

# Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

## Part One

ROBERT BUTLER,  
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN &  
DAVID GODMAN

THAYUMANAVAR 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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

Robert Butler is a former Ramanasramam librarian who now works in the UK. In recent years he has translated three of Muruganar's works into English. *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*, *Padamalai* and *Ramana Puranam*.

Bhagavan.

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.<sup>2</sup>

... 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-Chidambara 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1945, afternoon session.

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 Vedapureswarar 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,

<sup>3</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 45-6, 1992 ed. The translation of the 'Akarabuvanam-Chidambara 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 Thayumanavar 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!<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>4</sup> 'Paraparakkanni', verse 156.

<sup>5</sup> *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 220-1.

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).<sup>6</sup>

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!<sup>7</sup>

In a recent issue of *The Mountain Path*<sup>8</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> '*Summa iru*' becomes one word in written Tamil by the addition of a 'v' as a euphonic connection: '*summaviru*'. The same process operates in Tiruvannamalai where the 'v' connects a word that ends with the letter 'u' and a word that begins with an 'a'.

<sup>7</sup> *Padamalai*, 'Padam's Grace Towards Muruganar', vv. 168, 170, p. 354.

<sup>8</sup> *The Mountain Path*, Aradhana issue, 2004, pp. 75-83.



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.<sup>9</sup>

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!<sup>10</sup>

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!<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1946.

<sup>10</sup> 'Udal Poyyuravu', verse 5.

<sup>11</sup> 'Udal Poyyuravu', verse 52

<sup>12</sup> '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.<sup>13</sup>

During Bhagavan’s lifetime Tamil poetic works were chanted in his presence everyday. Initially, at Skandashram, only *Aksharamanamalai* 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,

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

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.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

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,

<sup>14</sup> ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’, vv. 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> *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.<sup>16</sup>  
 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.’<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> This could also be translated as ‘neither *jiva* nor Iswara appears’.

<sup>17</sup> This can also be translated as ‘This is the state of the Self’.

<sup>18</sup> ‘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.'<sup>19</sup>

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 his 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,

<sup>19</sup> *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 26.

The verse that follows was not specifically mentioned by Bhagavan. We have inserted it here because it closely resembles the contents of the verse by another author that Bhagavan quoted immediately after mentioning Thayumanavar. That verse said: 'O Gurudeva, your look falling upon it, a tiger becomes gentle like a goat, a snake like a squirrel, and a bad man becomes a good man...'

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!<sup>20</sup>

After reciting the verse, Bhagavan concluded by saying, 'The Guru's grace is extraordinary'.<sup>21</sup>

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

<sup>20</sup> 'Maunaguru Vanakkam', verse 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 26.

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!*<sup>22</sup>

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. ▲

<sup>22</sup> *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! ▲

# Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

## Part Two

ROBERT BUTLER,  
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN &  
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

Robert Butler worked in the ashram in the 1980s. He now lives in the UK. He is proficient in classical Tamil and has translated many texts. In recent years he has translated three of Muruganar’s works into English: *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*, *Padamalai* and *Ramana Puranam*.

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...<sup>1</sup>

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!<sup>2</sup>

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 nishtha*, the natural state of abidance in the Self.<sup>3</sup>

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 nishtha*.<sup>4</sup>

...Well indeed does your divine mind know

how my heart melted in tender love,

how I languished,

<sup>2</sup> ‘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.

<sup>3</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Asaienum’, verse 2.

<sup>1</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

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!<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

O Supreme of Supremes!  
 To remain,  
 free of sleep,  
 beyond thought's corruption,  
 is this the pure state of grace?  
 Pray, speak!<sup>7</sup>

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,<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> '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.

<sup>6</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.

<sup>7</sup> 'Paraparakkanni', verse 386.

<sup>8</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 61, B.I. Publications, 1979.

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.<sup>9</sup>

### 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 ten thousand times, you are indifferent, so how am I to attain peace and bliss?'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 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.'<sup>12</sup>

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!

<sup>9</sup> 'Ninaivonru', verse 7.

<sup>10</sup> *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.

<sup>11</sup> *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1967 ed., p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

Supreme Godhead,  
 pure and devoid of all attributes!  
 Supernal Light! Ocean of bliss!<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> ‘Sukavari’, verse 12, followed by three lines of the refrain.

<sup>14</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 26th June, 1946. The translation that Mudaliar made no longer exists. What follows is a translation by the authors of this article.

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?<sup>15</sup>

### ***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*.<sup>16</sup>

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!<sup>17</sup>

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*,

<sup>15</sup> '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.

<sup>16</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1st January 1936, Talk 122.

<sup>17</sup> '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!<sup>18</sup>

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.'<sup>19</sup>

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*].<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.

<sup>18</sup> 'Chinmayanandaguru', verse 11. Devaraja Mudaliar stated in *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 55, that Bhagavan occasionally referred to this verse.

<sup>19</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 398.

<sup>20</sup> *Spiritual Instruction*, chapter four, answer ten.

<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

Shining Supreme!

If we scrutinise 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*.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

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 [*irai pani nitral*].

**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, ahamkara*].<sup>25</sup> ▲

<sup>22</sup> *Padamalai*, 'Religions and Religious Knowledge' chapter, verses 1-5.

<sup>23</sup> '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.

<sup>24</sup> 'Paripurananandam', verse 5. *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

<sup>25</sup> *Spiritual Instruction*, chapter one, questions nine and ten.



# Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

## Part Three

ROBERT BUTLER,  
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN &  
DAVID GODMAN

*In the two previous parts of this series we summarised Thayumanavar's life and gave new translations of his verses that Bhagavan had either selected or used in his replies to visitors. In this third and concluding part we give more translations of Thayumanavar's verses that were cited by Bhagavan in conversations with visitors on topics such as death, enlightenment, and the nature of the 'I' and the mind. The translators' comments are in italics.*

### 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.

Liberation is another name for you. It is always here and now with you. It has not to be won or reached hereafter or somewhere. Christ has said, 'The Kingdom of God is within you,' here and now. You have no death.<sup>1</sup>

*Bhagavan then cited some lines from Thayumanavar to illustrate his theme:*

... those whose state of *nishtha* [Self-abidance] is permanent will not even entertain the thought that death exists. This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputations will ensue. Are not the divine-natured Markandeya and Suka, and the rest of the [great] sages immortals, their minds transcended?

Divine One, to whom

Indra and all the *devas*, Brahma and all the gods, sages learned in the *Rig* and other *Vedas*, the countless leaders of the celestial hosts, the nine principal *siddhas* the Sun, the Moon and the rest of the planets, the *gandharvas*, *kinnaras* and all the rest, join their palms together in worship!

My Lord, compassion's home, who dance your dance beyond the reach of thought, in consciousness's Hall!<sup>2</sup>

*Markandeya and Suka are deemed to be immortals, as are all the other sages who have permanently transcended the mind. Some of the commentators on this verse say that all the other beings who are listed after Markandeya and Suka are not immortal, and therefore have to continue to pay obeisance to forms of the divine.*

<sup>1</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9th March 1946.

<sup>2</sup> 'Karunakarakkadavul', verse 7.

*It is worth noting that Devaraja Mudaliar noted in his reminiscences<sup>3</sup> 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 disputations 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.<sup>4</sup>

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' or *na aham*. 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"'.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 124.

talking of “I” and “mine”, when I began to enquire about this “I”, I found *you* alone exist.’<sup>5</sup>

*This is the Thayumanavar verse:*

O Supreme of Supremes!  
Searching without searching who this ‘I’ was,  
soon I found You alone  
standing as the heaven of bliss,  
You alone, blessed Lord.<sup>6</sup>

*The following morning<sup>7</sup> Bhagavan showed Devaraja Mudaliar the written texts of both these verses, and he also added the following Thayumanavar verse which, in its middle portion, expounds the same theme:*

Though you dwell as space and the other elements,  
as all the worlds in their tens of millions,  
as the mountains and the encircling ocean,  
as the moon, and sun, and all else that is,  
and as the flood of heaven’s grace;  
and though, as I stand here as ‘I’,  
you dwell united with myself,  
still there is no cessation of this ‘I’.  
And since I go blabbering ‘I’, ‘I’,  
undergoing countless changes,  
ignorant in spite of knowing all this,  
will it be easy to overcome the power of destiny?  
Is there any means of awakening one,  
who even before the day has ended,  
remains, feigning sleep, his eyes tightly closed?  
What, then, is the way that may be taught?

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!<sup>8</sup>

### *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:*<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23rd January, 1946.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 225.

<sup>7</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 24th January, 1946.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Anandanaparam’, verse 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 29th April 1946.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 276.

*In Talks Bhagavan mentions that Thayumanavar mentions mauna in many places, but only defines it in one verse. The definition, given in Talks, is that 'Mauna is said to be that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego'.<sup>11</sup>*

*The specific verse is not given, but in the Tamil edition of Talks, Viswanatha Swami identifies it as 'Payappuli', verse 14:*

The unique source [*tan*], fullness [*purnam*],  
prevalled within, in my Heart  
so that the 'I' which deemed itself  
an independent entity  
bowed its head in shame.  
Conferring matchless bliss,  
consuming my whole consciousness  
and granting me the state of rapture,  
it nurtured in me the condition of *mauna*.  
This being so, what more is there to be said?

*This verse, a clear expression of the state that Thayumanavar finally reached, closely parallels the idea contained in Ulladu Narpadu, verse 30, in which Bhagavan describes how the individual 'I' subsides into its source, the Heart, leaving only the perfection of the Self:*

When the mind turns inwards seeking 'Who am I?' and merges in the Heart, then the 'I' hangs down his head in shame and the one 'I' appears as itself. Though it appears as 'I-I', it is not the ego. It is reality, perfection, the substance of the Self.<sup>12</sup>

*The similarities are so marked, it should come as no surprise that Bhagavan once commented that this was his favourite Thayumanavar verse.<sup>13</sup> It was included in the Tamil parayana at Ramanasramam, along with the nine verses from 'Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam' that have already been given.*

<sup>11</sup> Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 122.

<sup>12</sup> Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ulladu Narpadu verse 30, tr. K. Swaminathan.

<sup>13</sup> Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 122.

*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:<sup>14</sup>

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!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 646.

<sup>15</sup> '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.<sup>16</sup> ▲

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<sup>16</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 647.*