Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

Part One

ROBERT BUTLER, T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN & DAVID GODMAN

THAYUMANNAVAR was a distinguished Tamil poet-saint who lived in the first half of the eighteenth century, from 1705 to 1742 AD. His devotional poetry was frequently cited by Bhagavan, with obvious approval, and many Ramanasramam books record fragments of his poems that Bhagavan either read out or quoted from memory. However, in most cases the full verse is not given in the ashram literature. In this article we are presenting the complete versions of most of the verses that Bhagavan referred to, giving, wherever possible, the circumstances and context in which they were quoted.¹ We do not propose to analyse Thayumanavar’s poetry or philosophy in any great detail; we merely wish to present, in a full form, those portions of his work that particularly appealed to

¹ We have not been able to identify all the verses since some of the references are too general.

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Bhagavan was sometimes so emotionally moved when he read out verses by Thayumanavar, he would be unable to continue. Devaraja Mudaliar, who was responsible for recording many of Bhagavan’s references to Thayumanavar, wrote about this on two occasions:

I may here record that I have noticed on more than one occasion in the past how Bhagavan could not proceed with the reading of any deeply devotional poems of Tamil works such as *Thevaram* and Thayumanavar.²

... when touching songs were recited or read out before him, or when he himself was reading out to us poems or passages from the lives or works of famous saints, he would be moved to tears and find it impossible to restrain them. He would be reading out and explaining some passage and when he came to a very moving part he would get so choked with emotion that he could not continue but would lay aside the book. To quote a few instances, such a thing happened when he was reading and explaining some incidents in Sundaramurti Nayanar’s life in connection with the *Tiruchuzhi Mahatmyam*, and also when he was reading out ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambare Rahasyam’ in Thayumanavar’s works, and came to the twenty-fourth verse:

Conceiving you as everything from earth to space,
I shall record my thoughts on the large page of my mind,
and looking at that image ever and again, I shall cry out:
‘Lord of my life, will you not come?’
Repeatedly believing myself to be You,
I am unable to fix my attention on anything else.

Lamenting in this way, like one whose heart is wounded, dissolving inwardly, so that tears pour down in floods, uttering deep sighs, unaware even of my body, I stand transfixed.

His [Bhagavan’s] eyes were so filled with tears and his throat so choked with emotion [as he read these words] that he had to put aside the book and break off his discourse.³

Thayumanavar was brought up in the Tanjavur District of Tamil Nadu in the coastal town of Vedaranyam. His father, Kediliappa, came from an agricultural background but progressed from being a farmer to being the administrator of the local Vedapureeswarar Temple. He carried out this responsibility so well, he was subsequently offered the job of palace manager and royal advisor by Vijayaranga Chokkalinga Naicker, the reigning Prince of Tiruchirapalli. When Thayumanavar was born, his father named him after Thayumaneswarar, the presiding deity in the temple of Siragiri, which is nowadays known as the Tiruchirapalli Fort Temple.

Thayumanavar received a good education at court in which he ended up acquiring an outstanding knowledge of the Tamil language and literature. He must also have made a good impression on the royal family because, when his father passed away, Thayumanavar, who was still in his teens, was considered qualified to take over his job. He subsequently managed the financial affairs of the kingdom and apparently fulfilled his duties with some distinction. However, while this was going on, his religious yearnings impelled him to look for a Guru who could help him to progress spiritually. Unfortunately,

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² *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12th December 1945, afternoon session.

³ *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 45-6, 1992 ed. The translation of the ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambare Rahasyam’ verse was done by the joint authors of this article and does not appear in the book. We have made new translations of all the Thayumanvar verses that appear in this article and have inserted them at the appropriate places, that is, whenever Bhagavan quotes from them or refers to them.
as many seekers have discovered before and since, such beings are hard to find. In later life Thayumanavar wrote about the qualifications that are necessary for one who is looking for a qualified Guru. Bhagavan once cited this verse, and endorsed its contents, in the following dialogue:

**Question:** What is satsang?

**Bhagavan:** Satsang means only *Atma sang* [association with the Self]. Only those who cannot practise that are to practise being in the company of realised beings or sadhus.

**Question:** When does one get the company of sadhus?

**Bhagavan:** The opportunity to be in the company of a Sadguru comes effortlessly to those who have performed worship of God, *japa*, *tapas*, pilgrimages etc. for long periods in their previous births. There is a verse by Thayumanavar that points out the same thing:

> For those who, in the prescribed manner, have embarked upon the path of divine images, holy sites and holy tanks, a Sadguru, too, will come to speak one unique word, O Supreme of Supremes!"

Only he who has done plenty of *nishkamya punyas* [austerities performed without any thought of a reward or consequence] in previous births will get abundant faith in the Guru. Having faith in the Guru’s words, such a man will follow the path and reach the goal of liberation.

We can assume that Thayumanavar had the requisite qualifications since his search for a teacher ultimately led him to a man called Arul Nandi Sivachariar, who was also known as ‘Mauna Guru’. This teacher could trace his lineage back to the famous saint Tirumular, whose book, *Tirumantiram*, written more than a thousand years ago, became one of the canonical works of Saivism.

When Thayumanavar approached him and asked if he could become his disciple, Mauna Guru nodded his head, thereby giving his consent. Thayumanavar then asked if he could follow him wherever he went. Mauna Guru responded by telling him ‘*Summa iru,*’ which can mean ‘Be still,’ ‘Be quiet,’ and also ‘Remain as you are’. This one phrase apparently brought about a major spiritual transformation in Thayumanavar. In later years, when he began to write ecstatic devotional poetry, he frequently mentioned this event, this phrase, and the effect it had on him. He frequently called it ‘the unique word’ in his verses (including the one cited in the last quotation).

This phrase was also used by Bhagavan, often with similarly dramatic effect. Muruganar has written in several of his poems that Bhagavan enlightened him by uttering this phrase:

> Saying, ‘Enough of dancing, now be still [*summa iru,*],’ *Padam* [Bhagavan] bestowed on me the state of true *jnana* that exists forever in my Heart as my own nature.

> The sovereign grace of *Padam* completed my *sadhana* with the words ‘Be still’. What a wonder is this!

In a recent issue of *The Mountain Path* there was a report of how a shorter version of this phrase, ‘*iru,*’ meaning ‘be’ or ‘stay’, effected a life-transforming change in Tinnai Swami.

The ‘unique word’, *summa iru,* uttered by a qualified Guru, has an immediate and liberating impact on those who are in a highly mature state. For the vast majority, though, hearing this word from

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4 ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 156.

5 Living by the Words of Bhagavan, 2nd ed. pp. 220-1.
the Guru’s lips is not enough. Bhagavan discussed this in the following dialogue, which he illustrated with more verses from Thayumanavar.

A young man from Colombo asked Bhagavan, “J. Krishnamurti teaches the method of effortless and choiceless awareness as distinct from that of deliberate concentration. Would Bhagavan be pleased to explain how best to practise meditation and what form the object of meditation should take?”

**Bhagavan:** Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real nature. If we can attain it or be in that state, it is all right. But one cannot reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age-long *vasanas* carry the mind outward and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that, effort is necessary for most people. Of course, every book says ‘*Summa iru*,’ i.e., ‘Be quiet or still’. But it is not easy. That is why all this effort is necessary. Even if we find one who has at once achieved the *mauna* or supreme state indicated by ‘*Summa iru*’, you may take it that the effort necessary has already been finished in a previous life. So, that effortless and choiceless awareness is reached only after deliberate meditation. That meditation can take any form which appeals to you best. See what helps you to keep away all other thoughts and adopt that method for your meditation.

In this connection Bhagavan quoted verses 5 and 52 from ‘Udal Poyyuravu’ and 36 from ‘Payappuli’ of Saint Thayumanavar. Their gist is as follows. ‘Bliss will follow if you are still. But however much you may tell your mind about the truth, the mind will not keep quiet. It is the mind that won’t keep quiet. It is the mind which tells the mind “Be quiet and you will attain bliss.”’ Though all the scriptures have said it, though we hear about it every day from the great ones, and even though our Guru says it, we are never quiet, but stray into the world of *maya* and sense objects. That is why conscious deliberate effort is required to attain that *mauna* state or the state of being quiet.9

This is the full version of the three verses that Mudaliar summarised:

‘Remain still, mind, in the face of everything!’
This truth that was taught to you, where did you let it go?
Like wrestlers, bent upon their bout, you raised your arguments.
Where is your judgement? Where, your wisdom? Begone!10

Bliss will arise if you remain still.
Why, little sir, this involvement still with yoga, whose nature is delusion?
Will [this bliss] arise through your own objective knowledge?
You need not reply, you who are addicted to ‘doing’!
You little baby, you!11

Though I have listened unceasingly to the scriptures that one and all declare, ‘To be still is bliss, is very bliss,’ I lack, alas, true understanding, and I failed even to heed the teachings of my Lord, Mauna Guru.
Through this stupidity I wandered in *maya*’s cruel forest.
Woe is me, for this is my fated destiny.12

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9 *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.
10 ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 5.
11 ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 52.
12 ‘Payappuli’, verse 36. Bhagavan also quoted this verse and ‘Udal Poyyuravu’ verse 52 in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 646.
One may presume from the complaints in the last verse that Thayumanavar was not one of the fortunate few who attained liberation instantly merely by hearing his Guru tell him ‘Summa iru’. As Bhagavan remarked in an earlier quotation, it is necessary for almost all people to make some conscious effort to control the mind. Mauna Guru, Thayumanavar’s Guru, accepted that this was the case with Thayumanavar and he consequently gave him detailed instructions on how he should pursue his sadhana. Thayumanavar recorded many of these instructions in his verses, some of which were selected by Bhagavan and included in the Tamil parayana at Ramanasramam.13

During Bhagavan’s lifetime Tamil poetic works were chanted in his presence everyday. Initially, at Skandashram, only Aksaramanamalai was chanted, but as the years went by, more and more works were added. By the 1940s there was a prescribed list of poems, all selected by Bhagavan himself, that took fifteen days to complete at the rate of about one hour per day.

Here are nine of the ten verses that Bhagavan selected. The first three describe the suffering inherent in samsara, while the remainder contain Mauna Guru’s prescriptions for transcending it:

In all people, as soon as the ego-sense known as ‘I’ arises to afflict them, the world-illusion, manifesting as multiplicity, follows along behind.
Who might have the power to describe the vastness of the ocean of misery that grows out of this: as flesh; as the body; as the intellectual faculties; as the inner and the outer; as the all-pervasive space; as earth, water, fire, and air; as mountains and forests;
as the multitudinous and mountainous visible scenes; as that which is invisible, such as remembering and forgetting; as the joys and sorrows that crash upon us,

wave upon wave, in maya’s ocean; as the deeds that give rise to these; as the religions of manifold origin that [try to] put an end to them; as their gods, as their spiritual aspirants, and as the methods described in many a treatise that bear witness to their practices; and as the doctrinal wrangling amongst them. It is like trying to count the fine grains of sand on the seashore.

In order to teach me to discern the truth of how all these woes, impossible to measure – which accumulate, multiplying bundle by bundle – were insubstantial, like the spectacle of a mountain of camphor that disappears entirely at the touch of a flame, he associated with food, sleep, joy, misery, name-and-place, and wearing a bodily form similar to my own, he came as the grace-bestowing Mauna Guru to free me from defilement, in just the same way that a deer is employed to lure another deer.14

The idea that God takes on a human form to catch other beings who have this same form is one that appears in many spiritual texts. Bhagavan explained this particular reference in the following reply:

The Master appears to dispel... ignorance. As Thayumanavar puts it, he appears as a man to dispel the ignorance of a man, just as a deer is used as a decoy to capture the wild deer. He has to appear with a body in order to eradicate our ignorant ‘I am the body’ idea.15

The next six verses contain the upadesa that Mauna Guru gave to Thayumanavar, and a description of the effect it had on him:

Coming thus, he claimed my body, my belongings, my very life as his possessions,

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13 A reference to this selection was made in My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, by Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 54, 1992 ed.


15 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk no. 398, p. 370.
and teaching the path of rejection, he declared:

“The five senses, the five elements, 
the organs of action, and all the rest, 
you are not. You are none of these. 
Nor are you any of the qualities that pertain to these. 
You are not the body, nor are you knowledge and ignorance. 
You are chit, the real, which is like a [colourless] crystal, 
that appears to assume the colours 
of whatever is placed before it, 
and yet having no connection with it. 
It is my inherent nature to enlighten you 
when I find that you are ripe for it.’

‘If you desire to gain the vast, supreme reality 
that is the temple of refreshing grace, 
inseparable from all that is, becoming pure consciousness 
and obtaining the indestructible state whose nature is bliss, 
listen as I explain to you the proper means: 
May you live long, winning in your heart 
the reality that is devoid of all qualities! 
May you attain the state of bliss-consciousness, 
so that all the dense accumulation of ignorance disappears! 
May you liberate yourself from bondage!’

Through his grace, he imparted to me the state of mauna, 
the true knowledge in which bondage is abolished: 
‘For that state, there is no thought, no “I” sense, 
no space, no time, no directions, no pairs of opposites, 
nothing lost, nothing other, no words, 
no phenomena of night and day, 
no beginning, no end, no middle, no inner or outer. 
Nothing is.’

‘When I say: “It is not, it is not”, 
this is not a state of nothingness. 
It is pure identity; it is the nature that eternally endures, 
a state that cannot be expressed in words. 
It is the swarupa which engulfs everything, 
so that neither ‘I’ nor anything else appears.16

As the day consumes the night, it consumes ignorance entirely. 
Easily overcoming and swallowing up 
your personal consciousness, it transforms your very self, 
here and now, into its own Self. 
It is the state that distinguishes itself as self-luminous silence.’

‘Other than the nature that is its own Self, 
it allows nothing else to arise. 
Because there is no other consciousness, 
should anything attempt to arise there 
it will, like a camphor flame, vanish. 
The knower, devoid of both knowledge and objects known, 
falls away, without falling, since it still remains. 
But who can tell of its greatness, and to whom? 
By dint of becoming That, one exists only as That. 
That alone will speak for itself.’

‘If we call it “That”, then the question will arise, 
“What is That?”
Therefore did Janaka and the other kings and the rishis, foremost among whom is Suka, 
live happily, like bees intoxicated with honey, 
entirely avoiding any mention of “That”. 
Remain in this state.’17 Thus did he speak. 
Grant me the abundance of your grace 
so that, in the nirvikalpa state of total tranquillity, 
I may know and attain the condition of supreme bliss, 
in accordance with your rule. 
I shall not sleep or take up any other work 
until I attain this state.’18

16 This could also be translated as ‘neither jiva nor Iswara appears’. 
17 This can also be translated as ‘This is the state of the Self’. 
18 ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’, vv. 18-23.
Thayumanavar's reverence for his Mauna Guru, for the teachings he gave him, and for the experiences he ultimately bestowed on him, were the subject of another poem that Bhagavan mentioned. The subject arose when Bhagavan was asked about the necessity of having a Guru:

‘Is it possible to gain knowledge without the blessings of a Guru?’ asked a devotee. ‘Even Rama, who was like a dullard in his early life, became a realised soul only with the help of his Guru.’

‘Yes,’ said Bhagavan, ‘how can there be any doubts? The grace of the Guru is absolutely necessary. That is why Thayumanavar praised his Guru in his hymns.’

At your [Mauna Guru’s] glance,
the tiger that roams the forest
will sport with the cow.
At a sign of your hand,
the rutting elephant will come,
carrying with its trunk
a huge load of great logs for a bonfire.
Kamadhenu herself will attend
your golden feet,
saying, ‘Your meal is prepared’.
Kings of the earth, and kings of verse
will laud you as the king of tapas,
crying out ‘Victory and praise to you!’
At the mere sight of your face,
abode of knowledge and compassion,
the nine siddhas will desire your friendship.
Realised sages, with Suka
and Vamadevar at their head,
will express their admiration for you.
Is it easy to tell of the greatness of you,
before whom both heaven and earth
come to offer their worship?

Mantra Guru! Yoga Tantra Guru!
Mauna Guru, sprung from Tirumular’s ancestral line!

After reciting the verse, Bhagavan concluded by saying, The Guru’s grace is extraordinary.

Having been refused permission to follow Mauna Guru wherever he went, Thayumanavar continued to serve at the royal court. After some time, though, the prince, who was a pious man himself, noticed the depth of Thayumanavar’s devotion and offered to release him from his service. When Thayumanavar told the prince that he just wanted to spend his life in meditation, the prince accepted his resignation and gave him a small house on the banks of the River Kaveri where he could meditate undisturbed. The prince, who had recognised his holiness, visited him regularly and often brought him gifts.

In 1731 the prince, who apparently was not a very able ruler, died soon after losing a major battle to an army that had attempted to invade part of his territory. His widow, Rani Meenakshi, took over the running of the kingdom. She came to Thayumanavar for advice on how to run the country’s affairs, and for some time he had to go back to his former job as a royal advisor. However, in an unexpected turn of events, Meenakshi fell in love with him and started to make amorous advances. Thayumanavar decided that the only way to escape her sexual demands would be to flee to a place that was beyond her jurisdiction. With the help of Arulayya, one of

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his devotees, he escaped, disguised as a soldier, and eventually moved to Ramanathapuram, where the local Raja welcomed him and arranged for him to stay in a quiet place where his meditations would not be disturbed. For some time he lived a very ascetic life there.

Rani Meenakshi ran her kingdom very badly. In 1736 her country was overrun by various invaders and she ended up committing suicide by drinking poison. Siva Chidambaram, Thayumanavar's elder brother, came in person to tell Thayumanavar that it was safe for him to return home, if he wanted to, since there was no longer any danger of royal revenge. He went back to his ancestral home where he was treated with great reverence by both his family and his community. However, a surprise was in store for him. His family wanted him to marry, and they were backed up by Mauna Guru who told Thayumanavar that it was his destiny to get married and have a child. In obedience to his Guru's wishes, he married a girl called Mattuvarkuzhali and they eventually had a son whom they named Kanakasabhapati. The marriage did not last long because Mattuvarkuzhali died soon afterwards, leaving Thayumanavar with the responsibility of bringing up a child.

Around this time Mauna Guru visited him again to give him darshan and instructions, one of which was to make a pilgrimage to Chidambaram. During their meeting Thayumanavar went into a deep samadhi that lasted for several days. When he returned to his normal consciousness, he realised that he could no longer fulfil his duties as a householder and a father. He handed over the care of his son to his older brother and left for Chidambaram.

Thayumanavar spent about two months in Chidambaram, mostly immersed in a deep samadhi state. He then embarked on a pilgrimage that took him to several of the sacred places in Tamil Nadu, including Tiruvannamalai, Kanchipuram, Tiruvarur, Madurai and Tiruvotriyur. His final destination was Rameswaram at the southern tip of India. Shortly after his arrival there he made a very public appeal in the temple for God to intervene and end a drought that had severely afflicted that part of the country. An immediate and torrential downpour filled all the tanks and wells. Thayumanavar, who generally shunned publicity as much as possible, found himself being carried in triumph through the streets of Ramanathapuram on a palanquin. He was feted by the local king, the Raja of Ramnad, and even offered a new job as a royal advisor.

Thayumanavar rejected all the royal honours and spent the remainder of his brief life in a small hut, meditating and composing the songs that were to make him famous. His two principal disciples, Arulayya and Kodikkarai Jnani, wrote down the poems and began to sing them in public. They were immediately popular and spread widely even during Thayumanavar's lifetime.

In January 1742 he withdrew into his hut and left the following message pinned to the outside of the door:

Dear friends, withdraw the mind from the senses and fix it in meditation. Control the thought-current. Find out the thought-centre and fix yourself there. Then you will be conscious of the divine Self; you will see it dancing in ecstasy. Live in that delight. That delight-consciousness is the God in you. He is in every heart. You need not go anywhere to find Him. Find your own core and feel Him there. Peace, bliss, felicity, health—everything is in you. Trust in the divine in you. Entrust yourself to His Grace. Be as you are. Off with past impressions! He who lives from within an ingathered soul is a real sage, even though he may be a householder. He who allows his mind to wander with the senses is an ignoramus, though he is learned. See as a witness, without the burden of seeing. See the world just as you see a drama. See without attachment. Look within. Look at the inner light unshaken by mental impressions. Then, floods of conscious bliss shall come pouring in and around you from all directions. This is the supreme Knowledge; realise! Aum Aum!

This was his final message. When Arulayya went in he found that Thayumanavar had left his body. He was given a royal funeral by the local raja, and his songs were sung as his body was interred.

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22 The Silent Sage, by Dr B. Natarajan, pub. The Himalayan Academy, 1978.
the deity room and prayed that through His grace I may get Realization in this very life and, with that, freedom from birth and death. Immediately, I heard a voice: “Find out ‘who is it that wants realization’ and you will get realization.” I looked up and was surprised to see Bhagawatji standing next to me and reading aloud from a book in his hand. I asked him why he was reading at this time. He said “I saw you praying to Bhagavan for a long time, and you were getting late to go to the airport, so I opened this book at random and read His answers to a question put by a devotee long ago.” When I explained to him what my prayer to Bhagavan had been, everyone around was pleasantly surprised at the simple and direct way His grace had manifested in response to my plea.

**Bhagavan’s Grace**

Through Bhagavan’s grace, my professional and personal life was a complete success in every way I could imagine. I did not struggle through tremendous adversity like many of my friends did. I just surrendered to Him and practiced self-enquiry as often as I could, even in the middle of a busy professional life. I also chanted as often as possible, Arunachala Siva—the Bridal Garland of Letters or *Akshara Mana Malai* addressed by Bhagavan on our behalf to Siva as Himself. May the love of Bhagavan engulf the entire world and bring peace and prosperity. Arunachala Siva!

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**Bhagavan and Thayumanavar**

**Part Two**

Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramaniam & David Godman

In part one we gave a summary of Thayumanavar’s life and included translations of many of his verses that Bhagavan selected for the ashram parayana. In this second instalment we give more translations of his verses that Bhagavan referred to while he was responding to devotees’ questions.

**The state of the Self**

This first section begins with a discussion that centred on experiences Tennyson, the famous 19th century English poet, induced in himself:

In continuation of yesterday’s conversation about Tennyson, the relevant passage was found in a footnote to the English translation of *Upadesa Saram*. It was not in a poem but in a letter to B. P. Blood. Bhagavan asked me to read it out, so I

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did: ‘...a kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being: and this is not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.’

Bhagavan said: ‘That state is called abidance in the Self. It is described in a number of songs.’

He took up Thayumanavar and it opened at the very page he was looking for...

Mauna Guru, you who declared:
‘The state in which there is neither merging nor separation, no pairs of opposites, no expansion or contraction, no qualities, no coming or going, that leaves no lasting trace; that is free of the three defilements; that cannot be conceived in terms of having a top, bottom or sides; that in which there is neither bindu nor natham, and in which the five elements, variously constituted, do not exist; that in which the knower and his knowledge are not; that which is without decay; that which, moreover, is not one and not two, and is without voice and without mind; that which is free, even, of the ecstatic seeking,

wherein [the devotee] tastes with his lips, and drinks from the ocean of bliss that is the eternally enduring supreme and all-pervading reality – that is the enduring state.’

Siddhanta Mukti’s Primal Lord!
Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri!
Guru, you who are pure consciousness’s form!

Bhagavan quoted two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion, but they are not really expressions of what the Self is like. They are, instead, pleas from a disciple who wants to attain this state. Bhagavan mentioned them because he said that they both contained references or allusions to sahaja nishta, the natural state of abidance in the Self.

Reality, pervading everywhere!
Like a supplicant who seeks the favour of a benefactor, begging him, in a manner free of all reproach, to show compassion and grant his petition [I apply to You]. Hear my plea! O Transcendent Supreme! Listen to the petition of one whose heart is of wood and show pity.
[My plea is] to dwell in mauna in the fullness of your ethereal grace, the state of sahaja nishta.

...Well indeed does your divine mind know how my heart melted in tender love, how I languished,

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\[1\] *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

\[2\] *Chinmayanandaguru*, verse 8. The last three lines, detached from the main verse, are the refrain. Siragiri is the hill at Tiruchirapalli. *Bindu* and *natham*, which are mentioned in the middle of the verse, are Saiva Siddhanta terms that denote the place or point from where the universe emerges and evolves.

\[3\] *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

\[4\] *Asaienum*, verse 2.
hoping that I might clearly apprehend this state.
If I try to abide in this state for a while,
then my ignorance, a foe posing as a friend,
comes and makes my mind its home.
Shall defiling maya and karma return again?
Shall births, in unbroken succession, assault me?
These thoughts fill my mind.
Lend me the sword of true steadfastness [sraddha],
give me the strength of true jnana
so that my bondage is abolished;
guard me, and grant me your grace!
Consummate perfection of bliss,
whose abundant fullness reigns,
without exception, everywhere I look!5

In the next dialogue Bhagavan is questioned about turiya, the
underlying substratum of the Self in which the three states of waking,
dreaming and sleep appear and disappear. He answered the query
about these states and concluded with a brief quotation from
Thayumanavar:

**Question:** How are the three states of consciousness inferior
in degree of reality to the fourth? What is the actual relation
between these three and the fourth?
**Bhagavan:** There is only one state, that of consciousness or
awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream and
sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will
always exist. The ‘I’ or existence that alone persists in all the
three states is real. The other three are not real and so it is not
possible to say that they have such and such a degree of reality.
We may roughly put it like this. Existence or consciousness is
the only reality. Consciousness plus waking we call waking.
Consciousness plus sleep we call sleep. Consciousness plus
dream, we call dream. Consciousness is the screen on which
all the pictures come and go. The screen is real, the pictures
are mere shadows on it. Because by long habit we have been
regarding these three states as real, we call the state of mere
awareness or consciousness as the fourth. There is, however,
no fourth state, but only one state.

In this connection Bhagavan quoted verse 386 of ‘Paraparakkanni’ of Thayumanavar and said that this so-called
fourth state is described as waking sleep or sleep in waking –
meaning asleep to the world and awake in the Self.6

O Supreme of Supremes!
To remain,
free of sleep,
behind thought’s corruption,
is this the pure state of grace?
Pray, speak!7

In the final verse in this section Thayumanavar describes the
moment of Self-realisation and some of the experiences that stem
from it. Arthur Osborne wrote that this was a verse that Bhagavan
particularly liked,8 but there are no recorded instances of Bhagavan
quoting this verse in his replies to devotees.

When overpowered by the vast expanse
that has neither beginning, middle nor end,
the truth of non-dual bliss will arise in the mind.
Our entire clan will be redeemed.
Nothing will be lacking.
All our undertakings will prosper.

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5 ‘Paripurananandam’, verse 5. **Maya** and karma, mentioned in the middle of
the verse, are, according to Saiva Siddhanta, two of the three impurities of the
individual self. The third is anava, the ego.

6 *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.
7 *Paraparakkanni*, verse 386.
There will be sporting in the company of those wise ones who, like sunrise at the break of day, have known the dawn of grace, where there is neither abundance nor lack. Our nature will become such that like babies, madmen or ghouls, we should not rejoice, though offered heaven and earth in their entirety.  

The mocking comments of the mind

... [Khanna] handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which he had written something. After reading it Bhagavan said, ‘It is a complaint. He says, “I have been coming to you and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet and I find no improvement at all in my condition. My vasanas are as strong as ever. When I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask what good my stay here has done me.”’

Then, turning to Khanna, Bhagavan said, ‘Why distress your mind by thinking that jnana has not come or that the vasanas have not disappeared? Don’t give room for thoughts. In the last stanza of ‘Sukavari’ in Thayumanavar the saint says much the same as is written on this paper.’

And Bhagavan made me read the stanza and translate it into English for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. It goes: ‘The mind mocks me, and though I tell you thousand times, you are indifferent, so how am I to attain peace and bliss?’

The translation recorded by Devaraja Mudaliar in Day by Day with Bhagavan comes from the second part of the verse. G. V. Subbaramayya has noted that Bhagavan explained the first half of the verse in the late 1930s, although neither the circumstances nor the explanation itself is given.

This particular verse seems to have been one that particularly interested Bhagavan for Devaraja Mudaliar has reported: ‘On one occasion stanzas 8 to 11 of ‘Mandalattin’ and twelve of ‘Sukavari’ [the verse just referred to] were elaborately explained by Bhagavan and were translated into English by me for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. These stanzas used to be frequently referred to by Bhagavan.’

In the first half of the ‘Sukavari’ verse the mind of Thayumanavar is complaining to its jiva, its spirit or soul, about the division that has sprung up between them.

‘Like yourself [the jiva] who are spirit, have not I, the mind, and my friend, the prana, always dwelt within the body? Long ago someone or other separated us, designating us as “insentient” and yourself as “sentient”. From the day you heard that, right up to the present day, you have unjustly erected a barrier between us and suppressed us, exercising your oppressive rule. What a great task you have accomplished, right before our eyes!’

When my foolish mind thus grossly abuses me, my heart is scorched and blackened, like beeswax exposed to a leaping flame! Can this be right and proper? Though I have called upon You [God] ten thousand times, you have not taken pity on me, and bestowed your grace. Henceforth, how may happiness ever come to me? Speak!

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9 ‘Ninaivonru’, verse 7.
10 Day by Day with Bhagavan, 26th June, 1946. In the same work it is stated that Bhagavan also explained this verse to Dr Srinivasa Rao on 22nd November 1945, but the explanation itself was not recorded.

Supreme Godhead,
pure and devoid of all attributes!
Supernal Light! Ocean of bliss!  

On the occasion that Devaraja Mudaliar read out and translated the ‘Sukavari’ verse for Khanna’s benefit, there was a further dialogue on this subject, after which Bhagavan quoted three more Thayumanavar verses, the same ones that Mudaliar said Bhagavan had once given a lengthy explanation on:

Then I [Devaraja Mudaliar] said to Khanna: ‘You are not the only one who complains to Bhagavan like this. I have more than once complained in the same way, and I still do, for I find no improvement in myself.’

Khanna replied: ‘It is not only that I find no improvement but I think I have grown worse. The vasanas are stronger now. I can’t understand it.’

Bhagavan again quoted the last three stanzas of ‘Mandalattin’ of Thayumanavar, where the mind is coaxed as the most generous and disinterested of givers, to go back to its birthplace or source and thus give the devotee peace and bliss, and he asked me to read out a translation that I had once made.

Mind, you who evolve from maya
as jewels are wrought from gold!
If you are freed from your defects
so that blissful samadhi is attained
by meditating on [reality] within oneself
as oneself, by melting within,
and by making [you] fall away,
I shall attain redemption.
No one is as kind to me as you are – no one.

When I ponder on this, you [the mind] are equal to the grace of God.

Amongst those who have taken on bodies to experience [the world],
be they Brahma, or any of the gods,
it is true, is it not, that for any of them to reject you [the mind],
and exist without you, is impossible, quite impossible.
Without you, can anything be, in this world or the next?
To vainly label you ‘unreal’ is unjust.
So I shall praise you as ‘real’ also.
In order that my wretched state may be ended, you must return to the glorious land of your birth.

You who have been my companion for many a day, were you to lie dead through the enquiry [vichara] that has separated you from me, I should revere that ground with perfect devotion. Through the mauna Guru who has ruled me I will be free from ‘I’ and ‘mine’, becoming one with his grace. The eight siddhis, liberation itself, which is a vision delightful to behold, shall be mine upon the earth. Through you my anxieties shall be ended.

All my interminable wrangling with birth will end in this very birth. For me, the state of jivanmukti, which is difficult for anyone to experience, will arise.

Oh, Sir [mind]! Will even a cloud
or a grove of karpaka trees [wish-fulfilling trees]
suffice as a comparison to you?
Can your greatness be described
in the seven worlds, beginning with earth?\(^\text{15}\)

**Siddhis, yoga, and religious harmony**

Though Thayumanavar mentioned in the last verse but one that siddhis would come automatically when his mind had, through the grace of his Guru, ceased to function, he generally disapproved of attempts to pursue such powers. Bhagavan mentioned this in the following reply:

One man said that a siddha of Kumbakonam claimed to overcome the defects in Sankara’s system which deals only with transcendentalism and not the work-a-day life. One must be able to exercise super-human powers in ordinary life, that is to say, one must be a siddha in order to be perfect.

Sri Bhagavan pointed out a stanza in Thayumanavar which condemns all siddhis.\(^\text{16}\)

In the English version of *Talks* the Thayumanavar verse is not specified, but in the Tamil edition, the translator and editor, Viswanatha Swami, states that the following verse is the one that Bhagavan was referring to:

To tame a rutting elephant, who has snapped his tethering-post, and to walk him under our control – that is possible.
To muzzle a bear, or a fierce tiger – that is possible.
To ride upon the back of the incomparable lion – that is possible.
To charm snakes, and make them dance – that is possible.
To put mercury into a furnace, transform the five base metals,
sell them, and live from the proceeds – that is possible.
To wander the earth, invisible to everyone else – that is possible.
To command the celestials in our own service – that is possible.
To remain forever young – that is possible.
To transmigrate into another physical body – that is possible.
To walk on water, or to sit amidst flames – that is possible.
To attain supernatural powers, that know no equal – that is possible.
But the ability to control the mind, and remain still, is very difficult indeed.
God, whose nature is consciousness, who as the reality, impossible to seek, took up his abode within my understanding! Refulgent light of bliss!\(^\text{17}\)

Thayumanavar did not merely disapprove of the pursuit of siddhis. His criticism extended to extreme ascetic practices, attempts to prolong the lifespan of the body, and methods which aimed to raise the kundalini to the sahasrara. In the following verse, which Devaraja Mudaliar said Bhagavan occasionally referred to, Thayumanavar asserts that none of these practices by themselves can lead to liberation.

Though we firmly stand upon devotion’s path, though we perform pradakshina of the broad earth’s nine divisions, though we bathe in the ocean, and in the rivers too, though we place ourselves between the rising flames without a thought of thirst or hunger, stopping up the gnawing pangs with water, air and fallen leaves, though we dwell in silence, retreat to lofty mountain caves, though we purify the ten channels which ever endure, though we contain within the sphere known as somavattam the inner fire, along with the vital air which rises from the root, tasting thus the nectar that no words can describe, though we practise the acquisition of powerful siddhis,

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\(^{15}\) ‘Mandalattin’, verses 8-11. The last four verses of ‘Mandalattin’ are given here since Mudaliar has already mentioned earlier in the article that Bhagavan once gave an extensive explanation of all four of them. See *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

\(^{16}\) *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1st January 1936, Talk 122.

\(^{17}\) ‘Tejomayanandam’, verse 8.
to prolong this mere trifle of a body through every aeon of time, other than through jnana can liberation be attained? Siddhanta Mukti’s Primal Lord! Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri! Guru, you who are pure consciousness’s form!

There are a few technical terms in this verse that may need to be explained:

1. The five fires (panchakkini) are those amidst which an ascetic performs tapas – four at the cardinal points, and the fifth being the sun.
2. The ten channels are the ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, along with seven lesser-known ones.
3. The somavattam, associated with the moon, is a circular area at the centre of the sahasrara chakra, located in the area of the crown of the skull. When the vital breath, originating in the muladhara or root chakra, combines with the kundalini energy, it rises through all the six chakras until it becomes contained and held in the seventh, the sahasrara chakra, the thousand-petalled lotus with the somavattam at its centre. At this point a nectar is released through the melting effect of the fiery energy. The yogi, in his state of absorption, is able to feed upon this nectar, and thus remain in this state for long periods. Bhagavan referred to this practice when he said: ‘The yoga marga speaks of the six centres, each of which must be reached by practice and transcended until one reaches the sahasrara where nectar is found and thus immortality.’

The key line in this verse is the last one in which Thayumanavar asserts, ‘other than through jnana can liberation be attained?’, a rhetorical question whose answer is clearly ‘no’. This conclusion and the preceding comments about the pointlessness of pursuing siddhis can both be found in a remarkably similar answer that Bhagavan gave out when he was asked about the relationship between enlightenment and the attainment of siddhis.

Only jnana obtained through enquiry can bestow Liberation. Supernatural powers are all illusory appearances created by the power of maya. Self-realization which is permanent is the only true accomplishment [siddhi]. Accomplishments which appear and disappear, being the effect of maya, cannot be real. They are accomplished with the object of enjoying fame, pleasures, etc. They come unsought to some persons through their karma. Know that union with Brahman is the attainment of the sum total of all the siddhis. This is also the state of Liberation [aikya mukti] known as union [sayujya].

Thayumanavar and Bhagavan were in agreement that yogic practices alone will not directly result in liberation. Bhagavan has pointed out in several places that its practices can result in bliss, siddhis, and even nirvikalpa samadhi, but he also maintained that it is not until the ‘I’ dies in the Heart that jnana, true liberation, occurs.

Though Bhagavan and Thayumanavar both pointed out the limitations of yogic practices, and though both were sharply critical of people who attempted to attain siddhis, they had a generally tolerant attitude to different religions and their various practices. They knew that they all ultimately resolved themselves into the state of mauna in which all such distinctions and differences were rendered invalid. The next quotation on this subject is from Bhagavan, and it is followed by a very similar statement from Thayumanavar.

The doctrines of all religions contradict each other. They wage war, collide with each other, and finally die.

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18 ‘Chinmayanandaguru’, verse 11. Devaraja Mudaliar stated in My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, p. 55, that Bhagavan occasionally referred to this verse.

19 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 398.

20 Spiritual Instruction, chapter four, answer ten.

21 See Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talks 398 and 474 where Bhagavan expresses his views on these yogic practices in great detail.
On this battlefield all the religions retreat defeated when they stand before mauna, which abides beneficently, sustaining them all.

The rare and wonderful power of mauna is that it remains without enmity towards any of the religions.

The many different religions are appropriate to the maturity of each individual, and all of them are acceptable to reality.

Abandoning vain disputation, which only deludes and torments the mind, accept the doctrine of the mauna religion, which always remains undisturbed.22

Shining Supreme!
If we scrutinize all the religions that look so different, we find no contradiction in their purpose. They are all your sport. Just as all rivers discharge into the sea, they all end in the ocean of mauna.23

The two major competing systems of religious and philosophical thought in South India have, for several centuries, been Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta. The proponents of each school have been criticising the other in their writings for much of the last thousand years. Bhagavan tended to use the language and philosophical structures of Vedanta when he answered visitors’ questions whereas Thayumanavar, in his poems, showed a strong Saiva Siddhanta influence. However, neither was dogmatic about his system since they both knew, from direct experience, that in the experience of the Self all philosophical divisions and distinctions are dissolved. As Thayumanavar wrote:

Since my own actions are forever your own actions, and since the ‘I’-nature does not exist apart from you, I am not different from you.
This is the state in which Vedanta and Siddhanta are harmonised.24

Bhagavan’s own synthesis of the two apparently contradictory philosophies can be found in the following two replies:

**Question:** What is the end of devotion [bhakti] and the path of Siddhanta [i.e., Saiva Siddhanta]?

**Bhagavan:** It is to learn the truth that all one’s actions performed with unselfish devotion, with the aid of the three purified instruments [body, speech and mind], in the capacity of the servant of the Lord, become the Lord’s actions, and to stand forth free from the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. This is also the truth of what the Saiva Siddhantins call para-bhakti [supreme devotion] or living in the service of God [inai pani nittral].

**Question:** What is the end of the path of knowledge [jnana] or Vedanta?

**Bhagavan:** It is to know the truth that the ‘I’ does not exist separately from the Lord [Iswara] and to be free from the feeling of being the doer [kartrtva, abamkara].25

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22 Padamalai, ‘Religions and Religious Knowledge’ chapter, verses 1-5.

23 ‘Kallalin’, verse 25. The verse appears in full in Day by Day with Bhagavan, 21st November, 1945, and was briefly mentioned in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 594.


25 Spiritual Instruction, chapter one, questions nine and ten.
Death and Liberation

**Question:** Is liberation to be achieved before the dissolution of the body or can it be had after death?

**Bhagavan:** Is there death for you? For whom is death? The body which dies, were you aware of it, did you have it, during sleep? The body was not, when you slept. But you existed even then. When you awoke, you got the body and even in the waking state you exist. You existed both in sleep and in waking. But the body did not exist in sleep and exists only in waking. That which does not exist always, but exists at one time and not at another, cannot be real. You exist always and you alone are therefore real.
It is worth noting that Devaraja Mudaliar noted in his reminiscences\(^3\) that Bhagavan once quoted him a portion of this same verse ("This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputation will ensue.") Mudaliar understood this to mean that Bhagavan was occasionally circumspect about giving out some aspects of his teaching to people who were not ready for them because to do so would merely provoke pointless arguments.

The real ‘I’ and the spurious ‘I’

There was once a discussion in the hall about the true meaning of verse ten of Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham which states:

The body is like an earthen pot, inert. Because it has no consciousness of ‘I’, and because daily in bodiless sleep we touch our real nature, the body is not ‘I’. Then who is this ‘I’? Where is this ‘I’? In the Heart Cave of those that question thus, there shines forth as ‘I’, Himself, the Lord Siva of Arunachala.\(^4\)

Dr Srinivasa Rao asked whether [this stanza] does not teach us to affirm soham [repeating ‘I am He’ as a spiritual practice]. Bhagavan explained as follows.

It is said that the whole Vedanta can be compressed into the four words, deham [the body], naham [not I], koham [Who am I?], soham [I am He]. This stanza says the same. In the first two lines it is explained why deham is naham, i.e., why the body is not ‘I’. The next two lines say, if one enquires ko aham, i.e., Who am I?, i.e., if one enquires whence this springs and realises it, then in the heart of such a one the omnipresent God Arunachala will shine as ‘I’, as sa aham or soham: i.e., he will know “That I am,” i.e., “That is ‘I’.”

In this connection Bhagavan also quoted two stanzas, one from Thayumanavar and the other from Nammalvar, the gist of both of which is: “Though I have been thinking I was a separate entity and

\(^1\) Day by Day with Bhagavan, 9th March 1946.
\(^2\) ‘Karunakarakkadavul’, verse 7.
\(^3\) My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, p. 91.
\(^4\) The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, p. 124.
Yet, this vileness is unjust, so unjust.
Who is there to whom I might plead my cause?

Supreme One, whose form is bliss,
whose unique fullness encompasses
this universe and that which lies beyond.

Mauna and the thought-free state

Mr Nanavati asked Bhagavan, ‘What is the heart referred to in the verse in Upadesa Saram where it is said, ‘Abiding in the heart is the best karma, yoga, bhakti and jnana?’

Bhagavan: That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the heart referred to.

Nanavati: How can we conceive such a heart?

Bhagavan: Why should you conceive of anything? You have only to see wherefrom the ‘I’ springs.

Nanavati: I suppose mere mauna in speech is no good; but we must have mauna of the mind.

Bhagavan: Of course. If we have real mauna, that state in which the mind is merged into its source and has no more separate existence, then all other kinds of mauna will come of their own accord, i.e., mauna of words, of action and of the mind or chitta.

Bhagavan also quoted in this connection the following from Thayumanavar:

O Supreme of Supremes!
If the pure silence [suddha mauna] arises within me,
my mind will be silence,
my actions and words, all
will be silence.

5 Day by Day with Bhagavan, 23rd January, 1946.
6 ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 225.
7 Day by Day with Bhagavan, 24th January, 1946.
9 Day by Day with Bhagavan, 29th April 1946.
10 ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 276.
The subject of silence and the thought-free state came up again after Bhagavan had cited, with great approval, a passage by Gandhi in which the latter had given a description of his own experience of this state:

Sri Bhagavan referred to the following passage of Gandhiji in the *Harijan* of the 11th instant:

‘How mysterious are the ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance.

‘The fact is, it takes no effort to stop thinking. The thoughts do not come. Indeed, there is no vacuum – but I mean to say that there is no thought about the mission.’

Sri Bhagavan remarked how true the words were and emphasised each statement in the extract. Then he cited Thayumanavar in support of the state which is free from thoughts:

The state in which you are not, that is *nishta* [Self-abidance].
But, even in that state, do you not remain?
You whose mouth is silent, do not be perplexed!
Although [in that state] you are gone, you are no longer there, yet you did not go.
You are eternally present.
Do not suffer in vain.
Experience bliss all the time!  

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14 *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 646.
15 ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 53. The last line may also be translated as ‘You can have bliss. Come!’ Bhagavan mentioned two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion (‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 52 and ‘Payappuli’ verse 36) but since they feature elsewhere in this article, they are not repeated here.
Two days after Bhagavan had cited Thayumanavar to illustrate Gandhi’s thought-free experiences, a visitor returned to the subject:

Devotee: Is not what Gandhi describes the state in which thoughts themselves become foreign?
Bhagavan: Yes, it is only after the rise of the ‘I’-thought that all other thoughts arise. The world is seen after you have felt ‘I am’. The ‘I’-thought and all other thoughts had vanished for him.
Devotee: Then the body sense must be absent in that state.
Bhagavan: The body sense is also a thought whereas he describes the state in which ‘thoughts do not come’.
Devotee: He also says, ‘It takes no effort to stop thinking’.
Bhagavan: Of course no effort is necessary to stop thoughts whereas one is necessary for bringing about thoughts.
Devotee: We are trying to stop thoughts. Gandhiji also says that thought is an obstacle to God’s guidance. So it is the natural state. Though natural, yet how difficult to realise. They say that sadhanas are necessary and also that they are obstacles. We get confused.
Bhagavan: Sadhanas are needed so long as one has not realised it. They are for putting an end to obstacles. Finally there comes a stage when a person feels helpless notwithstanding the sadhanas. He is unable to pursue the much-cherished sadhana also. It is then that God’s power is realised. The Self reveals itself.
Devotee: If the state is natural, why does it not overcome the unnatural phases and assert itself over the rest?
Bhagavan: Is there anything besides that? Does anyone see anything besides the Self? One is always aware of the Self. So it is always itself.\(^\text{16}\)