heart."[9] Therefore, the mention of a location is to make the jīva turn inward, seeking its source, and merge there to become pure awareness, the true state of the self.

Yoga vāsiṣṭhaḥ further states[10]:

तत्तु प्रधानं हृदयं तत्रेदं समवस्थितम् ।
तदादर्शः पदार्थानां तत्कोशः सर्वसंपदाम् ॥
सर्वेषामेव जन्तूनां संवित् हृदयमुच्यते ।
न देहावयवैकांशो जडजीर्णोपलोपमः ॥

tattu pradhānaṃ hṛdayaṃ tatredaṃ samavasthitam |
tadādarśaḥ padārthānāṃ tatkośaḥ sarvasaṃpadām ॥
sarveṣāmeva jantūnāṃ saṃvit hṛdayamucyate |
na dehāvayavaikāṃśo jaḍajīrṇopalopamaḥ ॥

[8] Śloka 22
[9] *Conscious Immortality*, p. 48
[10] *Yoga vāsiṣṭhaḥ* 5.78.36 & 37

That indeed is the essential Heart and in it all this world abides. It is the mirror in which all things are seen. It is the source of all wealth. Therefore the awareness of all beings is declared to be the Heart. It is not a fleshy organ of the perishable body which is inert like a stone.

We are told here, hṛdaya is the seat of awareness, the true state behind every person and every thing, and even the so-called material objectivity gets reduced into this pure awareness when it is investigated to its core. When matter is analysed threadbare into its ultimate composition, it vanishes into mere space-time. And what is space-time if it is not merely a consciousness of being?

Hence, matter vanishes into a pure consciousness of being when it is dematerialised by an analysis of its internal components. Thus goes man with his body, and so also the whole universe with its contents. That which remains is the heart, the true state.

We will continue to dwell on hṛdaya and significance of the famous śloka of "*hṛdaya kuhara madhye*" in the next part of this series. ▲

CENTENARY SOUVENIR

This centenary souvenir (with dimensions of 11 x 9 inches in landscape format, the book spans 280 pages and showcases over 400 photographs) presents a collection of articles on Bhagavan by esteemed writers, alongside reflections on the ashram's history, current administration, building renovations, outreach initiatives, and the Puja and festivals observed. Enriched with captivating photographs spanning the past century, it offers readers a journey through time, bringing the ashram's legacy to life. The centenary souvenir is available for purchase at the bookstore or online at https://bookstore.gururamana.org.

D. Thiyagarajan

Maha Sivaratri Day Evening Puja - 26 February 2025

Tirukkuṛaḷ: The Wisdom of Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar

M.R. Kodhandram

3. Greatness of Renunciation

21. ஒழுக்கத்து நீத்தார் பெருமை விழுப்பத்து
வேண்டும் பனுவல் துணிவு.
ozhukkattu nīttār perumai vizhuppattu
vēṇḍum panuval tuṇivu.

Meaning

Those who have renounced (their desires, attachments and ego) and lead a life of virtue; the scriptures extol their greatness of achievement as the most beneficial and desirable (of all attainments).

[நீத்தார் = those who have renounced; ஒழுக்கத்து = (and lead) a life of virtue; பெருமை = their greatness; விழுப்பத்து = most beneficial, excellent; வேண்டும் = desirable; பனுவல் துணிவு = considered view of scriptures]

Commentary

Renunciation is not giving up the family and going away to a forest or ashram in the Himalayas, but it is only giving up all desires, attachments and ego. It is not giving up your material possessions, taking up the begging bowl and wearing an ochre robe; it is to give up the possessiveness that gives rise to attachment. This is the true renunciation. It is not giving up something external to you, but to give up in the mind all that are impediments to your spiritual progress which includes your selfishness, attachments, bad habits, conditionings of the

mind, fixed notions, narrow-mindedness and negative emotions such as desire, pride, greed, anger, hatred, jealousy, etc., so that the mind becomes purer and subtler. Such true renunciation is highly beneficial and desirable because it helps you to internalise the mind and progress faster on the spiritual path. When there are desires and attachments, our mind will only be externalised into the world. All these will bind us more and more to the world, and therefore, we need to develop sense control and mind control which will help us to internalise the mind and take it to its source within us and attain Self-Realisation which is the goal of life. We should also lead a virtuous life wherein we don't do any sinful actions leading to bad karmas. That is why the scriptures extol the greatness of those who have achieved such excellence in life. Such great ones who have renounced and lead a life of virtue will be able to lead a life of supreme peace and happiness and fulfil the purpose of life which is to attain Liberation.

23. இருமை வகைதெரிந்து ஈண்டறம் பூண்டார்
பெருமை பிறங்கிற்று உலகு.
irumai vagai-terindu īṇḍaṛam pūṇḍār
perumai piṛaṅgiṭṛu ulagu.

Meaning

Realising the nature of the two things (Real and unreal) through enquiry and attaining the Supreme Knowledge (*Jnana*) in this birth — the greatness of such people shines forth in this world.

[இருமை வகை தெரிந்து (வகை = nature; தெரிந்து = to enquire and understand) = Realising the nature of two things through enquiry; ஈண்டு அறம் பூண்டார் (ஈண்டு = in this birth; அறம் = Jnana; பூண்டார் = to attain) = attaining the Supreme Knowledge (Jnana) in this birth; பெருமை பிறங்கிற்று உலகு (பெருமை = greatness; பிறங்கு = shine) = the greatness of such people shines forth in this world]

Commentary

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chap 2:16, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna: "The unreal (world) does not endure and the Real never ceases to be; only the Sages who have realised the Reality (that is permanent and unchanging within their body), can clearly perceive the nature of both the Real and the unreal."

When we get to realise the true nature of the Reality and the unreal world through enquiry and discrimination, based on the knowledge given to us by the Guru and the scriptures, we would be able to develop non-attachment towards the world because we would realise that the objects of the world which attract us are unreal, which means they are impermanent and subject to change, and the whole world is only an appearance or projection on the screen of the Self. It is a product of maya. What looks like water from a distance is actually a mirage. And what gives us pleasure in the world may also give us pain.

When we thus realise the true nature of the world process, our mind would no longer be attracted to the false world and this is known as *vairagya* or desirelessness or non-attachment. When the attraction for the world ceases, the mind would no longer be running outside into the world and we would be able to internalise it and take it to its source within the Heart through Self-Enquiry and sustained meditation on the Self, and thus obtain the Supreme Knowledge or Jnana through direct Realisation of the Self or Reality that is permanent and unchanging. This is the goal of life and those who have attained this supreme state have attained Liberation from the cycle of birth and death. They are the *jivanmuktas* who are rare in the world. Their greatness on attainment of Jnana shines forth in the world attracting many a seeker to their fold like how the nectar in a flower attracts bees. It is like how the whole world came to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi after he attained Jnana. They were all automatically drawn to Bhagavan like bees to a flower.

24. உரனென்னும் தோட்டியான் ஓரைந்தும் காப்பான்
வரனென்னும் வைப்பிற்கோர் வித்து.
uran-ennum tōṭṭiyān ōr-aindum kāppān
varan-ennum vaippiṛkōr vittu.

Meaning

With the intellect (strengthened with spiritual knowledge) as the tool, one who keeps in check the five senses through enquiry and understanding, will be (sowing) a seed (for a place) in the world that is considered Supreme.

[உரன் என்னும் தோட்டியான் (உரன் = intellect) = with the intellect as the tool; ஓர் ஐந்தும் காப்பான் (ஓர் = enquiry, understanding) = one who keeps in check the five senses through enquiry and understanding;

வரன் என்னும் வைப்பிற்கு ஓர் வித்து (வரன் என்னும் = considered supreme; வைப்பு = land, world; வித்து = seed, basis) = will be (sowing) a seed (for a place) in the world that is considered Supreme]

Commentary

We need to keep our five senses under check if we want to develop sense control which is so important and fundamental for one who wants to progress on the spiritual path and attain the Supreme Goal of life which is Self-Realisation. If the senses are not checked and allowed to run freely into the world, they would get caught in the maya of the world and we would not be able to achieve the objective of our birth in this world which is Liberation. The senses can be controlled only by an intellect that has been strengthened with spiritual knowledge and understanding.

Therefore, based on the knowledge obtained from the Guru and the scriptures we need to first develop the right understanding of the world through enquiry and discrimination between the Real or Self and the unreal world which is known as *Viveka*. Then with this understanding, we need to use our intellect to constantly check the senses as and when they try to externalise into the world due to desire and habit. This is the discipline we have to develop so that our senses do not get caught in the world. Then, in course of time, the senses would come under control and we would be able to internalise the mind and practise our sadhana of Self-Enquiry to reach the Self within us. Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar is saying here that sense control is the seed or basis for our attainment of the Supreme State which is to reach the Self within our own Heart and unite with it. Thus, we need to develop sense control as the first step towards attaining the Supreme Goal of life.

25. ஐந்தவித்தான் ஆற்றல் அகல்விசும்புளார் கோமான்
இந்திரனே சாலும் கரி.
aindavittān āṭṛal agal-visumbuḷār kōmān
Indiranē sālum kari.

Meaning

The mental strength or power of one who has conquered his five senses is great — (the shameful incident in the life of) Indra himself,

the Lord of Heaven (who was cursed to suffer), is sufficient proof (to this fact).

[ஐந்து அவித்தான் = one who has conquered his five senses; ஆற்றல் = mental strength or power; அகல் = great; விசும்பு உளார் கோமான் இந்திரனே = Indra himself, the Lord of Heaven; சாலும் கரி = is sufficient proof]

Commentary

Here Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar is hinting at the story of Ahalya in the Ramayana. She was the wife of Gautama Rishi. Indra, the Lord of Heaven, fell in love with her and developed amorous intentions. One day he went to the Ashram of the Rishi after midnight and crowed like a cock to make it look like it was early morning. Gautama Rishi was deceived and he thought it was time for him to get up and go to the river for his morning ablutions. As soon as the Rishi left the Ashram, Indra assumed the form of the Rishi and mated with Ahalya. The Rishi came to know of this when he returned and saw Indra leaving his hermitage in the form of the Rishi with guilty looks and cursed him and Ahalya. He cursed Indra to be without his testicles so that he would become impotent. And to Ahalya he said: "You shall remain immovable in this place for thousands of years without food or drink, subsisting on air alone. You shall be lying down on ashes doing penance, invisible to all living beings. When Rama, the son of Dasharatha, visits this place, you shall be cleansed of your sin. Completely rid of your lust and infatuation by virtue of the hospitality you shall extend to him, you will regain your own pristine body and return to my presence full of joy." (*Ramayana*, *Bala Kānda*, Chapter 48.29-32)

Here, the incident is narrated to Rama and Lakshmana by the Sage Vishvamitra when he was taking them to Mithila to see the bow of Lord Shiva. The Gautama Ashram was at the outskirts of Mithila. In this narration, it is said by Vishvamitra that Ahalya was also responsible for the immorality as she had knowingly and willingly mated with Indra (*Bala Kānda,* Chapter 48.19, 20).

However, in the *Uttara Kānda*, Chapter 30.40, Sage Agastya narrates the same incident to Rama and Lakshmana in a different manner in which Ahalya after being cursed by her husband told him about her innocence, "I was unwittingly violated by the Deva (Indra)

appearing in your guise, and not according to my own free will, O Brahmarshi; you ought, therefore, to extend your grace to me."

Her innocence is also mentioned in the *Tirucchuzhiyal Puranam*, Chapter 10.9, which Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi refers to (Ref. Chapter 220, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*). This Purana which is the Tamil version of the Sanskrit *Trisula Purana*, clearly states that Ahalya had mated with Indra **without knowing** that he was not her husband. After Gautama cursed his wife, Ahalya retorted angrily to Gautama: "Oh, you ignorant Muni! You have acted rashly. Do you not bear guilt in this? Should you not have protected me from such deceit? Without enquiring into the truth, you have cursed me and have not even stated when I shall be free from the curse. Tell me, when will the curse end and how? Why not have some consideration for me and tell me at least that?" Gautama thereupon told her that she would be released from the curse when the dust from Rama's feet fell on her.

Gautama then left that place and tried to get into his daily rituals but he could not, for he had no peace of mind. He tried his level best but could not control his mind and became more and more troubled. On thinking deeply over the matter, he realised that he had cursed his wife Ahalya without a proper enquiry and also recollected that she had in return cursed him, by saying, 'Oh, you ignorant Muni!'. After all, she was also a great *tapaswini*! Hence, those words which were unusual must have resulted in an irrevocable curse on himself. He therefore sought the help of Ishvara to get relief from the curse. For this, he went to Chidambaram but was told that he had to go to Tiruchuzhi to get relief. Thus, he came to Tiruchuzhi, the birthplace of Bhagavan Ramana, and did Tapasya for a very long time before he obtained the Lord's Grace for relief from his curse.

Later on, Ahalya became purified by the dust of the feet of Sri Rama, regained her normal form and approached Gautama. He too was very pleased to see her back and both of them went to Tiruchuzhi to obtain the blessings of Ishvara before they resumed their normal family life.

Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar is mentioning this incident to show how powerful the Rishi was over even Indra because he had developed high spiritual powers through sense control and Tapas. And Indra, though being the Lord of Heaven, had lost his powers through sense indulgence and

was put to shame by the powerful Rishi. Thus, Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar is pointing out the value of sense control and the need to observe moral values in life.

26. செயற்கரிய செய்வார் பெரியர் சிறியர்
செயற்கரிய செய்கலா தார்.
seyaṛkariya seyvār periyar siṛiyar
seyaṛkariya seygalā dār.

Meaning

Those who accomplish great things are great (indeed), while those who are not capable of such great tasks remain small (in their accomplishments).

[செயற்கு அரிய செய்வார் பெரியர் = those who accomplish great things are great; செயற்கு அரிய செய்கலாதார் சிறியர் = those who are not capable of such great tasks remain small]

Commentary

Great people accomplish great things. Mahatma Gandhi won the freedom struggle for India through non-violent methods. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Adi Shankara and Andal became Jivanmuktas at a very young age, so rare an achievement even for great saints. These are truly great people who became great through their accomplishments. But those who are not capable of such great tasks may be good men but they will not be considered as great. Suppose you do something great, your name would be included in the Guinness Book of Records, or you would get a Nobel Prize.

Thus, it is only the magnitude of the tasks one accomplishes in life that makes him great or small. You do not become great simply because you are the son of the Prime Minister. You need to do great things in life to become great for which considerable efforts and sacrifices are required. If you are unwilling to put in great efforts, you will remain a small person, unsung and unknown. So we need to think big and strive hard to achieve it, if we want to achieve greatness in life. The greatest thing one can achieve in life is Self-Realisation. In comparison to this, all other worldly attainments pale into insignificance. None can match the greatness of Jnanis like Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Sai Baba of Shirdi, Adi Shankara, Andal, Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Milarepa of

Tibet, who attained Jivanmukti which is the rarest of rare attainments in the world. Such Jnanis are the greatest in the world.

27. சுவைஒளி ஊறுஓசை நாற்றமென்று ஐந்தின்
வகைதெரிவான் கட்டே உலகு.
suvai-oḷi ūṟu-ōsai nāṯṟam-enḍṟu aindin
vagai-terivān kaṭṭē ulagu.

Meaning

Only a person who knows the method of controlling the five senses — taste, sight, touch, sound and smell — (is capable of conquering the desires of the) world.

[சுவை ஒளி ஊறு ஓசை நாற்றம் என்று ஐந்தின் வகை தெரிவான் கட்டே (வகை = method; கட்டு = to control, conquer) = Only a person who knows the method of controlling the five senses — taste, sight, touch, sound and smell; உலகு = (is capable of conquering the desires of the) world]

Commentary

The world is attractive to us due to maya and we seek so many things in the world due to desires. We do not have the right understanding about the illusory nature of the world. We are trapped in it like prey caught in a spider's web. As long as the world is attractive to us, our senses will get carried away by it and we would get caught in the materialistic world for even *janmas*. Then our evolution would not take place and we would stagnate in samsara. Therefore, we should acquire the right knowledge of the world from the Guru and the scriptures and strive to control the senses whenever they externalise into the world seeking objects for enjoyment. We also need to develop strength of mind through prayers, *satsangh* and enquiry, and rein in the senses which are like horses going fast in the direction of the world.

A rat gets caught in a trap and perishes because it falls prey to the smell of the bait kept in it; a deer gets drawn to the hunter because of the music played by him and thus it falls prey to the sense of sound. The elephant falls prey to the touch of a female elephant which is used to draw it towards a pit dug by the poacher in which it falls and gets caught. The moth falls into the fire and perishes because it gets attracted to the light of the fire. The fish gets attracted by the taste

of the bait and is caught by the fisherman. Thus, we see how each of these creatures perish because they were unable to control just one of their senses, and man with all the five senses running wild into the world is an easy prey to get caught in the mire of the world process which would pull him down like quicksand.

Thus, we need to understand the nature of the world process from the Guru and the scriptures and try to rein in the senses through enquiry and prayers whenever they get attracted by the objects of the world. To succeed in our efforts, we need to develop devotion towards God and Guru and strongly hold on to them in both good and bad times. Only then we would be able to control the mind and internalise it and take it towards its source and achieve the purpose of life. All the happiness we are looking for in the outside world is available only within us. The pleasures of the world are only fleeting and lead to pain eventually. Therefore, through devotion, satsangh, enquiry and discrimination, we have to develop *vairagya* and bring the senses under control. Thus, developing sense control is the first step on the ladder of spiritual development.

28. நிறைமொழி மாந்தர் பெருமை நிலத்து
மறைமொழி காட்டி விடும்.
niṛai-mozhi māndar perumai nilattu
maṛai-mozhi kāṭṭi viḍum.

Meaning

The greatness of those who speak from their plenitude (of Wisdom) is evidenced by the world from their teachings of 'That' which lies hidden (within).

[நிறைமொழி மாந்தர் பெருமை = The greatness of those who speak from their plenitude (of Wisdom); நிலத்து மறைமொழி காட்டி விடும் = is evidenced by the world from their teachings of 'That' which lies hidden]

Commentary

Here Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar has used the word *maṛai* to refer to the Self which lies hidden within us beyond the five sheaths or *Koshas*. It can be realised only when the five senses are withdrawn from the externals and the mind internalised and taken to its source in

the Heart and made to merge in the Self. Those who attain this supreme experience have attained Jnana which is Self-Realisation. Their knowledge has now become a direct experience as Realisation through abidance in the Self. They have attained perfection and the fullness of Knowledge and regained their original nature. What they had learnt earlier from their Guru and scriptures were only limited knowledge. After Realisation, their knowledge has attained completion and now they are in a position to teach others from their own experience, and it is not knowledge borrowed from books and others. Only from their teachings of the Self, the people of the world will be able to infer their supreme attainment, for, to talk about the Self perfectly, one has to have direct experience. If they are talking only from book knowledge, they will not be able to convincingly answer all the questions and clarify doubts. When they attain the Supreme State, they will be able to interpret the scriptures in a perfect manner. Fortunate are those who surrender and learn from such Realised Souls who, having traversed the Path, are in a position to guide others. The teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Andal, Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Adi Shankara belong to this category.

29. குணமென்னும் குன்றேறி நின்றார் வெகுளி
கணமேயும் காத்தல் அரிது.
guṇam-ennum kuṇḍṛēṛi niṇḍṛār veguḷi
gaṇamēyum kāttal aridu.

Meaning

One who has ascended to the peak of the hill of character and abides there, will not allow anger to rise in him, even for a moment.

[குணம் என்னும் குன்று ஏறி நின்றார் = One who has ascended to the peak of the hill of character and abides there; வெகுளி காத்தல் அரிது (காத்தல் = protect, withhold, tolerate) = will not allow anger to rise; கணமேயும் = even for a moment]

Commentary

Who are the people who have conquered anger? They are the saints and sages who have through self-effort conquered anger which is the most difficult and common of all negative emotions. They have attained the peak of character and are abiding in that state due to

evolution. What Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar is saying here is that the anger of a person who has attained the peak of character or virtue will not last even for a moment. His inner peace and tranquillity will not allow the anger to last even for a moment; such would be his mental strength and alertness. He would not tolerate it even for a moment as he knows the ill effects of anger thoroughly. Anger is a vile emotion and those who would like to protect their character at the highest level should control it very quickly. Otherwise, they would not be able to abide at the peak of the hill of character and would quickly slide down from the top of the hill which they would have ascended with great effort. The fact that Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar has used the metaphor of a hill to refer to character shows that it is an uphill task and one has to strive hard to reach the top and also abide there without slipping. If one yields to anger, he will slip from the top. It also shows that one should be strong in character like the hill.

Those who have reached the peak of character or virtue are the saints and sages who would have conquered anger and destroyed the *vasana* or tendency at the root itself through enquiry, *tapasya* and prayers over a long period of time. Anger is a reaction which arises when the ego is affected. Men of great character would have conquered their ego to a very large extent through their Tapas and hence would not allow anger to rise in them and affect their mental balance. They would be able to cut it off the moment it rises due to their high mental strength and peace. Their attainment is truly great. The fact that Sage Tiruvaḷḷuvar has mentioned only anger in this *Kuṛaḷ* shows how important it is to overcome anger, as it is the most prominent and difficult to conquer emotion in most people. Thus, we have to take special efforts to overcome it to progress on the path of attaining egolessness, which is the sine qua non for Liberation.

30. அந்தணர் என்போர் அறவோர்மற்று எவ்வுயிர்க்கும்
செந்தண்மை பூண்டு ஒழுகலான்.
andaṇar enbōr aṛavōr-maṭṛu evvuyirkkum
sendaṇmai pūṇḍu ozhugalān.

Meaning

Sages who have reached their destination are virtuous people who will show compassion to all living beings in a ‘visible manner’.

[அந்தணர் என்போர் = Sages who have attained their destination; அறவோர் = virtuous people; மற்று = அசை, an expletive; எவ் உயிர்க்கும் = to all living beings; செந்தண்மை ஒழுகலான் = practise compassion; பூண்டு = பூணுதல், அணிதல் = to wear (which means, their compassion would be in a visible manner)]

Commentary

The term *andaṇar* refers to one who has attained his destination (*andam*) which is to unite with the Self in the Heart and thus attain the purpose of life. What is the hallmark of such a person who is known as a Sage? He will always conduct himself in a virtuous and wise manner and show compassion to all living beings, that too in a visible manner, so as to set an example for others — like not wearing silk or using leather, nor doing leather business, not eating non-vegetarian food or running non-vegetarian hotels, etc. Having attained the Supreme State, he will not discriminate between living beings and will have an equal eye for all as he has realised the oneness of all at the core. He is an ocean of virtue and wisdom and will never indulge in wrongdoing even the least. His compassion will be seen by others in his conduct as he will not hurt or harm any living being and will be kind and helpful to one and all. He will not eat non-vegetarian food which is a product of violence. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was an example of such a conduct. He used to treat even animals and birds with a lot of courtesy. The way He used to treat monkeys, squirrels, cows, deer, dogs, and birds was a delight to all. He would never allow any ill-treatment even to snakes and scorpions. He would not tolerate anyone hurting even the trees in any manner. He would chide some of the ladies even if they plucked flowers unnecessarily. He used to particularly treat the poor and the downtrodden with a lot of courtesy.

Thus, a Jnani is known to the world by the way he conducts himself, for after all, actions speak louder than words! ▲

(To be continued)

Essence of Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad

Part 5 – Bliss of Self-Experience

Annotated by V. Krithivasan

Advaita Vedanta's Emphasis on Experience

अद्वैतमेवं न मतं यथाऽन्यत् नास्ति प्रचारो मनसो हि तत्र ।
अद्वैतमुक्तं निजसत्यभावे निष्ठैव चिन्तारहिताऽस्तलोका ।। (45)

advaitamevaṃ na mataṃ yathā'nyat nāsti pracāro manaso hi tatra |
advaitamuktaṃ nijasatyabhāve niṣṭhaiva cintārahitā'stalokā ||

Advaita is not dogmatic like other religions, because by the experience of Advaita, the mind ceases to function. Advaita is declared to be just the state of Being in one's own real nature (as the Real Self), free from thoughts and free from the world.

Advaita Vedanta, the author points out, is not a dogma like most religions are. In other words, it is not a religious doctrine proclaimed as true, without proof. Advaita is also not a belief system, as it lays emphasis only on personal experience. Advaita's primary concern and focus is on the ultimate reality, Brahman, which transcends all dogmatic and conceptual frameworks. It also respects other

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philosophical traditions, recognizing that all paths are designed to suit aspirants with diverse mental makeups and maturity levels. Unlike most religions, it encourages critical thinking, questioning and debate, fostering a spirit of enquiry.

Moreover, as the ultimate goal is to reach the state of pure Being where the mind has to necessarily disappear, this mindless state leaves no scope for disputes with conflicting opinions or metaphysical frameworks. Bhagavan would never encourage intellectual discussions about which path is superior and which is inferior. He would say that one should first experience the goal laid out by the path one is advocating and afterwards one should express one's opinion on other paths. In *Ulladu Narpadu*, he has said:

யான்கெட்டுத் தன்னிலையில் நிற்றல் தலை.
yaan kettut tannilaiyil nitral talai

After the destruction of egoity, to remain in one's own state is best.[1]

Advaita is not an *ism* in the sense of a closed system of philosophy. In the words of Rene Guenon, a French Philosopher, "Non-dualism is capable of immeasurably surpassing the scope of all philosophy because it alone is genuinely metaphysical in its essence. It is an expression of the most essential and fundamental character of metaphysics itself."[2]

Mere intellectual understanding of the sacred lore does not grant one the Supreme Advaitic state. Unfortunately, there are many who are content with understanding the doctrinal substance, without striving to attain the true experience.

न तेन दृश्यं प्रविलापितं हि स्वचित्स्वरूपे परमार्थसत्ये ।
शास्त्रार्थ बोधात् समवैति यः स्वं न तस्य देहात्ममतिः विनष्टा ।। (47)

na tena dṛśyaṃ pravilāpitaṃ hi svacitsvarūpe paramārthasatye|
śāstrārtha bodhāt samavaiti yaḥ svaṃ na tasya dehātmamatiḥ vinaṣṭā||

[1] *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.2.
[2] T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Ramana Maharshi and his Philosophy of Existence*, p. 33.

Such a one (who has only intellectual understanding of Advaita) has not dissolved the world appearance by remaining in the true state of the Self as the Supreme Reality. He that knows the Self by understanding the substance of the books has not got rid of the false notion that the body is the Self.

The notion 'I am the body' – *dehatma bhaavam*- is the core of *avidya* (ignorance). The most difficult part is to get rid of this notion. As long as this notion exists, the false appearance of the world with its multiplicity, is inevitable. In other words, the true *Advaitic* experience cannot be obtained as long as *dehatma bhavam* exists. Mere intellectual understanding of this truth does not make one get rid of this false identification but only arduous sadhana leading to *atma-anubhuti.*

Like the one who takes a crocodile
For a boat and with its help
Tries to cross a river are those
Who while they pamper the trivial flesh
Claim also that they are earnest seekers
Of the living Self. [3]

Scholarship sans Experience

वाग्यन्त्र तुल्योयं उदीर्यते च बुद्ध्वाऽपि शास्त्रार्थं अशान्तचेताः।
अपण्डिताऽपि अवरोऽयमुक्तो मदादिदोषैः परिभूतभावः।। (50)

vāgyantra tulyoyaṃ udīryate ca buddhvā'pi śāstrārthaṃ
aśāntacetāḥ |
apaṇḍitā'pi avaro'yamukto madādidoṣaiḥ paribhūtabhāvaḥ ||

It is said (by Sri Bhagavan) that the knower of the sacred lore whose mind has not subsided in the peace of the Supreme State is just like a gramophone; he is even worse off than a man without learning, because unlike the latter, he is prone to be full of pride.

[3] *Guru Vachaka Kovai,* v. 125, Translated by Prof. K.Swaminathan.

Lakshmana Sarma has coined an interesting Sanskrit word for a machine which records and plays back sound – वाग्यन्त्र (*vāgyantra*). This word refers to the gramophone which existed during Bhagavan's time. Bhagavan used to refer to an intellectual who has understood the doctrine of Advaita and who can explain all the jargon convincingly – but without an iota of the ultimate experience – as a gramophone device. A device is just an insentient machine incapable of experiencing anything. A human, who has the capacity to experience, must do better than a machine and not stop with merely repeating the profound truths of Advaita to an audience. Such a person is even worse than an illiterate person because the latter does not suffer from pride like the learned one does! The intellectual's mind has not subsided in peace, which is the mark of the ultimate experience.

Adi Sankara also condemns mere intellectual prowess without actual inner experience in *Vivekachudamani*:

> Loud speech consisting of a shower of words, the skill in expounding the scriptures, and likewise erudition – these merely bring on a little personal enjoyment to the scholar, but are no good for liberation.[4]
>
> The study of scriptures is useless so long as the highest Truth is unknown, and it is equally useless when the highest Truth is already known.[5]
>
> The scriptures consisting of many words are a dense forest which merely causes the mind to ramble. Hence men of wisdom should earnestly set about knowing the true nature of the Self.[6]
>
> यदार्कतप्तो मृगतृष्णिकायां स्नात्वा नरः तापविमुक्तिं एति ।
> अन्नं पचेत् चित्रगताग्निना वा परोक्ष बोधेन तदाऽस्तु मुक्तिः ।।
>
> *yadārkatapto mṛgatṛṣṇikāyāṃ snātvā naraḥ tāpavimuktiṃ eti |*
> *annaṃ pacet citragatāgninā vā parokṣa bodhena tadā'stu muktiḥ ||*

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[4] *Vivekachudamani*, v. 58.
[5] *Ibid.*, v.59.
[6] *Ibid.*, v.60.

When a man scorched by the sun gets cooled by bathing in a mirage, or when one succeeds in cooking food on a painting of fire, then one may attain deliverance by theoretical knowledge.

Can anyone take a bath in the waters of a mirage to escape from the scorching sun? Can anyone light a stove in order to cook, from the picture of a fire? The answer to these is an emphatic no. Similarly, hoping to attain the Supreme State by mere theoretical understanding is an impossibility. The antidote to ignorance – which is nothing but the 'I am the body' notion – is to gain the knowledge of 'I am pure Awareness.' The purpose of all scriptures is to reveal this truth and direct the attention of the aspirant towards the inner Awareness, bereft of all *upadhis* (limitations).

Thus, the Maharshi says,[7] "What is wanted for gaining the highest goal is loss of individuality. The intellect is co-extensive with individuality. Loss of individuality can only be after the disappearance of *buddhi*, good or bad." This is echoed by Murugunar,[8]

> Unless by one means or another
> Mind dies out and certitude
> From true self-recognition comes,
> **The knowledge which mere learning brings**
> **Is like the horse's horn unreal.**

विश्वं परो जीव इति त्रिरूपं विभाति सत्यं परमेकमेव।
ज्ञानं भवेन्नैव तु वाद एष ज्ञानं त्वहङ्कार विनाश एव।। (57)

viśvaṃ paro jīva iti trirūpaṃ vibhāti satyaṃ paramekameva|
jñānaṃ bhavennaiva tu vāda eṣa jñānaṃ tvahaṅkāra vināśa eva||

It is only the one Supreme Reality that appears as the three, namely the world, God and the individual soul, or jiva. But jnana is not an assertion of this truth as a doctrine; it is only the experience of the death of the ego.

The world, God and the jiva are called *tattva trayam*, the three primary principles. All religions and schools of philosophy postulate

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[7] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 502.

[8] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 144, Translated by Prof K.Swaminathan.

these three in some manner or the other. They differ amongst themselves only in their description or definition of the relationship between these. Can these three be independent principles? If I take myself as body-mind, then I perceive that both the world and myself are in perpetual change. This perception of continuous change in myself and the world presupposes an *aadhara*, a substratum which must be changeless. Advaita Vedanta calls this substratum, the Supreme, as the Supreme Reality or Brahman.

In the words of Chandogya Upanishad, सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म (*sarvam kalvidam brahma*), *all these are only Brahman.* The origin, subsistence and dissolution of the world and the jiva proceed from that omniscient, omnipotent cause called Brahman. The primal Being is One, and from it, the world of plurality has come into existence. The *Mundaka Upanishad* uses an interesting analogy[9]:

यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च ..... तथाऽक्षरात् संभवतीह विश्वम्

yathorṇanābhiḥ sṛjate gṛhṇate ca….. tathā'kṣarāt saṃbhavatīha viśvam

The spider brings out its web from within its own body, and again takes it back within itself. In the same manner, the world arises from the imperishable (*akshara*) Brahman.

Bhagavan says in *Ulladu Narpadu*, "Because we perceive a world, the acceptance of a multi-powered First Principle is settled. The picture, the name and form, the observer, the basic canvas and the revealing light – all these are He Himself."[10] Having said this, he goes on to say, as quoted earlier, the imperative of destroying one's ego and gaining the experience of non-dual Awareness and abiding in It without indulging in theoretical argumentation.

All paths lead to the ultimate goal

मतं न किञ्चित् विदुषोस्ति यस्मात् सज्जेत वादेषु कदापि नासौ।
सर्वं मतं सम्मतमेव तस्य मतिं न कस्याप्युत चालयेत् सः।। (60)

[9] *Mundaka Upanishad*, v. I.i.8
[10] *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 1.

mataṃ na kiñcit viduṣosti yasmāt sajjeta vādeṣu kadāpi nāsau |
sarvaṃ mataṃ sammatameva tasya matiṃ na kasyāpyuta
cālayet saḥ ||

Since the sage has no creed of his own, he never engages in useless discussions. All creeds are approved of by him. He does not seek to unsettle the faith of anyone.

The jnani has no intention or compulsion to prove anything to anyone; his unbroken experience of Pure Awareness is itself the ultimate proof. He does not indulge in wasteful discussions, as his mind has sunk in supreme silence. His interactions with the outside world are purely an emanation of grace, an outpouring of compassion to destroy the ignorance of the seeker. Even this explanation is from our point of view. Strictly speaking, he is not even aware of an 'other' to help or uplift.

From the sage's point of view, all the paths lead a sincere aspirant to the ultimate goal. According to the sage, a guru will appear invariably for the benefit of the earnest seeker, to guide him and suggest course corrections. Muruganar says this about Bhagavan in *Padamaalai*[11]:

என்னென்ன சாதனை எவ்வெவர் செய்யினும்
அன்னன்ன சாதனைக் கன்பினருள் பாதம்
ennenna sadhanai evvevar seyyinum
annanna sadhanaik kanbinaruL paadam

Whoever they may be and whatever sadhana they may practice, *padam* (Bhagavan's feet) will lovingly bless that sadhana with his grace.

This is exemplified in the teachings and actions of Bhagavan, as cited below, where a single path was never advocated to aspirants.

Everyone knows what great stress Sri Bhagavan lays on *atma vichara*, Self-enquiry. He wrote in *Atma Vidya Kirtanam*, 'Self-knowledge is an easy thing, the easiest thing there is.' Yet, surprisingly, not once of his own accord did he ever ask any devotee to follow this method. He could have ordered

[11] *Ramana Jnana Bodham, Padamalai* 2614

the practice of self-enquiry, and all the devotees would have blindly and willingly followed... Sri Bhagavan's presence and teachings gave hope and strength to different classes of seekers at different levels...Sri Bhagavan gave help and guidance to all kinds of people on all kinds of paths and never demanded that devotees change from one sadhana to another.[12]

A lot of people are under the impression that Bhagavan talked advaitic philosophy all the time and prescribed self-enquiry to everyone who asked for his advice. This is simply not so: Bhagavan gave out different advice to different people. He would see their level of development and their temperament and act accordingly. One devotee might ask a question and be given an answer. If another devotee asked the same question a few minutes later, he might be given a different answer, so different in fact that it would contradict the first one. If each of these devotees acted on Bhagavan's advice, with full faith in its efficacy, each would find that Bhagavan's grace was flowing into him.[13]

द्वेषं विनाऽन्येषु मतेषु तस्माद्विहाय वादानपि शान्तचेताः ।
यतेत साधुः स्वमतोक्तरीत्या मोक्षेच्छया साधनतत्परः सन् ।। (61)

dveṣaṃ vināʼnyeṣu mateṣu tasmādvihāya vādānapi śāntacetāḥ |
yateta sādhuḥ svamatoktarītyā mokṣecchayā sādhanatatparaḥ
san ||

Therefore, the aspirant should, with a mind at peace, cease from hatred of other faiths and from all disputations and engage in sadhana as taught by his own faith, intent on winning moksha.

The assumption that one's own religion or creed alone is true and others are false, arises only in an individual whose mind is still in the firm grip of opinions and judgments. The egoless state, which alone is superior to all religious faiths, has not yet been won and this is a serious shortcoming.

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[12] David Godman, *The Power of the Presence*, Part 2, pages 91,93.
[13] *Ibid*., page 159.

Whatever creed you may believe in,
Turn inward with true faith, live up
To it, instead of setting out
To hate and attack the faith of others.[14]

Madhava Tirtha Swami was witness to an incident which exemplified Bhagavan's universality in matters of religion. He says:

> I saw a good example of the Maharshi's disinclination to impose Hindu ideas on people who would not appreciate them. Once a group of devout Muslims came to see him. One of them asked Sri Maharshi, "What is the best aim of human life?"
>
> Sri Maharshi replied, "It is Islam, which means 'to remain at the feet of God.' And as a consequence of that, one gets *salaam*, which means peace."[15]

Desire for unbroken Happiness

अदुःखमिश्रं सुखमन्तहीनं वाञ्छन्ति सर्वे खलु जन्तवोऽपि ।
सुखं स्वभावो हि समस्तजन्तोः तादृक्सुखं क्वेति हि चिन्तनीयम् ।। (63)

aduḥkhamiśraṃ sukhamantahīnaṃ vāñchanti sarve khalu jantavo'pi |
sukhaṃ svabhāvo hi samastajantoḥ tādṛksukhaṃ kveti hi cintanīyam ||

> All creatures alike want perfect happiness, unmixed with suffering, all the time. This (is natural because) Happiness is the real nature of all creatures. So one should inquire where such happiness can be had.

Everyone wants to be happy all the time. This is a universal truth. Happiness forms the motive for all actions of man. Bhagavan says that man's desire for happiness untainted by misery stems from the fact that his very nature is happiness.

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[14] *Guruvachaka Kovai*, v. 991, Translated by Prof.K.Swaminathan.
[15] David Godman, *The Power of the Presence*, Part 1, page 271.

M.: The desire for happiness (*sukha prema*) is a proof of the ever-existing happiness of the Self. Otherwise how can desire for it arise in you? If headache was natural to human beings no one would try to get rid of it. But everyone that has a headache tries to get rid of it, because he has known a time when he had no headache. He desires only that which is natural to him. So too he desires happiness because happiness is natural to him. Being natural, it is not acquired. Man's attempts can only be to get rid of misery. If that be done the ever-present bliss is felt. The primal bliss is obscured by the non-self which is synonymous with non-bliss or misery. *Duhkha nasam = sukha prapti*. (Loss of unhappiness amounts to gain of happiness.) Happiness mixed with misery is only misery. When misery is eliminated then the ever-present bliss is said to be gained.[16]

All the scriptures and sages have said that happiness is the very nature of the Self.

Self is Bliss. This Bliss is the source and support of all creatures during life. It is also the goal they have to come back to in the end. [17]

Pure Happiness is experienced in the Egoless State

प्रिया सुषुप्तिर्हि समस्तजन्तोः प्रियत्वहेतुः सुखरूपताऽस्याः।
सुखाय तस्यां विषया न सन्ति किं मूलकं स्यान्नु सुखं सुषुप्तेः।। (65)

priyā suṣuptirhi samastajantoḥ priyatvahetuḥ sukharūpatā'syāḥ|
sukhāya tasyāṃ viṣayā na santi kiṃ mūlakaṃ syānnu sukhaṃ suṣupteḥ||

The state of deep sleep is dear to all creatures, and it is dear because it is a state of happiness. But in that state there are no objects of enjoyment! What can be its source?

Everyone looks forward to a good night of restful sleep and makes all necessary preparations for it. This is due to the universal experience of happiness associated with deep sleep. Strangely, there

[16] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 619.
[17] *Taittiriya Upanishad Bhriguvalli*

are no objects of enjoyment in sleep, as objects are absent there due to the disappearance of the mind. Therefore the question arises as to what can be the source of the happiness experienced in deep sleep.

> Maharshi: If a man thinks that his happiness is due to external causes and his possessions, it is reasonable to conclude that his happiness must increase with the increase of possessions and diminish in proportion to their diminution. Therefore if he is devoid of possessions, his happiness should be nil. What is the real experience of man? Does it conform to this view? In deep sleep the man is devoid of possessions, including his own body. Instead of being unhappy he is quite happy. Everyone desires to sleep soundly. The conclusion is that happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realise his Self in order to open the store of unalloyed happiness.[18]

Pointing out that ego is absent in sleep and arises when a man wakes up, Bhagavan says:

You cannot deny your existence in sleep. Nor can you deny you were happy then. You are the same person now speaking and raising doubts. You are not happy, according to you. But you were happy in sleep. What has transpired in the meantime that the happiness of sleep has broken down? It is the rise of ego. That is the new arrival in the *jagrat* state. There was no ego in sleep. The birth of the ego is called the birth of the person. There is no other kind of birth. Whatever is born is bound to die. Kill the ego: there is no fear of recurring death for what is once dead. The Self remains even after the death of the ego. That is Bliss - that is Immortality.[19]

In other words, Bhagavan is drawing the conclusion that the egoless state of Pure Being that is present during deep sleep is the source of happiness. What is unconsciously enjoyed in deep sleep, must be attained consciously in the present state of wakefulness; all sadhana is only towards this end.

अनित्यमल्पं च सुखं सुषुप्तौ मनोऽस्ति तस्यां खलु बीजभावे ।
तुर्ये प्रपूर्णं सुखमस्त्यनन्तं आनन्दसंज्ञं श्रुतिषु प्रसिद्धं ।। (67)

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[18] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 3.
[19] *Ibid.*, Talk 251.

anityamalpaṃ ca sukhaṃ suṣuptau mano'sti tasyāṃ khalu bījabhāve|
turye prapūrṇaṃ sukhamastyanantaṃ ānandasaṃjñaṃ śrutiṣu prasiddhaṃ

The happiness of sleep is meagre, because the mind survives there in seed form. In the Supreme State (*Turiya*), there is infinite bliss, known as *Ananda* in the Vedantic lore.

The author brings out in this verse the difference between the happiness experienced in sleep and *Turiya*. The bliss experienced in the Supreme State of mind-free Awareness, is perfect. The bliss of the deep sleep state is not comparable to it. In Vedantic lore the bliss of the Supreme State is called as *Ananda* whereas the deep sleep state is *anandamaya kosa,* a mere sheath. Mind is dormant or suspended temporarily in deep sleep and survives there in its seed form. Mind's potential to re-emerge makes the happiness experienced as imperfect. The potential for the mind to re-emerge from deep sleep renders the happiness experienced in this state imperfect. This is exemplified and explained in detail by Bhagavan in *Talks*, as given below.

> To be in one's natural state on the subsidence of thoughts is bliss; if that bliss is transient - arising and setting - then it is only the sheath of bliss (*anandamaya kosa*), not the pure Self. [20]
>
> The experience in deep sleep was said to be the bliss of Brahman. It is only the negative aspect of such bliss, as it is the result of the absence of thoughts. Moreover it is transitory. Such a bliss is only the *abhasa*, the counterfeit of Supreme Bliss. It is not different from the blissful feeling of sensual pleasures. [21]

[20] *Ibid.,* Talk 624.
[21] *Ibid.,* Talk 617.

Muruganar in His Own Words

Part Five

Love For His Mother

Hari Moorthy

Once Muruganar came under the merciful gaze of Bhagavan, his entire life became centered around his singular, unwavering love for Him. Bhagavan's seemingly casual words became Muruganar's elixir of life, inspiring him to compose verses that flowed effortlessly from his heart, like water rushing downhill from a mountaintop.

As Muruganar's mind gradually unburdened itself of worldly concern, his attachments fell away one by one. This gentle unfoldment was guided by Bhagavan's ever-present grace, which allowed Muruganar to steady himself in his inner Bhagavan, who was deeply rooted in his heart.

In a beautifully expressive verse[1] from *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, Muruganar reveals how this detachment blossomed naturally, in direct proportion to the growth of his love and devotion toward Bhagavan. His poetic words tell us of the serene transformation of his heart freed from worldly entanglements, finding its fulfillment in the divine presence of his beloved Guru.

மக்களும் மனையும் மண்ணொடு பொன்னும்
மற்றுள பற்பல பொருளும்

[1] Verse 198.

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

தொக்கன போலத் தோன்றுறும் உலகம்
தொன்றுபோல் ஒன்றுமே யின்றி
உக்கன வாகி ஒழிந்திடல் கண்டும்
உண்மையை உணரவே ஒட்டாப்
பொய்க்கனவு அதனில் பொருந்துதல் ஆற்றேன்
புண்ணிய ரமணமா தேவே.

Meaning[2]:

Wife and children, land and gold
And other objects we hold dear
Are trivial, transient; the whole world
Is not as it was formerly; for
All things rot and die.
Seeing this, I shall no more persist
In this false dream,
Mighty Ramana, virtuous Lord.

In this verse, Muruganar reflects on the impermanence of worldly attachments – "மக்களும் மனையும் மண்ணொடு பொன்னும்" ("wife and children, land and gold") – and the fleeting nature of human existence. These cherished possessions, often viewed as cornerstones of one's life, are here labeled as trivial and transient. This perspective directly contradicts the conventional mindset that places family, wealth, and material pursuits at the center of happiness and security. Muruganar's life underwent a radical transformation after coming into Bhagavan's presence. His emerging stature as a Tamil poet, his role as a freedom fighter supporting the cause of India's independence from British rule, his literary accomplishments, his lucrative teaching career, and even his domestic life with his wife – all came to an abrupt end. Freed from these attachments and pursuits, he became singularly devoted to Bhagavan.

However, in his verse, composed very early during his association with Bhagavan, Muruganar makes no mention of his love for his mother. This is likely because the bond with his mother remained the deepest and most tenacious of his worldly attachments, binding

[2] Translation by Sri Prof. K. Swaminathan from *Homage to The Presence of Sri Ramana*.

him subtly yet powerfully to the material world. It was only through Bhagavan's divine intervention and grace that Muruganar was able to eventually overcome even this final attachment.

This unfolding story offers an excellent spiritual lesson for all aspirants. It illustrates how deeply ingrained attachments – especially those rooted in familial love – can be the most challenging to transcend. Yet, through the guidance and grace of a realized master, even these bonds can be severed, allowing the seeker to move closer to true spiritual liberation. Muruganar's journey serves as a reminder that complete freedom requires not only external renunciation but also the dissolution of the most subtle and cherished ties of the mind.

Even the greatest saints have exemplified respect and devotion toward their mothers. The illustrious Advaitic guru Adi Shankara stands as a shining example. Upon the passing of his mother, he composed five deeply moving verses[3] that capture the depth of his gratitude and reverence. In these verses, Shankara poignantly acknowledges the immense sacrifices and suffering his mother endured to bring him into this world. The heartfelt intensity of his words is so powerful that they could move even the hardest of hearts to tears, reflecting the bond between a mother and her child.

Aasthaam tavaddeyam prasoothi samaye durvara soola vyadha,
Nairuchyam thanu soshanam malamayee sayya cha samvatsaree,
Ekasyapi na garbha bara bharana klesasya yasya kshmo dhathum,
Nishkruthi munnathopi thanaya tasya janyai nama.[4]

Meaning[5]:

Oh mother mine,
With clenched teeth bore thou the excruciating pain,
When I was born to you,
Shared thou the bed made dirty by me for a year,
And thine body became thin and painful,
During those nine months that you bore me,

[3] *Mathru Panchakam.*
[4] Verse 1 of *Mathru Panchakam.*
[5] Translated by Sri P .R .Ramachander.

For all these in return,
Oh mother dearest,
I can never compensate,
Even by my becoming great.

In Tamil literature, we find a similar theme beautifully expressed by Pattinathar,[6] one of the language's most revered poet-saints. At his mother's deathbed, he composed ten poignant verses that eloquently convey his deep love, gratitude, and reverence for her boundless compassion and sacrifices. Through his heartfelt words, Pattinathar captures the universal sentiment of a child's indebtedness to a mother's selfless care, leaving an enduring mark on spiritual and literary traditions. The first of these ten poignant verses reads as follows:

ஐயிரண்டு திங்களா வங்கமெலா நொந்துபெற்றுப்
பையலென்ற போதே பரிந்தெடுத்துச் – செய்யவிரு
கைப்புறத்தி லேந்திக் கனகமுலை தந்தாளை
யெப்பிறப்பிற் காண்பே னினி.

Meaning[7]:

After suffering severe pain in all her limbs for ten months,
She gave birth and lifted me softly as soon as she knew it was a boy,
And then she carried me in both her hands and fed me from her golden breast,
In which of my future births would I be able to ever see her.

In this deeply emotional verse, Pattinathar reflects on the immeasurable sacrifices and love of his mother, portraying her as the embodiment of selflessness and compassion. He begins by acknowledging the "severe pain in all her limbs for ten months," a vivid and heartfelt description of the physical suffering his mother endured during pregnancy. The reader can immediately feel a sense of gratitude for their own mother as the verse highlights how a mother

[6] Born in the 14th century into a prosperous family, Pattinathar renounced all worldly wealth and comforts to embrace the life of a mendicant, seeking the divine glory of supreme love for the Lord. Through his soulful verses, he extolled the virtues of renunciation and the power of divine love, inspiring generations to turn away from material attachments and seek the eternal truth.

[7] Translated by Sri P.R. Ramachander.

willingly bears such intense discomfort to bring a child into the world. In the third verse, he further laments the necessity of cremating his mother, wondering how he could possibly accomplish such an act, noble as she was in her love towards him.

வட்டிலிலுந் தொட்டிலிலு மார்மேலுந் தோண்மேலுங்
கட்டிலிலும் வைத்தென்னைக் காதலித்து - முட்டச்
சிறகிலிட்டுக் காப்பாற்றிச் சீராட்டுந் தாய்க்கோ
விறகிலிட்டுத் தீமூட்டு வேன்.

Meaning[8]:

She loved me putting me in a basket swing,
On her chest and shoulder and then,
Pleasantly spoiled me by putting me on feather bed,
And how would I light the firewood to burn my noble mother?

Pattinathar renounced his familial life, including the emotional comfort of being near his mother, to embrace a life of spiritual pursuit. Wandering across the country and frequently visiting temples, he immersed himself in the truth of supreme love for the Divine. Revered as a great realized saint, Pattinathar's verses offer insights into his realization of the Self and his journey toward spiritual liberation. Even for a saint of great spiritual attainment, the bond with his mother proved so powerful that Pattinathar laments with a poignant and haunting question: "In which of my future births would I ever be able to see her?" This line reveals his deep anguish over the impermanence of human relationships and the fleeting nature of life itself. Despite his realization of the transient nature of bodily existence, Pattinathar underscores that a mother's love and care are so rare, selfless, and precious that they may never be encountered again, even across the infinite cycle of births and rebirths. Furthermore, he fondly recalls the love she showered on him as a young boy, tenderly placing him in a basket swing, cradling him on her chest, and carrying him on her shoulder.

Mirroring the pathos of Pattinathar's verses, Muruganar, in some of his most emotionally poignant verses, reveals his deep love and devotion toward his mother while chronicling his anguish over her deteriorating health. Through these verses, he tenderly captures his

[8] Translated by Sri P.R. Ramachander.

emotional struggle, weaving in his fervent supplications to Bhagavan for her well-being, reflecting both his human vulnerability and his sole faith in the divine form of Bhagavan.

In the following verse,[9] Muruganar pours out his heartfelt prayers to Bhagavan, imploring him to heal his mother's ailments without delay.

கொடியேனை யாண்ட குருநாதா நின்சே
வடியேனை ஈன்றெடுத்த வன்னை - படிமேல்
உழந்ததுயர் எல்லாம் ஒருகணத்தில் போக
வழங்குவாய் நல்ல வரம்.

Meaning: O Satguru, You have come to reign over this cruel person. In Your compassion for this devoted son's mother, who suffers in this world, kindly bestow blessings to alleviate all her afflictions instantly.

The opening line, "**கொடியேனை யாண்ட குருநாதா**" ("O Satguru, You have come to reign over this cruel person,") is an expression of humility. By referring to himself as a cruel person, Muruganar acknowledges his own perceived flaws and unworthiness in contrast to Bhagavan's boundless grace. It reflects the poet's clear acknowledgement that his request to Bhagavan stems from his emotional pain, unable to bear his dear mother's suffering. Even in that emotional state, his surrender to Bhagavan is very evident. Muruganar's plea, "In Your compassion for this devoted son's mother, who suffers in this world," highlights his role not only as a spiritual seeker but also as a devoted son. While deeply rooted in his spiritual path, he does not shy away from expressing his human attachment and concern for his mother.

As his mother's condition fails to improve, Muruganar's prayers grow even more fervent, expressing his increasing desperation and unwavering faith in another deeply moving verse.[10]

அன்னை பிணியால் அழுங்கிப் படுமவஸ்தை
உன்னுதோ றுள்ளம் உடையுமே - மன்னவா
ஆங்காலம் நோக்கிநீ அட்டித்தல் செய்யாதே
நீங்காத நோய்விரைவில் நீக்கு.

[9] Verse 20 in *Sri Ramana Deva Malai*.
[10] Verse 21 in *Sri Ramana Deva Malai*.

Meaning: Even contemplating the pain and suffering my mother endures due to her illness, my heart shudders. O Lord, I implore You to swiftly intervene without delay, to alleviate her persistent ailments and grant her healing.

In this emotionally charged verse, Muruganar lays bare the depth of his love and compassion for his mother while expressing his inner turmoil and helplessness. His words capture the emotional struggle of a son who is torn between his spiritual aspirations and the undeniable bonds of familial love. Muruganar's growing desperation is unmistakably conveyed in the tone of this verse, where his supplication transforms into a resolute command directed at his master, expressed in the words, "**நோய் விரைவில் நீக்கு**" (alleviate her ailments immediately).

Seeing no end to his mother's suffering and with no progress in sight, Muruganar returns to Bhagavan once more, his heart filled with renewed pleading, desperately seeking divine intervention to heal his mother from her deep, unrelenting pain in the following verse.[11]

ஆன்றோர் இறைஞ்சுரம ணானந்தா ஆசையால்
ஈன்றாள் படுபிணிநோய் எல்லாமென் மீதேவி
அன்னாளை அந்த அரும்பிணிவாய் நின்றுமே
இன்னேமீட் பிக்க இனிது.

Meaning: O Lord Ramanananda, the One whom all wise and enlightened beings revere, in Your boundless compassion, I humbly implore You to transfer all the pain my beloved mother bears onto me, so that she may find relief from the torment of her afflictions and live free of suffering.

Muruganar's heartfelt plea to Bhagavan – to "transfer all the pain my beloved mother bears onto me" – is an expression of self-sacrificial love, revealing his extraordinary willingness to shoulder the suffering of another. This selfless plea shows a level of devotion that transcends personal boundaries, highlighting his deep love for his mother.

On some level, Muruganar understood that such a miraculous transfer of pain was unlikely, especially given Bhagavan's unwavering stance that one must bear the fruits of their actions with patience and unconditional surrender. No one exemplified this attitude

[11] Verse 23 in *Sri Ramana Deva Malai*.

more profoundly than Bhagavan himself. Yet, despite Muruganar's intellectual clarity, often evident in the incisive wisdom of his verses, his deep love for his ailing mother inspired him to make this extraordinary plea – one that seemed to defy the very laws of nature.

A similar situation can be seen in Bhagavan's life about twelve years before this story, when his mother suffered due to a fulminant fever.[12] Bhagavan's plea to his Guru, Arunachala, which he wrote in the form the following verse, was marked by the highest form of surrender, devoid of any grandiose or unrealistic claims.[13]

அலையா வருபிறவி யத்தனையு மாற்ற
மலையா யெழுந்த மருந்தே - தலைவாநின்
தாள்கதியா வாழுமென் தாய்தாப மாற்றியே
யாள்வதுவு முன்கடனே யாம்.

Meaning: O Lord, You have come as this sacred Hill to bring eternal relief to those who surrender, freeing them from the cycles of rebirth. It is Your divine duty to heal my mother's burning fever – her physical affliction and the feverish desires that consume her mind.

The word "தாபம்" carries multiple layers of meaning, including fever, burning desires, thirst, or sorrow. While on the surface the verse may seem like a prayer to cure her physical fever, its deeper spiritual significance lies in the broader interpretations of the word, including the inner struggles of desire, longing, and suffering.

Bhagavan's plea to Lord Arunachala seeks a deeper, spiritual healing – requesting not just a relief from his mother's physical suffering, but a transcendence of her recurring cycle of births caused by attachment. While witnessing his mother's intense physical agony, his appeal is for the supreme grace of inner liberation, offering her a release from the feverish mind's relentless desires rather than a mere temporary cure.

In contrast, Muruganar, overwhelmed with unbearable emotional anguish at witnessing his mother's suffering, fervently pleaded with

[12] *Saranagathi*, June 2009: In 1914, while returning from a trip from the shrine of Venkataramana at Tirupati, she stayed for some time with Sri Ramana at Virupaksha cave on the Arunachala Hill where she fell ill with typhoid. On this occasion when her condition became serious Sri Bhagavan composed a touching poem in Tamil on Arunachala praying for the recovery of his mother.

[13] This is the first of four verses composed by Bhagavan in 1914 as a heartfelt plea to Lord Arunachala.

Bhagavan to alleviate her ailments. In the following verse,[14] he again implores Bhagavan to cure his mother and ease her pain.

மாயோன் மகிழு மருகா குருரமணா
சேயே யெனாதுகுல தெய்வமே - தாயாம்
அபலைக் குறுநோய் அகற்றாயேல் உன்றன்
அபயக் கொடியை அகற்று.

Meaning: Guru Ramana, You are Muruga, the one who delighted Your uncle Vishnu. You, too, were a devoted son to Your mother. You are the personal deity for my entire lineage. My mother, helpless and afflicted by the relentless agony of her illness, suffers cruelly. If You cannot relieve her pain, then it would call into question the very refuge promised by the flag You raise for Your devotees.

In this verse, Muruganar addresses Bhagavan as Muruga, the one who brought joy to His uncle, Lord Vishnu. By invoking this vivid imagery, Muruganar seeks to stir Bhagavan's compassion and invoke Muruga's love for Parvati. He further highlights that Bhagavan Himself was a devoted son who prayed to Lord Arunachala to cure His mother's fever. The verse also references Lord Muruga's flag, a symbol of refuge and protection for His devotees. Muruganar poignantly suggests that if Bhagavan cannot alleviate his mother's suffering, the very promise symbolized by this flag would be called into question.

Muruganar, driven by an unbreakable emotional bond with his mother, pours out his heart in the verses above, expressing a wide spectrum of emotions in his fervent appeals to Bhagavan. His singular aim is to seek divine intervention to relieve his mother's suffering. Yet, each of his heartfelt pleas is met with silence from Bhagavan, while his mother's condition continues to deteriorate, leaving him in deep anguish and uncertainty.

The tone of the verse is bold yet deeply reverent. Muruganar's plea is not just a request for his mother's healing but an impassioned appeal to Bhagavan's role as a protector of devotees. This duality – the personal anguish of a son and the faith-driven assertion of a devotee – is what makes the verse so compelling. ▲

(To be continued)

[14] Verse 25 in *Sri Ramana Deva Malai.*

Pongal/Sankranti Day Puja - 14 January 2025

D. Thiyagarajan

What Alone Remains

B. K. Croissant

Comparison, as a mental tool, has served art historians everywhere and over the centuries very well. It sheds light on similarities and differences between works of art, giving rise to all sorts of mental gymnastics that fuel and even constitute the field of art history itself. In the spiritual realm, this particular tool can also be useful for sincere seekers, especially those with scholarly inclinations or simply a proclivity for deep contemplation. In the case of the great Sage Sri Ramana Maharshi, comparison is especially fruitful when applied to his many translations. Obvious differences and similarities can lead to depths of understanding that are not apparent on the surface.

This is the first article of a series dedicated to various verses from Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu Anubandham* or Supplement to *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu*, his forty verses on Reality. In each instance, they will be studied by comparing the original Sanskrit to his Tamil translations.

Even those familiar with the *Anubandham* may not be aware that verses 9, 25 and 40 were composed by Bhagavan as a free-standing composition. Two of them, 9 and 25, are his translations of verses 46 and 47 from *Devikālottarm*, while verse 40 is his translation of verse 47 from the *Kaṭharudra Upaniṣad*.[1]

[1] The author wrote a series of four articles on *Devikālottara Jñānācāra Vicāra Paṭalaḥ (Chapter on the Investigation of the Means for Jñāna as Given to Devi at the Final Stage of Maturity)* that appeared in the *Mountain Path* from the April-June 2023 issue to the January-March 2024 issue.

B.K. Croissant was caught in the jaws of the tiger in 1993. Since then her quest has been unceasing inner worship.

That said, verse 9 of the *Anubandham* is derived from this original Sanskrit *śloka*.

हृत्सरोजेह्यहं रूपा या चितिर्निर्मलाऽचला |
अहङ्कार परित्यागात् सा चितिर्मोक्षदायिनी

hṛtsarojehyahaṁ rūpā yā citirnirmalā'calā |
ahaṅkāra-parityāgāt sā citirmokṣadāyinī ||

What blemishless and motionless awareness in the form of 'I' in the heart-lotus, from renouncing ego, that awareness grants liberation.[2]

In *Devikālottaram* Siva relates to Parvati another way to attain liberation. It consists of abandoning all practices that involve the mind or ego, like *puja*, *japa* and meditation on an object, and attending solely to the Self as it is, thus dwelling in the heart free from all thoughts and adjuncts. That absolute awareness bestows the highest goal of human life.

Bhagavan translated verse 9 thus:

ahakkama lattē yamala vacala
vahamuruva māhu ma<u>r</u>ivē — dahattai
yaha<u>t</u>ri<u>ḍ</u>uva dālav vahamā ma<u>r</u>ivē
yahavī ḍaḷippa da<u>r</u>i

What awareness is the blemishless, motionless 'I'-form in the heart-lotus, ***only that awareness which is 'I' (a-vv-aham ām a<u>r</u>ivē)*** *is what will give* ***inner (aha)*** *liberation by* ***removing (aha<u>t</u>ri<u>ḍ</u>uvadāl)*** *'I'.* ***Know (a<u>r</u>i).***[3]

only that awareness which is 'I': Why only? Because in verse 8 of *Anubandham* two paths to liberation are indicated. Here is Sadhu Om's version of Bhagavan's Tamil translation of that verse written in 1915 when Jagadiswara, a disciple, asked for his assistance in composing it (Bhagavan signed the verse 'Jagadisan' to make it clear that the ideas were not His own).

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[2] All of the Sanskrit verses in this article were translated by the author.

[3] All of the translations of Tamil verses in this article were done by Michael James. To him I owe immense gratitude. See *https://blog.sriramanateachings.org/2024/05/ulladu-narpadu-anubandham-tamil-text.html.*

In the centre of the cave which is the Heart, the one (non-dual) Brahman alone shines directly in the form of Self as 'I-I' (or 'I am I'). Enter the Heart (by the mind) sinking scrutinizing Self, ***or by the mind sinking along with the breath****, and be one who abides in Self.*[4]

Sadhu Om states "Thus in this verse [verse 9] Sri Bhagavan clearly reveals that, of the two paths mentioned in the previous verse [verse 8], the path of scrutinizing and knowing the true nature of the consciousness 'I' alone will bestow liberation, which is the state of self-abidance."[5] In paragraph 8 of *Nāṉ* Ār, Bhagavan states that *prāṇāyāma* is an aid to restrain the mind but will not destroy it.

inner: According to Michael James, "*Aham* is both a Tamil noun that means 'inside', 'home', or 'heart' and a Sanskrit pronoun that means 'I'. That is, the Tamil noun *aham* does not actually mean 'I', except by implication (because in the deepest sense of the word 'heart', it is the pure 'I', which alone is our real home and what is most inside), but Bhagavan often use this word *aham* to refer simultaneously to its meaning in Tamil and its meaning in Sanskrit."[6]

removing: Bhagavan translates *ahaṅkāra-parityāgāt* in Sanskrit, meaning 'from renouncing, abandoning, neglecting the ego', with *ahattai yahaṯriḍuvadāl* in Tamil, which means 'by removing, expelling, banishing the ego'. This is a significant change that makes it clear that only the Self has the power to eliminate the ego. How else can the ego be destroyed than by absolute awareness from which it arises? According to Michael James, "The only means by which we can leave, abandon, desert, quit, give up or renounce ego is by being aware of ourself as we actually are, so that awareness alone 'is what will give inner liberation by removing ego'."[7]

Know: *Aṟi* meaning 'know', as well as other similar words, often occurs at the end of verses in *Devikālottaram*. Since it is in the imperative, it can be interpreted as a firm injunction to practice

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[4] *Sri Ramanopadesa Noonmalai*, Sri Sadhu Om, Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, 2007, pp. 100-101.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 103.

[6] Personal correspondence, 11/25/24.

[7] Personal correspondence, 11/16/24.

ātma vicāra itself. What better way to judge the truth of verse 9 than by personal experience? We are relentlessly enjoined by the Master to practice, practice, practice, which alone will bring us to direct experience of the Self and allow the ego to be annihilated.

When Bhagavan translated all 85 verses of *Devikālottaram* sometime prior to July 1928, he made additional changes to the meaning of the original Sanskrit verse. Here it is in the *kaliveṇba*ā version.

uḍal uḷ sārum
idayakama lattē yahamuruvā meccit
tadunimala niccalamē yāhu — mudikku
mahaṅkāra nīkkudalā laccittē mutti
sukhaṅkoḍuppa deṉḏru tuṇiyāy

What awareness is the 'I'-form, which is blemishless and motionless, in the heart-lotus, ***which mingles within the body (uḍal uḷ sārum)****,* ***may you know for sure (tuṇiyāy)*** *that only that awareness is what will give the* ***happiness of liberation (mutti-sukham)*** *by removing (nīkkudalāl) the* ***rising (udikkum)*** *ego.*

which mingles within the body: The ego is the knot between absolute awareness and the insentient body that does not say 'I' and has no existence independent of the Self. The body and the world imagined by the ego are like reflections contained within an infinitely vast mirror that is not affected by either in the least. When a fire or a flood appears on the screen of the Self, the screen neither burns nor becomes wet.

may you know for sure: Again, a gentle and compassionate reminder not to believe anything that has not been tested by your own personal experience. When you turn away from thoughts and earnestly seek the source of 'I', the pure awareness that remains swallows the ego leaving blissful peace. How can there be greater certitude than that?

happiness of liberation: The opening paragraph of the essay version of *Nāṉ* Ār extols happiness as the goal of all beings. In this instance happiness is not a matter of superficial pleasure but utter bliss without the slightest hint of suffering or anxiety. Wholeness versus the ego's nagging and perpetual dissatisfaction. The knot has been sundered.

the rising ego: Rising because the ego has no permanence. It perpetually emerges from its source, which is the substratum of all, and is absorbed by its source. With it, the whole world rises and falls. When faced with one-pointed determination, it disappears. So does the world and every single thought.

Now turning to verse 25 in *Anubandham* (verse 47 in *Devikālottaram*), consider it first in the original Sanskrit.

सर्वोपाधिविनिर्मुक्तं चिद्रूपं यन्निरन्तरम् ।
तच्छिवोऽहमिति ध्यात्वा सर्वासक्तिं विवर्जयेत् ॥

sarvopādhivinirmuktaṁ cidrūpaṁ yannirantaram |
tacchivo'hamiti dhyātvā sarvāsaktiṁ vivarjayēt ||

Meditating constantly 'That Siva I am which form of awareness is free of all attributes', abandon every attachment.

Bhagavan translated it as follows:

akhila vupādhi yahaṉdra varivē
dahamac śivameṉ ḍraṉiśa — mahattē
yahalāt dhiyāṉa madaṉā lahatti
ṉakhilavā catti yahatru

*By **incessantly uninterrupted** meditation **in the heart**, 'What awareness is devoid of every adjunct, that* śivam is I', dispel every attachment **of the mind**.

incessantly uninterrupted: The import of this verse, as the next logical step to verse 9, lies in the strong admonition to practice *ātma vicāra* constantly until there are no longer any intervals of thinking, which is nothing other than dreaming in the waking state. While verse 9 involves turning the mind inward, thereby renouncing or surrendering thoughts, this verse makes it clear that is not enough. In other words eventually every single thought must be relentlessly caught in the act of distracting us from our authentic nature. Bhagavan gives us a beautiful analogy in paragraph 11 of *Nāṉ* Ār.

If one clings fast to uninterrupted svarūpa-smaraṇa [self-remembrance] until one attains svarūpa [one's own real nature, namely oneself as one actually is], that alone is sufficient. So long

as enemies [namely viṣaya-vāsanās] are within the fortress [namely one's heart], they will be continuously coming out from it. If one is continuously cutting down [or destroying] all of them as and when they come, the fortress will [eventually] be captured.[8]

It's important to understand that in this verse 'meditation' does not involve thoughts of any kind. It is meditation without thinking, simply holding onto the pure and immaculate awareness that arises when the heart is reached. Meditation on the thought 'I am Siva', is not *ātma vicāra* and is not what is meant here.

in the heart...of the mind: The addition of these words reminds us that the essence of *ātma vicāra* is merging the mind in the heart. It's a simple enough instruction and, although difficult to realize, a path that is available to all beings regardless of any distinctions whatsoever.

Here is Bhagvan's *kaliveṇbā* version of verse 25 when he translated all 85 verses of *Devikālottaram*.

aham sēr
saruva vupādhiyuñ sārā duḻacit
turuva meduvoṉ ḏruḻadu — nirantara
mandac śivamahameṉ ḏraṉbāṟ ṟiyāṉittē
yendavā sattiyunī yeṯrudi

*Incessantly meditating **with love**, 'What **one** existing awareness-nature exists unconnected with all **I-mixed** adjuncts, that* śivam *is I', **may you sever each and every** attachment.*

with love: This is a powerful reminder that liberation is not possible without devotion. What stronger motivation to pursue a demanding path than love for the Guru, and in this case, a Sad Guru of unsurpassable and extraordinary might and compassion? When true surrender occurs and the experience of the Guru's love manifests itself, the seeker's love grows, which leads to an even deeper level of devotion.

one: There is no other. That is the message of *advaita*. Not two, just one. No room for the phantom ego.

[8] Translation by Michael James. See *https://sriramanateachings.org/nan_yar.html.*

I-mixed: This refers to the first thought 'I am the body' upon which all of the other thoughts during the day depend. Not one of them is real, and all thinking is merely a dream.

may you sever each and every: Again a gentle reminder that the world and liberation cannot and do not exist simultaneously. One or the other. You choose. Purification comes from relentless practice until the fortress is won.

Now onto verse 40, the last of the three verses translated by Bhagavan as a free-standing composition. It is the last verse of the *Anubandham* and also the last verse of the *Kaṭharudra Upaniṣad*, which is one of 20 documents in Sanskrit known as the *Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads*. These *upaniṣads* pertain to ideas about renunciation and provide valuable information about Hindu ascetical institutions.[9] According to verses 45 and 46 of the *Kaṭharudra Upaniṣad*, "The intelligent man should meditate upon his own Self as devoid of all conditioning. He who knows this in reality becomes Brahman itself."[10] Verse 47 reads as follows:

सर्ववेदान्तसिद्धान्तसारं वच्मि यथार्थतः ।
स्वयं मृत्वा स्वयं भूत्वा स्वयमेवावशिष्यते ॥

sarvavedāntasiddhāntasāraṁ vacmi yathārthataḥ |
svayaṁ mṛtvā svayaṁ bhūtvā svayamevāvaśiṣyate ||

I shall truly declare the essence of the established conclusion of all Vedānta. *I having died, having become I, only I remains* (evāvaśiṣyate).

Here is Bhagavan's translation of that verse.

akhilavē dāntasid dhāntasā rattai
yahamuṇmai yāha vaṟaiva — ṉahañcet
tahamadu vāhi laṟivuru vāmav
vahamadē micca maṟi

I shall proclaim truly the essence of the final conclusion of all vēdānta: if, I dying, I become that, ***that I, which is the form of awareness****, alone is what remains.* ***Know****.*

[9] For a full treatment of this fascinating subject, see *Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads* by Patrick Olivelle, Oxford University Press, 1992.

[10] Translated by Prof. A.A. Ramanathan, published by The Theosophical Publishing House, Chennai.

that I, which is the form of awareness: Make no mistake, the 'I' that arises when the ego perishes is the real 'I' that is eternal, changeless, indivisible and self-illuminating. Bhagavan expresses the same idea so forcefully in *Upadeśa Sāraḥ,* verse 20.

On 'I' undergoing annihilation, the heart shines forth spontaneously as 'I am I'. The supreme whole reality.[11]

Know: What the seeker should know is not ideas or words but actual experience. It is beyond the mind, so it is silence itself. The more often the seeker feels It and holds It, the closer he becomes to **being** It. The easier surrender becomes. His resolve and determination increase as does his love for that which surpasses human understanding. Becoming It is not a matter of time but is timeless because the seeker never was anything else. Nothing ever happened except images on a screen seen only by the non-existent ego.

Hear what Lakshmana Sarma has to say about this verse: "What is to be known is that the names and forms are many and momentary and therefore unreal. The Imperishable and Changeless Being and Awareness, is the Eternal Reality. When the unreal perishes, the Real alone remains, is the Truth declared. This State of Non-duality--the Experience of being the Self--is attained by being solely centered on *Ātma Vicāra*, through association with the enlightened sages, devotion and discrimination, and sinking into the Heart by the steady practice of *Ātma Vicāra* leading to the extirpation of the ego."[12]

Now read all three verses together without any interruption. Read them slowly and let their truth sink in.

9. What awareness is the 'I'-form, which is blemishless and motionless in the heart-lotus and mingles within the body, may you know for sure that only that awareness is what will give the happiness of liberation by removing the rising ego.

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[11] Translated by Michael James. See *https://blog.sriramanateachings.org/2022/03/upadesa-sarah-sanskrit-text.html#us20.*

[12] *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's* Reality in Forty Verses (with Supplement), commentary by 'Who' (K. Lakshmana Sarma), Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2013, p. 229.

25. Incessantly meditating with love, 'What one existing awareness-nature exists unconnected with all I-mixed adjuncts, that* śivam *is I', may you sever each and every attachment.

40. I shall proclaim truly the essence of the final conclusion of all vedānta: if, I dying, I become that, that I, which is the form of awareness, alone is what remains. Know.

These three verses not only beautifully summarize the essence of Bhagavan's teachings but echo one of the most beloved verses from ancient wisdom. (Note that this verse and verse 40 of *Anubandham* end with the same refrain, namely *evāvaśiṣyate*).

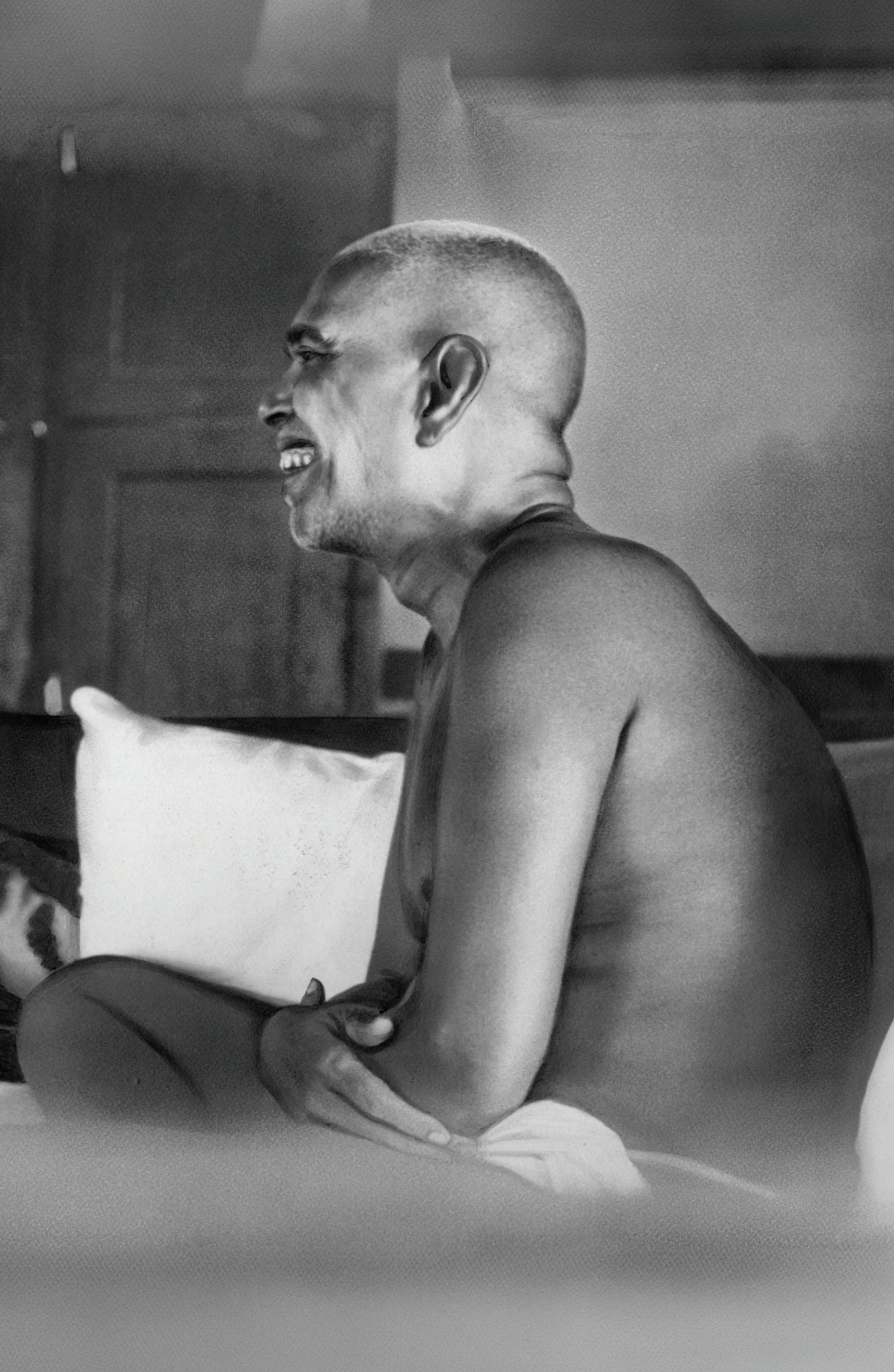
Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate,
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate

Om. Infinite is That [Brahman], infinite is this [manifested universe]. From the Infinite [Brahman] proceeds the infinite. [After the realisation of the Great Identity or after the cosmic dissolution], when the infinity of the infinite [universe] merges [in the Infinite Brahman], there remains the Infinite [Brahman] alone.[13]

Bhagavan goes with us everywhere, always. Realise that. Stop dreaming and wake up! May we all seek true happiness through his grace and dwell in That forever. ▲

Oṁ śantiḥ, śantiḥ, śantiḥ.

[13] *The Principal Upanishads*, Swami Nikhilananda, Advaita Ashrama.



Advaita Primer

Importance of Dharma

Part Eleven

M. Giridhar

Introduction

In the first article of this series, we explored the importance of studying Advaita Vedanta. In subsequent articles, we examined key concepts, including *jīva* (individual self), *nirguṇa Brahman* (Brahman without attributes), *jagat* (world), and *saguṇa Brahman* (īśvara or Brahman with attributes). Advaita Vedanta emphasizes non-duality, asserting that the ultimate reality (Brahman) is devoid of distinctions and that the individual soul (Ātman) is fundamentally one with it. To clarify these metaphysical ideas, the previous articles used various analogies within Advaita Vedanta. In this eleventh article, we delve into the concept of dharma, its scriptural roots, relevance in modern life, and role as a bridge between worldly engagement and spiritual transcendence.

In Advaita Vedanta, where the ultimate goal is realizing the Self as Brahman—an infinite, indivisible essence—one might question the significance of dharma, which belongs to the relative world of duality, a realm that Advaita seeks to transcend. However, for seekers on the path to Self-realization, dharma serves as both a compass and a vehicle. It aligns personal conduct with universal order, purifies the mind, and cultivates virtues essential for liberation (*moksha*).

The word dharma carries profound connotations, evoking reverence, wonder, and even awe among those steeped in the Vedic tradition or influenced by its philosophy. Rooted in the ancient wisdom of *shruti*, *smṛti*, *purāṇa*, and *itihāsa*, dharma is more than just a concept; it is the cornerstone of life itself in the Vedic worldview.

The word dharma comes from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ*, meaning "to hold" or "to sustain." This etymology captures its essence: dharma sustains individuals, society, and the universe. It is often translated as "righteousness," but this term scarcely conveys its complexity. Dharma encompasses duties, laws, ethics, and cosmic principles that govern existence. In its grandest interpretation, dharma is the law, the cosmic principle underlying our perception, experience, and response to the universe.

In the Vedic worldview, the universe operates on the principle of *ṛta* — a natural order that sustains harmony. Dharma manifests as *ṛta* in action, maintaining balance in the moral and physical realms. The *Ṛg Veda* extols *ṛta* as the foundation of truth and justice, indicating that dharma is not merely human-made but intrinsic to existence itself.

Types of Dharma

Dharma is contextual and varies based on age, role, and circumstances. The scriptures delineate four types of dharma:

1. Samanya Dharma (universal values): Truthfulness, non-violence, compassion, and self-restraint.

2. Vishesha Dharma (specific duties): Based on individual roles, such as those of a teacher, parent, or leader.

3. Ashrama Dharma: Duties corresponding to life stages—student, householder, hermit, and renunciate.

4. Yuga Dharma: Duties that adapt to the era or context.

The scriptures further elaborate on dharma through injunctions and prohibitions (*śāstra-vidhi and śāstra-pratiṣedha*). The *Bhagavad Gita* provides a framework for understanding and practicing dharma, particularly emphasizing self-discipline, righteousness, and selfless action. The text famously states that even a little adherence to one's dharma can protect one from great fear and suffering (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:40). In the *Karma Mimamsa Sutras*, Jaimini Rishi begins his inquiry into dharma with the proposition that it is the essence of scripturally prescribed actions. He underscores the need for meticulous study and understanding of the Vedic injunctions to determine what constitutes righteous action.

Dharma as a Universal Principle

The essential dharma of anything is that which makes it what it is, without which it ceases to exist. This essential dharma is the Self, the unchanging essence underlying physical, mental, and intellectual expressions. Swami Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati, the revered sage of Kanchi, described dharma as beneficent action. He viewed it as the guiding principle that redirects human pursuits from transient sensual pleasures toward eternal bliss and societal harmony. He likens dharma to a pole in pole-vaulting—an instrument that helps one transcend ignorance (*avidya*) and illusion (*maya*), ultimately losing its utility once the goal is achieved but extremely important till the goal is attained.

Adi Shankaracharya, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, elucidates the twofold nature of dharma (धर्मः) as taught in the Vedas: *pravrtti* (प्रवृत्तिः) and *nivrtti* (निवृत्तिः). *pravrtti* refers to outward action, the dynamic engagement with the world, while *nivrtti* signifies inward contemplation, the pursuit of inner spiritual peace. Together, they form a balanced philosophy aimed at achieving both socio-economic welfare, *abhyudaya* (अभ्युदयः) and ultimate spiritual liberation, *nihsreyasa* (निःश्रेयसम्) for all beings.

Adi Shankaracharya emphasizes that both action and meditation are indispensable for holistic human well-being. When society leans excessively towards one — *pravrtti* or *nivrtti* — the balance is disrupted, leading to societal or individual ill-health. Through *pravrtti*, we build a welfare-oriented society by enhancing economic, political, and social systems. *nivrtti*, on the other hand, nurtures a life of values and inner fulfillment, deriving strength from humanity's spiritual dimension. Modern civilization, however, has overly prioritized *pravrtti*, neglecting the inward journey of *nivrtti*. This imbalance leads to stress, value erosion, and escalating violence.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer aptly observed: "When men achieve security and welfare, now that they have solved all other problems, they become a problem to themselves." This insight resonates with Shankaracharya's teachings. The unending pursuit of wealth, power, and sensory pleasure creates societal unrest, underscoring the need for *nivrtti*. To counteract this, Shankaracharya underscores the importance of *prāṇināṁ sākṣāt-abhyudaya-niḥśrēyasa-hētu* — a life philosophy that integrates social welfare with spiritual freedom,

harmonizing *pravrtti* and *nivrtti*. This ideology, which interweaves dual life purposes of societal welfare and spiritual freedom, is not restricted to any one group; its universality encompasses all human beings (*praninan*, प्राणिनां), making it relevant across cultures and societies.

By synthesizing *abhyudaya* (material well-being) and *nihshreyasa* (spiritual liberation), Shankaracharya proposes a model for total human development. While *pravrtti* ensures material well-being, *nivrtti* safeguards humanity from becoming mechanized and devoid of deeper purpose. He highlights the natural human inclination toward *pravrtti*, observable even in children who are instinctively active and curious. Therefore, *pravrtti* does not require formal instruction. However, *nivrtti*—the cultivation of inner peace, harmony, and the ability to love and coexist—requires conscious training and effort.

The *Bhagavad Gita* masterfully bridges these two dimensions, teaching how *nivrtti* can inspire and purify *pravrtti*. *nivrtti* helps stabilize and refine our thoughts, guiding action with wisdom and compassion. It enriches human life, ensuring that progress in the external world is matched by inner growth. This integration prevents humanity from losing its essence to materialism. The *Gita* reminds us that true well-being lies in the harmonious development of both the outer and inner dimensions of life. Thus, the *Gita* serves as a guide for achieving this balance, fostering a world where action is informed by contemplation, and progress is grounded in peace.

Advaita Vedanta and Karma

Advaita Vedanta, unique in its approach to karma, teaches that the purpose of human birth is not to chase worldly aspirations but to subtly renounce them. Shankaracharya advises performing karma (actions) selflessly, without attachment to their fruits, fostering introspection and spiritual growth. This perspective transforms one's understanding of dharma, encouraging a life enriched by virtues and higher purpose. Dharma, as envisioned in Advaita, adapts to circumstances while remaining anchored in universal principles.

In Advaita, the ultimate truth is *nirguna Brahman* (formless reality), beyond the distinctions of right and wrong. However, this realization requires *adhikaritva*—fitness or qualification—cultivated through a disciplined life grounded in dharma. The mind

is the instrument through which self-knowledge is attained. A mind clouded by desires, anger, or delusion cannot perceive the subtleties of *Advaita's* teachings. Dharma purifies the mind by fostering virtues like truthfulness, non-attachment, humility, and compassion.

It offers a succinct formula for practicing dharma: "Speak the truth in a pleasing manner. Do not speak unpleasant truths, nor pleasant falsehoods. This is eternal dharma." Krishna's teachings to Arjuna during the *Karna Parva* (69.46–53) of the *Mahabharata* expand on this theme, explaining the intricate relationship between truth and dharma. Krishna tells Arjuna that truth and dharma are often interwoven but context-sensitive. He narrates stories like that of Rishi Kaushika, who reveals the location of innocent travelers to dacoits, to illustrate that truth in practice can be complex. Absolute truth may not always align with the welfare of the world; sometimes, a lie that saves an innocent life is more virtuous than a truth that causes harm.

This teaching showcases the nuanced understanding of dharma needed in difficult situations. Krishna makes it clear that the preservation of life and justice is paramount, and actions must be weighed carefully in light of their consequences. Dharma is about protection and sustenance, and actions aligned with dharma uphold and support societal stability.

For instance, practicing *ahimsa* (non-violence) minimizes harm to others and reduces mental turbulence caused by hatred and aggression. However, dharma requires applying *ahimsa* judiciously, prioritizing societal welfare. For example, neutralizing a terrorist to protect society is considered *dharmic*. The *Karna Parva* of the *Mahabharata* states: "Dharma is that which upholds society and ensures its smooth functioning. Whatever sustains and fulfills these objectives is dharma." Vyasa's assertion, "Dharma destroys those who destroy it and protects those who protect it," underscores its dual role as both guide and governing force.

Dharma and Inner Purity

The *Tirukkural* emphasizes inner purity as the essence of dharma, dismissing mere outward conformity. This perspective highlights dharma*'s* adaptability to changing circumstances, ensuring it remains relevant while maintaining its eternal essence.

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes *karma yoga*—selfless action performed without attachment to results. In this context, dharma becomes the guiding principle for action. By fulfilling one's duties with equanimity, one transcends egoic tendencies and moves closer to self-realization.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi in the first three verses of *Upadesa Saram* puts it succinctly as,

"Karma must ever yield its proper fruit,
For thus it is ordained by God, Himself, Supreme Creator.
Then is Karma God? No, for it is itself insentient.
Of Karma the results must pass away,
Yet it leaves seeds which in their turn will sprout
And throw the actor back into the flood Of Karma's ocean.
Karma cannot save.
But acts performed without attachment's urge
And solely for the service of the Lord
Will cleanse the mind and indicate the way
Which leads at length unto the final goal."

Dharma is the lifeblood of Indian philosophy—a dynamic principle that evolves with time while remaining rooted in eternal truths. It provides the ethical and spiritual framework for life, guiding individuals toward righteousness and selfawareness. In Advaita Vedanta, dharma serves as a preparatory ground for the ultimate realization of nonduality.

Though dharma operates within duality, it ultimately leads beyond it. The virtues of discrimination, dispassion, and detachment, exemplified by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, help us understand that true happiness is not found in external objects, relationships, or fleeting experiences. Instead, it is our very nature—ever-present and waiting to be realized.

With deep reverence for Arunachala Ramana, we now turn to a deeper exploration of dharma in the next part of this series, examining its role in both worldly life and the path to ultimate freedom. ▲

(to be continued)

In Love with Oneness

Sikhidhvaja and Cudala

Neera Kashyap

As a start to the teaching, Kumbha muni narrates two significant parables. The first points to the king's ignorance in finding but not recognizing the value of the wish-fulfilling jewel, Cintamani (Cudala) and throwing it away in favor of a piece of uncut glass (ritual renunciation, of relatively low value). Kumbha minces no words while interpreting the story's meaning for the king: Giving up the kingdom was renunciation, but not complete renunciation, for the king was overcome by thoughts of his supposed status in life and all the new experiences that came with it. If thoughts still operate, how can the mind be considered to have been renounced? You abandoned the bondage to kingdom but became bound again by the ascetic life, foolishly thinking, 'I have obtained the cintamani,' when you gained not even a piece of crystal.

The second story describes how a strong elephant captured and tortured by an elephant driver breaks its chains, but eventually does not kill its captor out of a misplaced notion of loftiness – only to be captured by him again. Kumbha's interpretation: By choosing the life of the forest, you wounded the ignorance that lies in pursuing pleasure, but you failed to destroy it by abandoning the mind – even as the elephant failed to kill the driver. Hence, this ignorance has risen again in keeping with the way you overpowered your previous desires – through the trap-pit of rituals and asceticism, through breaking free of a material cage but not from psychological bondage.

The pivotal instruction comes in the form of what constitutes true renunciation. When Sikhidhvaja cites his giving up of palace,

wealth, kingdom and even his beloved wife as true renunciation, Kumbha-muni puts the king through a *neti-neti* process wherein he explains that everything still desired – retiring to the forest, his sparse possessions, his very body – even the renunciation of these does not constitute true renunciation. The king is reminded that none of these things are really his – hence there is no meaning in renouncing them. In fact, in renouncing what he considered his, he is creating a division within the self. For real renunciation lay in giving up the mind or the *citta*, destroying the idea of 'I' – the seed for the kingdom, for the body, wife and all the rest. When this seed is abandoned, there is total renunciation of all that is in the present and even in the future. Once this is abandoned, the truth is experienced at once. All notions of unity and diversity come to an end; there is peace. Even after the mind is renounced, there is existence.

चित्तत्यागं विदुः सर्वत्यागं त्यागविदां वर।
तस्मिन्सिद्धे महाबाहो सत्यं किं नानुभूयते । ४३ ।। (VI.1.93.43)

Translation: O ye that wants to know what resignation is must know that it is the resignation of the mind that makes you renounce all things. If you seek the abnegation of your mind, you come to know the truth, and feel the true felicity of your soul.

Sikhidvaja asks Kumbha the exact nature of the mind and the means to destroy it. Kumbha-muni's response: Vasana (memory, subtle impressions of the past, conditioning) is the nature of the mind. The utter destruction or extinction of the mind is the extinction of samsara. Therefore, uproot this tree whose seed is the 'I' – idea, with all its branches, fruit and leaves, and rest in the space in the heart. His advice: The mind is like a vicious tree. Its branches are of the nature of conditioning. Remain unconcerned and unattached to them, without identifying yourself with them. Through the strength of your consciousness, these vasanas will weaken. You will then be able to uproot the tree altogether. The destruction of the branches is secondary; the primary aim is to uproot it. The method: By engaging oneself in the enquiry into the nature of the Self – Who am I? This enquiry is the fire in which the very seed and root of the tree known as *citta* are burnt completely.

राजन्स्वात्मविचारोयं कोऽहं स्यामिति रूपधृक् ।
चित्तदुर्दुमबीजस्य दहने दहनः स्मृतः ।।२९ ।। (VI.I.94.29)

Translation: Prince, the fire which is able to consume the seed of the noxious plant of the mind is the question: "Who am I that bears this corporeal form upon myself?"

Attracted to Self-enquiry, Sikhidhvaja now uses this method to reach beyond the senses, the mind and the intellect. However, the king's prior acts of tapas and physical renunciation had strengthened his ego, and this ego-seed, sprouting outward, constantly reminds him of the things he had given up. Unable to overcome this impurity, he feels distressed. Kumbha asks him a crucial question: Tell me if this impurity, on account of which you are an ignorant man bound to samsara, is real or unreal?

Urging him to look deeper within, Kumbha muni provides an important tip: Brahman or the Supreme Self is one without a second, without a cause and without an effect, for it has no reason (motivation or need) to do anything, to create anything. Unborn, infinite, tranquil and imperishable, it is therefore not the doer; neither is there any action, instrument or seed for activity. An effect which has no cause cannot be said to be real but an illusion, as unreal as the second moon seen in double vision. As seed of the tree known as mind, the notion 'I' grows in the field of the Supreme Self, which is also pervaded by the illusory power known as *maya*. Thus, a division is created in that field and experience arises. With this, the determining faculty known as buddhi arises. Being an expanded form of the seed, its nature is notional or conceptual – imaginary, like water in a mirage. Such a deceptive appearance ceases on being enquired into.

Sikhidvaja is awakened by the realization that, since Brahman is neither the doer nor the creator of anything, there is no cause – hence no mind, nor an ego sense. Whatever appears as the world is perceived in Brahman, by Brahman, such perception being known as the mind. In Brahman, the universe floats as a particle of dust, the word 'world' acquiring substantiality or reality through the power of *maya*. For whatever consciousness sees itself to be, that it becomes – if embodied, it sees itself embodied as the world, embodied as jiva. In this plane of consciousness, whatever slight appearance there seems

to be is but the reflection of consciousness in itself, a self-reflection of infinite forms that appear like carvings in uncarved stone. In reality, there is neither the mind nor the world, infinite consciousness being incapable of division.

तस्मादिदं निरंशस्य चिद्व्योम्नोऽप्रतिघाकृतेः।
निराकृतेरनन्तस्य पूर्वात्पूर्वनिरंशतः ।। २६ ।। (VI.I.98.26)

Translation: Therefore know this world to be contained in the undivided and unutterable vacuity of the Divine Self which is an infinite and formless void, forever in its undivided and indivisible state.

This world of multiplicity, time, space and movement will at some time or the other end by resolving itself in consciousness. The seeker must seek mergence with the quiescent unmanifest Brahman by invoking the unmanifest through the feeling, 'I am not the doer. I am not the experiencer,' and by establishing an identity with the unmanifest Absolute. Here, as means, another sloka comes to mind from the Yoga Vasistha Sara under the chapter 'Dissolution of the mind': "Just as fire born out of wind (fanned into a flame) is extinguished by the same wind, so also that which is born of imagination is destroyed by imagination itself."[1] Thus, one who sees the universe without the intervention of the mind and, therefore, without the notion of a universe, alone sees the truth. This occurs when the mind is utterly quiet, freed from impurities and psychological conditioning. His final advice to the king is for Sikhidvaja to realize the undifferentiated nature of the One. Kumbha's words enter the innermost core of Sikhidhvaja's heart, and he is freed from sorrow, from striving and from all attachments.

To test her husband's state of inner stability, Cudala invents a story wherein Kumbha muni has been cursed by sage Durvasa to turn into a woman – Madanika – each night. As the king spends his nights in innocence with Madanika, Cudala sees no disturbance in his heart. When Kumbha muni proposes that the king marry Madanika so she can taste the natural pleasures of conjugal life, the king agrees with child-like acceptance. In this state of happiness, the king is neither indulgent nor involved. Further, when Cudala creates the likeness of heaven, with Indra, the king of Gods, offering Sikhidhvaja the long-

[1] *Yoga Vasishta Sara,* Sri Ramanasramam, 2012, p.13

term pleasures of divinity, the king remains unaffected, space having ceased to have effect, whether of heaven or of earth.

As a final test, Cudala magically creates a lover for Madanika. On beholding the two of them in joyful embrace, the king is neither ruffled by passion nor anger. Cudala then appears before the king in her true form and informs him that it has been her all along, in the role of Kumbha muni, who has been acting as his guru. She also tells him of the unreality of all the forms that she created. Sikhidhvaja enters into deep meditation and sees inwardly all that has happened from the time he left the palace. Hearts overflowing with love for each other, they remain for sometime as if in a superconscious state. As liberated ones without delusion, destined for royalty, they return to the kingdom to rule it with wisdom for a thousand years.

Yoga Vasishta states that while all individuals proceed from the Ultimate Reality without any cause on their part, having come into existence, their own actions become the cause of their unhappiness or misery. The choice of methods used to get free of samsara is also an action on the part of the jiva. As Cudala's mind was ripe, she chose the swift and direct method of self-enquiry, using this to trace her senses, mind, intellect, ego and *jiva* back to the Self.

In Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's teachings, the word mind is used interchangeably with the terms: subtle body, ego, *jiva* or soul, all these constituting one entity known as 'I.' The important mechanism in Bhagavan's method of self-enquiry is to trace every particular thought back to this general thought-entity behind it – the 'I-thought' - and to hold to it, to find out what it is. In response to a devotee's protest that the thoughts are endless, Bhagavan said, "I do not say that you must go on rejecting thoughts. Cling to yourself, that is, to the 'I'-thought. When your interest keeps you to that single idea, other thoughts will automatically get rejected and they will vanish."[2] Further, Bhagavan says: "The light of the Self falls on the vasanas and produces the phenomenon of reflection we call the mind. If the mind becomes introverted through enquiry into the source of *aham vritti* (I-thought), the vasanas become extinct. Thus when the vasanas become extinct

[2] Godman, David, ed., quoted in *Be as you are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Sri Ramanasramam, 1985, p.55

the mind also disappears, being absorbed into the light of the one reality, the Heart."[3]

Sikhidhvaja's mind was tradition-bound, so he used the gradual method of sanctioned prayer, *japa* and austerities in his spiritual quest. It took him eighteen years before he was relatively free of thoughts and impurities to the extent that he could begin *atma vichara* under the enlightened guidance of a guru. He admits that he should have sought the company of the wise instead of opting for isolation, yet he is still not ready to accept Cudala, a woman, not to mention his wife as his guru, thus her need for disguise. Sikhidhvaja's very tapas consolidated his ego instead of eliminating it. Bhagavan's teaching here is significant: "Every kind of path except that of *atma vichara* presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the sadhana, and without the mind it cannot be practiced. The ego may take different and subtler forms at the different stages of one's practice, but is itself never destroyed…..it is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself."[4]

It is for this reason perhaps that Bhagavan discouraged devotees from renouncing their lives as householders in favor of *sannyasa*. Said Bhagavan: "Whether you continue to live in the household or renounce it to live in the forest - your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and world, and it makes you think of being a *grihasta*. If you renounce, it will only substitute the thought of *sannyasa* with that of *grihasta* … but the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. It is no help to change the environment. The one obstacle is the mind; it must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest."[5]

At the end, Cudala asks her husband to convince himself through *nirvikalpa samadhi* that it was she who had worked through the guise of Kumbha-muni and other magical forms. By this time, she would have felt sure that, in the oneness of the Self, there was no scope for gender differences! ▲

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[3] *Op.cit.*, p.55
[4] *Maharshi's Gospel,* Sri Ramanasramam, 2002, p. 38
[5] Op.cit., p.4

MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM

The Blessed Life of Sant Bhanudasa

Nabaji Siddha

In the past few issues, we have looked at the blessed life of Sant Jayadeva. As we continue this series to cover other revered saints, it is important to mention that Maha Bhakta Vijayam is a renowned work celebrating the glory of Vithoba (Vittal), a form of Lord Krishna, whose temple is located in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, India.[1] Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi held this sacred text in high regard and encouraged his devotees to keep a copy in their homes.

The story of Bhanudas is a profound tale of unwavering devotion, honesty, and the transformative power of faith. It begins with the birth of a boy in Pratishthan, where the Sun God is said to have once descended as an avatar. This divine connection sets the stage for an extraordinary life story that inspired countless generations.

A devout and wise couple lived in Pratishthan, dedicating their life to worshipping the Sun. Their prayers and piety bore fruit when

[1] This monumental work, surpassing both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana in length, was originally composed in the 17th century by Sri Nabaji Siddha under the title Bhakta Sara. In 1780, the renowned saint and poet Mahipati Bavaji expanded the text in Marathi, renaming it Bhakta Vijaya. Over the years, it has been translated into numerous Indian languages, including Tamil. The first Tamil translation was done by Chitrur Venkata Dasar and later popularized by Saidapuram Umapati Mudaliar, with its publication in 1864. Maha Bhakta Vijayam tells the life stories of Varkari saints like Eknath, Chokhamela, Sant Tukaram, and Savata Mali, as well as other venerated figures such as Jayadeva and Meera Bai. This series presents a free-form translation of the full Tamil text, with audio renditions of selected portions available for devotees and readers at https://www.gururamana.org/Resources/Audios/maha-bhakta-vijayam.

Sketch by Ghovi

a son was born to them—a gift that filled their heart with boundless joy. This child, named for his brilliance, was destined to bring glory not only to the family but also to the deity he served. The boy grew up in an environment imbued with reverence and devotion. When he came of age, his sacred thread ceremony was performed, marking his entry into spiritual and scholastic pursuits. His parents showered him with affection and took great pride in his upbringing. Yet, life's trials soon tested their familial bond.

One day, the boy's father, in assigning him the duty of studying the Vedas, showed displeasure at his perceived lack of focus. Hurt by his father's anger, the boy became despondent. In his innocence and fear, he decided to leave home, seeking solace elsewhere.

After wandering for some time, the boy's eyes fell upon an old, underground temple. Hidden from the world and seemingly abandoned, the temple exuded a mysterious aura. Intrigued, he entered and found an idol of the Sun God. Drawn to its divine presence, he prostrated himself at its feet, pouring out his devotion. Unbeknownst to the boy, this act of faith moved the deity deeply. The Sun God, pleased by the child's innocent and unwavering trust, decided to manifest before him. Transforming into a human form, the deity approached the boy and offered him milk, ensuring he would not go hungry. With a compassionate voice, the Sun assured him of protection, saying, "Fear not, child. Remember Shri Panduranga (Lord Vittal) always. If ever you face distress, call upon me, and I will come to your aid."

Meanwhile, the boy's parents were frantic. Seven days had passed since their son's disappearance, and their sorrow grew heavier with each moment. They searched tirelessly across the town and beyond, calling out his name and seeking help from others. Hope flickered when a Brahmin spotted the boy near the temple's entrance and informed the family. With a group of townspeople, the parents made their way to the temple hidden in the forest. Armed with torches, they descended into its dark interior. To their astonishment, they discovered their son asleep at the feet of the Sun God's idol. Overcome with emotion, the parents rushed to embrace him, tears of relief streaming down their faces.

"How have you survived here alone?" they asked, their voices trembling with a mix of concern and joy. The boy, with a calm

demeanor, recounted his miraculous experience. "A radiant figure, full of light and compassion, appeared to me. He fed me milk and protected me," he said. The townspeople were awestruck. They exclaimed, "This is no ordinary boy! His devotion has drawn the Sun God himself to manifest!" From that moment, the boy was called Bhanudas, meaning "slave of the sun," to honor the divine connection he had forged.

Grateful for their son's safety, the parents resolved to treat him with greater gentleness, recognizing that his path was guided by divine forces. "Let us not impose our will on him," they agreed. "Narayan (God) has returned him to us as a gift. We will no longer risk distressing him." In time, the parents arranged Bhanudas's marriage, hoping it would anchor him to worldly responsibilities. Yet, his heart remained devoted to the worship of Sri Hari (Pandurang). He spent his days immersed in prayer and meditation, seeking spiritual fulfillment over material pursuits.

When his parents eventually passed away, Bhanudas faced new challenges. Despite having a family to support, he refused to engage in any form of trade or service. He lived with a steadfast indifference to worldly concerns, focusing solely on his devotion to God. His wife, however, grew increasingly distressed. With children to care for and no source of income, she struggled to manage the household. Her pleas for Bhanudas to take up a trade fell on deaf ears. Concerned by the family's plight, a group of people in the town intervened.

"Bhanudas," they said, "your devotion is admirable, but your family needs food and clothing. Your parents supported you when they were alive, but now it is your responsibility to provide for your household." To help him, they proposed a plan. "We will give you a hundred rupees as capital to start a small business. Buy cloth and sell it in the marketplace. From the profits, you can care for your family while returning the principal to us gradually."

Though reluctant, Bhanudas agreed out of respect for their earnestness. The townspeople purchased cloth for him and introduced him to experienced peddlers who would guide him in the trade. In the marketplace, the peddlers taught Bhanudas the nuances of selling, including a secret numerical code to communicate prices and strategies for maximizing profits. They emphasized the importance of negotiation and even suggested that small lies were necessary to succeed in business.

Bhanudas, however, refused to compromise his principles. "I will never speak an untruth," he declared. "I will only tell my customers the exact cost price and the profit I seek. If they find it acceptable, they may buy; if not, they are free to go elsewhere." Bhanudas was a man of unwavering principles, even amidst skepticism and adversity. In a market full of peddlers, his honesty set him apart, much to the astonishment—and envy—of his fellow traders. When Bhanudas joined the market, other peddlers mocked him, saying, "It is his fate to live by begging. He won't listen to reason. His name should be Poor Man." They doubted his sincerity, convinced that one day he too would succumb to greed and deceit. One peddler remarked cynically, "Let him taste profit once, and he'll start uttering falsehoods. No one blessed by Fortune remains truthful in business." Their words reflected their own dishonesty, for they believed all men were as deceitful as themselves. As the saying goes, "A blind man thinks all are blind."

But Bhanudas remained steadfast. He refused to speak falsehoods, even when it meant losing potential sales. Bhanudas's approach to business was revolutionary. If a customer inquired about his goods, he would plainly state the cost price and the profit margin he sought. His words were simple yet profound: "If you approve, buy it. If not, feel free to look elsewhere." While other traders relied on persuasion and manipulation, Bhanudas quietly chanted the names of God, leaving the decision entirely to the customer. His unwavering honesty drew people to his stall, and soon his reputation spread.

How true it is that one who is born blind thinks all men are blind. Even savoury food tastes bitter to someone who is bodily sick. In the same way, a man with a false heart believes that no one is true. As a man's heart is, so others appear to him. Once character is fixed, it continues the same through life. A dog may sit quietly in the house, but if thieves steal bread, the accusation will fall on the dog. No one can intuitively know who the real culprit is. A tiger may lie peacefully, yet it will be said he is preparing to spring and kill. A miser may take up the life of an ascetic, but people will claim it is merely a new way to deceive. An adulterer may visit sacred watering places, but others will say he is searching for someone else's wife. Even a cat lying perfectly still will invite remarks that it is hunting for a rat. So it is with us. Our whole life bears the marks of

perception shaped by our character and actions, often unchangeable in the eyes of others.

The public admired his integrity, saying, "Bhanudas will never speak an untruth, even to the end of time." Customers flocked to him, trusting his word and willingly paying the prices he asked without haggling. The success of Bhanudas did not sit well with the other peddlers. They watched in dismay as their customers abandoned them for his stall. Jealousy took root in their hearts. "He has cast a spell on people!" one exclaimed. "They are bewitched and pay whatever he asks without question." Another grudgingly admitted, "People believe in him because he speaks the truth, while we are driven by greed." Though some suggested they should follow his example and embrace honesty, others dismissed the idea, saying, "Even if we start speaking the truth now, no one will trust us. A reputation, once established, cannot be changed."

Their cynicism reflected a deep truth: trust, once broken, is hard to rebuild. Unlike Bhanudas, who had built his reputation on a foundation of honesty, their years of deceit had sealed their fate. Integrity is its own reward. Despite the challenges he faced, his commitment to truth brought him success and respect. His uncompromising honesty astonished everyone. Customers were drawn to his integrity and flocked to his stall. Word spread quickly, and Bhanudas's business thrived.

Bhanudas, unaffected by their animosity, continued his work with the same devotion he showed in worship. He saw his trade as an extension of his service to God, maintaining his integrity and repeating God's name even as he sold cloth. In time, the marketplace became a testament to his principles. Despite their struggles, the traders begrudgingly acknowledged Bhanudas's success as a divine blessing. "God has made him prosper because of his unwavering devotion and honesty," they admitted. Bhanudas's life became a beacon of hope and inspiration. His story demonstrates that faith, integrity, and a commitment to truth can overcome any challenge. Even in the face of adversity, his devotion to Panduranga remained unshaken, proving that divine grace rewards those who walk the path of righteousness. ▲

(to be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self-Attention

Part Fifty-Three

Sadhu Om
As Recorded by Michael James

9th April 1979

Sadhu Om: Shortly after I first came here, Chinna Swami [Bhagavan's younger brother and *sarvādhikāri* (manager) of the ashram] showed me a broken cane and said, 'You young fellows are lucky, because Bhagavan is now very gentle. You don't know how harsh he was previously. One day he beat me with this stick and broke it on my back'. When I asked others about this, they laughed and said, 'He always shows that stick to newcomers. It was in fact an old stick and almost broken already when Bhagavan hit him with it'. I then asked about the circumstances under which Bhagavan hit him, and was told as follows:

Chinna Swami and Dandapani Swami [one of the former managers of the ashram and father-in-law of Muruganar] were once quarrelling and started to fight with each other. Chinna

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, sriramanateachings.org.

Swami was a big man, but Dandapani Swami was even bigger, and Dandapani Swami was just about to throw Chinna Swami in the well when Bhagavan returned from his walk. To stop their fight, he first hit Dandapani Swami and then Chinna Swami. Seeing him, they immediately stopped fighting and said, 'O Bhagavan, we are sorry'. He replied, 'Don't think I am interfering in your quarrel. You may carry on arguing if you like, but I had to stop your fight because you are both wearing *kāṣāya* [ochre cloth worn by *sannyāsis* (renunciants)], so if one of you were to kill the other, that would bring shame on all *sannyāsis*'.

As he wrote in *Nāṉ Ār?*, 'To the extent possible, it is not appropriate to intrude in others' affairs', and he exemplified this principle, intervening in others' affairs rarely and only when he considered it necessary or appropriate, as in this case.

If you talk with any of those who were with him in Virupakshi or Skandashram, they will tell you that he was mild and gentle with everyone except his own mother, whom he chided on every possible occasion and often scolded quite harshly. But what may have appeared to others to be harsh treatment was actually his grace, because by treating her thus he gradually freed her of all her attachments and made her fit to receive from him the greatest gift of all: annihilation of ego.

Therefore we cannot judge a *jñāni* by his actions, because whatever he does is in the best interests of all concerned, whether we can understand it or not. Look at Krishna, for example. He played so much mischief and induced others to do things that would normally be considered to be unrighteous, but he did so for the good of all. Most of us would not have understood Bhagavan's actions correctly if we had lived with him in those days, and that is why he was gracious to make us come later.

12th April 1979

Sadhu Om: In Bhagavan's view, every incident in the *purāṇas* and every teaching in the *śāstras* is pointing to the need for us to know ourself by practising self-investigation. For example, in verse 1102 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* he implies that the dance of Lord Siva in the form of Nataraja signifies the skilful and loving self-investigation

(*ātma-vicāra*) that is going on within the devotee by his grace, and that the raising of his foot at the climax of his dance signifies his shining forth as *sphuraṇa*, the clear awareness 'I am I', thereby embracing the devotee in such a way that he merges back into his source, the heart, just as the rising sun marries the moon, embracing it in its spreading rays in such a way that the reflected light of the moon merges and becomes one with its source, the sunlight.

Sadhu Om [recalling and repeating what he had said about ten years earlier to Prof. Swaminathan and A. R. Natarajan]: The first generation of Bhagavan's devotees, including myself and all of us who are here now, must all go, and after a hundred years or so he will bring someone to clearly and firmly establish his real teachings, not by doing anything but simply by understanding and living them. That person will not remain long, but will make sufficient impact to weed out all confusions, misinterpretations and misrepresentations, thereby allowing Bhagavan's life and teachings to shine clearly in the world in all their purity and full glory.

[Hearing this, I said it is not clear to me how we should understand such a statement, because Bhagavan taught us that there is only one ego, and that the entire world seems to exist only in the view of this one ego, so the sole purpose of his teachings is to eradicate this ego, to which Sadhu Om smiled and replied:]

Yes, that is true, but the majority of Bhagavan's devotees do not understand this or are not willing to accept it, so each one understands him and his teachings in their own way, and hence for such people it is appropriate to say like this. Such statements are as true as the world in which they are made and to which they refer.

14th April 1979

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan exemplified the truth that humility is divinity. Though he is the supreme Lord of the whole universe, during his bodily life he conducted himself in the humblest of humble fashions. Now the world needs to learn from him that not to rise as ego and expose oneself to the world is true spirituality. In the name of religion and spirituality, there is so much dogmatism, fanaticism, self-assertiveness, pride, arrogance, self-boasting and humbug going

on throughout the world, and this has always been the case, because such is the nature of the world, but now we all need to learn from Bhagavan that subsidence, self-effacement and humility are the true signs of spirituality.

18th April 1979

Sadhu Om [referring to the 'Bhakti' chapter in *The Path of Sri Ramana*]: In the classification of the different levels of *bhakti*, the first, second and third (a) standards are not real *dēva-bhakti* [devotion to God] but only *viṣaya-bhakti* [devotion to whatever a person desires to gain from God]. Real *dēva-bhakti* begins only in the third (b) standard, in which we love God only for his own sake and not for the sake of the fulfilment of any desires, so as a result of such love, God will himself appear in the form of *guru* in order to teach us that he is our own reality and that we can therefore attain him only by turning back within and thereby subsiding and dissolving in him in our heart. By setting us on the path of self-investigation and self-surrender in this way, God promotes us from the third (b) standard to the fourth standard, which is *guru-bhakti*.

In order to reach the third (b) or fourth standard, it is not necessary for one to first pass through the first, second and third (a) standards. For example, there are some good-hearted people who do not believe in God, but who nevertheless are kind and compassionate to all people and other creatures. By being kind and helpful to others without expecting anything in return, such people are unknowingly practising *karma-yōga*, and thereby their mind will be gradually purified, until eventually they gain the inner clarity called *vivēka*, as a result of which they will be naturally drawn to the third (b) or fourth standard.

Question: A tenet of Christian faith is that to love one's neighbour is to love God, and to serve them is to serve God, so if a Christian is a good person and tries to live according to this principle, where does this fit in the classification of different levels of *bhakti*?

Sadhu Om: They are told that to love their neighbour is to love God because otherwise they would not be kind or charitable, but in fact it is not so. True love for God is love for God alone. Until one is

blessed with such one-pointed love for God alone, it is of course good to be kind and compassionate to all, but if one desires to help one's fellow men, that desire will make one rise and go outwards instead of surrendering oneself completely to God by turning back within and subsiding into the heart.

However, if someone acts on their desire to help others, that will gradually purify their mind and thereby lead them eventually to third (b) or fourth standard *bhakti*, in which they will desire nothing other than to give themselves entirely to God. If we have clear and sharp *vivēka*, we will understand that whatever happens is according to the all-loving will of God, and that he therefore does not need us to rise with the idea that we should rectify the world in any way. True service to God is not rising to do anything but only subsiding back into the heart to be as we actually are, as Bhagavan has pointed out in verse 29 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

> Standing [or steadfastly being] in this state [of beginningless, infinite and indivisible *sat-cit-ānanda*], thereby experiencing supreme bliss, which is devoid of [the dyad of] bondage and liberation, is standing in the service of God.

Therefore if one desires anything other than to subside and surrender oneself to God, that shows a lack of clear *vivēka*. However, by doing kind, compassionate and charitable deeds without expecting anything in return, one can gradually weaken *mamakāra* [the sense of 'mine'], and thereby one will gain the *vivēka* [discernment] to recognise that *ahaṅkāra* [ego or the sense of 'I'] is the root-impurity, from which all other impurities sprout, and that it can be removed only by self-investigation and self-surrender. Only when one thus recognises that this *ahaṅkāra* is what stands between oneself and God and therefore desires to remove it, has one truly reached the third (b) or fourth standard of *bhakti*.

I used to pray to Bhagavan: 'Whatever I desire, whatever I ask you for, and however much I weep and pray for it, do not fulfil my desires but give me only what you want to give me'. If we have such a contract with Bhagavan, we need not worry about however many desires we may have. He may fulfil some of our desires if that is good

for us, but he will not fulfil any that would not be good for us. Such an attitude is the beginning of true surrender, and if we yield ourself to him in this way, he will certainly protect us and weed out all our desires along with their root, the 'I' whose desires they are.

21st April 1979

Sadhu Om: In ancient days philanthropists would hoist a flag to announce any charitable deed that they were doing. For example, if they hoisted a flag to announce that they would feed the poor, they thereby guaranteed that they would feed anyone who came to the designated place at the designated time. This is what Bhagavan alluded to when he sang in verse 24 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*:

> Arunachala, embracing [or marrying] you, who [have vowed to] kill [your] devotees, hoisting a flag [to announce your intention to do so], how will I live?

This is a great assurance for us. If we come to him with a sincere longing to surrender ourself completely to him, he has guaranteed that he will kill us, meaning that he will eradicate ego, thereby absorbing us forever back into himself, as himself. ▲

(To be continued)

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: Ramana Maharshi says in his *Talks* that surrender helps conquer destiny. How will surrender help one conquer destiny?
Answer: Actually, the quotation is from a different book. In *Day by Day*,[1] Sri Khanna asks Bhagavan about destiny.

> Khanna: Is there destiny? And if what is destined to happen will happen is there any use in prayer or effort or should we just remain idle?
>
> Bhagavan: There are only two ways to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to enquire for whom is this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by destiny and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realizing one's helplessness and saying all the time: 'Not I but Thou, oh Lord!', and giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through bhakti-marga.

Destiny pertains solely to the realm of the body-mind-ego complex. It has no relevance or authority over the *Atman* or *Brahman*, which exist beyond the confines of space, time, and causality. The *Atman* is eternal, infinite, and untouched by the constructs of destiny.

Destiny arises because of the illusion of separateness — the belief that we are distinct entities apart from others and the world around us. This sense of individuality leads to desires and aversions, where we wish for specific outcomes, such as winning a lottery or avoiding an accident. These desires and the events tied to them are experiences of the body-mind-ego complex, which operates within the framework of destiny.

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[1] *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 28-6-46, Devaraja Mudaliar, Sri Ramanasramam.

As long as we identify with this body-mind complex as an individual entity, we remain subject to the effects of destiny. However, upon the realization of our true nature — *I am the Atman* — destiny loses its grip on us. In this awakened state, we recognize that we are not the transient body-mind-ego but the eternal, unchanging Self. While destiny may continue to unfold for the body-mind-ego, it no longer impacts *You*, the Atman. This realization transcends destiny, anchoring you in the timeless essence that simply *is*.

Thus, Bhagavan says, "Free will and destiny last as long as the body lasts. But wisdom transcends both, for the Self is beyond knowledge and ignorance."[2] He further emphasises,[3] "Free-will and destiny are ever-existent. Destiny is the result of past action; it concerns the body. Let the body act as may suit it. Why are you concerned with it? Why do you pay attention to it? Free-will and destiny last as long as the body lasts. But wisdom (jnana) transcends both. The Self is beyond knowledge and ignorance. Should anything happen, it happens as the result of one's past actions, of divine will and of other factors."

Thus, destiny can be overcome by Self-realisation. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi taught that the supreme happiness of Atman can be realised by *atma-vichara* – Self-enquiry – which is to question 'Who am I' in order to investigate and eliminate the false ego. Thus Bhagavan says, "The removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of Realisation." In Shankara's words, this is to remove the *avidya* that causes one to confuse a rope for a snake under dim light. Due to *avidya*, we assume that we are the body-mind-ego complex and confuse the real Self (Atman) to be this false self. However, Bhagavan also emphasized that *atma-samarpana* or Self-surrender is also a path because we give up the false ego to "become" the Self. Thus, he says,[4,5]

> M.: "All right. What need be said has been said. Well. What is destiny? There is no destiny. Surrender, and all will be well. Throw all the responsibility on God. Do not bear the burden yourself. What can destiny do to you then?"

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[2] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, Talk 346.
[3] *Ibid.,* Talk 193.
[4] *Ibid.,* Talk 244.
[5] *Ibid.,* Talk 321.

D.: Surrender is impossible.

M.: Yes. Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for all. In course of time that will lead to complete surrender. Well, if surrender is impossible, what can be done? There is no peace of mind. You are helpless to bring it about. It can be done only by surrender.

D.: What is unconditional surrender?

M.: If one surrenders oneself there will be no one to ask questions or to be thought of. Either the thoughts are eliminated by holding on to the root-thought 'I' or one surrenders oneself unconditionally to the Higher Power. These are the only two ways for Realisation.

The body-mind-ego complex creates the illusion of being an independent entity by habitually fixating on thoughts of the past and the future, or on external objects, perceiving them as separate and "outside" itself. This outward focus reinforces the false sense of individuality. The practice, therefore, is to turn our attention inward, allowing the mind to subside and dissolve its mistaken identity as a separate entity, thereby realizing its true nature.

Bhagavan Ramana taught that to experience the boundless happiness of true self-knowledge, we must either seek to know our real self by investigating 'Who am I?' or relinquish our false self by surrendering it to God. These two approaches—self-enquiry and self-surrender—are not separate paths but a single, unified path. Both aim to free us from misidentification with the body-mind-ego and reveal the truth that we are, and always have been, the *Atman*, the infinite Self.

When this realization dawns, the concept of destiny becomes irrelevant. Destiny only governs the body-mind-ego, and once we transcend identification with it, we abide as the timeless and unchanging *Atman*, beyond the reach of destiny. We thus end with a quote from Bhagavan,[6] "Find out to whom Free-Will or Destiny matters. Abide in it. Then these two are transcended. That is the only purpose of discussing these questions. To whom do these questions arise? Find out and be at peace."

[6] *Ibid.,* Talk 427.

Chinnaswamigal Aradhana Day - 12 February 2025

Question: Why does an Upanishad say, "He whom the Atman chooses, to him alone does It reveal Itself, not to others." Does this mean effort is not required as the Atman will reveal itself to whoever 'It' chooses?
Answer: In *Mundakopanishad*, there is a famous passage which goes like this: "This Atman cannot be known from lengthy explanations of the scriptures; nor is it known by the intellect; not even by profound scholarship."[7]

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन।
nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena|

Then it goes on to say,

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यः
yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ

This is a key sentence, central to our theme. There are two general pronouns in it: '*yam'* meaning 'him' and *'esha'* meaning 'he'. There can be two interpretations to this statement, one by taking *yam* to mean the Atman and *yesha* to mean the aspirant and the other by taking *yam* to mean the aspirant and *esha* to mean the Atman. The two interpretations are:

1. He who chooses to seek the Atman, obtains It.
2. By him it is attainable whom It (Atman) chooses.

We can see that the two interpretations contradict each other. According to scholars, Sri Sankara has interpreted it to mean the former and Sri Ramanuja the latter.

The first interpretation implies that if a seeker makes efforts, he will be able to get Self-Realisation. The second one implies that Atman chooses whom It will and Realization is bestowed by Grace, not achieved by effort. The first interpretation raises the question, "Is Grace needed at all?" The second interpretation raises the question, "If Grace alone bestows Mukti, why make efforts?"

After Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana,* it seems Sri N. Balarama Reddy visited Maa Anandamayi in Calcutta and posed this question to her, "Which interpretation is correct?" She replied with a smile, "Both are correct!" Well, this answer appears to add to the confusion! But not when we carefully analyse Bhagavan's statements on various occasions.

[7] *Mundaka Upanishad*, Mantra 3-2-3

To start with, we need to understand the nature of 'effort' or sadhana that Bhagavan advocates. Self-realization is not something new to be achieved but an eternally existent state to be discovered or revealed. Just like clouds hiding the sun or moss covering up clear water, Reality remains covered up by ignorance. Bhagavan says,[8]

"We loosely talk of Self-realization, for lack of a better term. But how can one realize or make real that which alone is real? All we need to do is to give up our habit of regarding as real that which is unreal. All religious practices are meant solely to help us do this. When we stop regarding the unreal as real, then reality alone will remain, and we will be that."

Bhagavan also says,[9]

"Sadhana is necessary but for what purpose? The Self is there at all times and at all places. So there is no need to try and get it from somewhere else. Sadhana is only to get rid of the bodily and other illusions which are in the way of the self standing up as Self. This delusion arises only by thinking that this bodily world is real, instead of looking at the Self, which is real. Sadhana is only to get rid of this illusion"

This is elaborated by Bhagavan,[10]

"No. It is correct. It chooses those only who devote themselves to It, who become Its devotees. One must turn inward to find the Atman. He who thinks of It, It will draw to Itself. All such thoughts as 'Attainment is hard' or 'Self realisation is far from me', or 'I have got many difficulties to overcome to know the Reality', should be given up, as they are obstacles; they are created by this false self, ego. They are untrue.

Do not doubt that you are the Reality; live in that understanding. Never question it by referring your realisation of it to some future time. It is because people are victimized and hypnotised by such false thoughts that the Gita says that few out of millions realise the Self. The order of asramas [four stages of life] was

[8] *Day by day with Bhagavan*, 22-3-46.
[9] *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Letter 68.
[10] *Conscious immortality*, p. 158.

established as a general principle, i.e. to regulate the gradual development of the ordinary run of humanity. But in the case of one highly mature and fully ripe for *atma vichara* there is no graduated development. In this case *jnana vichara*, i.e. the Self enquiry and the blooming of jnana, are immediate and quick."

Hence, the efforts pertain to removal of ignorance. In other words, the obstruction called ego has to be removed. In order to do that, one has to develop understanding and 'will-power' to engage persistently, determinedly and skillfully in identifying all the ingredients that have created the illusory ego and remove them. Sounds logical - but immediately it can be pointed out that the individual self that is tasked with removing the ego is none other than the ego! It amounts to saying that the ego sets up the hunt to catch itself and destroy itself and in the process, discover something beyond itself! Paradoxical, is it not? Bhagavan says,[11]

"The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it."

Let us now move on to Grace. When Kapali Sastriar asked this question, "Can I dispense with outside help and by my own effort get to the deeper truth by myself?" Bhagavan's answer was,[12]

"The very fact that you are possessed with the quest of the Self is a manifestation of divine Grace. It is effulgence in the Heart, the inner Being, the real Self. It draws you from within. You have to attempt to get in from outside. Your attempt is the earnest quest, the deep inner movement is Grace. That is why I say, there is no real quest without Grace nor is there Grace active for him who does not seek the Self. Both are necessary."

He emphasizes it,[13]

"Divine Grace is essential for Realisation. It leads one to God-realisation. But such Grace is vouchsafed only to him who is a true devotee or a yogin, who has striven hard and ceaselessly on the path towards freedom."

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[11] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 28.

[12] Kapali Sastry, *Sat Darsana Bhashya*.

[13] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 29

From these utterances, one can conclude that as long as one feels that he is an individual with limitations, he will have to begin making efforts to know the Truth behind himself and the world in which he moves about. This is because, sooner or later he will find imperfection in his circumstances. All his desires and expectations will not come to fruition, as this is the way of life. When he begins the quest for total satisfaction or happiness, he has to necessarily take up spiritual pursuits and to engage in s*adhana* that will remove all obstructions to his total happiness. As *sadhana* progresses, he reaches a stage where he finds that he is helpless to complete the journey without divine help. Referring to this stage Bhagavan says,[14]

> "When the mind comes to the end of its resources and stands baffled before the unanswerable question, then a Higher Power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed, the Real, the Wonderful."

The last of the *vasanas* cannot be eliminated by the individual's efforts and thus Bhagavan says,[15]

> "All you need to do is find the source of the ego and abide there. Your efforts can extend only thus far. Then the Beyond will take care of Itself. You are helpless there. No effort can reach it"

In the final stages of *sadhana*, the *sadhaka* has to be aware of the fact that ego's existence only gets prolonged by the desire to make efforts to 'obtain Realisation.' Now, the mind has to necessarily give up all further efforts; it merely has to remain still. When all desires, including the desire for moksha are given up, the Higher Power takes over. Grace, in the end, burns up all the props of the ego. The salt doll dissolves in the ocean. The unreal, which never had any real existence to begin with, is transcended to reveal the Glory of the Self.

The initial stage of the quest is characterized by persistent effort and the final stage is defined by the patient wait for Divine Grace. Thus we can see that the reply of Maa Anandamayi that 'both are right', is no longer a puzzle. ▲

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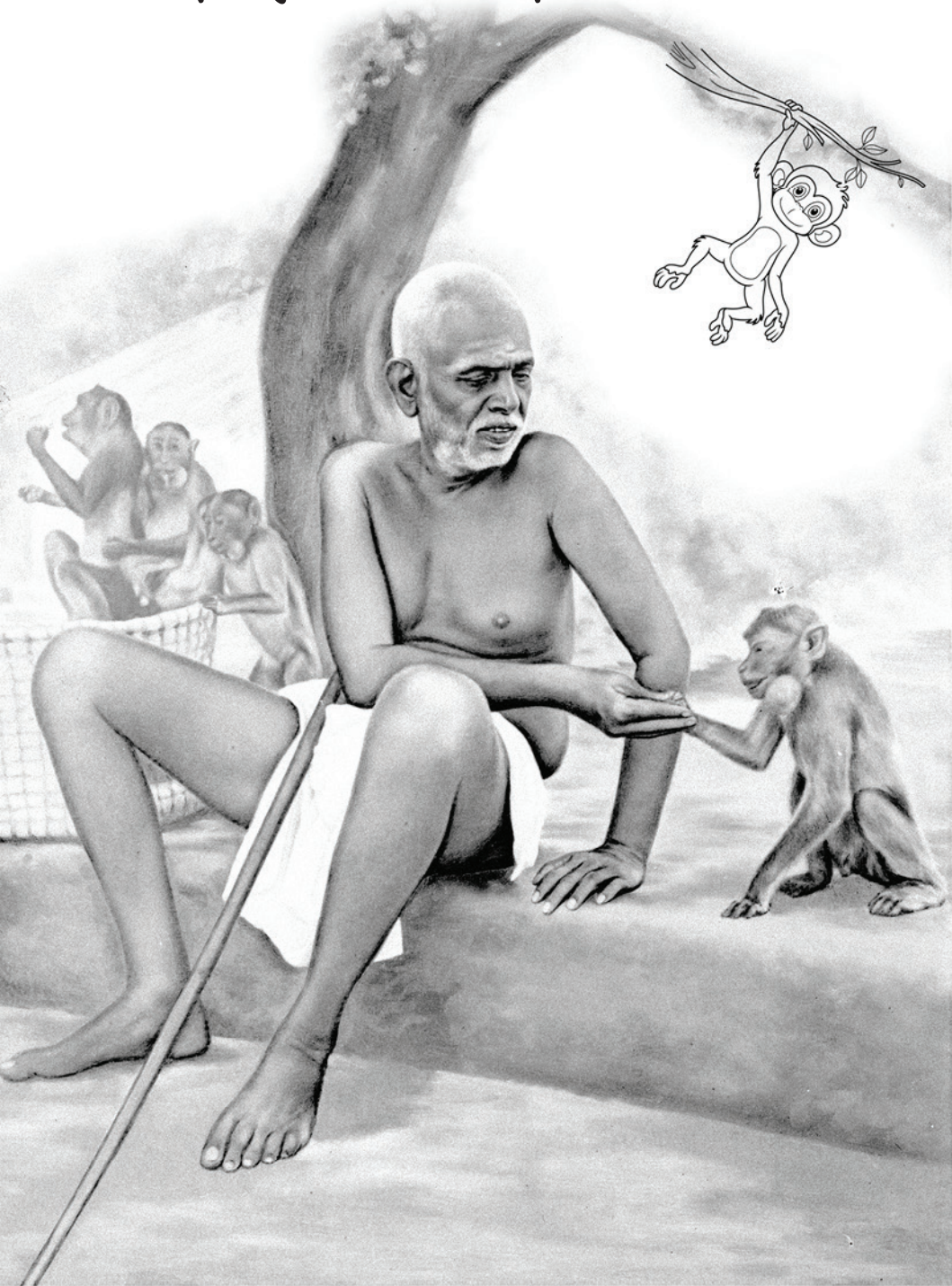
[14] Krishna Bhikshu, *Ramana Leela*,
[15] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 197

Nondi's Corner



Hello young adults and children!

This is Nondi, a monkey devotee of Bhagavan. Welcome to the April 2025 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.

Sincerely,

Your friend,

"Nondi"

Connect with Sri Ramanasramam:
Live Streams and 'In Focus' Videos

Sri Ramanasramam offers live streaming of the Sri Chakra Puja on the first and last Friday of each month. Daily live streaming (Monday to Saturday) from 8:00 to 9:30 am and 5:00 to 6:45 pm IST continues, and includes the Vedaparayana, puja, and Tamil Parayana. (There is no streaming on Sundays.) To access the videos, please visit:

https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos

Sri Ramanasramam publishes a monthly "In Focus" video showcasing the Ashram's activities on its YouTube channel. To watch and subscribe, please visit:

https://www.youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/playlists

The importance of earnestness of purpose

Here's a story shared by Bhagavan that highlights the importance of earnestness and dedication. It's from Crumbs From His Table by Ramanananda Swarnagiri. Bhagavan emphasizes that true success in any endeavor requires sincere effort and unwavering commitment.

Ramanananda Swarnagiri once began copying Bhagavan's great work *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses on Reality) by transcribing the contents of the Ashram's copy into his notebook. Observing him write with earnestness (*shraddha*), though with some difficulty and strain (likely due to his lack of experience with squatting and engaging in continuous writing work), Bhagavan shared a story of a sannyasi and his disciples to illustrate the meaning of *shraddha*, or earnestness of purpose.

There was once a Guru who had eight disciples. One day, he asked them all to make a copy of his teachings from a notebook he had kept. One disciple, who had lived an easy-going life before renouncing the world, could not make a copy for himself. He, therefore, paid a couple of rupees to a fellow disciple and asked him to make a copy on his behalf.

The Guru examined the notebooks one day and, noticing two books written in the same handwriting, asked the disciples for an explanation. Both the writer and the disciple on whose behalf it was written told the truth. The Master commented that, although speaking the truth was an essential quality of a spiritual aspirant, that alone would not carry one to their goal. He explained that *shraddha* was also necessary. Since this quality had not been exhibited by the disciple who had entrusted his labor to another, he was disqualified from discipleship. Referring to the payment for

the work, the Guru remarked that salvation is invaluable, and the disciple was not at liberty to purchase it rather than undergo training under him. So saying, he dismissed the disciple.

The tediousness of copying the Guru's teachings by hand may have deterred some, but the lesson served as a powerful reminder: true progress demands effort, discipline, and sincerity. Inspired by this story told by Bhagavan, the devotee resolved to complete the work with his own hands. May this story encourage all aspirants to embrace diligence and commitment on their journey.

Youth Corner

Here's a personal account from our young friend Advait Shrivastav about how he came to Bhagavan and what Bhagavan means to him. Advait is a quadrilingual poet and writer, currently pursuing an M.A. in English at a central university in Delhi. Since 2021, he has been serving as the editor of Ramana Kendra Delhi's quarterly journal, Direct Path*. His poems, articles, and stories have been published in various magazines.*

I was born in September 1999. When I was barely four years old, my aunt took me regularly to the Ramana Kendra in Delhi. I remember virtually nothing from those days. But Sri Ramana Maharshi did not forget this little boy. A child who once enjoyed visiting temples became an atheist before reaching his teenage years. My teenage years were filled with mental suffering. Depression and anxiety were as common as oxygen. My hitherto high grades crashed, but I still managed to pass class twelve in 2017 with a decent percentage. I took a gap year after passing school. This phase was also full of intense suffering. My depression was at its peak and I could initially not even move out of my room, which had an attached bathroom. However, I started gravitating towards spirituality as the winter of 2017 came closer. Maharshi says that "Suffering is the way for Realisation of God." This is what happened with me: a staunch atheist began to feel drawn to the Sanskrit Upanishads and Kabir's colloquial poetry after hearing about both from his father.

I had become a complete theist by 2018. One of my habits was to read and collect spiritual books and magazines from various spiritual organizations such as the Ramakrishna Ashram which I frequently visited in 2018 and 2019. I had

many discussions with my father on spiritual topics during this phase. I was (re)acquainted with Sri Ramana Maharshi during one such talk, and my father gave me a copy of the book, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The Delhi Kendra came back to my life in the last months of 2019. I wanted to buy books on Maharshi's teachings. I also wanted to know if the Kendra had a magazine, so I visited its website. I discovered *Direct Path* and decided to visit the Kendra to diversify my collection. The Kendra was not near my home anymore because we had shifted to Dwarka after my class 10 examinations. My first visit to the Kendra as an adult was in January 2020. I bought books and the three latest issues of Direct Path.

I visited again in the same month, but my plans to attend the Kendra regularly were thwarted by the pandemic and the resulting lockdown. *Direct Path* switched to an online-only mode during the lockdown. This very magazine linked me to Maharshi over the coming months. I wrote my first English poem in 2019. I sent this poem to *Direct Path* on 15 April 2020 and it was published by the then editor in the May-July issue. He also added me to the Kendra's WhatsApp group in May and I would receive quotes of Maharshi on it. I felt assured that Direct Path was a good platform for my philosophical poems. The May-July issue was released in the last week of July. This is when the then editor enquired if I would be interested in volunteering for the Kendra. I conveyed my assent. I was gradually becoming convinced that I was recovering well and that new avenues were opening up. I was assured that my tough times were behind me. But it was then that the ghosts began to appear.

Depression struck again. It was more intense this time. Past trauma flooded my mind, undoing all the progress I had made in 2019. The trauma was related to my difficult teenage

years, during which immoral acts were committed by me and against me. Suicidal thoughts returned in the last quarter of 2020. This is when Maharshi took me into his fold completely. I was still receiving quotes on the WhatsApp group. One of the quotes said that a sinner should not worry and weep and instead meditate on the Self. This quote from the fourteenth paragraph of *Who Am I?* made me accept my past. His views on sin were the most profound I had ever encountered. Another quote by Maharshi (which was put to verse by Sadhu Arunachala) helped me look beyond the depression of the past and the anxiety of the future: "The fates of souls are all by God ordained / According to the deeds that they have done. / That end that's destined ne'er to be attained / Will never be achieved by anyone / However hard they try. All those things, too / That are destined must occur one day, / Will come to pass whatever you may do / To interfere and try their course to stay, / And this is certain. At length we come to see / That it is best that we should silent be."

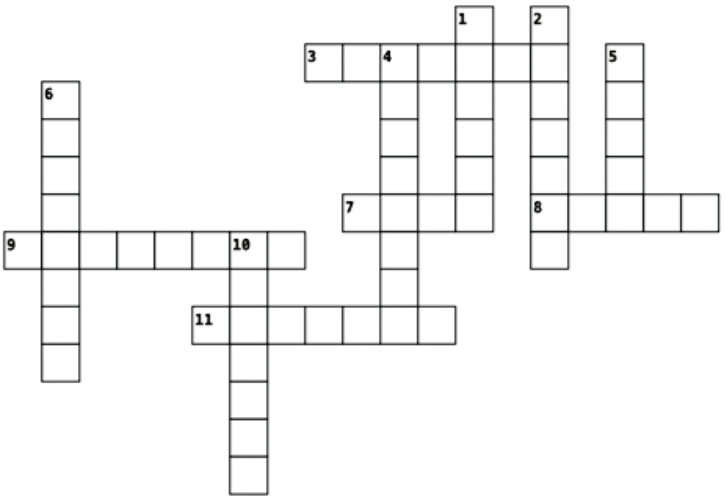
A development happened in November 2020. The then editor of *Direct Path* invited me to document online satsangs that were hosted by the Delhi Kendra on Zoom and later uploaded to YouTube. I would listen attentively to the satsangs I was assigned while documenting them. These activities brought me closer to Maharshi's teachings and helped me transform into a devotee. I began chanting a famous devotional Sanskrit chant regularly. The Sun had risen in the forest of darkness. 2021 was a new year which brought new hope. I completed my BA (Hons.) English degree in July that year. I was called by the then secretary of the Kendra in March and was offered the post of editor for the *Direct Path*. I accepted it without any hesitation. I took over in April and brought out the Feb-Apr 2021 issue, but my name was not printed in the first two issues. I still hold this position and enjoy the grace and protection of Maharshi.

The act of writing poetry originates from a divine blessing. I believe that Maharshi's grace not only transformed me as a person but also helped me grow as a creative writer. I had written only 22 poems by the end of 2020, but I wrote 2654 verses in the following years. Philosophical insights would pour into my mind, and I transformed each one into a poem. I wrote my first poem on Maharshi in the last quarter of 2021. I have written around 100 such poems on Bhagavan to date, which is a testament to the fact that it is He, the Maharshi, who fueled my poetry. I later learned that Neera Kashyap Madam had suggested my name — first for documenting satsangs and then for the position of editor of *Direct Path*. She guided me thoroughly during my first year as editor. My bond with her made me realize that Maharshi works through His devotees to save and transform the lives of non-devotees. The non-devotees are transformed into devotees, joining the chain, and thus, wisdom is multiplied as ignorance dissolves.

My struggle with depression has now become negligible. Maharshi's teachings have shaped my mind and brought me much clarity. This clarity helps me materially, mentally, and spiritually — such is the breadth of Maharshi's wisdom. A lost boy has now become a clear-headed man. I aspire to explore various creative fields, and Maharshi's teachings have shaped both my philosophical outlook and my creative expression. This influence enables me to convey my understanding and experiences to others, inspiring transformations similar to my own. My favourite activity (writing poetry) finds new dimensions each time I reflect on Maharshi's literature. Maharshi's words also assist me in another way: there are times when past trauma surfaces like bubbles, temporarily filling me with negative thoughts. In these moments, Maharshi's written wisdom and omnipresent grace prompt me to introspect, helping me navigate these thoughts. The timeless teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi support me every time.

HERE'S THIS ISSUE'S FUN CORNER

Crossword Puzzle: Find family members of Bhagavan



ACROSS

3. Mother of the current Ashram President (7)
7. Bhagavan's youngest grand nephew (4)
8. Current President of the Ashram (5)
9. One of Bhagavan's grand nieces (8)
11. One of Bhagavan's grand nieces (7)

DOWN

1. Bhagavan's brother-in-law (6)
2. Editor of the The Mountain Path (5)
4. Former President of the Ashram (8)
5. Sister of the current Ashram President (5)
6. Bhagavan's nephew (8)
10. Bhagavan's sister (6)

Scriptures translated into Tamil by Bhagavan

NUMADCAEIHVKIAV _____

DIKR YRDIAS AKVEVI _____

AAVBDGHA GITA _____

DRHYUANIMSKHAT TORSTA _____

UURG SITUT _____

ALKMAHSAAAT TTASRO _____

MAAT DOBHA _____

AMTA ASAAARKSHKT _____

TATVIAKDOERLA _____

RAVACHI MNAI LMAA _____

Shloka: Sri Ramana Ashtottaram

Let's continue to memorize 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 memorize one name at a time and understand its meaning. Here's Name 6:

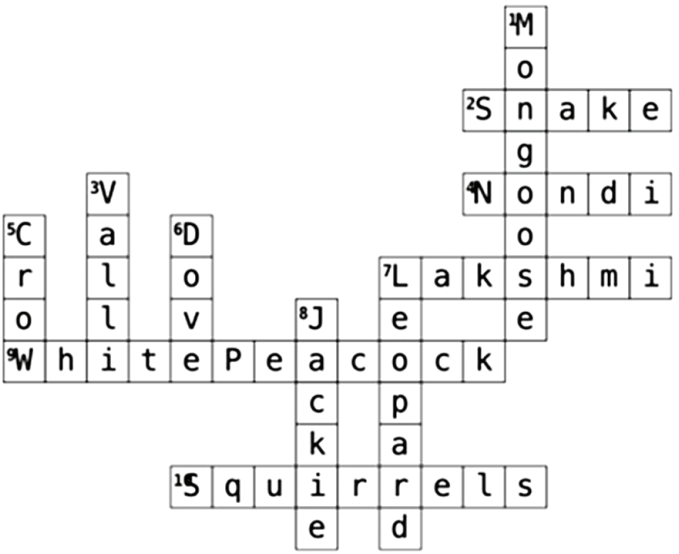
ॐ कारणोद्भवाय नमः।

Oṁ kāraṇodbhavāya namaḥ

Meaning: One whose birth was for a purpose

He was born for the divine purpose of renewing human life and transforming the world.

Solutions to January 2025 crossword puzzle and life events matching puzzle



ACROSS

2. Bhagavan humorously asked his attendant Vaikuntavasar not be afraid of this animal - his "bed" (5)
4. Name of the lame monkey devotees (5)
7. Name of the most famous cow devotee (7)
9. Gift of the Rani of Baroda (5, 7)
10. Bhagavan fed them cashew nuts and they ran on his lap (8)

DOWN

1. Visited Skandashram fearlessly, of golden hue (8)
3. Name of the deer for whom a samadhi was built at the Ashram (5)
5. When this bird died, Bhagavan remarked, "A siddha purusha has left his body today" (4)
6. The wounded bird that Bhagavan cared for and restored to health (4)
7. Bhagavan said this animal was a jnani who came down the hill to listen to the Vedas (7)
8. Name of the dog Bhagavan tended to and who died in his hands (6)

Women devotees of Bhagavan

NEREOAL LIENAPU NYOE	ELEANOR PAULINE NOYE
SRIU MNMGAAA	SURI NAGAMMA
KMAAALKMAN	KANAKAMMAL
YCUL ESCNNRLOSE	LUCY CORNELSSEN
UIACL SENOBRO	LUCIA OSBORNE
SAAMLIHKGAN	NAGALAKSHMI
LALE IMLRALAT	ELLA MAILLART
UAELAML	ALAMELU
SAHKIAKM	KAMAKSHI
ABHIARTPAV AJER	PRABHAVATI RAJE
MUDAIARL APITA	MUDALIAR PAATI
AAIJKN AAMTH	JANAKI MATHA

BOOK REVIEW

PIERCING HUMAN EXPERIENCE: BASED ON MANDUKYA KARIKA:
Published by Advaya Press; 15 March 2021; By Tushar Choksi (Author); Englsh; paper back; 178 pages. ISBN-10: 057870160x; ISBN-13: 978-0578701608. https://www.amazon.in/Piercing-Human-Experience-Mandukya-Karika/dp/057870160X

The *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* stands as a monumental text in Indian philosophy, remarkable for its brevity and depth. Comprising only 12 verses, it explores the nature of the Self (Ātman) and its ultimate union with the absolute reality (Brahman). Despite its compact size, the text delves into profound metaphysical questions, examining the states of consciousness—waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), deep sleep (*suṣupti*), and the transcendent state (*turiya*). Using the sacred syllable "Om" as its central framework, the Upanishad elucidates the unity underlying these states.

In the *Muktika Upanishad*, which catalogues 108 principal Upanishads, it is asserted that a complete understanding of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* suffices to comprehend the essence of all other Upanishads. However, the text's brevity and dense, cryptic nature often necessitate careful study under the guidance of a teacher.

The Māṇḍūkya Kārikā: A Masterpiece of Non-Dual Thought

To unravel the profound teachings of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, the sixth century sage Gaudapāda authored the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, a seminal commentary and expansion that serves as a cornerstone of Advaita Vedānta. Comprising 215 verses across four chapters, the *Kārikā* systematically develops the philosophy of non-duality (Advaita) and provides a sophisticated metaphysical framework for understanding reality, consciousness, and liberation.

This text not only elaborates on the Upanishad but also lays the intellectual groundwork for Adi Shankaracharya's the systematization of Advaita Vedānta. Many of Shankara's arguments about the illusory

nature of the world and the non-dual essence of Brahman have their roots in Gaudapāda's work. Through its rigorous critique of dualism and its articulation of non-origination (*ajāti-vāda*), the *Kārikā* has become an enduring beacon of philosophical inquiry.

The first chapter of the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* expands on the Upanishadic description of the four states of consciousness:

Waking state (*jāgrat*): In this state, the self engages with the external world through sensory organs. It is associated with outward-moving consciousness and is empirical and transactional in nature.

Dreaming state (*svapna*): Here, the consciousness moves inward, creating its own reality independent of external stimuli. Though less tangible, this state resembles waking life in structure.

Deep sleep state (*suṣupti*): Characterized by the absence of desires and dreams, this state offers bliss but lacks self-awareness.

Turiya: The transcendent state beyond dualities. Gaudapāda identifies *turiya* with pure consciousness and ultimate reality. Unlike the first three states, *turiya* is not bound by empirical or subjective distinctions and represents the substratum of all existence. Gaudapāda emphasizes that *turiya*, often termed the "fourth state," is not one among others but the sole reality, with the other states being mere manifestations.

In the second chapter, Gaudapāda introduces the principle of *māyā*, asserting that both waking and dreaming experiences are ultimately illusory. While waking life appears real due to its coherence and continuity, it is no more substantial than dreams from the perspective of ultimate reality. He uses the famous analogy of a rope mistaken for a snake: just as ignorance (*avidyā*) leads to misapprehending the rope as a snake, ignorance of the Self leads to perceiving the phenomenal world as separate from Brahman. Upon realization, the illusion dissolves, revealing the undifferentiated reality of Brahman.

The third chapter articulates Gaudapāda's radical non-dualism. He argues that distinctions between the individual self (*jīva*) and the universal Self (Brahman) are illusory. Apparent diversity arises from ignorance, while true knowledge reveals the oneness of existence. Gaudapāda boldly declares that creation itself is an illusion. From the ultimate standpoint, there is no creation, no dissolution, and no duality. This philosophy

of *ajāti-vāda* (non-origination) forms the heart of his non-dualism, challenging conventional notions of causality and existence.

The final chapter emphasizes the sacred syllable "Om" as a symbol of Brahman and a meditative tool for realizing non-duality. Gaudapāda connects the phonetic components of "Om" with the four states of consciousness, asserting that meditating on "Om" can guide seekers toward the realization of *turiya*.

The *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* is not merely a philosophical treatise but a practical guide for self-realization. Its blend of Upanishadic teachings with elements of *Yoga* philosophy offers a comprehensive roadmap for spiritual seekers. Gaudapāda's logical dismantling of dualism has influenced not only Indian philosophy but also comparative studies with Western idealism, highlighting its universal significance.

A Contemporary Interpretation

Tushar Choksi's *Piercing the Human Experience: Based on Mandukya Karika* provides a modern interpretation of the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary spiritual needs. The book explores human experiences like waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, emphasizing the discovery of the self (Ātman) that transcends these states.

Choksi distills complex Vedantic principles into relatable terms, making them accessible to modern readers. The book combines philosophical depth with practical exercises, such as meditation techniques and mind-control practices. Choksi bridges the gap between abstract metaphysical ideas and their application in everyday life, emphasizing self-realization as a path to freedom and peace.

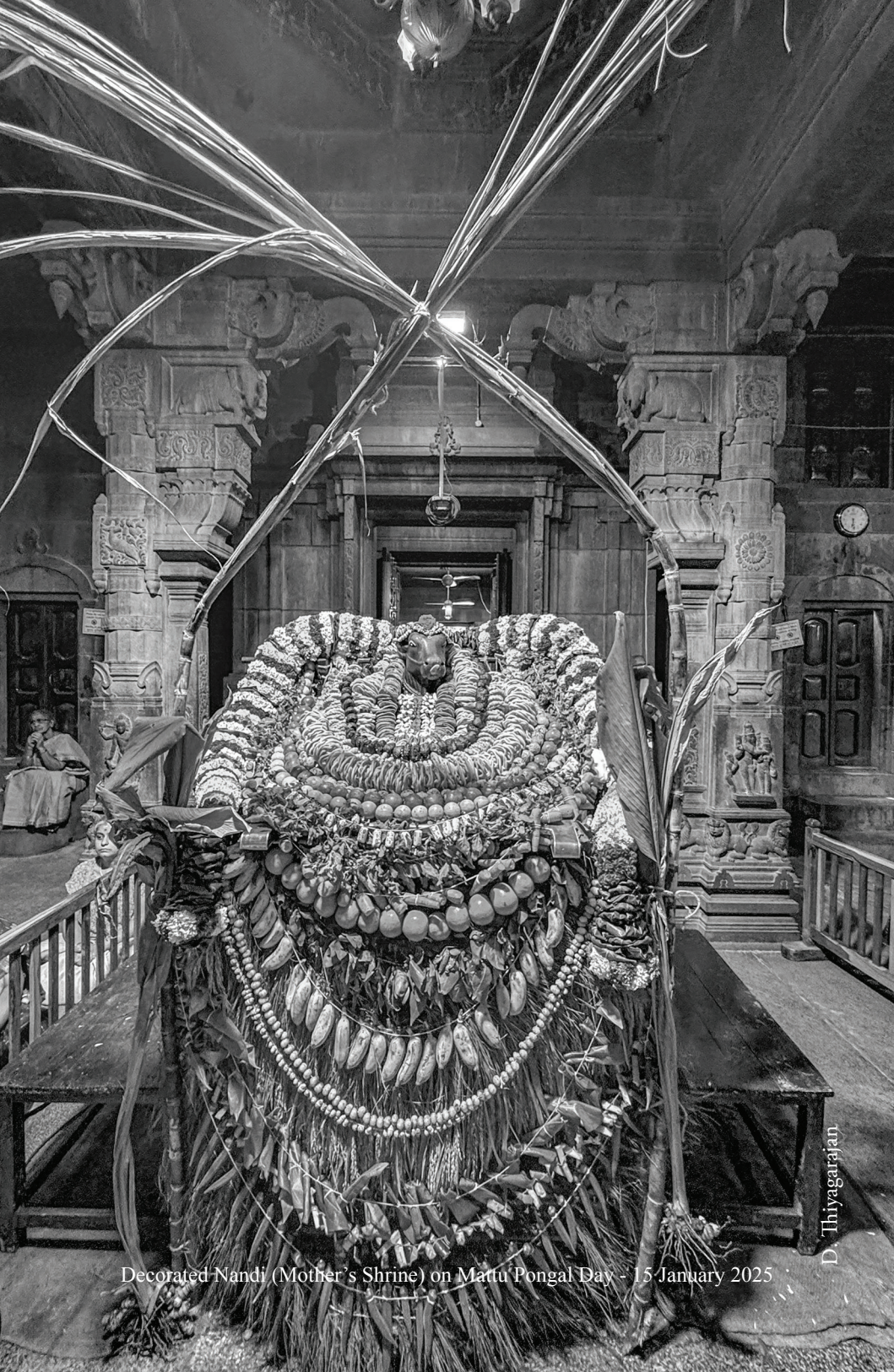
While Choksi's interpretations are insightful, readers unfamiliar with *Advaita Vedānta* or Eastern metaphysics may find the philosophical depth challenging. However, the author's systematic breakdown of ideas ensures significant value for committed readers.

This book offers a modern lens for engaging with these ancient teachings, making them relevant and applicable in the contemporary world and inspire seekers to explore the mysteries of consciousness and embrace the infinite, unchanging essence of the Self. ▲

– M.Giridhar

D. Thiyagarajan

Vibhuti Making Puja on Maha Sivaratri Day - 26 February 2025



Decorated Nandi (Mother's Shrine) on Mattu Pongal Day - 15 January 2025

D. Thiyagarajan

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Sivaprakasam Pillai Day

Sivaprakasam Pillai (1875-1948), first met Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1902. He is best remembered for his role in getting Bhagavan to write down his teachings, which were later published as the book *Who am I?* When news of Pillai's *mahānirvāṇa* was conveyed to Bhagavan, he indicated that this great devotee had attained mokṣa. On Thursday, 12th January 2025, devotees gathered in the New Hall to celebrate Pillai's Aradhana by singing a selection of his compositions on Bhagavan. The recitation was followed by āratī and the distribution of prasād.

Ramaswami Pillai Day

On Saturday 14th January, devotees gathered at the samādhis of devotees near the back gate at the shrine of Ramaswami Pillai. After chanting Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai, āratī was performed followed by the distribution of prasād.

Mattu Pongal

Mattu Pongal was celebrated in grand fashion at the Ashram. This day is dedicated to honouring and expressing gratitude to cattle, particularly cows and bulls, for their role in agriculture and farming. Puja was performed for Siva's bull, Nandi, in the Mother's Shrine, at the samadhi of Cow Lakshmi, and in the ashram goshala, where the cows were lovingly decorated and fed by devotees.

Maha Sivaratri

Sivaratri was celebrated at the Ashram on Krishna Paksha Chaturdasi, the 26th of February, 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.

Obituaries

Born 7th April 1933 in Berlin, Smt. Heike Hildebrand made her home in Tiruvannamalai following a call from Ramana Maharshi through the well-known Wellings Bust which hung in her flat. A voice from the photo seemed to say, "Why wait any longer? Come live at the foot of Arunachala!" She heeded the call and came to settle near the Ashram in 2008.

Daughter of Lucy Ma (Lucy Cornelssen) who translated the works of the Maharshi into German, Heike visited Ramanasramam during the decades her mother lived in Tiruvannamalai. After coming to settle in Tiruvannamalai, Heike (also known as Snehajyoti) helped introduce Germans to the Ashram and devoted herself to inter-religious dialogue. She passed away peacefully at her home in Tiruvannamalai at 2 pm on Kanum Pongal day, 16th January 2025. Her seventeen years in Tiruvannamalai left an indelible mark on the Ashram community, where her presence and devotion were cherished.

Indusekhara S. Madugula, Ph.D. was a prolific author and a seeker of truth, believing that the most direct path to understanding the meaning of life lay in self-inquiry—exploring one's origins, one's true Self, and the inevitable mergence into Supreme Consciousness. His book, Beauty and the Saint: Śaṅkara's Saundaryalahari (2023), delves into how Śaṅkara's poetry uniquely engages the spiritual seeker. From 1996 to 2021, Dr. I.S. Madugula was a regular contributor to *Mountain Path*, where he wrote numerous articles, including the two-part piece How I Came to Bhagavan. Dr. Madugula passed away on January 6, 2025. His insightful contributions to spiritual literature will be deeply missed. ▲

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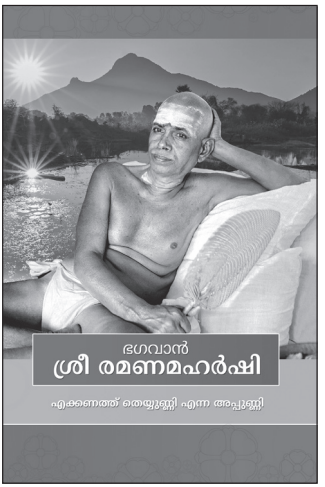
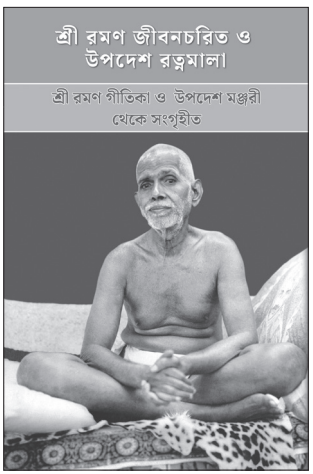


Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (Malayalam): This book, which is the translation of B.V. Narasimha Swami's *Self-Realisation*, is a testament to Bhagavan's grace. Devotee Ekkanattu Appunni (Theyyuni) undertook this labor of love, receiving Bhagavan's blessing in a dream and subsequent tacit approval after reading the completed translation to him. The original English biography offers profound insights into Ramana Maharshi's life and teachings, guiding seekers toward Self-enquiry. Appunni's dedicated translation captures this essence, making Bhagavan's wisdom accessible to Malayalam readers. This book chronicles Ramana's journey, from boyhood to revered sage, emphasizing his silent presence and teachings on Self-realization. It is hoped this translation will inspire many Malayalam readers on their spiritual paths. pb. xx+244; Rs. 200; ISBN: 978-81-8288-337-6.



Sri Ramana Jeevancharit O Upadesh Ratnamala (Bengali): This book presents Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's prose works: *Self-Enquiry*, *Who Am I?*, and *Spiritual Instruction* (*Upadesa Manjari*), alongside a brief biography. Translations of *Self-Enquiry*, *Who Am I?*, and the biography are drawn from the 1959 Bengali edition of *Sri Ramana Geetika*. *Spiritual Instruction* is taken from Dr. Purnima Sarkar's *Upadesh Manjari*. All texts have been revised and annotated for clarity. Reflecting the original compilation, each work is preceded by a short introduction explaining its context. This collection aims to benefit Bengali readers eager for more translations of Bhagavan's teachings..pp.viii+80; ISBN: 978-81-8288-338-3; Rs.80.

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When there are thoughts, it is distraction;
When there are no thoughts, it is meditation.
— *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 68*

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