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Ramana Ashtottaram

19. Om Pitrupadanveshine namaha

Prostration to the one who seeks the Father's abode, the Father's presence.

From an early age Bhagavan was entranced by the thought of Arunachala. When an uncle returned from a pilgrimage that included a visit to Arunachala and related his experiences to the young Ramana, he was astonished that Arunachala was an actual place and not a myth in his mind. When the transcendent experience occurred at Madurai, Ramana's mind was absorbed with the Father who then drew him in a final act of union to the holy hill, Arunachala.

Withdrawing the mind from outward objects and seeking the Self within is seeking the Father's abode. "I go in search of my Father," wrote Bhagavan when he left Madurai. In Arunachala, Siva withdraws Sakti into Himself and stands as pure Being and Awareness. After reaching Arunachala Bhagavan 'does' nothing. His story is the story of his subsequent devotees.

20. Om Indumoulina pitrumate namaha.

Prostration to the son of the crescent-crowned God.

Chandrasekhara is an aspect of Siva. *Chandra* meaning moon reveals the *sekhara*, tower, the power of Siva. This aspect of Siva symbolises the beauty and strength of Siva. There is another meaning: it indicates the brilliance of the crown, that is, the light of the sahasrara. We can see this expressed in the halos round the heads of saintly or divine beings. Bhagavan's complete self-realisation is thus expressed in traditional Hindu iconography.

21. Om Pituradesatah sona sailam praptaya namaha.

Prostration to He who reached Arunachala at his Father's bidding.

Bhagavan's parting letter says "at my Father's bidding". The journey to Arunachala, like the descent of grace, was divinely ordained; it was not due to any human effort.

EDITORIAL

Sanatana Dharma

THE term Hinduism is a recent word of convenience used to indicate the land and people who live east of the Indus River. It is indicative of the Indian psyche that it accepted this classification with much the same ease with which it absorbed many elements of the Mughals and other Muslim invaders without in the main, losing its own intrinsic identity. In fact, Hinduism is probably the only major religion and culture to bear the full brunt of the extraordinary surge of Islam over the past thousand years and retain its own character.

The people who live from the snows of Kashmir to the shores of Kanya Kumari should however rather be recognized as adherents to an Indian way of life entitled the sanatana dharma. It is an important distinction and we should be aware of it as such. By knowing this we can better gauge and understand the roots of this principle and its relevance to us. Otherwise like the blind we grope at its enormous structure and make glib conclusions which can mislead us.

There is no exact English equivalent for the expression sanatana dharma. One approach could be the term *philosophia perennis* or perennial wisdom, but really we remain just as perplexed as if we

had stuck with the original Sanskrit. Both are technical expressions which demand a certain prior knowledge. What we are looking for contrary-wise is understanding. We do require facts but not at the expense of insight, for scholarship can obscure just as much as it can facilitate understanding.

The word dharma is fundamental to our understanding. It is not a fixed term but fluid and applicable to a wide range of conditions. Indeed, one could say that to understand dharma is to understand life itself. The root of the word is *dhri* which has the meaning of carrying, supporting or sustaining. Without this concept of stability we are doomed to endure a maze of rapidly altered states whose only constant is the one of confusion. This root word is almost identical with another one, *dhru* which means pole. It indicates the unchanging axis around which change occurs.¹

And sanatana? It implies duration and perpetuity. It has the quality of being indefinite. It cannot however be defined by a specific time and place. The term sanatana indicates that dharma applies equally to all beings and their states of manifestation. Again we see here the idea of permanence and stability.

But what is it that binds a Brahmin in Kashmir with one who lives in the very south of the country some thousand or more miles away among Tamils or Malayalis? When we consider the historical conditions of, say two thousand years ago, it is astonishing to find that aside from some local customs pertaining to food or dress, they have everything in common. One underlying language, Sanskrit; one ritual contained in the Vedas and one outlook which is liberation from the cycle of life and death in this material universe. If they were brought together they can communicate easily. How was this possible? How is it that over so many centuries this glue has held together so many disparate people, for the Bengalis distinct from the Gujarati, the Marathi from the Assamese? And today would the voice of Ramana Maharshi a south Indian born man inspire so many

¹ See R. Guenon, *Studies in Hinduism*, Chapter 11, Sanatana Dharma. Sophia Perennis, NY.2001

people of such a diversity unless it resonated with instantly recognisable truth. That is why his influence has spread not only throughout India but also amongst westerners and peoples even farther east such as from Japan and Korea.

One man, born in an obscure village, of upright but not influential or powerful parents, Ramana as his life progressed steadily assumed the status of a god among those who fell under the spell of his sagacity and compassion. Was he unique or was he a familiar product of this so-called sanatana dharma? If he could rise to such heights of recognition because of an undoubted integrity why not us? Like Ramana, do we too need to be born in obscurity and enjoy sports rather than academic life? Do we too need a superb memory that can carry a dreamer over the pitfalls of any exam system be it in the halls of academia or on the highways of becoming a 'success'?

The answer obviously is no. Each of us is unique and each has his or her own path to walk. Nobody can do it for us. Circumstances determine the terrain we must traverse to understand who we are. It is only by understanding this that there is an opportunity to transcend our limitations. Before we can fly we must confront the obstacles on the ground. It is only by being true to our path do we adhere to our *svadharma*. This is crucial to an understanding of what the sanatana dharma offers us, as a consolation in the face of anomalies in our personal and public life. And also as an alternative to the mindless, knee-jerk reactions we tend to indulge in when buffeted by the demands of the society within which we live.

Is there any criterion, method or medium by which we can judge our progress though life? Yes. It is called the sanatana dharma.

Some may think this ancient way an anachronism in our smart, modern day and age. It is all very well to have ideals but do they feed us? Do they fulfil our human desires? In short, according to commonly accepted current wisdom, we should 'wake up' and 'get real' and not indulge in a so-called fantasy.

The 'conventional' trend of thought can only sink us further into the 'set of values' which pervades our present confused generation. If we further dare to ask what is the point of this hurried

and anxious scramble for wealth, status and security? We do it because others do it and we feel accepted. We are reassured that we are on the right track. But are we? The fact that so many people are searching for an alternative set of values should tell us something.

That being the case what does the realization of a young man in Madurai in 1896 have to do with the focus of our investigation into the sanatana dharma? What did he discover and what did he realize which totally and irreparably transformed his life and in consequence, ours? What happened to Ramana was not that he discovered something but more to the point, he was engulfed by the power of a living principle. Like the proverbial moth naturally attracted to light or like the astonishing migratory geese who unerringly track the magnetic lines of the two polar caps, Ramana was overwhelmed by the surge of his enquiry. He was at one moment sucked out of the skin of his narrow physical world and at the same time, stripped of all illusion and transformed into a complete human being. This was made possible by an unwavering adherence to the single, unifying and universal life force, the sanatana dharma.

Do we dare ask the same question as he did? Are we ready to take that risk and give up the beliefs of our small restless world? What is our *svadharmā*? ▲

A Scientist Becomes a Vedantin

The Effect of Bhagavan's Darshan

This article, written anonymously in Tamil by a scientist, was received by Ramanasramam on 15th April, 1946. It remained unpublished until it appeared in Tamil in the 1996 Advent Centenary Souvenir. This first English translation by T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman, is a slightly abridged version of the original article.

A young man who was studying in a university was avidly learning modern western science. He frequently listened to lectures by science professors such as Sir C. V. Raman; he had a strong desire to be like them and get deeply involved in scientific research; he wanted to discover the truth of the material that constituted the world.

When his B.Sc. examinations were over, he should have gone directly to his parents' place for the summer holidays. This time, though, having received some money as a refund from his hostel, he decided that he would go home in a roundabout way, using the extra cash to visit somewhere else on the way. At that moment Tiruvannamalai came into his mind. His father had been a frequent visitor to Ramanasramam during this period, and there were other attractions as well: there was an ancient temple with a famous history;

there was the mountain; and there was the ashram of a rishi. The thought that he should see what a rishi's ashram was like arose in him. So, the night that his last examination was completed, he started his journey to Ramanasramam, and reached there the following morning.

He received the Maharshi's darshan as soon as he arrived. He had not seen rishis before, except in films, and the Maharshi was unlike any of the cinematic rishis he had seen. Though he wore only a loincloth, the Maharshi appeared to be an ordinary person. The young man prostrated to the Maharshi and sat in front of him in the hall. The Maharshi was just sitting silently, and not even a whisper came from those who were sitting near him. Some time passed in this way, but the young man could not sit still for long without speaking. However, he did not know what to talk about with the Maharshi. Fortunately for him, there were books near the Maharshi. He picked one out and began to read it. It was an English commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*.

In this book he found phrases such as 'the world is false' and 'what exists is only one'. These ideas puzzled the young man. All that he had learned at the university rose up in his mind: the nature of the atom and the universe, the wonderful and great power that was stored in them; and the means employed by scientists to harness this power for everyday use.

He began to think about the book he was reading and the academic knowledge he had acquired: 'I am like a tiny atom in this vast universe. Why should God create me here? Where was I before I was born? Where will I be after I die, and why should I be here now? Is not everything that I see real? Am I not aware of the existence of things through my five senses? The Maharshi says that none of these things exists. Am I not seeing the Maharshi himself sitting in front of me?'

Thoughts such as these churned his mind until he could no longer continue reading the book. He became lost in deep thought.

The Maharshi then looked at the young man and asked, "What is your doubt?"

The young man immediately sat up and, looking at the Maharshi, replied, 'A form exists on the sofa, and another form exists on the floor. If I open my eyes and look, the two of them are clearly visible. But you are teaching that what exists is only one. How can this be true?'

The Maharshi laughed a little and then kept quiet for some time. A few minutes later he gave the following reply.

"Don't you perform experiments in the laboratory when you are at the university? Let us suppose that you are researching into some topic. To whatever extent the equipment you use in the experiment is subtle and precise, to that same extent the real nature of the things being studied will be known. But even if the equipment is highly sophisticated, if your vision is not normal, then the true nature of the things being studied will not be known. Even if the vision is normal, if the brain itself is not normal, then also the true nature of the object being studied will not be known clearly. And even if the brain is normal, if the mind does not engage itself with full attention on the experiment, knowing the truth will not be possible. So, ultimately, ascertaining the truth of an object of study is dependent on the mind.

"What is this thing that we call 'mind'? Only thoughts. But all thoughts expand from one and the same thought. That one thought is the primary cause and basis of all other thoughts. It is the I-am-the-body thought. Unless this thought occurs first, the appearance of the many external objects and the accompanying thought that they are different from oneself will not occur. In deep sleep, where the I-am-the-body idea is absent, the world does not appear. Nor do other thoughts appear there. When one wakes up, it is the thought I-am-the-body that rises first. In this thought there are two components: one is the body and the other is 'I'. The body is something that appears and disappears. It keeps changing all the time and its existence is dependent on outside materials such as food. However, the characteristic of 'I' is directly opposed to this. That which truly exists must exist all the time, but the body does not exist all the time. Therefore, it cannot be real. The 'I', though, exists all the time in all

the three states of waking, dream and sleep. It is therefore real, whereas the body is unreal. Furthermore, these two joined together cannot constitute a real entity. How can night and day, darkness and light, exist together? If light exists, there is no darkness; if there is darkness, there is no light. In the same way, no entity comprising the body and “I” exists. Therefore, the I-am-the-body thought is itself false.

“If you begin to research into the world with this false thought as the instrument, how can the truth be discovered?” asked Bhagavan.

At that very moment the obsession that the young man had had for modern, western, scientific methods completely vanished. He understood that truth cannot be known through its methods.”

Bhagavan then concluded by saying, “Only after knowing the truth of oneself can one know the truth of the world”. Then he briefly explained the path of vichara, following which one can know oneself.

One should see what the ‘I’ is like when there is no association with the body. In deep sleep we have no thoughts. While remaining awake, we should look at ourselves and remain in the [thoughtless] state that exists during sleep. But since this waking state will not be like our present waking state, it is not possible to compare it to anything else.

If one questions the jnani, who is awake in the Self, he will say that all our ideas about the ‘I’ are wrong. Beyond that, he will remain silent. It is not possible to know the truth of the ‘I’ from one’s present state of ignorance. However, one can intuit it to some extent. In deep sleep the world, the body that appears in it, the thought ‘I am an individual having the form of a body’, and God, who is considered to exist apart from oneself – none of these exist. But no one says that he ceases to exist during sleep. From this we come to know that the ‘I’ is not like our present state of individualised existence, but what its real nature is, is not known. Only being the Self is knowing the Self.

How is one to abide as the Self? Mind should turn back from the world, which is its own concept, and merge in the Self, its source. This is not an ordinary endeavour. Mind should die and only its

true quality, the Self, should be left behind. Only the one who has made his mind die is truly born.

After getting a good intellectual grasp of this teaching, the young man returned home. Once again he engaged himself in the study of science, but now his aim had changed. He knew that he should use the imperfect mind to go back to its source, the Self. The young man knew that for this to be accomplished, the mind’s desires and attachments – attachment to sense objects – should go. The mind should become strong; it should engage in vichara unceasingly and realise the truth. The young man also knew that for this to be accomplished the grace of the Guru was needed. Those heroic ones who are endowed with a keen intellect will immediately engage themselves in sadhana. Others, though they live in the world, must enquire, through the power of the Guru’s grace and with a discriminating intellect, into the joys and sorrows they experience and should pay close attention to what they have to learn from these various experiences.

In order that the mind does not get deceived and become involved in the joys and sorrows of worldly life one should curtail one’s worldly needs; one should take sattvic food in moderation; one should live in harmony with nature; and whatever one does, it should not be a hindrance to spiritual sadhana. Though this life is unreal and dreamlike, the experiences we get from it will not go in vain. We should remain alert and pay attention only to the truth learnt from this experience. All this will be very useful for sadhana.

It was only with this aim that the young man continued to read science. He did not aspire to get either a high qualification or an elevated position. Whatever subjects he learned, he did not learn them with the intention of getting high status and wealth. He first attained a good proficiency in all the subjects he had taken up for study and then went into service as a teacher. With love and respect towards everyone, and without compromising on his self-respect, he is living courageously, keeping everyone satisfied. The reason for all this is that, through the grace of the Guru and through his instructions

on the Self, he became a vedantin. In truth, the Guru's grace and the instructions he gives on the Self are one and the same.

Vedantins do not exist without the light of Vedanta. That light of Vedanta is only Iswara. That same light is now shining in the form bearing the name 'Sri Ramana Maharshi'. Let us pray to him with all our heart, obtain his grace and abide in bliss. ▲

KEYWORD

ARUL

Arul in **Tamil** or *Anugraha* in **Sanskrit** means Grace and has the connotation of divine blessing.

Divine grace is available everywhere and at all times. God blesses all beings, even the worst sinner¹ as well as insentient matter. The power of blessing is the very nature of God and that is why God's grace is called blessed grace or *tiruvarul*.

How does divine principle do this? The entire manifested universe containing sentient beings and insentient matter is pervaded by God as unconditioned absolute awareness like the space which pervades the universe. An analogy of this is the screen which pervades and supports all the images in a film show.

In this unconditioned absolute awareness, Self or God, the world of things and beings manifests, exists and dissolves. Therefore God knows the entire universe as *thanmayam*, 'I I', or Self.

In his writings Muruganar takes *tiruvarul* to be the awareness of 'I' or 'I am'. It is the tangible manifestation of the Self, by following

¹ GVK v.970

which, one is lead back to the source. This awareness of 'I' is, says Muruganar: "... verily the form of divine grace (*tiruvarul*) that dances on high, subduing everything else."² In other words, since God shines as 'I I' in the Heart, the source of self consciousness of sentient beings, it is easy for the seeker to turn his attention towards the Heart or Self and realize his real nature. This is therefore His blessed Grace.

Bhagavan, whom we identify with a body, is none other than God. Therefore He declares: "Arunachala Ramanan is none other than *Paramatman* or Self, who shines as absolute unconditioned awareness in the Heart of all living beings. Dive deep into the Heart with supreme devotion to know the truth of this all pervasive absolute awareness or *chithakasa*."³

Bhagavan succinctly states that understanding: "Since God denotes Self and grace means awareness, there is no time when God remains unknown. Sun illumines the whole world but if the sun shine is not seen by the owl, the fault is with the sight of the bird and not of the sun. Similarly if one is unaware of the ever-present Self-effulgence (awareness) definitely the fault is with the attention of the ignorant person and not with the Self. Since grace is the very nature of God, He is well-known as 'the blessed grace'. Therefore ever-present God whose very nature is grace does not have to bestow His grace; nor is there any particular time for bestowing His grace."⁴ ▲

² GVK v. 966 and commentaries of Muruganar and Sadhu Om

³ Thanippaa after Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam in Arunachala Sthuthi Panchaham

⁴ Collected Works, Spiritual Instruction, ChapterII/7



Bhagavan's Ubiquitous Grace

COMAL VENKATA SUBRAMANIAM

I have been immeasurably blessed to converse with, and receive the periodic darshan of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi from January 1940 up to His Mahanirvana in April 1950. My mother, Srimati Rajammal Venkataraman, was an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan from her early years, continually chanting Bhagavan's namasankirtanas, and was deeply involved in her devotion. It was due to the Grace of Bhagavan, and my mother's immense bhakti that the seed of devotion was implanted in me too.

In the late 1930's and early 1940's, World War II afflicted the administration and economy of British-ruled India. I was in my 18th year, my professional interests inclined towards aeronautical systems and I was able to make use of the civil aviation training programs in the Air Force battalions. During one of the training sessions, the battalion chief informed us that there was a need to serve for the ongoing World War. After my decision to participate, I was allowed

C. Venkata Subramaniam is a retired engineer who worked for Air India. He lives in Concord, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

a week leave to visit my mother. When I told her of my decision to enter into combat, she was instantly worried that she might lose me in the war. She resolutely said, “Only if Bhagavan permits, may you proceed.” Coincidentally, our years of yearning to have the darshan of Sri Bhagavan was finally realized with the help of one of our family friends based in Tanjore. My mother, brother, and I were ecstatic to learn that we were actually to receive and comprehend in person, the manifest grace of Sri Bhagavan.

The first dSarshan

We reached Tiruvannamalai at the dawn of January 14th 1940 (the Makarasankranti day) and took a bullock cart ride to the ashram. During this ride, my mother was utterly absorbed in thoughts of Bhagavan and she consistently chanted his name while I was repeating “Om Namō Bhagavathe Sri Ramanaya.”

At Sri Ramanasramam, after our bath, we assembled at the meditation hall for the darshan. Both my mother and I experienced the sense of being very near to the God’s abode. There were about 10 people in the room, including Sri Devaraja Mudaliar and Sri Muruganar whose names were unknown to me then. Bhagavan, accompanied by two attendants entered the room, honouring us with his omnipresent smile. The instant I saw him all thoughts vanished from my mind and I was sucked completely into his ocean of grace. We stood and offered our pranaams. Seated on his couch he extended his grace to all who were present in the room with His smile while looking at everyone. We prostrated in front of Bhagavan. He made very kind inquiries about us and asked whether we had breakfasted. One could easily see the respect, love, and humility with which Bhagavan made his enquires. I longed to ask him the multiple questions that flooded my mind. But Bhagavan answered these questions even prior to my asking either through silence or while answering someone else’s query. Bhagavan periodically glanced at us as we sat there in silence extending his grace through his smile. I felt a powerful beam emanating from his eyes, which directly penetrated my forehead. It was sheer bliss. My whereabouts were forgotten. I could think of nothing but Bhagavan. (I had this experience

consistently during all of my future visits). Only when the ashram bell rang for lunch did we know that time had passed: such was the effect in the supreme presence of Bhagavan.

Bhagavan instructed everyone in the hall to proceed to the dining hall. Bhagavan was very particular that visitors should have *prasad*. Lunch was served and Bhagavan made sure that everyone was served with equality. I had an opportunity to be seated near Sri Bhagavan and I noticed he immediately mixed all the items served on the leaf and then ate. I could clearly feel that in this ashram ‘Everyone is equal under this roof’.

Bhagavan and his friends

After the lunch, Bhagavan proceeded to meet his friends. The first one among them was Mother Lakshmi, the Ashram holy cow. In the Goshala (cow-shed), Mother Lakshmi immediately knew that her master was coming and she started running towards Bhagavan. She started licking Bhagavan’s feet to convey her love and respect. I was delighted to view this vivacious scene. Bhagavan enquired of Lakshmi if she had eaten with respectful words such as “*Ennama? Ennama..... Saaptiyaama?*” (What mother, What? Have you eaten?) The respect that Bhagavan gave to Lakshmi initiated a significant feeling within me.

After feeding Lakshmi, when Bhagavan started back to the hall, and a monkey holding her baby jumped from the trees in order to convey its love and respect to Bhagavan. Bhagavan talked affectionately to the monkey and its baby and fed them some bananas.

After he entered the hall, a group of squirrels assembled near the window. Bhagavan treated them like children offering them some almonds and cashew nuts, and enquiring about them in colloquial Tamil. It was a treat to observe Bhagavan treating all, animals and humans, respectfully and with equality and humility.

Communication of my decision to Bhagavan

During the second day of our visit at the Ashram, I along with my mother stepped forward to seek His permission and blessings about my war participation. My mother initiated the matter.

Bhagavan was then reading the local news daily and once hearing us said, “You appear very weary, do not think now, go and take some rest.” We promptly obeyed those words.

Similarly, in another attempt on the third day, Bhagavan listened but did not immediately respond. He just gazed at the person in question. After a few minutes, He said, “*Poi Giripradakshinam pannitu vaangolen*” (Why don’t you go and perform the pradakshina of Arunachala). We immediately acknowledged Bhagavan’s words and left and walked round Arunachala, *girivala*.

Since my leave was granted just for a week, on the fourth day we decided to get Bhagavan’s permission before going. We were also still anxious to know Bhagavan’s order in regard to me taking part in the war. When we went and stood before Bhagavan, he enquired of us very humbly and with great affection how we were. We sought His blessings before leaving and added a note about my participation in the war. Bhagavan, gave an effervescent smile, and said “*Besha pannungo*,” (of course; certainly do) basically giving me an unreserved go-ahead. His smile continued to transmit grace on us. I felt as if I was having the darshan of the Sun-God Himself, Lord Surya. We prostrated and left for Tirupati and Chidambaram to receive the darshan of our presiding deities.

Bhagavan’s grace for my visits to his abode

Since my first visit, by the grace of Bhagavan, I have continued to be blessed by visits to the Ashram for at least 3 days, once every three months in a year. The proof of Bhagavan’s grace became visible in every aspect of my life. For instance, in the year 1942, the whole city of Madras was practically evacuated, and, on official duty I was posted to serve with the British in the areas of Lahore, Ambala, and Karachi (then a part of pre-independent India). In that tough duty regime getting leave was a near impossibility. I have known many of my colleagues mercilessly denied permission for days off even in the case of family tragedies. In that severe situation I was desperate to receive Bhagavan’s darshan so I once made up my mind to chance it and petition for a week leave to visit Sri Ramanasramam. Before entering my commander’s office, I meditated for a minute on

Bhagavan. On seeing my petition, the commander, Mr. Small, put a chirpy smile on his face and immediately approved it without saying a word. I was jubilant and attributed the happening immediately to Bhagavan’s recurrent grace.

Similarly, during another rigorous regimen when I was studying for an aircraft engineering-maintenance license, all applicants were subjected to a grilling six-hour mock interview on technical matters. By the grace of Bhagavan I was exempted from those exams and could come out, in less than twenty minutes and was licensed with flying colours much to the surprise of all of my colleagues and commanders. This very grace still prevails over me.

Bhagavan and cinema

Around 1945, during one of my subsequent visits to the Ashram, one Parsi gentleman who ran the Wellington Talkies cinema based in Madras, brought with him a projector and cinema screen, in order to show some devotional movies to entertain Bhagavan and His devotees in the Ashram. Three popular movies namely “Nandanaar,” “Meera,” and “Manickavasagar” were shown in the dining hall. Everyone in the audience, especially Bhagavan, enjoyed the shows. Bhagavan highlighted some significant scenes to children who were sitting besides him and added notes to certain important scenes, such as when the Nayanmars were immersed in bhakti and attained Siva-Moksha. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience for us sitting beside Bhagavan.

Bhagavan’s blanket protection

One night, armed with a sharpshooter rifle I was once required to perform guard duty in the jungles of the Rawalpindi area to protect the camp from enemies and wild animals. The night became scarier with the howling of jackals and hyenas. And I thought, ‘What a contrast this situation is to being with Bhagavan’. I recollected sitting in front of Bhagavan, accumulating His grace, visualizing His smile. I imagined asking Bhagavan “When will you take me out of this place? When will you grant me your darshan again? I was so fortunate to be in your presence but why do I have to suffer here in this wild jungle?” Saying this I glanced at the full moon (Purnima). It was the

glance of my lifetime. In the moon, smiling down on me Bhagavan gave me his darshan. Bhagavan re-energized me with that darshan. From that moment, I knew no fear and I see Bhagavan smiling and gracing me every time I see a full moon. Bhagavan has always protected me like a security blanket.

The grace on the Deepam day

One Karthika Deepam evening, we all assembled outside the hall and sat in front of the Holy Arunachala hill waiting to see the Deepam on the top. Bhagavan was sitting facing us, his back towards the mountain, in absolute stillness with His eyes closed. Right at the moment when the Deepam was about to be lit, Bhagavan opened His eyes and turned round to see it. During that time, I could see Bhagavan radiating intense luminosity as powerful as the Deepam on the Arunachala itself. I immediately prostrated before him for granting me such a darshan and obtained his blessings.

Keep my feet in your Heart

On another occasion, when visiting Bhagavan, having dropped all my belongings in the guest room I was waiting to receive his darshan. Bhagavan was just returning from his walk on the hill. I went to prostrate in front of Him, when he said, "These physical feet are perishable. Keep permanently within your Heart my true feet." By His grace, tears of joy and immense bhakti started trickling down my chin. Bhagavan's feet will reside in my Heart eternally.

The week before Mahanirvana

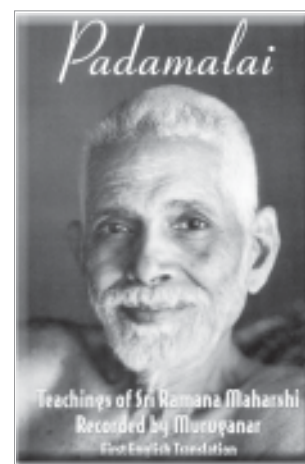
In the year 1950, when we heard Bhagavan was ailing, we decided to have his darshan. Once the news about Bhagavan's ill health spread, devotees and others swarmed to the Ashram from all over the world. We stood in a long line waiting to pass by Bhagavan to have his darshan. When we neared him, we could see that he had lost immense energy and was physically fading. But his smile remained the same. He continued to emit grace on everyone. That was the last time I saw the physical body of Bhagavan but I don't feel any difference due to his physical absence. He remains in my life even at this very moment. His

smile and grace still rule me.

Present Age

In 1996, my mother attained his lotus feet at the age of 97. Even in her last moments, she was continuously chanting His name as indeed she did throughout most of her life. Somehow though now too in my old age, Bhagavan has never allowed me to suffer pain. I attribute this to the effect of the supreme light that emanated from Bhagavan and my long devotion to him.

Padamalai



A major new collection of Bhagavan's teachings has recently been published. Entitled *Padamalai*, it comprises well over a thousand teaching statements made by Bhagavan which were recorded in two-line Tamil verses by Muruganar. The subject matter covers all areas of the teachings and the verses contain many statements by Bhagavan that do not occur in other books about him. This collection of teachings has recently been translated for the first time into English and arranged thematically by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, David Godman and Robert Butler. The editors have added many supplementary quotations from Ramanasramam literature which elaborate and explain in more detail the various points that Bhagavan is making.

In addition to the teaching material, there are also chapters in which Muruganar praises Bhagavan and speaks movingly of the gratitude he feels towards his Guru for the grace he bestowed on him. The book is now available from the Ramanasramam Book Depot, price Rs 150.



Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's
Commentary

verse four

S. RAM MOHAN

If the Self be with form, so would be the world and the Supreme Lord. But since the Self is without a form, who is there to see the forms of these two, and how could they be seen? Is the spectacle ever different from the eye that sees? The Eye, really, is the Real Self, and It is the Infinite Eye.

Commentary

THE sentence of the original translated above as 'Is the spectacle different from the Eye that sees,' can also mean; 'Can the spectacle be of a nature different from that of the seeing eye?' In this translation the meaning is that 'if the seeing Eye be a form, the spectacle also must necessarily be a form or forms.' The translation gives the meaning that the seeing eye and the spectacle are really one, which appears as two, because of maya.

The ignorant man is one who is convinced that the body is himself. Here the term 'body' also includes the subtle and causal bodies; the truth being that there are three bodies for each soul - a

gross body, a subtle body, and a causal body. The subtle body is the same as the mind and the causal body is the principle of ignorance, that is, the sense of 'I' which identifies itself with limited forms. Even the educated man who identifies himself with the mind is ignorant. All these: God, the subtle and the causal bodies, are all forms.

The ignorant person, while seeing himself as a form (the body) also sees other forms, and he sums them all up as one, and calls it the 'world'. And all these, namely that single body and the other forms are recognised by means of the physical eye, which is part of that body. That eye also is a form. As is the eye, so is the spectacle; this is the prevailing rule of vision, pointed out here by Bhagavan, and according to it, the objects seen are also forms.

This eye of flesh, by which these gross forms are seen, is itself seen by another eye, the mind. But that eye is only a subtle form, and so whatever is seen by the mind-eye is a subtle form.

The mind has no light of consciousness of its own; it shines by the consciousness-light of the real Self. This becomes clear in verse 22, 'Aside from fixing the intellect on the Lord.' Hence only the real Eye is only the Self, not the mind, nor the physical eye. That real Eye is consciousness. It is not a form. Since the Eye, the real Self is formless, its spectacle cannot be a form or forms, and so there are no forms in the true state. And differences (dvaita or duality) are seen only because of forms. In the state of right awareness of the Self, there are no differences – no duality – because the real Self is One; there is no second. That is to say, when we are the real Self in our natural state, after the extinction of the ego and the mind by the practice of the means (sadhana) taught here, the real Self is the sole remainder; all else is lost somehow. It is that real Self, the sole survivor in that supreme state, which is here styled the infinite Eye.

Thus it follows that all forms, good and subtle are creations of the ego-mind, and hence not real. It is the real Self, the Brahman that we conceive of as the personal God. The Brahman is the supreme spirit, formless. This God is what we describe as the supreme person. Also we believe Him to be distinct from ourselves, due to our

identifying the real Self with the body. As well, due to this ignorance we ascribe to Him some form or other (each according to his fancy, or as taught by preceptors). But these God-forms are mental creations, and therefore unreal. In truth the supreme person is none other than the real Self; the two are one and the same. But so long as we conceive of the Self as form, we are perforce to conceive of him as a form, due to the natural law enunciated above. But in the state of experience of the real Self, the world-forms and the forms attributed to God are realized as unreal, and the real Self is the sole survivor, so that the supreme Being is in reality only the real Self. This has been definitively taught by Bhagavan on many occasions.

So long as the sense of 'I am the body' does not cease, ignorant persons cannot help conceiving God as a form; this becomes clear, for the reasons given above. This description of a form ascribed to God is beneficial, says Bhagavan, because it thus becomes possible for devotees to adore God, (which is necessary at certain stages of spiritual evolution).

There are some who argues 'Since God is formless, is it not a sin to worship Him as a form?' This argument becomes clear from the following conversation between Bhagavan and some Muslim visitors.

Some Muslims came to Bhagavan wishing to argue with and defeat him. They were intent upon establishing their doctrine that it is sinful to ascribe a form to God and worship Him in that form. The following conversation took place between their spokesman and Bhagavan:

The Muslim: Had God any form?

Bhagavan: Who is it that says that God has a form? (In this way Bhagavan sought to suggest that the ascription of form to God is by the ego-mind. The Muslim took it that Bhagavan admitted his own doctrine that God is formless is correct).

The Muslim: If so, is it not wrong to worship Him in a form?

Bhagavan: Let that be. Have you a form?

The Muslim: Yes. Don't you see?

Bhagavan: Are you, then, this form, three and a half cubits high of dark colour, with moustache and beard?

The Muslim: Yes.

Bhagavan: Are you this in sound sleep?

The Muslim: Yes; after awaking I find I am only this.

Bhagavan: Are you this even after this body dies?

The Muslim: Yes.

Bhagavan: If so, will this (dead) body say, to the kinsmen who come to remove it from the house for burial, 'This house is mine: I will remain here; you must not take me away from here and bury me.'

It was only then that sense came to the Muslim; he realized that he had got entangled in utterly wrong argument. He said: 'I am not this body; I am the life (soul) that resides in it.'

Bhagavan then said: "Up till now you remained convinced that you were just the same as this body. This is the fundamental ignorance, from which arises all ignorance. And so long as this primary ignorance prevails and until it is extinguished, all those other ignorance's will also remain; there is no particular harm in them. If this primary ignorance is put to an end, then all the others also will cease along with it."

Also, the man who has the notion of 'I am this body' believes it is not actually true when he practices meditation on God without form. Since God is only the real Self, He cannot be objectified for meditation; He does not become an object, being always the eternal subject. The sectarian, who thinks that he is 'meditating on the Formless God,' is really conceiving of him as a subtle form and meditating on that subtle form, and not as he may think, a formless one. There can be no meditation on formlessness. But it is also wrong to think that meditation on a form of God is inferior. Some one asked Bhagavan the following question: "Meditation on a form is inferior. But I am unable to meditate on God as formless. What am I to do?" Bhagavan told him: "Who told you to inquire which meditation is superior and which inferior? Through meditation on form alone, the direct experience of the formless will be attained."

In the above talk of Bhagavan with the Muslims, from the question whether God has or has not a form, arose the question whether the questioner himself was a form. In the same way, from any question that is posed, the question of one's own true nature can be raised. This question is implicit in all questions that are raised and discussed. This question 'who am I', which is the quest for the truth of the Self, and by pursuing that quest one can attain experience of the truth of that Self. It will also be seen later in this commentary that one who has not experienced the real Self cannot rightly know the truth of anything whatever. So, to any question that may arise, the answer will be: 'Find out the truth of him that poses this question, namely yourself.' If this question were pursued, to the end both the questioner – the ego – and the question would cease to be. ▲

The Mountain of Medicine project

In recent years the area adjacent to Palakottu (the area where many of Bhagavan's *sadhu* devotees lived in the 1930s and 40s) degenerated into a public toilet and garbage dump. Fortunately, it has recently been taken over by a resident British devotee who, with full government support, is turning it into a park and forest whose flora will display the vast range of herbal and medicinal products that are indigenous to South India. Thanks to the recent unseasonable rains, the Mountain of Medicine project has managed in the last few months to plant thousands of trees on the lower slopes of Arunachala, all of which have survived. The area between the edge of this medicinal forest and the *pradakshina* road (a further ten acres) has also been allocated to the same organisation, and it will soon be turned into a heavily wooded children's recreation area. If you would like to support these reforestation activities in any way, please contact Govind (Luke Bowley) at govintvm@rediffmail.com.



John Levy

TEACHER OF VEDANTA AND MUSICOLOGIST

HANS HEIMER

JOHN Levy (JL) was one of the limited number of Britons who in the middle of the 20th century became a Western teacher of traditional Advaita Vedanta. I must make it clear that although I was one of JL's students, I had only limited and occasional contacts with him between 1957-1970. I studied his books and visited him in London from time to time. In the late 1980s I met Gordon H, who was a friend of JL and a fellow disciple of his Indian guru Sri Krishna Menon-Atmananda. Gordon H told me a lot about JL and where relevant I have included this information. However, because of my restricted knowledge, this article must be considered as a sketch of JL's life; perhaps it may act as an incentive to others whose experience complements mine, to come forward with additional data. I would be very pleased about this. JL's second book *The Nature Of Man According To The Vedanta* has a preface entitled *A Life In Retrospect*. It is a copy of an autobiographical article in the *Hibbert Journal* of January 1954. Because much of it is relevant, I quote extensively from it, quotations being enclosed in quotation marks'.

JL was born on April 28th 1910 into a wealthy London Jewish family. His secondary education was at Eton College, the most famous public-school in Britain. It must have been there that he acquired his upper class Oxford English accent, a voice very similar to that of Isaiah Berlin, another very distinguished ex public-school Jewish intellectual and radio broadcaster.

Paris

'It was in Paris that my real education began. I was nineteen when I went there to be a draughtsman-apprentice to the architect Auguste Perret. He received me in person and at first I was rather overawed by his presence, with his bearded dignity, his proud stance to which his high heels discreetly lent support, and his manner of speaking like an oracle, full of the consciousness of his achievement. He was, in fact, one of the foremost architects of his time and the first, I believe, to make use of reinforced concrete logically and unashamedly, some will say for good and others for bad. At all events, logic and audacity are in themselves qualities to be admired, and he did much to rid the world of nineteenth-century sham: for that, all lovers of honest building must be grateful. Monsieur August, as we called him, used to sit in his chair facing a photograph of the Parthenon...he was his own contractor and employed his own engineers, one had the unique experience of making the architectural designs, the structural drawings and of supervising the work in progress on the building-yards, a combination of aesthetics, theory, mathematics and the purely practical which gave me my first real insight into the underlying unity of all things. That is why I said my real education began in Paris.

My interest in architecture was not such, however, as to make me wish to devote my life to it, and I turned to the study of music, the art with which I have the greatest natural affinity and which has always attracted me more than any other. Like architecture, music is also an art of construction; but being fluid, so to speak, it is a better vehicle for the expression of emotion and intuition. Whilst the time I spent with Perret was a period of intellectual awakening and discipline, the years I spent with the gifted Nadia Boulanger helped

me to unite the head and the heart, a movement that almost everyone in our time has to accomplish, since the two are so often tragically divorced.'

'Amongst the musicians and artists I used to meet, the question of originality was frequently discussed. I began to see that in order to be truly original, one must first go to the very origin of things. It was becoming clear to me that what I was seeking was not a means of expression, but the background of experience that thoughts and feelings can only inadequately express. All this came home to me when I compared our discordant modern civilization with the more natural order of the old. Most thinking people have made the same comparison, and it was obvious that the splendid products of traditional civilizations, such as the mediaeval, were intimately connected with spiritual conviction. I wondered how one might recapture this feeling. Empty as much of our modern life is, it is not, certainly, wholly negative. And its more positive qualities and attitudes in which I believed, seemed to deny the beliefs and attitudes of civilizations which had their foundations in religion and tradition.

Though I did later adopt the forms of religious orthodoxy for a specific purpose, I began to look for traces of the truth they expressed as distinct from its expression in ritual and dogma. It is unfortunate that most people tend to dismiss the whole spiritual domain simply because they see only its unhappier manifestations in degenerated organized religion. ... I felt that all the great manifestations of religious conviction, such as a Romanesque church or Catholic Mass, pointed to an attainable end. Seeing no reason why I should not also acquire such a certitude, I set about seeking knowledge. I began to study mediaeval music, and especially the music of Guillaume de Machaut, for he seemed to be more consciously concerned than his successors, with metaphysics. I looked into the symbolism of ancient art and poetry. I also began reading a great many books in the hope of discovering the truth, whatever it might be.... And then at last I was introduced to the writings of Rene Guenon.

I owe to Guenon the sudden understanding that I and the universe are one and that this essential unity can actually be realized. Now I

find much to criticize in his attitude: and, in particular, his statement of Vedanta is often misleading. But his writings opened my eyes then and gave me a foretaste of the truth. His expression 'the Supreme Identity', by which he referred to this essential oneness of the individual soul and the universal soul, struck the deepest chord in my being. It was this and one other thing that really gave me my direction.

That other thing was the need of finding a competent personal guidance, without which absolute knowledge cannot be attained. All virile spiritual traditions have proclaimed this necessity. It is no mere formality nor, as some people think, is it an evasion of one's own responsibility. Lasting spiritual realization of the highest degree has never been observed to come by itself, and cannot in fact do so, because so long as a man believes himself to be a limited individual, the reality which is his essential being will be hidden. The seeker must therefore be enabled to realize that his essential self, far from being what his individualistic habits of thought would make it seem, is beyond limitation and thus infinite and eternal. Only one who has himself fully realized this can enable another to realize it. Although it was not until I came into contact with a true sage that I could define a spiritual master's function, I had at once an intuitive sense of what it implied, just as I had of what Guenon called the Supreme Identity. From that time onward, the aim of all the different steps I took was to find such a guidance, and I now know that true guidance is synonymous with true knowledge.'

Rene Guenon was a well known French mystic who later left France to live in Egypt, which he felt was a better country in which to practise and teach Vedanta. JL who at that time was a devotee of Rene Guenon, bought him a house in Egypt; an illustration of JL's generosity and devotion. Rene Guenon published a French book which was later translated into English and published in the 1940s with the title *Man And His Becoming According To The Vedanta*. Slightly out of historical sequence I would like to add that although JL never forgot the help he had received from Rene Guenon, he felt it necessary to write a critical essay in 1948, entitled *Vedanta And*

Liberation And The Works Of Rene Guenon. This essay was written in order to correct Guenon's views on Vedanta, in the light of the Indian traditional teachings which JL had by then received, understood and absorbed.

Judaism

'One of Guenon's most specious ideas was the theory of the fundamental oneness of all orthodox spiritual and religious traditions, by putting them all on an equal footing, if not in their present state of survival, at least in their origin. It is important to understand how this overgenerous assumption took root in his mind. From the very beginning of his devotion to metaphysics, the Hindu doctrine of Non-Duality or Advaita had given him a standard of truth. This is not surprising, for there only is the truth unambiguously expressed without its being embroiled in a mass of historical and other irrelevancies. With the bird's-eye view it gives to whomsoever has been able to grasp its implications, one can hardly avoid the tendency to discover, in the statements of the prophets, the saints and the scriptures, revelations of the highest truth, when possibly these statements indicate nothing but a deep intuition; and to see, in the whole paraphernalia of religious art and ritual, conscious symbols of the ultimate reality, when they only show a leaning towards it.

At the time I was charmed to find a theory which seemed in a moment to reconcile all differences. Taking it to the letter, I thought that the proper and adequate course to adopt was to return to the religion of my fathers, though I had been brought up liberally in the English public-school tradition, and had passed most of my life as an agnostic. In short, I became an orthodox Jew. I did so with all my heart, attaching myself to a Rabbinical school (in Ramsgate, England), scrupulously following every orthodox precept and enjoying daily conversation with the head of the college, a cheerful and learned man who was descended from a line of Cabbalistic Rabbis. ... With the background acquired from the study of Guenon's writings and, if I may say so, as a result of my own earnest endeavours, the time I spent in this path was anything but a dissipation. It helped me to convert into a single stream the disordered currents of my aspirations.

And for the first time in my life I felt myself to be anchored to a changeless principle that I could not as yet fully discern. This may astonish those accustomed to take their knowledge from books. But spiritual knowledge is not theoretical: either it is immediate or else it is no knowledge at all. You can talk to an Eskimo about life in the tropics, but he cannot, without living there, really know what it is.'

It is not absolutely certain at what stage JL decided to terminate his practice of orthodox Judaism. I would like to suggest that it became clear to him that written tradition had limitations. 'Now the truth is eternal and doesn't change, but the manner of expressing it most certainly does, according to time and place, and the inner obstacles towards its understanding change also, since each man and each generation of men differs in some respect from every other. If we are to depend upon teachings given hundreds or thousands of years ago, teachings given to people quite unlike ourselves in background, mental make-up and general temperament, we shall never obtain satisfaction.'

Islam

JL's next step was to turn to Islam.... 'I lived as a Muslim, practised the rites of orthodox Islam and performed the disciplines, the ritual dances and the meditations of an Order of Sufis under the direction of a Sheikh. I should explain that what Cabbala is to Judaism, Sufism is to Islam. Now, the characteristics of all religions on the level at which they serve the needs of ordinary men is the acceptance of the duality of God and man, thought usually there is in the scriptures something that points to a higher truth....Duality colours the mind of all who are brought up with the Quran as their scripture.....

It is in many ways parallel to the dualists of India who say they only want to taste the sugar, which stands for the truth, and not to become it. Whereas the very basis of Non-Dualistic Vedanta is that it is impossible to become something you are not already: you have only to become aware of what you actually are, that is to say, absolute consciousness or knowledge when self is viewed from the standpoint of thought, absolute bliss or peace from the standpoint of feelings, and absolute existence from the standpoint of life. Even so, this

awareness is not considered by Vedantins to be enough: it is one thing to have recognised your essential being, but what of the world? ... In Non-Dualistic Vedanta, this analysis is considered to be quite essential: without it, your experience of the world remains unexplained and complete knowledge is then impossible.Islam gave me the most invaluable help and brought me to the state of heart and mind in which I could receive the pure truth from a great Vedantin. That was in India, several years ago, and my life really began at that moment.'

JL told me that he was dressed in the garb of a Sufi dervish when he first met his guru Sri Krishna Menon. Fairly soon JL realised that there was no need for these outer symbols and he changed into Western attire. As a Sufi, he had also learned to read other people's minds. Because of the embarrassment it caused, he was glad to rid himself of that ability too.

The Second World War Years

During the Second World War, JL enlisted in the British Army as a private soldier and was attached to the Army Educational Corps in India. It is a remarkable testimony to JL's humility, that he, with his public-school and higher education and his wealth, did not enlist as an officer; which I am sure he could have done if he had so wished. I believe he later on rose to the rank of sergeant. I smile at the thought of how the working class privates who were his colleagues, viewed this polished and highly educated man? One picture relevant to this period is Gordon H's, who was a fellow soldier, recollecting JL on his bunk bed in the army barracks thinking about philosophy during his off-duty periods, whereas his colleagues were engaged in various pursuits to enjoy themselves. As already mentioned, it was in India that JL met his guru, the South Indian Sri Krishna Menon, who lived in Kerala and whose profession was that of a senior police officer. JL and Gordon H were both disciples and both considered Sri Krishna Menon as their spiritual master. JL greatly loved and appreciated the teacher and his teaching. JL made all his wealth available to Sri Krishna Menon, who did not misuse it for his own personal advantage. The closeness of JL's relationship with his guru

gave rise to jealousy, especially by the latter's relatives and some Indian disciples. JL's autobiographical article finishes as follows:

'Needless to say, because I have passed through so many phases to arrive at a solution, it does not follow that others have to do the same. Perhaps from one angle, it was necessary that I should have had to pursue such a roundabout path in order to better assure my fellow-seekers that the truth, in the end, is utterly simple and self-evident.'

The Post-War Period

When JL returned to England after leaving the army, he became the ambassador of Sri Krishna Menon in the West. JL sponsored a visit to Great Britain by Sri Krishna Menon, where at a lecture the audience was baffled by the lengthy silence of the guru sitting on a stage; they had no understanding of the Indian concept of darshan, the visual contact with a spiritual person. JL published his second book *The Nature Of Man According To The Vedanta* in 1956, in order to clarify some problems of his friends. This book, which I consider to be his masterpiece, is an exposition of Advaita Vedanta based on a logical analysis of human experience, from first principles. It is closely argued, much like the work of Benedict de Spinoza, but taking into account modern physiology, philosophy and psychology. JL found it difficult to write this book, as it addresses readers who lacked the traditional Indian background. JL wrote it and read it in draft to his circle of friends, using their comments to improve the clarity where necessary. I think the title, being very similar to Rene Guenon's book *Man And His Becoming According To The Vedanta* (discussed previously), was chosen to correct the errors in that book.

JL used his books to propagate the message of his guru and this brought him into contact with a circle of friends and seekers. He was an excellent linguist and travelled frequently in Europe, giving talks on Advaita Vedanta. He also frequently went to India, visiting his guru whenever possible, as well as corresponding with him. I have seen extracts from some of the letters written by Sri Krishna Menon in reply in 1944 and 1945. From these it became



Krishna Menon

clear that at that time, JL was still struggling to abide in the teaching and looking to his guru for reassurance and guidance.

Musicology

As already mentioned, JL was an accomplished musician. His spiritual interests were paralleled by an interest in the spiritual music of many different traditions and he started to make recordings in Kerala, India in 1958. Thereafter his musical interests followed a spiritual trail which led him to many parts of the Orient. Many of JL's recordings were broadcast by the BBC. After JL's death, his collection was bequeathed to the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh. This is an inter-disciplinary centre for both Scottish studies and neglected fields of study. The John Levy collection there consists of nearly 700 original tapes, several thousand slides and photographs, 16mm cine films, and a large number of standard-play and long-play discs from all parts of the world.

My Memories of John Levy

I was a young student of Yoga and Eastern philosophy when I came across *The Nature Of Man According To The Vedanta* in a Manchester bookshop in 1956. I found the book difficult to understand, but re-read it many times very carefully. One of the difficulties was the interlocking of the various logical arguments and propositions; the author had to assume that the reader accepted some of the earlier statements on trust, as otherwise no progress could be made with the later statements. There are therefore many cross-references and these made it difficult for the inexperienced reader to know where he stood. I then wrote to the author via the Publisher and I met JL for the first time at his London ground floor apartment in Gloucester Square in 1957. I was very impressed by JL's warmth, his knowledge of Indian philosophy and his beautiful apartment with its paintings and furnishings. As I was living 200 miles north of London in Manchester and had to visit the capital from time to time as part of my duties as a professional engineer, we had occasional discussions and corresponded. My most memorable meetings were four successive evenings in 1961, when JL made a presentation to a group of about 5-8 people at his



Krishna Menon with John Levy

apartment, going through the basic principles of Advaita Vedanta. It was a wonderful occasion; JL fully explaining his second book. After each talk JL served some food to us, which in my heightened spiritual state, tasted wonderfully. Not all listeners were equally impressed. I remember that one of JL's remarks was that he sometimes wished that a nuclear war would destroy the world, and then our illusions would all cease. I think he got rather carried away by his emotions when he made that remark, but it deeply offended some of his audience.

My memory was that the teaching lifted a great burden of ego from my thoughts, and for days afterwards I was in an ecstatic mood, carrying out my professional duties, but filled with a spirit of love. However, gradually over the following weeks, my mental liberation diminished, the ego with its moods and fears returned. Thereafter we corresponded and met occasionally, but because JL travelled frequently abroad and there were limited opportunities for me to visit London, we drifted apart.

I could not accept all of the teaching, the main sticking points at the time were:

With my Viennese and Jewish background, I felt that the teaching was using the mind to destroy the mind. As an intellectual, who had been conditioned to esteem the mind as our most important asset, this destructive policy seemed morally very wrong. (It was many years before I realised that enlightenment did not imply the destruction of the mind).

JL taught me several mental practice antidotes to the erroneous conception of limiting my self to mind and body. I assiduously used these mental methods, but did not have any permanent success. JL did not emphasise meditation or other yogic methods. He made it clear he was not a saint or yogi, rather he was a teacher, who had to be milked like a cow in order to produce the spiritual food required by the student. No other technique was necessary. JL told me that the Advaita Vedanta he taught, did not involve any yogic techniques and if I required these, I should look elsewhere. He recommended the teachings of Ramana Maharshi to me. I was already acquainted

with these through the books of Paul Brunton, which I had read in the 1940s.

The last time we met was in 1970. He had moved to a new penthouse apartment on the other side of Gloucester Square. In our discussion, he lost his temper with me for a time, because of my failure to make progress. He asked me to return to him the two books by Sri Krishna Menon which he had loaned to me. We parted, not on the best of terms. I was saddened by our last meeting. When I tried to make contact with him again in 1977, by visiting his apartment, I found a stranger there who told me that John Levy had died, but could give me no further details. I felt very sad about it, but as I had no contact with anyone who knew JL, I could get no further details.

Conclusion

JL had a hobby of motor cycling, which he relished, especially on the motorways which were being constructed in England in the 1960-1970s. One day he came back to London on his motor cycle from visiting a friend in Oxford, when he collided at high speed with a car. It was a terrible crash and for weeks JL was in hospital in a coma between life and death. Both his legs had to be amputated and eventually he had to live the remainder of his life using a motorised wheel chair. His health had not been good before the crash and he never fully recovered. He died on December 28th 1976. His funeral was attended by his circle of friends and his ashes were buried in the small garden in the centre of Gloucester Square. I did not hear about JL's accident until I met Gordon H.

When I received this news, I was terribly shocked and saddened, because in spite of our differences, I greatly respected him. JL had a remarkable life. Like Ramakrishna, JL fully entered into several spiritual traditions, with humility and perseverance, until he found his spiritual master. Besides his musical interests, he collected other things of beauty: paintings, porcelain, furniture and rugs. He had no real love for money. He was a generous person and the number of excellent published discs of his material stemmed from his readiness to share with others his experiences and knowledge of Oriental music. He was a gourmet, a fine cook and versatile linguist and had an

abundance of good humour which was sorely tested during his last few years on this earth when he became a cripple following his motor cycle accident.

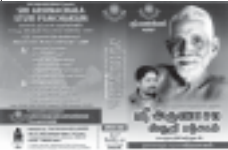

Books by John Levy

Immediate Knowledge And Happiness: Non-Dualistic Vedanta, its doctrine, practice, and some General Applications. John Lloyd, London, 1951. (I think this publication was associated with the London bookshop and publisher John Watkins, who was a friend of JL)

The Nature Of Man According To The Vedanta. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1956 and 1970.



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A Philosophical Introduction to *Gunas*

ROLF SKARNITZL

THERE is no creature either on earth, or again among the gods in heaven, which is free from the three modes (*gunas*) born of nature. BG XVIII, 40 Trans. S. Radhakrishnan.

The term '*guna*' was first mentioned in the Sankhya, one of the oldest philosophical systems in India. The Sankhya represents an attempt to analyse cosmic evolution or emanation. It is generally assumed that the father of the Sankhya system is Kapila, judging by the influence of his teachings on Buddha. Kapila lived before the sixth century B.C.

In Kapila's view the phenomenal world is based on two autonomous principles—spirit called *purusha* and primordial nature

Rudolf Skarnitzl was born in 1925 lives in Prague, the Czech Republic. Since his youth, he has been attracted to yoga and later Vedanta and from 1980, to Ramana Maharshi's path. He has always been strongly interested in the *gunas*, being the sources of our behavior, and focused his long-term attention on them. He is the author of numerous books and translations with Vedantic topic.

Rudolf Skarnitzl may be reached at r.skarnitzl@seznam.cz.

called *prakriti*. Spirit, the eternal being, is permanently free, perpetually serene, calm and sentient. It stands behind all the changes of known life. Though it is not a soul in the normal sense of the word, but a clear, inactive, self-radiating principle, originating from absolute-nothing. Man is not *purusha*, but since spirit is the basis of his existence, man may become spirit in the sense of personal identity.

Nature, the primary matter consists of and is formed by the three gunas and exists in two states. In the first one, nature is dark, motionless and undeveloped. In this state, gunas remain in stable balance and do not interact with each other: no manifestation occurs. The second state comes with the fertilizing presence of Purusha with its seed expression in the nature's womb. That is, when nature revives and becomes creative under the influence of spirit. This starts the activity of the gunas, the big bang originated from the 'cosmic primeval sound' coming into action. As soon as the gunas start interacting, the universe enters into existence. It is the gunas which provide the characteristics of all objects of the universes. Nature is the mother, the womb of the universe. Spirit is the father, the fertilizing sperm.

This is the way Sankhya explains the origin and existence of the whole universe—on the basis of interaction of spirit and nature. The diversity of objects in the universe is due to the interaction of nature's components, the gunas.

The introduction of the gunas concept into philosophy makes Sankhya unique not only within Indian philosophy, but in the whole general history of philosophy. Gunas are the primary components of nature, the basis of all substance. According to Sankhya philosophy, the whole universe consists of innumerable combinations of gunas, which provide the basis of all phenomena, whether physical or mental. Gunas represent the incessant basic three-part creating process.

The word 'guna' carries two meanings i.e., 'quality' and 'a strand of rope'. The strand of rope precisely conveys the term gunas, since together they bind the spirit. The gunas are not qualities in the commonsense meaning of the word, but compounds of *prakriti*.

Likewise, the strand does not form an entire rope, but a bond holding these forces together.

It is said that immediate perception of gunas is impossible, but their vibrations can be, by self-observation perceived and derived from their effects. Their immediate perception supposes a state that transcends the gunas, which is beyond normal human level.

The gunas are: Sattva representing a quality of luminosity; rajas representing a quality of motion; and tamas representing a quality of static inertia. Every creature of nature represents a combination of these gunas.

When the primary balance of gunas is broken, they start to act together and create. They intermingle and sustain one another. But though they work together they never coalesce and though modified or rendered more active by their mutual influence none loses its essential power. They cannot be perceived but are deduced from their effects, and have no power of discrimination. All three are present at every stage of creation, because with creation the process of evolution begins, and for evolution two opposing forces and one complimentary force are needed. They are closely related as of necessity is the flame, the wick and the oil of a lamp.¹ Sattva and tamas are opposites, rajas is complimentary to them. Rajas creates new states, sattva develops them and tamas destroys them. The evolutionary process continues during simultaneous creation and destruction. Rajas functions in this scheme as a neutral dynamic force, essential for life and creation. Only in the scope of rajas do we gain necessary experience. The facility of rajas therefore is crucial for every individual.

There is a specific connection between sattva and tamas. Sattva harmonizes the universe, rajas develop it and tamas represents the end of things. Thus the gunas are responsible for the origin, preservation and destruction of the world. Even in the cosmic trinity of Indian gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the gunas are replicated, Vishnu the preserver reflects sattva; Brahman the creator the rajas; and Shiva the destroyer, tamas.

¹ Sankhya Karika 13.

These three gunas are concerned in every physical, biological and mental phenomena, but in different mutual reaction; thus they create the variety in our existence. In relation to matter they act as lightness (*sattva*), motion (*rajas*) and darkness (*tamas*). When forming mental phenomena they act severally as goodness, greed and dullness. It is necessary to stress that Sankhya considers the two aspects of our existence, physical and mental, as simply modifications of nature.

According to Indian tradition, the first product to emerge from cosmic nature is intellect. This is closest to spirit, and reflects spirit's awareness so that it is itself aware. The intellect is associated with the second product of cosmic nature, the I sense, that is, the basic sense of an individual. Thus I-ness and the feeling of possession, the my-ness, arises. This leads to the I considering itself the agent of all actions. The third product is a formation called mind, which behaves as a co-ordinating centre among the five senses, the organs of cognition and of action. All of this starts to act in accordance with the activity of the gunas. From an individual's point of view the gunas act both objectively by creating phenomena and subjectively by conditioning and sustaining a person's mental life.

'There is no knowledge like Sankhya and no force like Yoga,' goes an Indian saying. They create a complete system. Sankhya provides a theoretical explanation of human difficulties and Yoga deals with the practical action necessary for achieving liberation from suffering. The Bhagavad Gita calls those who seek to exclude theory from practice, i.e., Sankhya from Yoga, as childish: 'Children, not the wise, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as distinct. He who is rightly devoted to even one obtains the fruit of both.'²

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras say that the purpose of the union of purusha and prakriti is to help purusha achieve a thorough knowledge of its true nature.³ Prakriti serves purusha. By herself prakriti has no purpose and exists only because of purusha.⁴

² B.G. V, 4

³ II, 23

⁴ II, 21.

Sankhya assumes a quantity of purushas, but only one prakriti (mother nature) which has two functions. Firstly, it involves purusha in materiality; covering the purusha with a cloud of ignorance and delusion, so that it forgets the purity of its own nature and seeks for bliss outside itself. The second function of prakriti is that of patient motherly care, spontaneously acting to release the purusha. On his evolutionary path, an individual going through cycles of birth and death is provided via prakriti care, with experiences that help form his personality.

When an individual becomes a more advanced there arises a desire to know the real state of things. Prakriti inspires a desire for knowledge and truth. The bearer of this quality is the guna sattva; the salutary actor in the cycle of birth and death. During the development of the personality, sattva increases in strength and begins to see through the misleading influence of prakriti's rajas and tamas in their veiling effects. If sattva is developed, it consistently helps the individual on the path to knowledge, until he achieves Self-realisation. Sankhya sees knowledge as the 'simple awakening' that reveals the essence of purusha.

The most effective means given by Prakriti for acquiring knowledge is the development of intellect (*buddhi*), the distinctive principle of intelligence and, because of its pre-eminence, the most perfect manifestation of such. The dynamic factor of the intellect helps the process of knowledge because, in the preparatory stage of the quest, it serves to unveil reality. Intellect by definition manifests the clear light of sattva, it represents the most perfect motherly gift of nature to the individual on his path to freedom.

When the embodied purusha, under the influence of prakriti's veiling, identifies itself with the play of gunas and forgets its own imperishable and unlimited consciousness, it becomes, due to ignorance, convinced that it is joined to the gross body through the senses. In the body it feels reactions and considers them to be its own. This delusion is supported by the play of gunas in every one of us. For selfish gratification it then makes use of the body and mind.

The question is how to understand the mind as an idea? A definition of the mind presents a permanent problem. If the mind is active, modifications appear which veil and absorb it in such a manner that we can neither perceive it directly nor get to the bottom of it. When a man learns to control and soften its modifications, the mind dissolves in consciousness. The mind cannot be perceived itself because of its changeability. It veils its true appearance. Further, we also cannot perceive the mind when free of all its modes, because then it only exists as purusha.⁵

Being involved in the 'I am the body' idea, the individual takes upon himself the karma of the body and suffers the cycle of birth and death. These sensations are not of the spirit because activity and movement pertain to the realm of the guna rajas. Man's purpose should be to achieve the insight that he has as little to do with his gross manifestation as the moon with its reflection on water. The individual liberated from bondage must rise above the gunas. Liberation is attained when the pure buddhi state of the individual can discriminate permanently between spirit and nature.⁶ ▲

⁵ I. Taimni, *Glimpses into the Nature of Yoga-Mind and Consciousness*, pp.247

⁶ Compare with Yoga Sutra IV, 34: "Kaivalya is the state of Enlightenment following the re-emergence of the gunas, because of their becoming devoid of the object of the Purusha. In this state the Purusha is established in his real nature, which is pure consciousness." See *The Science of Yoga* by I. Taimni, p.443 The Theosophical Society Publishing House, 1971.

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.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.

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.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-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.

² *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12th 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.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 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,

³ *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!⁴

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.⁵

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

⁴ 'Paraparakkanni', verse 156.

⁵ *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, 2nd 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).⁶

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!⁷

In a recent issue of *The Mountain Path*⁸ 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

⁶ '*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'.

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

⁸ *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.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

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 *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,

¹³ 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.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,

¹⁴ ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’, vv. 15-17.

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.'¹⁹

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,

¹⁹ *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!²⁰

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

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

²⁰ 'Maunaguru Vanakkam', verse 7.

²¹ *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!*²²

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. ▲

²² *The Silent Sage*, by Dr B. Natarajan, pub. The Himalayan Academy, 1978.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Lead, Kindly Light!

S.V. R. SOMAYAJULU

TO those of us who missed Bhagavan during his lifetime, it is a tremendous consolation to realize that he is very much present to shower his blessings among us today when our hearts open up to him.

I am one of those fortunate persons who have experienced his grace and compassion due I can only believe, to perhaps the accumulated merit of my past lives. I cannot think of anything I have done in this life to deserve his mercy. Here, I would like to share a couple of my experiences with you, for I can no longer contain the happiness within myself.

For many years during the 70s and 80s, I was eager to make a pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam to spend some time there and, also to go around the hill with my wife. That, however, was not to be considered, partly because of my employment and partly due to my wife being a chronic epileptic.

Sankisa Venkata Rama Somayajulu, a retired officer from Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd., Hyderabad, comes from an orthodox family devoted to the strict worship of Lord Siva. He has practiced meditation for a long time, enjoying many spiritual experiences.

In December 1995 the opportunity finally presented itself after I had retired from service. Taking a chance on my wife's health, we promptly made reservations for the Tiruvannamalai trip. Then, a couple of days before the travel date, I had the following strange dream in the early hours of the morning. There appeared in the dream on a street corner a somewhat emaciated teenage boy in tattered clothes eating what were apparently leftovers off a banana leaf. I enquired what he was about. He looked at me with big, bright eyes and, without a word, exhibited the leaf. On it to my wonderment, I saw a picture of Bhagavan, the same kind that I had in my puja room. The vision then faded, leaving me in a state of ecstasy.

At that point I did not know what to make of the dream but, when I reached the Asramam and bought a book by Nimishakavi Perraju and saw on page 18 the exact description of what happened to Bhagavan when he first arrived in Tiruvannamalai, I couldn't believe my eyes. I had never known about this detail in Bhagavan's biography.

Then occurred the miracle of miracles: my wife, who had suffered a severe seizure before starting on our giri pradakshina, had no problem whatsoever completing the entire fifteen kilometer walk! Neither our advancing years nor our poor health stood in the way of accomplishing our cherished goal of a lifetime.

Bhagavan's grace continued to manifest itself after my return to Hyderabad. I started doing nama japa regularly and, in a vision one night, I could distinctly see Bhagavan's feet stretching toward me, feet which I have always worshipped. At about the same time someone told me that a seven day walk around Arunachala would confer great benefits on a devotee. I decided to accomplish this, and reserved my train tickets for August 14, 1996. Sure enough, I saw Bhagavan once again in my dream the night before leaving. Thanks to the hospitality of the Asramam, my stay in Tiruvannamalai was made very comfortable, and I was able to complete successfully my proposed *sanchara sadhana*.

And an interesting thing happened during one of my walks around the hill when the sky was overcast and the clouds were being blown

hither and thither by the wind. As I turned my head to look towards one of the peaks, there was a cloud transforming itself into a *Siva linga* and it soon took on a concrete shape. To me it was Lord Arunachaleswara Himself materializing before me. A friend who was with me at the time confirmed my belief. How can there be any delusion in the city of God?

I would also like to refer to one recent, final episode. A few months ago, during a particularly difficult period in my life, I prostrated myself before Bhagavan and tearfully agonized over my unending problems and unbearable suffering.

Soon after, on June 29, 2003, I had another vision of Bhagavan, this time surrounded by many devotees. He beckoned to me and asked me what kind of sadhana I was doing. Timidly but joyfully I said that I had been engaged in *sahasra gayatri* and the repetition of *Siva Kavacham* and *Indrakshari Stotram*, whereupon I was immersed in a shower of golden rays emanating from an icon hovering high above the ground, as Bhagavan raised his eyebrows and looked directly at me.

The bright illumination and the even brighter looks from Bhagavan totally filled me with indescribable bliss. Bhagavan then asked me to come nearer and, placing a piece of paper with some writing on it in my hands, asked me to read it. I had some difficulty figuring out what was written, so he himself read it out to me:

u t k r s h t a m (Excellent!).

I took it to mean that my sadhana had received his stamp of approval.

As I continue to receive signs of Bhagavan's mercy, I pray humbly to him, "Lead me, kindly light!" ▲

An Exemplary Disciple

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

IN the passing of Sri S. Sankaranarayanan we realise that a gifted child of the Divine Mother has gone back to Her loving care. Initiated into ancient Sanskrit religious literature by his grandfather, Sri S. Narayana Iyer, Sri Sankaranarayanan was able to integrate his academic study of mathematics and professional career of management with Sri Vidya upasana. An exemplary disciple, he has mentioned that he was able to achieve this because of his guru, Sri T.V. Kapali Sastri:

“When I found myself helpless in the spiritual path and was lost in the bylanes, it was he who drew me to the royal path and helped me journey forth for my good here and in the hereafter. He had come as a god to rule over me and revealed the secrets of *Devi Mahatmya*.”

Sri Kapali Sastri was attuned to the sadhana of Ramana Maharishi and of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Sankaranaraynan walked beside his master and absorbed the spiritual riches gifted to him by his guru with

Prema Nandakumar is the daughter of savant, K. Srinivasa Iyengar, and is a fine scholar in her own right. She is the author of *T.V. Kapali Sastri; A Study of 'Savitir'*; and *In Search of Hinduism*. She lives in Sri Rangam, Trichy.



exceptional clarity. Presently he became a conduit to bring the Sadhana Shastra of Sri Vidya and the sublime thoughts of Ramana Maharishi to our generation through the English language. His *Sri Chakra* (first edition, 1970), *The Ten Great Cosmic Powers* (Dasa Mahavidyas, 1972) and *Ramana Gita* (1998) are classics that have been spreading a steady illumination throughout the world.

Ramana Gita contains the answers of Ramana Maharshi to the questions posed by aspirants in Tiruvannamalai. The great savant, Vasishtha Ganapati Muni set them down in eighteen chapters.

Sri Kapali Sastri wrote a Sanskrit commentary on the *Ramana Gita* titled *Prakasa*. Ramana Maharshi heard it read and gave his approval. Essentially an inquiry into the nature of the Self, the work is rich with the spiritual diction of India. Sri Sankaraarayan had a daunting task on hand when Sri B. Ananthaswami suggested a commentary on the *Ramana Gita* in English. Fortunately he had also laved deep in the works of Sri Aurobindo and his own guru was a master-stylist in the English language. The English translation of *Ramana Gita* has indeed achieved a parampara of classics beginning with Ramana Maharishi's sayings that gave rise to the *Prakasa* commentary. Sri Sankaranarayanan's translation must be one of those very few books which achieve the status of a classic even as they are published.

Lucid, with a never-failing attention to detail, it is a pleasure to read Sri Sastriar's *Prakasa* and its English version which together give us lessons on the grammar of translation. A translation should be a work in its own right, but also illumine the original with perfect precision. In the course of the work, there is a passage on the uses of rituals and study in one's spiritual life:

“For beginners, for those who have started Self-enquiry ... all these acts like sacred bath prescribed by the Shastras, Sandhya japa etc. result in contributing a great deal to their mental purification. For those who are engaged in Self-enquiry after acquiring the necessary fitness, the practice and performance of the acts, in the initial stage contribute to the purification of the mind, not for those who think that the acts are the be-all and end-all.”

If the English has followed like a *Prabha* the original Sanskrit of the *Prakasa* both being punya teerthas, a good deal of the credit goes to Sri Sankaranarayanan's wife Vijaya, a gift of the guru's grace for the earnest disciple. For more than half a century the couple lived the life divine among the great, imbibing adhyatmic thoughts and spreading the light of our masters. Our loving thoughts to Vijaya in this moment of an irreparable loss, even as we salute the memory of Sri Sankaranarayanan, an ideal child of the Divine Mother. ▲

ADVAITA PRIMER

Satyam jnanam anantam brahman

JOHN GRIMES

THE essence of Advaita is the doctrine that at the core of every human being is Consciousness-Absolute. The individual human being is non-different from the Absolute. This essential identity with the Absolute Reality is expressed in the great sayings of the Upanisads: 'The Absolute is Consciousness'; 'The Self is the Absolute'; 'That thou art'; and, 'I am the Absolute.' There is also the famous, oft-repeated scriptural declaration which expresses this same experiential truth: *Satyam jnanam anantam brahman* or The Absolute is Existence-Absolute, Wisdom-Absolute, Infinitude-Absolute.

The implication is not that nothing exists (as some aver), or that all is illusion (as others accuse Advaitins of propounding) but that 'All this, whatsoever, is only the Self-Absolute/Atman/Brahman' (*ekamevadvitiyam*). All this including the seeker, is *Satyam jnanam anantam brahman*. No question of form is implied, in other words, formlessness, which is beyond name and shape and attributes,

John Grimes received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the prestigious Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras. He has taught at Universities in the USA, Canada, Singapore and India. He is the author of numerous books including: *The Vivekacudamani of Sankaracarya Bhagavatpada* and *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*.

transcending even the beyond, is what alone am I. No one can say that he/she does not know this and the very act of denying it, one declares its presence. The mark of reality is that it exists by itself and in itself eternally as far it is given to us to know.

The essence of Advaita is simply to state, 'You are That, here and now.' To any person who objects, 'but is not my search proof of my being lost?' the reply must be, 'No, it only shows that you believe you are lost. For, what are you in search of? How can you restore that which you already are?' For any seeking is a denial of the presence of the sought. Sankara has said, "Why are you looking for the Self or God in city after city, temple after temple? God dwells in the heart within. Don't look for God in the East or in the West, look for the Guru. God dwells within you. For in truth, you are God and need to find a Guru who will guide you to yourself." Or, in the direct words of Ramana to discover, 'Who am I?'

Bhagavan Ramana opened a path to 'wake-up' individuals to their inner reality. "The one Self, the sole Reality, alone exists eternally. The ancient teacher Dakṣiṇāmurti revealed It through speechless eloquence Where verily there is, as it were, a duality, there one knows another. But when, to the Knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, what should one know and through what?"¹ and Ramana conveyed it thus: "Since the Reality exists in the Heart beyond thought, who can and how to meditate upon that Reality, which is called the Heart?"²

Throughout history, individuals have found themselves tossed between the twin banks of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, seemingly alienated from themselves, from others, and alienated from the Absolute. From such a perspective, it makes sense to ask, how is it possible for a finite, mortal individual human being to be identified with an infinite, immortal Absolute? Each of the words, *satyam*, *jnanam*, *anantam*, imparts a three-fold knowledge which Advaita seizes upon as the key to self-realization. First, they remove a person's deep-seated misconception of being a finite and imperfect mortal being, and conversely, they reveal that the true

Self is infinite, ever-existent, ever-perfect. Second, they remove the conception of the supreme Reality being remote and unattainable, and declare It to be immediate, direct and the innermost Self of all. Third, they reveal that there are no separate individuals and an absolute but that each individual is somehow part of the whole. They declare, unequivocally, that, here and now, 'You are That'. Advaita categorically rejects all three types of difference.³

When individuals superimpose various qualities such as mortal and imperfect upon themselves and the opposite qualities, immortal, omniscient and far away, upon the absolute, Advaita resorts to a series of negations (*neti-neti*) to correct what amounts to a misunderstanding. Sankara said, "The Absolute can never be properly denoted by words, including the word Absolute."⁴ Thus, in the Advaita tradition, though there are passages like 'Brahman is Existence-Absolute, Wisdom-Absolute, Infinitude-Absolute', *Satyam jnanam anantam brahman* and 'The world is an unbroken series of perceptions of Brahman and hence nothing else but Brahman'⁵, until one's ignorance is obliterated, such statements will not be correctly understood. For spiritual aspirants, Advaita emphasizes 'not-this, not-that', which is not so much as to say that appearances are not applicable to the Absolute, as to indicate the impossibility of attributing any conceptualization to it. Brahman is too great for words and for the finite mind to fathom. Reality is called 'a-dvaita' to stress the point that there is nothing to which it may be compared.

The Advaita thesis is that the Self is ever-present without one realizing it. The problem for each individual is one of 'knowing' or 'not-knowing'. In Vedanta it is purely a matter of understanding, but an understanding both accurate and refined.

The purpose of Advaita is to kindle an awakening to the ever-present, already established Self. It utilizes the concept that appearances are not independent of a reality which upholds them.

³ "There is nothing similar to Brahman; there is nothing dissimilar to Brahman; and there is no internal variety." *Pancadasi* II.20

⁴ *Brhad Up. Bhasya* 2.3.6

⁵ *Vivekachudamani* 521

¹ *Brhad Up.*

² *Ulladu Narpadu* Invocation v. one.

To realize that one is the Self, one must make an enquiry into the content of the idea of 'I'. The existent Self is not a hypothetical postulate but embraces the immediate and certain perceptions of all. Because one must believe in oneself, the seer, thinker and so forth, one has faith that what one sees, and hears and ultimately thinks is 'real'. If doubt be necessary why not doubt the things which come and go, and hold on to that which is foundational to it all, your Self, the 'I am' that can never be changed into 'I am not'? What is experienced may be open to doubt, but it is certain that a sentient body experienced it.

Is there a postulated truth, anywhere, which is so certain that no one could possibly doubt its veracity? Advaita asserts that the only thing which one can never logically doubt is one's own Self: the very fact of doubting confirms one's existence for, if one asks, 'who exactly is doing the doubting?' The answer affirms the 'I'.

Ramana asks one to enquire into exactly who this 'I' is. How do you refer to yourself? Only as 'I', a single, humble syllable. Who makes the effort to know what this 'I' is? One refers to more than the physical body when speaking of 'I'. The 'I' cannot be the physical body; the body itself cannot say 'I'. One says, 'this is my coat, my body'. What belongs to me is not me. I am separate from it, I possess it. Whatever I possess I can dispense with and still remain who I am. When one says 'I', one is generally referring to the faculties of thinking, feeling, and willing. The same analysis applies. These are my thoughts, my emotions — they come and they go. I am the knower and they are the known. No one says, 'I am this shirt', likewise, it is a mistake to superimpose one's body, one's thoughts, upon the 'I'. Then what is the 'I'?

Ramana states that a little reflection will reveal that upon awakening from sleep, the first thought which arises is the 'I'-thought. First the 'I', and then the drama of one's life. One has never, and will never, have a thought or experience without this 'I' being present. Every thought relates to the 'I', either directly or in connection with other individuals, objects, things, events, opinions, and so on. The 'I' is the basis for everything experienced — the entire myriad universe of second and third persons, the universe of he, she, and it. Everything, inclusive, is rooted in one's 'I'. ▲

First Photograph of Sri Bhagavan

M. SIVAKUMAR

THE photographs of Bhagavan are a vital element in our relationship with him. When we see a picture of him it reminds us powerfully of our connection to our guru and of his path towards true understanding. Every photograph gives us another insight into the unique phenomenon that he was. It stimulates our commitment to follow in his footsteps. We are encouraged and uplifted by the sight of his physical form and it inspires us to strive for a closer relationship with him in our hearts. His photographs indeed possess a timeless message for humanity.

We are fortunate that an astonishing number of pictures were taken of Bhagavan over the years and amongst all of them there are some which are outstanding and indelibly imprinted in our memories. The Welling photos immediately spring to mind and the same can be said of the very first photo ever taken of Bhagavan. We behold total detachment (*vairagya*) in the power and intensity of his look.

M. Sivakumar is a resident of Sri Ramana Ashram. He originally came from Kumbhakonam where he worked for the Tamil Nadu Government and then ran a technical institute and computer centre. We are indebted to him for the time and effort he put into tracing Nallai Pillai's story.

His slim youthful body glows with an almost unearthly light. We instantly recognize that we are in a presence that fills us with awe and respect.

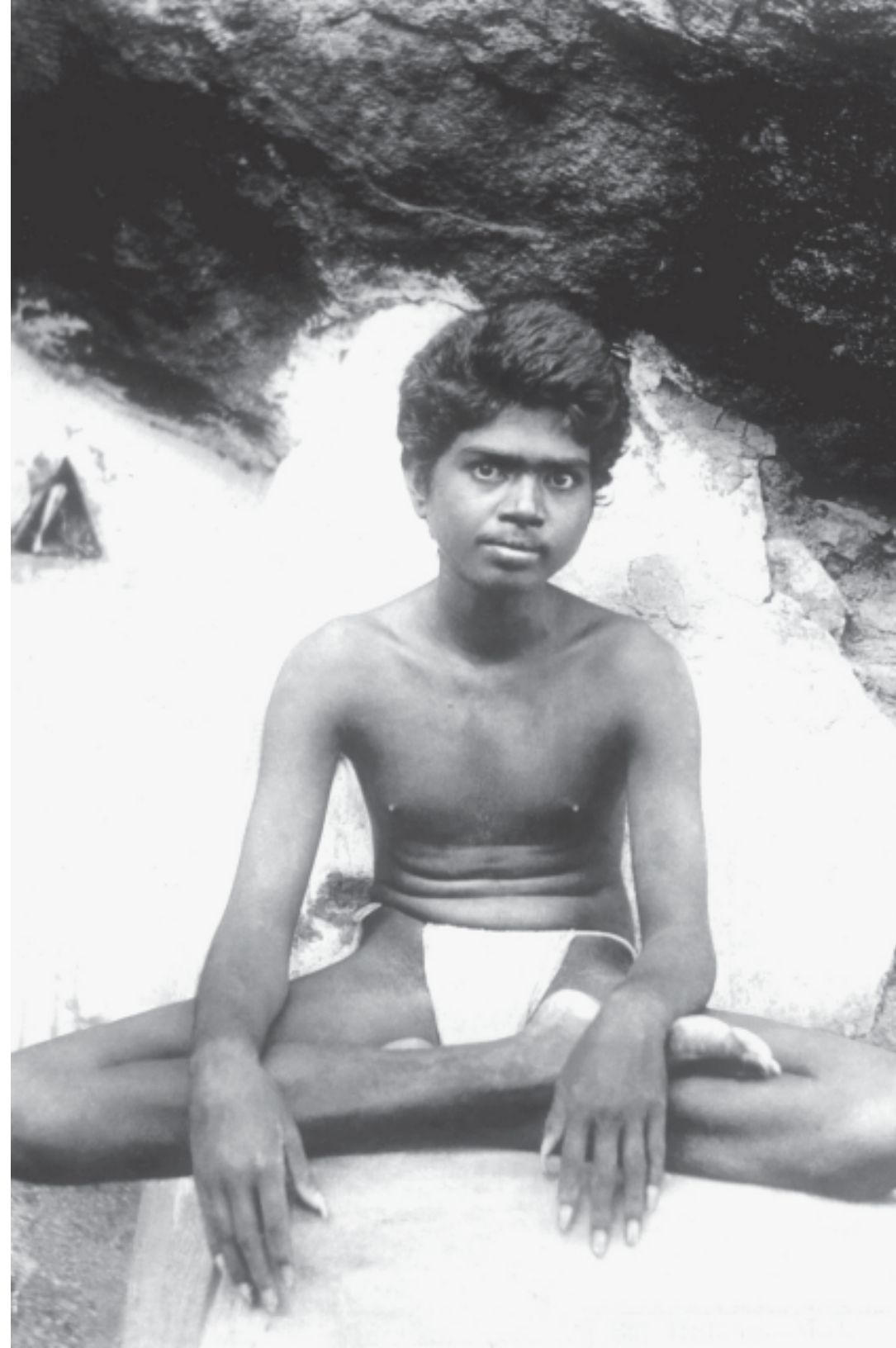
This picture has an interesting history. It was taken by Nalla Pillai, a professional photographer with his own family business. A. Nalla Pillai Studios was founded in 1878 and is still in existence today in Mutt Street, Kumbhakonam where it is now run by the fourth generation of the same family. Nalla Pillai Mudaliar, the founder, was a devotee of Kumbhakonam Mouna Swami who was well known at the time as a great tapasvin. Mouna Swami eventually attained



jiva samadhi which means that on his own instructions, he was interred while physically alive in the tradition of such great souls such as Raghavendra Swamy of Mantralayam..

Swami Vivekananda visited the Mouna Swami mutt in Kumbhakonam after he returned from his triumphant visit to the United States. Vivekananda did not enter the mutt and he later said that he had felt the powerful vibrations even outside and that if he had gone in he would never have been able to come back out. He still had his work to accomplish. Vivekananda then made a speech to the hundreds of people gathered to have his darshan.

Nalla Pillai was a very devout person and he used to seek out saints and spiritual people in order to record their images for posterity. He had been commissioned by the North Arcot Collector to photograph prisoners in that district for the police files, possibly because he was the only Indian photographer in the Madras Presidency of those days. He took with him, as was his custom, a picture of the



Mouna Swami. After finishing the work for the Collectorate he made enquiries about any local swamis and in particular he wanted to know about Brahmana Swami of whom he had already heard. Bhagavan was by then known outside of the vicinity of Tiruvannamalai and he had already moved to Arunachala hill where Nalla Pillai was able to locate him. The year was 1899. It seems the photographer was so impressed with Bhagavan that after taking his picture he gave him as a gift his own portrait of Mouna Swami.

The incident is recorded in *Day by Day* (6/2/46, Night)

In those days there were no elaborate arrangements for processing the negative which was on glass. The studio itself travelled with the photographer in a bullock cart. After taking the picture, the glass negative would be processed in sunlight with the positive paper below and the negative on top. It would all be enclosed, then it would be exposed to the sunlight for a split second before being dipped in a chemical. The photograph was then ready.

The glass negative of this first photograph of Bhagavan is still available at the ashram and is safely preserved in the Archives. ▲



Advaita & Western Neo-Advaita

A Study

ALAN JACOBS

THERE can be no doubt that Dennis Waite's 'The Book Of One' is a worthy introduction to the ancient teaching of Advaita. In a clear and erudite manner he summarises the main points of this great philosophy and spiritual teaching. The book is in sections with subsidiary chapters elucidating the chief principles. The main section titles are as follows: The Unreal, The Spiritual Path, and the Real. The subsidiary 18 chapters within these sections cover, amongst others, such topics as What I Am Not, the Nature of Man, Appearance and Reality, Consciousness, the Nature of Self and Realisation etc.

Dennis Waite is a respected member of the Ramana Foundation UK, and there are many useful references to the Maharshi's teachings in the text. He has studied the subject for over fifteen years and has a working knowledge of Sanskrit. The book is definitely to be recommended for those who need a succinct overview to the whole teaching in one medium size volume. It is easy to read and surveys the philosophy competently in an evenhanded way. This part of the book can well be regarded as a sound and valuable introduction to the whole field.

The Book Of One, The Spiritual Path of Advaita by Dennis Waite, Published by O Books, 46 West Street, Alresford, Hants, SO24 9AU, UK, 288 pages, paper back, £9.99 or \$17.95.

There is however a long Appendix of 24 pages packed with information on current western Advaita organisations, international internet sites, and a reading list. This part of the book raises an interesting and perplexing question of what exactly is happening to the hallowed and revered teaching of Advaita in the western world?

Neo-Advaita

Many firm devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi now rightly term this western phenomenon as 'Neo-Advaita'. The term is carefully selected because 'neo' means 'a new or revived form'. And this new form is not the classical Advaita, which we understand to have been taught by the great Advaitic Self-realised Sages. It can even be termed 'pseudo' because, by presenting the teaching in a highly attenuated form, it might be described as purporting to be Advaita, but is not in effect so, in the fullest sense of the word. In this watering down of the essential truths in a palatable style made acceptable and attractive to the contemporary western mind, their teaching is misleading.

Neo-Advaita Teachers

There are a great many so-called Advaita or non-dual teachers both in Europe, America and Australasia. Dennis Waite lists these numerous organisations, internet sites, and modern books. New teachers calling themselves 'awakened' appear frequently. They are often long standing ex-students of the late Rajneesh, or who visited Lucknow with H.L.Poonja.

Obviously styles, personalities, emphases, delineations, and content, vary considerably. But there are enough common threads to identify this tendency as 'Neo-Advaita'. First of all the teaching are mainly presented by question and answer at meetings called 'satsangs'. The teacher invites questions, and then answers them in his own particular way. There is no overview of the basic Advaita principles. So those who attend are left with no full understanding of the complete bases on which the teaching stands. One is dependent on what is said there and then, after many visits, which have to be paid for, one may appreciate what the self-appointed teacher is attempting to 'put over'. The books they have published are in the main just edited transcripts of these 'satsangs', and are also incomplete.

There is no doubt that many of these teachers are in most cases good-looking, talented, gifted communicators. They often have a certain charisma and an intelligent quick wittedness. They can handle concepts from an intellectual standpoint with dexterity and are often entertaining in an idiosyncratic way. Many seekers develop a psychological dependency on one favourite teacher, others move from one to another that will help them in their quest. But these satsangs tend to be fragmented: so many teachers and meetings need to be visited and this can lead to confusion. There is generally a lack of experiential understanding of the real Self and its power as deep silence and unconditional love.

Neo-Advaitic Instructions

Stated briefly, what has happened is that an advanced teaching pointer, normally given to the sadhak by a fully Self-realised guru, has been taken over as the preliminary step and is now given 'piecemeal' to any new adept. The suggestion that no further effort is necessary is only stated when the sadhak has reached the point where effort is no longer possible. The mark of the true guru is that peace, love and silence are palpably felt in his presence.

What Neo Advaita presents the seductive formula that 'there is nothing you can do or need to do, all you have to know is that there is no one there'.

That the mind is a bundle of thoughts, and that there is no entity called 'me' is ancient Upanishadic teaching, and not a new revelation as some purport. Paradoxically, and for a reason difficult to explain, all of the leading Neo-Advaita teachers have themselves engaged in spiritual practices of one kind or another, sometimes over a long period but they deny this necessity to their pupils.

The suggestion by the Neo-Advaitins that effort builds up the ego giving it a sense of pride in its ability to meditate, etc. is only true in a number of eccentric cases. In fact the effort of developing one pointedness leading to Self-enquiry in order to discover the source of the 'phantom me', the root of all thoughts and feelings, actually undermines this recalcitrant 'egotistical ghost'.

Effort gives the necessary modicum of mind control and one pointed attention. By sidelining Self-enquiry and treating it as an idea rather

than a practice along with devotion and the support practices for Self-enquiry, the student is left in a comfortable conceptual mental zone where it is stated cosily that 'there is nothing to do and nowhere to go'. One can park in this space forever, coming once a month and paying for another satsang, hoping grace will descend.

It is like trying to win a major lottery prize, without ever having bought the ticket of turning deeply and persistently inward and enquiring into the source of the 'phantom me'. The charge is made that effort is trying to 'get something' and therefore suspect as coming from the 'me'. In fact the 'ghost of the me' doesn't really exist as an entity, this is true, but the notion of 'the false me' is very powerfully fuelled subconsciously by the selfish-will and compounded by the vital force. It has to be diligently enquired into to be destroyed.

The Maharshi says emphatically that our only freedom as an ajnani is to turn inwards. It is not trying 'to get something'; it is rather trying to 'get rid of something', the sense of separation, i.e. identification with the thoughts, mind, and feelings. Otherwise there is a permanent occlusion, the granthi or knot, permanently screening off the tremendous power of the Real Self, which is the absolute unborn consciousness, unconditional love, dynamic silence, and oneness. Instead the Neo-Advaitin pupil merely basks in his or her reflected consciousness, designated as 'all there is, is perfect, whatever manifests'. The clear distinction between absolute and relative consciousness is not made, and possibly may not even be known about.

Misconceptions

To summarise, the main Neo Advaitin fallacy ignores the fact that there is an occlusion or veiling formed by the vasanas, samskaras, bodily sheaths and vrittis, and there is a granthi or knot forming identification between Self and mind, which has to be severed. If this were not the case then the whole of humanity would be living from absolute consciousness. As it is humanity still lives from reflected consciousness, including the Neo Advaitin teacher with his or her active vasanas, still identified with the mind. In effect Neo Advaita gives the ego licence, without attenuation, to live on under the justification of a seductive, hedonistic argument.

The Maharshi's remedy to this whole trap is persistent effective Self-enquiry, and/or complete unconditional surrender of the 'phantom ego' to Self or God, until the granthi is severed, the vasanas are rendered harmless like a burned out rope. Support practices and directions are given for those who find Self-enquiry too difficult to commence. Partial surrender is possible for all, leading to total surrender through grace consequent on efforts made through earnest one pointedness. In his foundation essay, *Self Enquiry*, Bhagavan clearly draws a diagram, which shows how the ego composed of thoughts, bodily sheaths, and tendencies, forms a mirrorisation, which reflects pure absolute consciousness through the door of the senses onto the world as reflected consciousness.

'Nothing Special'

The Neo Advaitin often says somewhat wryly that awakening is somewhat very ordinary and nothing special. Obviously it will appear 'grey' if vasanas are still active. How can living in sahaja samadhi and from absolute consciousness with unconditional love and dynamic silence abounding, be called 'ordinary'?

For the Neo-Advaitin teacher there is a process of cleverly intellectually deconstructing the 'sense of doership' or the 'false sense of me' which can if performed intensively lead to an experience, usually temporary, that there is 'nobody there' and even making the sense of doership temporarily dysfunctional. This is then termed as 'an awakening has happened' or some such hyperbole and the aspirant rests content and may even develop a desire to teach the same technique to others. The subtle part of the ego believes itself to be 'enlightened' but the vasanas are still active, so the awakening is only conceptual or imagined, rather like the 'born again' experience in evangelical Christianity.

No jnani ever claims to be enlightened. It remains for others to recognise his qualities. To say 'I am enlightened' is a contradiction as the I which would make such an assertion is the 'I' which has to be destroyed before enlightenment can happen.

The Neo Advaita teacher is still talking from the mind in reflected consciousness not from the 'no mind'. To claim to have awakened others' prematurely in this tentative way then becomes further proof

of a teacher's ability. This builds up a false sense of expectation in the mind of the naive adherents that they may become awakened too, if they are lucky. This then becomes a vocation, and in many cases a successful means of earning a livelihood. Pupils gravitate to the teacher with this kind of agenda, which confirms what he or she wants to believe, that no effort is needed.

The result is that the teacher, still living from the ordinary mind, with *vasanas* active, can never go back on the promise that he is 'awakened' and therefore forfeit the right to teach. That the *vasanas* have been accumulated and consolidated in previous 'life dreams' is not examined, and if raised, the teachings about *samsara* and *jiva*, are often considered too metaphysical to explain or grasp. They are invariably dismissed as old superstitions.

Teaching from the 'no mind state' or 'silence of the Sage' can never happen while the powerful *vasanas* are active. They have to die down and become harmless, and this means self-enquiry and surrender, until the mind, through grace, when the real Self recognises the *jiva* with a one pointed mind, has fully turned inwards. The nervous system has been prepared and the Self then draws the mind into the fully opened Heart. This is Self-realisation.

Ramana Maharshi

Many of the teachers claim Ramana Maharshi as their lineage, often displaying his photo prestigiously, but are not at all erudite in his teaching. Often the teaching is stripped of its devotional content. Some merely pass over him and are content to be the sole authority. To give 'satsang' in Arunachala gives some teachers added credence. How has this fundamental fallacy come about? Why is it so attractive to mostly young contemporary westerners, that they are content to by-pass self-enquiry, devotion and the surrender of the 'false self' to the Real Self or God, and so hand over all the responsibilities of their lives, with great faith, before even entering the spiritual life?

This advanced teaching of 'no effort needed' drawn from advanced Advaita and Cha'an Buddhism [the Sudden Awakening School] has slipped in as the fundamental Neo Advaita pointer. It is then easy for the radically sceptical western mind to accept this lazy way in our microwave culture of wanting instant gratification now, instead of

having to work at studying the teaching of the great source of the contemporary Advaita Renaissance, Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

Nor do they need to develop some power of attention and concentration. Nor does Hindu terminology have to be understood, and the traditional language assimilated even in translation. This demands study and effort. The making of an effort can arise without a sense of personal doership just as one makes efforts in life spontaneously when needed, from the vital energy. It is said that we are utterly helpless and there is nothing we can do, but this ignores the all-powerful Self and the grace, which starts to flow as a response to the initial and persistent effort of Self-enquiry and surrender.

The 'Awakening'

The idea that this 'awakening' may not be immediate does not appeal to the current desire for materialistic instant satisfaction. Hedonism, without pain, dominates Western culture. Religious values are at a low ebb and a humanistic teaching is much more appealing. Besides it lets the teacher off the hook. He can dispense with advising on *sadhana* altogether. Peace and quiet is preferable to *sadhana* as the prerequisite for enlightenment. This has a therapeutic value. In addition the idea of a 'living Teacher' is appealing. It is not understood that the supreme guru, the *jivanmukta*, who has left the body is still available both in the Heart as the *sat-guru* within or as absolute consciousness, the deathless unborn Self, beyond the mind. But to reach the *sat-guru* inwardly needs the effort of turning inwards and this is not a popular word to use, although effort is applicable in every other walk of life. The Neo-Advaitins claim there is no one there to make any effort. This is absurd. The energy for the wish for liberation arises and the intelligent part of the 'phantom ego' begins self-enquiry and its support practices leading to one pointedness. If there was no one there to make effort, how does any work get achieved on this planet at all?

Self-enquiry needs preparation, as David Frawley has pointed out in his excellent books on Advaita and articles in the *Mountain Path*. Self-enquiry may not yield an immediate perceivable result. It commences a graceful process of removing the obstacle of obscurations to the realisation of the real Self. To borrow metaphors

from the Gospels, the Kingdom of Heaven within is the pearl of great price. It has to be earned by earnest enquiry and surrender.

The real purpose of life in this birth is not merely to 'enjoy oneself' in sensual pleasure but to summon the necessary effort to remove the phantom ego's sense of separation and identification with the mind, thoughts, feelings and body. "If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch." It is truly a marvel of maya that some Neo-Advaita teachers can state personal views which suggest their knowledge is more profound than that of the Maharshi.

It must be said that this essay is a generalisation based on visiting the many Neo-Advaita teachers who come to or are resident in London, and seeing videos of others in the USA and elsewhere. My criticisms do not apply equally to all. Each one has his or her own emphases, angularities, and delineations, but the basic thrust of my reservations are generally applicable.

Conclusion

However, Neo-Advaita, no matter how faulty and incomplete, has a distinct advantage. It can serve as an introduction to the true Advaita teaching. Flawed as Neo-Advaita may be, it undermines 'the phantom ego' intellectually at least, after several 'satsangs'. At its best it is a partial surrender, but without full devotional content and therefore cannot lead to total surrender when the mental occlusion is absorbed in the Heart. One can only accept that the Neo-Advaitin movement with its proliferating teachers and burgeoning web sites is here to stay. Although some have prophesised that the tide is beginning to turn and that many are now beginning to earnestly enquire into Raman's teaching. Nevertheless, Neo-Advaita is a necessary part of 'what is' and as an aspect of the divine plan has its place as a preliminary introduction. It is therefore a valid, if imperfect stepping stone, for those who are ready and mature enough to walk on to true Advaita, instead of just reclining half way up Arunachala.

We must be grateful to Dennis Waite and his excellent book, with its appendix, for sharply bringing this whole question to our attention. ▲

The Mahabharata

CHRISTOPHER QUILKEY

THE greatest (*maha*) Sanskrit epic of India (*Bharata*), the Mahabharata is as its name suggests the story of this great land. The story proves great indeed: the multitude and complexity of the characters, the physical length of the saga, its historical significance for India and the persistent influence it has on the Indian psyche. Along with the Vedas, the Puranas and the Ramayana, the Mahabharata is one of the foundation stones of the sanatana dharma. It has even been called the Fifth Veda.

In the Mahabharata itself, it famously says, "Whatever is here concerning the four purusharthas, the aims of mankind, (Footnote: *dharma, artha, kama & moksha*) may be found elsewhere, but what is absent from here does not exist anywhere."

Like the Iliad, the Odyssey or the Aeneid in western civilisation, the Mahabharata epic has continued to exert a profound influence on the way its readers and listeners perceive themselves and the world around them.

Sanskrit epic poetry falls into two main groups. That which comprises old stories is called Itihasa, (lit. 'it happened like that') legendary history which is further subdivided into Akhyana, narrative

or ancient tale, Purana. The other group is called Kavya or artificial epic. The Mahabharata epic is the chief and oldest of the former group; the Ramayana which predates the Mahabharata, belongs to the latter category of Kavya epic. Both these classics are composed in the same form of the sloka metre as employed in classical Sanskrit poetry but the Mahabharata also contains remnants of an older phase i.e. archaic verse metres, besides preserving some old prose stories in again, entirely different metre. The Ramayana is the work of a single poet whereas the Mahabharata epic is a collation of disparate parts; the only unity being the connectedness of the epic cycle of the Pandu clan's struggle to claim their rightful inheritance, which consists only of about a fifth of the whole work. In its final shape, it is so crowded with didactic matter that it is not so much an epic but as a compendium of moral teachings.¹ In the post Vedic period, after the shift from the Saraswathi River basin to the Gangetic plain where the drama developed, it reflected the interests and concerns of the ksatriya aristocracy and how theistic emphasis, particularly on Vishnu, surfaced from the late Vedic ritualism. Krishna emerges as the dominant force which subtly dictates the outcome of the struggle between the Kurus and Pandavas.

It is said that Vyasa originally composed the chronicle in 24,000 slokas; later however the poet composed and added another 600,000 verses. Of these 300,000 slokas the devas knew, 150,000 the pitrs, 140,000 the gandharvas and 100,000 in the world of humankind.

¹ Most scholars agree that the *Mahabharata* was not written by a single individual. Instead, multiple authors compiled it over the course of several centuries. According to mythic tradition, however, the *rishi* (sage) Vedavyasa Krsnadvaipayana—who is also a character in the *Mahabharata*—wrote the work. In Sanskrit, the name Vyasa means 'collector,' 'compiler,' or 'arranger.' Thus, Vyasa represents the countless individuals who put together the various tales, histories, legends and treatises that are known collectively as the *Mahabharata*. The epic opens with Vais'ampayana, a disciple of Vedavyasa, who recites the one hundred thousand verses of the *Mahabharata* at Taksasfla (now Taxila in Rawalpindi district, Pakistan) in the presence of King Janmejaya, great grandson of Arjuna.

Of the latter 100,000 slokas of which we are aware, the Mahabharata is divided into 18 major Parvas of varying length. There is a 19th, the Harivamsa, which is a supplement concerned only with Krishna; the history of his incarnations, his exploits as the historical king of the Yadavas and finally, the future corruptions of the Kali Yuga.

Three main editions of the epic have appeared in India. The first printed edition of the book including the Harivamsa, was published in Calcutta in 1834-39. Another better edition was published in Bombay in 1863: being derived from a common source, they represent one and the same recension or critical review.

A third edition printed in Telegu was published in four volumes in Madras in 1855-60. This edition represents a distinct south Indian revision of text which differs to some extent from the northern recension. Both are of about equal length, omissions in the first being compensated for by inclusions in the second and vice-versa.

It appears that the epic underwent three stages of development from the time it first assumed definite shape. The oldest evidence we have for the existence of it in some shape or form is to be found in Asvalayana's Grhya Sutra, where a Bharata and Mahabharata are mentioned. This would indicate the fifth century BCE.²

A critical edition of 19 volumes in Sanskrit was published from 1933 to 1936 by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and has become a scholar's reference source for clarification of citation.

Kisari Mohan Ganguli at the end of the 19th Century made the first and most comprehensive translation of the epic into English in 12 intimidating volumes. I do not personally know anyone who has read all the 12 with their tedious lists and energy sapping descriptions of ritual minutiae. All the same when Ganguli does return to the story he tells a lively and colourful tale. There have been several translations since, notably one by Kamala Subramaniam who in 1965 gave us the core of the story with respectful and chaste skill, though the flow tends to be inhibited by her staccato sentences. She

² I am indebted to A. Macdonell's *A History of Sanskrit Language* for many details. It is published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. 1990. First edition 1900.

stayed true to the wording and structure of the story however and all commentators and new translators would undoubtedly have her text beside them for reference.

There are another two accessible English versions by Rajagopalachari and P.Lal who present respectively the southern and northern recensions. J.Van Buitenen from the University of Chicago began an ambitious new translation but was only able to complete the first five books before he died. His text received a mixed reception. The style is somewhat wooden but it is scholarly and has substantial introductions and notes, plot summaries and detailed index. It was published in the period 1973-8.

Now that I have briefly surveyed the history of the Mahabharata and its publication in both Sanskrit and English, one comes to the question as to why it is such a perennial source of interest to readers and why people who know the stories by heart, can listen fascinated by the turn of events. Why should we read a story written some say more than three thousands years ago? Why interest ourselves in characters so exaggerated and outdated compared to those inhabiting our marvellous, clever world of today? We see their ancient flaws, examine their motives and shudder at the results. Why for instance with the throw of a dice does Yudhisthira throw away his kingdom and place his family in jeopardy? Why is Duryodhana such a knave who green with narrow jealousy, dictates the destructive course and policy of his father's kingdom? Why does Krishna set in motion Duryodhana's jealousy by asking Mayaa the asura to create a sabha in Indraprastha? Why is Karna doomed to suffer all his life from the mystery of his birth though he is noble and such a skilled archer, the equal of Arjuna?

From the original story describing the crude internecine battle of the descendants of Bharata, the epic swells with the introduction of moral injunctions and the appearance of Siva and Vishnu on a level with the already present and omnipotent Brahma. Siva is seen as a powerful but distant force who can be propitiated but does not meddle in human activity. We see for the first time the introduction of Vishnu as a pro-active force guiding the destinies of men through his avatar

Krishna. The epic marks a definite perceptive shift in the way people view themselves and the world. The world is no longer static; it is full of contrary forces which if left to fester, will rip apart the fabric of the established social order.

Along with the appearance of this bright new energy, didactic matter was introduced into the epic which eventually assumed the character of a vast treatise on dharma — duty. Compared to the dignity of Rama and the simplicity of dharma played out in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata is a enthralling matrix of contradictions. The problems involved in establishing what is the nature of dharma are explored and how to apply it in specific but sometimes confused situations. We are frequently faced with apparently insoluble challenges where if one blindly follows the dharma, the result will be disaster in the short term.³ Think of Yudhisthira complying with the rules of etiquette and indulging in the fated game of dice, knowing it could be the annihilation of his status, the security of his family and his kingdom of Indraprastha. Consider the behaviour of Arjuna who when confronted by a great archer Ekalavya, whines to his guru Drona to rid him of this superior rival. And the righteous Drona obliges by the callous demand for guru dakshina in the form of Ekalavya's right thumb. Where is the dharma that is supposed to guide us correctly? Does it have anything to do with justice or just a product of the quirks of the gods, a Darwinian world of the fittest where might is right? Who decides the outcome of all the seemingly cruel happenstances guided, it seems, by a supposedly higher purpose. How do we judge Krishna and his, at times, shifty behaviour? For is not Krishna's purpose to end the reign of the ksatriya caste and usher in a new Yuga? The ends then justify the means?

³ We should not think Krishna is an interesting but redundant footnote of history. In our modern era we see the same death of the ksatriya code with the First World War when the cream of young men in France, England, Germany, Italy, Russia and later America, were exterminated by the stupidity of a mindless sense of duty.

At the crucial point of the epic where the merciless forces are drawn up in open hostility, suddenly the Bhagavad Gita is introduced. There are no further subterfuges, no sleights of hands, and no sophistry to justify behaviour. On both sides of the ugly divide there is a determination to resolve the contention whatever the cost, to the destruction of the kingdom and all its protagonists: even the universe as they knew it, if the discrepancies in dharma are not resolved.

The Vedic rishis emphasised the necessity of sacrifice but this eventually degenerated from a visionary purpose into a sterile set of rituals. Krishna's dharma was to reinvigorate this vision. He shifted the point of emphasis from the static to the mobile. From a dead set piece of ceremonies to an open ended series of potentials that would both energize and enlighten. He showed us that all situations give us a chance to reveal and live the dharma.

Krishna teaches that since the Self (atman) is eternal; it does not die in battle. He then goes on to say that all activity, if conducted in the attitude of detachment is also a yagna, a sacrifice. Sacrifice we understand to mean activity which, done with a high purpose in mind, frees the individual from the results of action on the physical plane of existence. For example, if we were to travel over hills and down valleys while keeping one's eye on the heavenly light guiding us to a correct destination, whatever we experience in the course of the travels do not impede but enrich our understanding and are left behind in the quest.

The introduction of the Gita is a stroke of genius. Here in blueprint is the resolution of all conflict by the perception of what is truly dharma. Krishna comes out into the open to display his terrifying cosmic aspect, but calmly guides Arjuna to see the inexorable acts of dharma a supreme principal of action. He reveals to Arjuna how one should act in harmony with it. After all the chicanery, Krishna clearly states how a warrior who wants to act according to dharma should conduct himself. And by warrior we mean here a fearless seeker of what is right, appropriate and true.

Historically the Mahabharata was central to the instruction of the common man in the intricacies of dharma. Sankara often quoted

it as a smrti and expressly stated that it was intended for the religious instruction of those classes who by their caste are debarred from studying the Vedas and the Vedanta.

The Mahabharata is about honour and deceit. It tells us tales of decent people led astray by circumstance and plain bad luck or what one could call destiny. The characters seeming to know what they are doing but are repeatedly brought down by the capricious whims of fate. There appears to be a purpose in this and yet the scenarios are confused by elements entirely outside the control and understanding of the characters. There are players like the devilish Duryodhana whose evil intent brings the whole world crashing down yet he could be, in the conducive circumstances the model of graciousness and openness. His father, the blind Dhritarashtra, presents a compelling portrait of a weak man wildly torn between what he knows to be right, the recognition of the Pandavas as legitimate heirs to the throne, and his own persistent and blind love for his son, Durydhana, whom he nevertheless knows is crooked. Who has not faced such dilemmas?

The Mahabharata is full of puzzles and supposedly unresolved questions. It teases us with the whims of fate. We empathise with the characters and deplore their fates. The story is alive which is why we continue to be fascinated with the Pandavas, the heroes of this magnificent tale.

A new version of the book has inspired me to reconsider its value. In a new rendering Ramesh Menon has taken the epic and recast it in modern idiom without losing touch with the spirit of the text. Though I have long known many of the stories, this new reading immediately stimulated my interest. The story does not drag yet the intent is not compromised and there is a felicity in Menon's style that is refreshing. He is something of a poet who has managed to enhance the story with a fine mixture of zest and sensibility. Due to his craft the structure of his story does not intrude on its smooth flow. The story propels one along and it is a pleasure to read for its pure entertainment value.

Menon is obviously a bhakta who loves the story and all its nuances. He has delicately brought out the ambiguities of the saga and has ignited affection for the characters struggling with their destiny. He shows their motives, open and obscure, which pulls them to do as they do. We sympathise with their travails and revel in their triumphs.

The clearest example of this is the tragic end Abhimanyu suffered. Abhimanyu's heroic fight is well known but Menon has breathed new life into it and like any modern successful thriller the final moment of this kshatriya's life sends a tingle down the spine at his desperate plight and his brave determination to sell himself dearly. The final mace blow that smashes his skull calls forth cries of disbelief. How can it be? Like Krishna, like Arjuna, Abhimanyu is alive in our hearts and can never really die.

This is the power and skill of Ramesh Menon who has brought to life these people who played their roles thousands of years ago.⁵

The Mahabharata lives even today. It is alive in dance and music, and is influential in modern Indian literature. Is it not indicative of the pervasive influence that many modern day people's names are evocative of those heroes we admire? The modern politics in Delhi are a curious re-enactment of the epic, nor is it a co-incidence that the modern day city is built on the ruins of Indraprastha. Like the Jews who seek precedents for behaviour in their histories of Abraham and his tribe, we too seek in the instructions and examples of those ageless Mahabharata characters the shape of our dharma. Who does not wish to emulate the heroic Arjuna, friend and intimate student of Krishna? Who does not wish to stand on the battlefield of life and know exactly what is the honest approach forward? ▲

⁵ Rupa has presented to the reading public a well-produced twin volume set of *The Mahabharata* in a modern style yet true to the original. The type, the texture of paper, the cover design and the convenient plastic box to contain both volumes, all indicate a special effort has gone into the production of this notable book.

BOOK EXCERPT:

The Mahabharata: a Modern Rendering Tarpana for a kshatriya

RAMESH MENON

DHRITARASHTRA asks Yudhishtira to take charge of arrangements for cremating the dead. The Pandava appoints Vidura, Sanjaya, Yuyutsu, Dhaumya and some others to the task. The corpses are gathered onto wood pyres, and set alight. A million pyres burn on Kurukshetra. Then, Dhritarashtra, Yudhishtira and the others come to the banks of the Ganga to offer tarpana to those who have died. The mourning women all come with them, Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi also.

Now the men put aside their silks and their jewels; covered by thin cloths, they enter the water. Thousands of women offer prayers, among them the Kaurava widows and Draupadi. Kunti's mind is on fire today at the river, for she, too, has seen a son lying headless on the field.

It was three days ago that Arjuna killed Karna, and the Pandava camp erupted in celebration. When Sanjaya told Dhritarashtra about Karna's death, Kunti overheard him. She felt as if her heart was being

The Mahabharata: A Modern rendering by Ramesh Menon. © 2004. 1,556 pages. Rs. 1500. Published by Rupa & Co. New Delhi. All Rights Reserved.

carved with a knife, but, of course, she could not share her grief with anyone. She clasped it to her and wept, alone.

Today, she sees Karna lying on Kurukshetra, his head sloughed off by Arjuna's arrow. She sees his wife mourning him, and Kunti's world spins around her; but she will not let herself swoon, nor does she say a word. She comes with the other women to the Ganga, and sees the lucid currents of the same river, which once, a life ago, bore her firstborn away from her in a wooden box. Kunti hears the Kuruscions paying final homage to their dead fathers. But her Karna is deprived of the dignity of sacrament even in death: all his sons have been killed. He had lived and died the orphan she had made him. Suddenly, his spirit cries out to her that at least now let some justice be done to him. Kunti hears him; she sees his splendid form before her eyes.

Meanwhile, Yudhishtira and his brothers have entered the river to offer tarpana to their dead sons. Arjuna stands with tears streaming down his face, as he offers holy water and pinda for Abhimanyu: to quench his thirst and allay his hunger on his final journey. Kunti lays a hand on Yudhishtira's shoulder. He turns in some surprise, "What is it, mother?"

She is quivering with the sorrow that tears at her. She says, "Yudhishtira, there is another kshatriya for whom you must offer tarpana."

Krishna stands near them, watching, a sad smile on his lips. How well Kunti had kept her secret. Even when war was declared she had not told Yudhishtira what she knew; not even when Karna died, had she said a thing. She knew, and Krishna knew, that if she had, Yudhishtira would have abandoned the war and gone back into the forest. But now the time for truth has come, the moment of confession.

Puzzled, Yudhishtira says, "How is that, mother? I know our dead, and I have offered tarpana for them all. I am not such an ingrate that I have forgotten anyone who gave his life for me."

The other Pandavas come up around them, wondering whom their mother means. Kunti says softly, "Karna. You must offer tarpana for him also."

Yudhishtira is astonished. "Karna? Why should I offer him tarpana? He was a sutaputra, mother, and our enemy. His sons are dead, so it his father who must offer tarpana and pinda for him. I am a kshatriya; how can I offer tarpana for a suta? What are you saying? I don't understand you."

Kunti is sobbing, and many of the other women have gathered round curiously. Yudhishtira asks in some annoyance, "Mother, what is the matter? Why are you crying?"

With an effort, Kunti calms herself. Again, she says, "You must offer tarpana for Karna. He was not a sutaputra, he was a kshatriya."

A gasp goes up from the others, and word flies forth, "Karna was not a sutaputra, he was a kshatriya!"

Yudhishtira looks a little dazed. Gently, he says, "But you know nothing about Karna. How do you know he was not a sutaputra? And even if he was a kshatriya, why should I offer tarpana for him? Hasn't Karna a father?"

The moment is upon her. Kunti takes a deep breath and says in a clear voice, "Surya Deva is Karna's father, and his mother was a kshatriya princess. She invoked the Sun God with a mantra given her by a rishi, and Karna was born from their love. He was born wearing golden kavacha and kundala. But his mother was a maiden, living in her father's house, and she feared the world's censure. She floated her baby down the Ganga in a wooden box, and it was on this river that Atiratha found the child and took him home to Radha. They adopted him, raised him as their own. As for his natural mother, in time she married and had other sons. But how could she ever forget her firstborn child? Throughout her life, there seemed to be a hollow space in her heart without him. She could never forget how she had sinned against him."

Kunti stands beside the sacred river, and she, who had been so strong all her life, seems so fragile. Tears still course down her face.

Yudhishtira asks, "Who is Karna's mother? Which woman could be so heartless as to abandon her own child as soon as he was born? You must know who she is, since you know so much about Karna."

Who was she that ruined what might have been such a noble life? Is the woman still alive?"

All eyes are on Kunti. She looks at her sons' faces, one to the other. She sees Krishna, and his eyes are full of mercy. Kunti feels a deep strength dawning on her from the Avatara's gaze. She turns back to Yudhishtira. She looks straight at him and, in a ringing voice, Kunti cries, "Yes, Karna's mother still lives, and she stands before you, Yudhishtira. Karna was my son, my first child!"

She sways on her feet, and falls on the soft silt of the riverbank. Vidura rushes to Kunti's side, while Yudhishtira stands as if he has been struck by lightning. Slowly, he turns to face Arjuna, who, if anything, looks more stricken than his brother. Into the hush that has fallen, Yudhishtira murmurs as in a dream, a nightmare, "We killed our brother."

A roar breaks out of Arjuna. He splashes out of the river, and falls on the ground, crying, "What have I done, Yudhishtira? I have killed my own brother!"

He cries out his shock, repeatedly, until river, forest and sky echo with it. "I killed my brother, and I gloated!" howls Arjuna. "How can I go on living after what I did?"

His eyes roll up, and he faints. Yudhishtira's eyes turn crimson; otherwise, he does not move, but stands as if his mother's confession has turned him into a statue. Bheema staggers out from the water and sits beside the unconscious Arjuna. The effect of Kunti's truth is most evident on poor Bheema. Those that watch see him turn, before their eyes, from an overgrown boy into a man.

Bheema remembers the day of the exhibition in Hastinapura. He thinks of the moment when he mocked Karna, 'Sutaputra, you are not fit to have yourself killed by my brother Arjuna. Put down your bow, and get yourself a horsewhip. That will suit you better.'

He remembers what Duryodhana said to him then, 'Karna brims with every noble quality a kshatriya should have. He is like a tiger. I pity you, Bheema, that you don't see him for what he is, and are blind to his greatness, which shines from him like a sun. I have made him king of Anga; he deserves to be lord of this earth!'

How foolish he, Bheema, had been on that day, and how prescient Duryodhana. Bheema's thoughts drift on to Kurukshetra, and the duel he fought against Karna. He sees Karna's mocking eyes, and his strange smile again, as he prodded Bheema with the tip of his bow, contemptuously, and spared his life. Karna's words are burned on his heart, 'Some day, Bheema, you will think back on this duel and feel proud. Some day you will rejoice that you fought Karna.'

Bheema knows, from now, that moment will be his most precious memory. It crosses his mind that, hereafter, for him Karna would be his eldest brother. Near Bheema, Sahadeva sits in a daze, thinking of the moment when Karna spared his life, 'Go now, boy, and hide behind your brother Arjuna. Don't come to fight your betters.'

Sahadeva sees the glittering eyes, and the haughty smile. He also sobs. Yudhishtira has come ashore now, and sits shaken and grim, never looking at his mother. His heart cries out within him that it would be better if he never saw her face again, for what she did to his brother, his *older* brother. Why, for what she had done not just to Karna but to all of them, the sin she made them commit.

Sitting with Krishna and Arjuna, Yudhishtira remembers the final day of Karna's life. He recalls every moment of it, vividly. He thinks of how he mocked his brother, calling him sutaputra. Suddenly, Yudhishtira turns to Kunti. Coldly, he asks her, "Mother, did Karna know who he was? Did he know he was our brother?"

She hangs her head, and cries. Krishna answers him, "He knew."

All the Pandavas turn to face Krishna. Yudhishtira whispers, "And you also knew, my Lord?"

"Yes."

The frantic Yudhishtira turns on Kunti, "How could you keep this from us? You made us kill our brother. Do you know, when I heard Karna had been killed, I ran to the field to see if the news was true? More than anyone else, I wanted Karna dead. I feared my brother more than I did any other man. Mother, how could you let us do this horrible thing?"

Then Yudhishtira looks into Kunti's eyes, and sees an age of grief in them, far, far greater than his own. He sees that his mother already

suffers as much as she can bear. He sighs and does not say a word more. With his brothers around him, he enters the river again. Now he offers tarpana to his dead brother, and it seems the tears he sheds are all he needs as holy water for Karna's final journey. Somehow, Abhimanyu's death, and even the nearer deaths of Draupadi's sons are forgotten. The Pandavas have just one thought in their minds: they had another brother, and they killed him.

Seeing the Pandavas' mourn, the women on the riverbank set up a fresh lament. When he has finished offering tarpana and pinda to dead Karna, Yudhishtira raises his voice above the women's wailing, and curses womankind, "It is because my mother kept her secret so well that we killed our brother. May no woman ever be able to keep a secret again!"

Slowly, they come out of the whispering Ganga and make their way back to the camp. The Pandavas walk at the head of the procession. The women follow them, still crying, and a few paces behind the women, Krishna and Satyaki bring up the rear. ▲

Ozhivil Odukkam

Eternal Repose Upon Annulment (Withdrawal as Eternal Being)

two

KANNUDAYA VALLALAR

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY J. JAYARAMAN

THE 63 verses of the first chapter of the Ozhivil Odukkam encapsulate the entire transmission through this convergence of Vedanta and Siddhanta. The Eternal Tradition (*sanaatana dharma*), requires that any work must begin with at least one of the benedictions to Guru, or God or Self; and that this is to be followed by providing the purport of the work and its context. This calls for highlighting three points: (a) the Subject Matter (*vishayam*) which is proposed to be laid out; (b) the nature of the Relationship (*sambandham*) that the hearer of this work is expected to have with the subject matter, in order that the transmission can occur; and (c) the End Result (*prayojanam*) of the 'treatment' that one, who receives or learns from this work, gains.

This unusual work has all the three forms of benediction. The first verse of this work, was the benediction seeking the Guru's blessing. The other two forms of benediction (to God and, Self), are dealt with in an epigrammatic verse 17.

Verse 2 defines the dynamics of the omni-present sadguru's palpable appearance external to the seeker. Verses 3 to 6 paint the

false guru. Verses 7 to 10 describe the nature of the guru's transmission (*krpa*, grace). Verse 11 is a reminder to the reader, that the author has not yet moved out of the benedictory beginnings of the text!

Verses 12 to 14 describe the Matter, *vishayam*. Verses 15 and 16, the Relationship, *sambandham*. One naturally expected the verses immediately following, to deal with the Result, *prayojanam*. But this is not to be for a very good reason, as we shall see, at verse 17.

11. Through the deflation that Truth brings about over the reality [erroneously] ascribed to objective experience, and fixing me therein, Sambandha of Sirkazhi, the pure being, the Scholar in Tamil, the knower of the Vedas, showed me the way, in his grace, as pointed out in this work.

Notes

'deflation that Truth brings about': *satya nirvaanattaal*: by the deflation that truth alone has the authority to actualise. Truth alone can overcome ignorance. It does so by deflating all of the wrong knowledge due to the ignorance of Self that arose as a seer-seen reality. What a million swords cannot do to the darkness in a deep cave, a lighted lamp would accomplish instantaneously. The inflated all pervasive darkness does not have to 'go' elsewhere in order to make room. The light merely deflates the substantiality attributed to this false impression.

A seeker asked Bhagavan Ramana whether the relationship between Self and Creation, is like that between substance and shadow. Maharshi replied there is no relationship at all, and that one falsely experiences a shadow as 'substance', and then sees the latter's shadow. The sun (Self) knows no darkness(creation).

12. The Self ever inheres as the unopposed, non-dual plenum. And many are the means courted by those who are eager to be rid of the misery of the limitation called ego, which obstructs undifferentiated merger in the Self. Without any reservations, we spread [our ware] bare, *as it is*, in order that you shall repose beyond impermanence, as pure being.

Notes

'beyond impermanence': Maharshi points out that the Self plus waking is called the waking state of the self; the Self plus dreaming is called the dream state of the self; and the Self plus deep sleep is called the causal state of the self. The self, from the stand point of a waking state, which it regards as real, swears that the other two are transient phenomena dependent upon the former. This is wrong knowledge and arises because the self is oblivious during its transition between waking and dream. The absence of the correct focus in be-ing, in other words absence of 'enquiry into one's true self', is itself ignorance. This condition of ignorance objectifies the sleep as 'another' state, naming it the 'state of blissful sleep'.

Sleep is the *only* state of ego. And during that sleep, the false phenomena of waking and dream appear and disappear, without any real damage to that sleep of ignorance. Self-enquiry shifts the focus of abiding be-ing away from the impermanent. True being is that which abides unaffected by presence or absence of transience.

13. This work "To Repose as Pure Being", is the work which truly reveals the Knowledge which is agreeable to all the three, namely the Scripture, the master's word and one's own experience. This scripture is the seed [the root stock] of all other works.

Commentary

Received, Reasoned, Revealed.

It is most reasonable to accept that *sruti*,¹ *yukti* (inference) and *anubhava* (one's own experience) are the triune criteria for removing dross and validating the ultimate Reality.

(i) Sruti points out that that perspective alone, which is unchanged even amidst change, can be accepted as truly real. Sruti declares the presence here and now. Bhagavan calls this perspective the 'eternal

¹ Received scripture that refers to the sap enlivening discrimination, and which points to that beyond scripture.

Eye'.² The acquisition of this perspective alone is worth striving for. Sruti denotes it as aware Being, *prajnaana*, and advises the seeker to search for it as the basis of all experience. Sruti asserts the primary locus of the 'Eye' as one's inmost being, the ever present Heart. The Heart is described as 'containing' the individual, the world, and the Lord, in the way water 'contains' froth born of the waves.

(ii) *Yukti* (inference): The sense of reality regarding the waking world, and the regarding of oneself as being awake during the state of waking, are both negated in dream; the dream world, and dream-self regarding itself as being awake, are negated upon waking. The spiritual quest is for one who is willing to accept that both states are therefore false. This is a daily round of experience and inference that is available to all.

The sense of self (that is, the ever-current sense of 'I am'), and in the secondary sense of its recollection from memory,³ is present in both waking and dream states, but appears to be absent in sushupti.

An enquiry conducted into the sense of self by the self, must necessarily be deprived of the luxury of 'clear' separation of the studied object from the studying subject. In ignoring the guide-posts from the sages, and proceeding solely on one's experience, one often operates upon the incomplete data at one's command. This is because the ignorance, which one seeks to remove, itself predisposes one to overlook the larger picture. Thus even the best among modern scientific minds routinely reach wrong conclusions: namely, that (i) the ultimate reality is a powerful but inert, cosmic being devoid of Intelligence; and (ii) one's sense of being is entirely dependent on the body-processes; there is no direct, objective proof in sushupti of this sense of being; it is the 'noise' of molecular traffic in waking and in dream; there is no abiding substratum as conscious Self in all this.

² *Ulladu Narpadu v.4*

³ "I readily recall that my attention was suddenly drawn to my *being*, a week ago while waiting in a queue;" or "I now recall a similar noticing of being during last night's dream."

A Magic Pot Simile

We can say that the sense of 'being here' (whether in waking or dream) is a necessity for manifesting as real a world 'out there'. Just as clay, the basic ingredient, is necessary for manifesting every kind of clay-pot. The surface of a lump of clay is the energetic-boundary where the 'self' of the clay—let us assume sentience in clay for the sake of this illustration!—has to 'engage with' a larger non-self all around it, and with which it must learn to co-exist. Thus two pots from the same clay only differ due to the form of their respective surfaces.

So too, the dream and waking selves are mutually different only due to the difference in their relationships with their worlds. It is as if a pot, failing to enquire into its reality as clay-substance, falsely took itself to be mere surface-quality, and this 'surface-self' then begins to magically switch into other states. It first finds itself as 'coarse being' (the waking experience), then abandons that way of experiencing itself and starts to experience itself as 'smooth being' (the dream state) in an endless cycle.

A Cross-Check with Roots

As its ultimate statement, sruti declares: The Self, alone is ever realized, ever present. Ignorance of Self, is false.

We would do well to follow the sages' advice to regard anything that lacks *fixity*, as false. Thus the false, should it be (falsely) experienced as true, *must* undergo change in order to falsify its posture as truth. This then is the key given to the seeker whose problem is the utter inability to stop experiencing the false as real and to *be* the effortlessly blissful reality of Self that sees the false as the false.

The Key

The question arises: 'If the ignorance-of-Self is false, it must undergo change. In that case, it is clear that ignorance-of-Self can be certified as having changed *only* when it becomes some kind of knowledge-of-self. And so, is not this so-called *new* state of self-knowledge also false?'

Precisely. The knowledge-of-self, that alternates with ignorance (the absence of any knowledge-of-Self; as in *sushupti*) must itself be false, owing to its built-in transience. The self in the waking or the dream, experiences itself as 'I am so-and-so'. The 'I-am-a-poor-man' identity in waking, which differs from an 'I-am-a-power-man' in dream, is due to the different psycho-somatic environment with which the self identifies itself. The seed behind the sprouting of differing identity, is the sense of location, felt as "I am *here*".

The nature of ignorance has not changed when it articulates itself as so-called knowledge. It is false because there is invariably the element of change involved. False knowledge is ignorance by whatever name we call it. This is what Bhagavan Ramana points out in *Ulladu Narpadu v.12*: True Knowledge is beyond both (wrong) knowledge and ignorance .

Wrong knowledge is a projection (*vikshepa*) of ignorance (*ajnaana*). Unless the ignorance 'surrounding' the self is investigated, this rudiment of wrong knowledge mysteriously secures a validity for itself by projecting 'part' of itself as real and the 'remainder' as false. This is how wrong knowledge projects the waking world as real, by rejecting the dream as false.

Though waking and dream are both false owing to their transience, it would seem transience is of two kinds. The former kind carries the impression of a recurrence (and it is therefore wrongly regarded, as a reality independent of the seer, as in the case of the waking world), and the latter kind is non-recurring, (and correctly regarded, as an experience dependent on the seer, as in the case of the dream world). So, isn't there a difference after all, between the waking and dream states?

No Difference

As long as one is awake one regards the state as real, and other mental states as false. This same bias is observed in the dream state too. We can infer from this observation that there is no difference between waking and dream.

This is explained below:

It is obvious that while awake, one differentiates the waking state from the dream state. We also differentiate different states of mind within the waking state. It is possible one has a sub-dream in the midst of a dream. That is to say, the person 'waking up' from the sub-dream will look upon the parent dream-world as waking and self-existent. That is, the dream-world existed even while the sub-dream briefly 'took-over'. Also, one 'returned' to it and so it is recurrent and *independent* of oneself. The same dreamer would regard the sub-dream, which one 'woke up' from, as non-recurring and *dependent* on oneself, that is, personal to oneself.

The inability to accept that the waking is *absolutely non-different* from the dream state, is crucial and arises out of incomplete meditation on the point clarified here. The great guru Gaudapaada, in a terse couplet, disposes of this point in his *Maandukya Kaarika*. The point is extremely subtle, and sacred, and it is no wonder that this precise 'laser' treatment' given to the attentive intellect, weakens craving and egoic-life, and promotes mauna and the samaadhis of witnessing.

Magic Pot Reappears

Did a sense of self continue in sushupti, sound sleep? The Rishis inspire us to see that the sense of self as the dimensionless 'I am' continues in the space between thoughts, between dreams and dream and waking. If this insight is maintained it is the gateway to the natural abidance as Self.

Similarly, if the pot is merely seen as a 'rough pot', and not seen as the 'rough *clay* pot', then it follows, that the same error will continue with the 'smooth pot' not being seen as the 'smooth *clay* pot'.

The transition from waking-self to dream-self, or the reverse, is really like the pot giving up the idea 'I am a rough-surfaced pot', and then holding on to the idea, 'I am the smooth-surfaced pot'. The interim, after the 'roughness' is forgotten and before the 'smoothness' is assumed, is a state lacking definition of 'pot surface'. The *clay* however continues without break.

The sense of self as 'I am' must necessarily, 'clay-like', continue in sushupti, in between its relinquishment of 'being *this* self' and prior

to its assumption of 'being *that* self'. This is as far as inference, aided by the *sruti*, can guide us.

(iii) *anubhava*: Unless the inferential conclusion is firmly internalised by the waking-self, the demands of the waking world will continue to dictate outward attention, and this ensures one's blind assumption of the role as the waking-self. Thought is always apprehended *post facto*, and never while one was being led by one's thought-nose. When thus 'waking up' from a thought, the practice of self-enquiry enquiring 'who was just now involved in thought?', always produces an instant answer in the form of a focus felt as 'I'. The query then consists of taking advantage of the momentary separation between the waking-self and its just-receded thought. The waking-self must itself be a 'something' clothed in thought (we infer this, from the transient nature it shares with the dream-self). The object of focus at the point of the answer 'I', is on the self *as self*. Whereas, when the self was involved with its thought, the self's object of focus was on the (self as) *seen*.

Self-enquiry in itself dissolves this causal ignorance.

14. Other methods like chanting or rituals, create new attachments. For those who, by previous merit, are already unattached, this teaches how to get rid of limitations.

Commentary

A higher vantage point can only be communicated to a seeker by leading him beyond his current stand point. A person at Tiruchuzhi who seeks the route to Tiruvannamalai, will experience bewilderment if shown the route from Tirukkoilur to Arunachala. He must first be enthusiastically led from wherever he is, that is from Tiruchuzhi onto Madurai, and then be led further on to Tirukkoilur until he reaches his primary goal, namely Arunachala.

Adhyaaropa and Apavaada

When a sublime communication or instruction actually involves the *removal* of wrong knowledge rather than a transmission of knowledge, there is invariably a sequence which calibrates a superficial truth (*adhyaaropa*) appropriate to the capacity of the

student. And this in turn must be sublated (*apavaada*) through reasoning, onto the higher truth when the seeker expresses dissatisfaction over the previous limited truth.

The surrender of an earlier standpoint to a higher truth even if this too be temporary truth, eventually inspires that 'leap' beyond the finger pointing to the moon.⁴ This is the time-honoured process of *adhyaaropa-apavaada*. Whenever the seeker is ready to consider a higher truth the rishi would exercise a ruse whereby superficial attributions are resorted to, and the same are later retracted to lead to ever higher revelations.

This is the eternal way of learning: whether it is 'blind' nature reluctantly re-veiling Her self through the ever-evolving theories of the modern scientist, or the Rishi actively revealing ever-present Self-knowledge to the worthy seeker.

Evolution from Matter to Spirit (*Srshti-Drshiti*)

Bhagavan Ramana points out that for those who are not ripe enough to see the role of mind in projecting the world, the guru talks of evolution as a real process. Each guru might even list a different sequence of manifestation, one preceding from the elements, one from prana, or even the Void. These differences are all consequences of the ruse referred above. For various reasons, the seeker may not be able to readily distance himself from involvement in the external world. For such a one the guru prescribes external aids such ritual, chanting, prayer, the offering of the fruits of worldly action to the guru or God, all of which temporarily steady his mind.

Projection in Spirit (*Drshiti-Srshti*)

It is possible a seeker is ripe enough to consider his dream experience, and discover that the dream world simultaneously arises with all evidences of its dream-past 'embedded' at the moment of conception. He is then sufficiently mature to start questioning the absolute reality, ascribed by the guru, to the slow and successive evolution in the seeker's waking world. The guru at this stage rejects

⁴ See note (ii) of the first verse of this work.

his own earlier emphasis on the standpoint of waking as being one of *srshti-drshti*⁵The guru now encourages the seeker to accept the waking state as being every bit a dream, from the standpoint of *drshti-srshti*.⁶The seer and seen arise and set simultaneously in mind, and whatever is not seen by the seer does not exist in his world till he sees it.

Sruti, Sage and Modern Science

Quantum Theory now says that an object can be teleported instantaneously from one particle to the other of an EPR particle-pair. It also requires that all information swallowed by a Black-Hole, must be returned as radiation back to the universe (and perhaps be imaged automatically in other mirror-like universes *also*), while the collapsing Hole vanishes. This essentially points to Creation being a re-Projection rather than being a chancy one-time hit-and-go from the initial information-depleted conditions.⁷This is something the 'finger' of instruction in *Yoga Vaasishtha* never tires to point out when it actually points to the 'moon' of non-creation.

Non-Creation (*Ajaata*)

To the seeker who is ripe enough to question the basis for such a maya-play of self-ignorance, there emerges the question, 'why should there be at all, a self needing to enquire and wake up from the effects

⁵ The idea that matter evolves into mind and seer, and that the seen exists independent of the seer.

⁶ It means that Mind appears as in a flash, and does so, fully 'embedded' with evidences presented to the observer which serve as proof of the validity of evolving ages.

⁷ In the circles of modern technology's science, it would soon seem quite 'proper' to allow that: The consistency of a Grand Unified Theory must still submit to the Incompleteness Principles governing sets in maths. A system is said to be consistent when a statement, proved to be true, cannot also be proved to be untrue, within the system. This will necessarily demand that for a dream state to be internally consistent (*and the same must also hold true for waking*) (i) there must necessarily exist at least one statement *within* the state, that declares that the state, considered *as a whole*, is false; (ii) and that the statement itself must be true; (iii) and that the truth of that statement cannot be proved solely from within the state. The *sruti* and the *rishi*'s *jivanmukti* i.e.transcendence while seemingly involved in the state, serve as this embedded 'statement'.

of a self-ignorance?' The guru delivers the final retraction, by rejecting even the idea of such a 'waking up' as being a dream. That is, the idea of an entity waking up from the dream of a kernel called self-ignorance, is itself a dream. There was no bondage and therefore no liberation from this phantom bondage. By analogy, the sun knows no darkness. If there was darkness which contained 'a beam of sunlight' or ray of supposed knowledge, the sun can only entertain it as falsity. Light and darkness are mutually exclusive and there are in principle, no degrees of relationship or co-existence.

This verse is in anticipation of the dropping of the process of *adhyaaropa-apavaada* itself, which is the final bursting of the bubble. The seeker exists in a subject-object relationship with the teacher and the teaching, and in his quest to 'become' the Truth, this dual relationship forms the basis of the transmission of any instruction. The falsity of this understanding is revealed to the ripest of seekers in whom the guru has detected strong disillusionment with the structural defect of dual means exercised in developing understanding. The action of self-enquiry alone minimizes this duality directly. All other methods need to *maintain* duality, as these methods are really outward-oriented; though they do serve as necessary intermediate steps.

The seeker who develops unshakeable conviction regarding the defect inherent in seeking relief from sense-objects, is sure to gain *vairaagya* (the text says: 'who by previous merit are unattached'). His attention is now released from outward compulsions, he gains the facility to turn within to the source of origination and then the practice of self-enquiry is unflinching and efficient.

15. This teaching is for those who serve the master absolutely, as breath serves the body [by providing Life to it], as eye-lids protect the eyes [by winking without thought of injury to themselves], and as thread follows [unquestioningly] the direction of the needle. The disciple hesitates not, when directed [by guru] to enter fire, take on a tiger, or engage a snake. This teaching, will not serve

those who lack the wealth of ardour for liberation, just as fire cannot burn the [watery stem of the] banana tree, nor the philosopher's stone turn an earthen pot into gold.

Notes

'as breath serves the body': The Mind as the seer, through its denser state as prana, manifests the seen. Prana manifests as gross pranic process that links the fields outside and inside of the body by exchange of breath. The inner pranic intelligence manifests as the physical body's homeostasis or equilibrium; and in its subtler aspect prana manifests the ingrained habits of mind as the play of emotions, vaasanas. There is a connection therefore between prana and the vaasanas, which is of immense value to the seeker. It facilitates the individual's search for higher states of awareness, and ultimately, jnana.⁸ In spite of the abuse of one's body through deleterious physical and emotional habits, prana continues to do its utmost to enable the body throw out the accumulating burden of the side-effects born of individual confusion within and social confusion without.

The sruti declares the body to be the primary instrument for practice of dharma: *sareeram aadyam khalu dharma saadhanam*. The highest dharma is attainment of the natural repose of *sahaja svarupa stithi*. The seeker must serve the guru selflessly, just as prana serves the body through all trials and tribulations.

16. The study of this [work] will occasion the Bliss [of Self] only in those whose heart-longing can transmute [my words into experience], in the same way as the sensual man

⁸ In Yoga Vaasishtha, the sage tells Rama that Self-knowledge is impossible without *mano-naasa* (negation of mind), and that *mano-naasa* is not obtained without voiding of vaasanas, and that this in turn is not gained in the absence of Self-knowledge. Rama, befuddled by this vicious cycle begs the sage, "What is one to practise then?" Vasishtha replies: "do all three". Rama persists and asks him if there is an additional way to weaken the negative vaasanas. The sage replies that the practise of restraint of prana directly helps weaken vaasanas. He emphasises more than once in his great work, that this pranayama is *not* of the conventional hatha yoga (meaning 'forced practises'), implying that this is intelligent restraining of prana, according to the way of Jnana.

would himself become [the five shades of] the waves of thrill which arise from the five kinds of physical embrace embodied in the sensual-song of an adept. [The adept's direct experience empowers the investing of such ecstasies, in song, and makes the song capable of a transmission]. [And, in the same way] as a lotus blossoms [effortlessly] at sunrise and as a music-lover listens [surrendering body and mind, head and heart] to divine music.

A Two-in-one Benediction completes Tradition's Trio

17. A work, which does not bow [to an 'other' since Ozhivil Odukkam is really concerned with non-dual Self], cannot have [a benedictory verse in the mood of] an obeisance [to God]. In being so, where is the merit in offering [textual] obeisance to the evil [of imagined separation]?

Even if one were to [compromise, by bowing to literary tradition, and] incorporate the obeisance [into this work], not all [of the literati present in the audience] would be pleased [with that]. [So, it is clear] neither would receive universal condemnation.

Notes

(i) This is the meaning according to the Tamil commentator: "There can be no benediction for an egoistic work. There is no merit in offering benediction and singing praise for a work full of defects. Even if that were done, it would not be agreeable to all, as some, overcome by jealousy, would reject the work. Again, there can be no meritorious work that is unacceptable to all".

Munagala Venkatramiah made a translation of the above as follows: "A pretentious work needs no benediction; an evil work though accompanied with prayer, is still no good. In spite of an apologetic preface even a good work is not considered good by all, nor an evil one, evil."

This verse is terse and seemingly out of context. In its literal sense as given above, it interrupts the smooth flow of the preceding verses surcharged with advaita. But really, there is treasure hidden within its seeming naivete. The matter in square brackets fills the gap. The treasure is unearthed below.

(ii) Benedictions for a literary work can only be of three kinds. They are *aashirvaada mangalam* (receiving blessing), *namskaara mangalam* (offering obeisance), and *vaastava/vastu nirdesha mangalam* (substantive; expressing the all-consuming Substance which is used here in both its senses of 'true meaning or jnana' and 'reality or Self' and signified by the word 'I'). Thus benedictions are three: Receiving, Giving and Being. Passive, Active and Static. The first two being dualistic, are employed in the majority of works. The third is advaitic.

The first verse of this work began with the Receiving kind, when the hand of the guru Jnana Sambandha, raised in blessing is pictured.

In the present verse, the author submits his Obeisance, being the benediction of the Giving kind, and expresses confidence that he has preserved protocol without sacrificing the pristine philosophy.

(iii) It is useful to imagine that the author is visualizing an august gathering of sages established in *sahaja samadhi* and savouring the launching of his work dealing with the transmission of the purest form of advaita concerning the natural state. He realizes that a work started with all round approval, is a work well concluded. He is therefore keen to ensure that in his observance of the tradition regarding the prefatory benediction, the work incurs no disapproval from the sternest of sages. This is a tall order, since all three forms of benediction must be employed, and must be seen to be employed in such a way, as to satisfy all the rishis, especially those who might, out of sheer *lila*, choose to take opposite positions over the benedictions.

Under these constraints, this benediction, through Obeisance, is necessarily indirect, being a 'nested' nugget, reminiscent of the famous *chidambara rahasyam* (the secret in Chidambaram). The author offers the Obeisance in the form of an analysis of two opposing positions :Tradition versus The-Thing-in-Itself; and then

pays tribute to the soundness of both, and concludes that their mutual exclusivity prevents their formal inclusion, and brings it to a close, confident of winning the appreciation of all, by implying that his acknowledgement of the impossibility of accommodating such 'duality', is a surrender, in itself the Obeisance!

This is expanded below.

Commentary

(i) One visualises the author, Kannudaya Vallalar arguing:

'The advaitic metaphysicians would object to the inclusion of obeisance, as a compromise of bowing down to a duality and hence a falsehood, and would immediately declare a certain defect in this work, while the traditionalists would applaud instead, the preserving of the protocol.

'On the other hand, if I were to give up the idea of including an obeisance in the benediction, Even then, I could not succeed in achieving my aim of pleasing all of the authorities present here. The sticklers for protocol would object to its non-inclusion, while the sticklers for metaphysics would instead applaud this choice.'

The author concludes:

'Having accorded fair and thorough consideration to both points of view, we now declare that the two schools—one for, and the other against Obeisance in a dual context—are equally valid contenders, *but are mutually exclusive like sun and darkness.*

'Our humble acknowledgment of the impossibility of accommodating such 'duality' simultaneously, is itself a surrender to the Truth of the moment; is itself the Obeisance!'

The author takes a bow in mauna:

'Thus we have enshrined the benediction through Obeisance, as well as the Substantive benediction, within this verse. These, the second and the third of the traditional trio, are respectively, the benediction to divinity as an 'other', and the benediction to the Self as oneself.'

(ii) It is interesting that even the benediction of Blessing received from the 'other' portrayed as Jnana Sambandha in the first verse, does not transgress the non-duality which the author has upheld in the latter benedictions of verse 17. For, he actually employs the portrayal of the hand raised in blessing as a simile for invoking the grace within which is Self!

In summary, the author incorporates the two traditional kinds of 'dualistic' benedictions in verse 1 and 17 respectively. The third kind, to the Self, is the undeniable advaitic undercurrent uniformly present in both those verses!

(iii) As verses 23 to 27 show, the author is compassion incarnate. Those who might express dissatisfaction that the Lord is not specifically remembered in verse 17, would receive full satisfaction from these verses.

(iv) Verse 18, which follows the present verse, revealed to me the contextual setting of verse 17. It uses the word 'payan', (*prayojanam*), the End Result. That was the key to intuiting the loosened-up structure the author has adopted to express all three Benedictions, and the triad of Matter, Context, and End Result concerning his text. Outside of the context of the expressed problem over Benediction, verse 17 lacks reasonable coherence, placed here in the sage's narrative.

This one verse demonstrates the rational rigour, terse tongue, and robust revelry, which the poet in the sage commands by virtue of his perfect inherence in blissful Self. My own obeisance to him for his prasaada of granting me the *rasa*, the taste secreted in this verse. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS

SANKARA STOTRA RATNĀKARAM: A Treasure Trove of Sankara's Hymns: (bilingual characters) translated by Rema Nair. 2004. Pub: Swati, 'Swati, Palakkad 678 013, Kerala.<NairRema2003@yahoo.co.in> <www.SanskritHymnsTranslations.com> pp354, Rs350.

Included are 48 of Sankara's Pancharatnas, Ashtakas, Dasakas, Mānasapūjas, Kshamāpanas, Bhujangas, including Bhaja Govindam, Ānadalāharī and Shatpadī stotram. The unabashedly advaitic Dakshināmūrti, Manīsha, and Prātaḥsmarana stotras are also here. The greedy chanter will naturally complain of those excluded! The largesse of eye-pleasing large-type Sanskrit is marred by disconcerting metre-tripping typo-errors in conjunct consonants, and elongations. The satisfactory English rendering, would be enhanced with a larger glossary. A simple addendum on the 'laghu-guru' durations governing our metres will empower group recitation culture in youth. This is a very timely compilation inspired through Rema's guru Śrī Gnānānanda of Kanyākumārī.

Praise the fiery formless Mound
Aye, evidence abounds
Rhythmic Rishi-sound surrounds
Kali's current merry-go-round
Hold the ground while we're bound
For what was never lost
At no cost
Is soon found.
—J.Jayarāman

AWAKENING NATURE'S
HEALING INTELLIGENCE
(Expending Aylurveda Through the
Maharshi Vedic Approach to Health by
Hari Sharma. 1999. Pub: Motilal
Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi
110007. pp277, Rs225)

This book gives the readers a rare insight into the common focus of all natural health approaches. It presents a

comprehensive frame-work for understanding how nature's intelligence emerges and how it can be harnessed for greater health and well-being. The book shows how both modern science and the ancient Vedic science of India point to wholeness as an essential quality of existence.

The Maharshi has cast the broad spectrum of Vedic literature into a systematic and comprehensive understanding which brings the Vedic wisdom into the reach of everyone. All parts of the Vedic knowledge contain valuable insights into enhancing all facets of human life. Mind, behaviour, life-style, environment, design of our homes, sun and moon all influence our physiology. The focus is on the underlying wholeness of existence.

Disease is viewed as the result of a breakdown in the delicate balance of the intelligence that rules the functioning of the body. The breakdown results from the disconnection of intelligence from its source in wholeness. The concept of wholeness is derived from the Vedic tradition, paralleling modern physics' discovery of the unified force of reality beyond the sub-atomic level. The Maharishi's Vedic approach to health treats the whole person.

The book covers a large number of techniques to good health, which are on the level of individual life-consciousness, physiology, behaviour and environment. Truly this is a multi dimensional system of health-care.

The approach aims at averting 'the danger that has not arisen' instead of awaiting crisis management.

The author deserves praise for delivering such a good book. Readers will be transformed into a new and fresh outlook, after going through the pages.

—T.N.Pranathārthi Haran

MY EXPERIMENTS WITH UNTRUTH: Gyan C. Jain. 2001. Pub: P.K.Gupta, Hoover Media Lines, 302-A-14 Bhandari Complex, Mukherji Nagar, Delhi 110009. pp293, Rs150

This book carries a foreword by Sri SC Kashyap, the former Secretary General of the Lōk Sabhā, and Member of National Committee to Review the Working of the Constitution.

The author has to his credit a number of popular books on electronics, technology and diverse themes. The present book resembles the Mahātmā's autobiography only in its title. It is perhaps the very anti-thesis of everything he stood for.

[Gāndhiji swore by swarāj (self-rule, rather than selfish-rule masquerading in a west-promoted sense of right and might). The political swarāj (the triple-pillared democratic governance) that we have fashioned, seems to be a constitutionally tolerable, tipsy infant 'ruler' who is fast maturing, by his increasingly having to connect with 'his' constitutionally boat-rocking 'brethren' from afar, and by increasingly having to contend, within 'his' own shores, with Bhārat's criss-crossed but, entrenched ancient web of diverse life-styles and other-worldly aspirations. This is an ecology-sustaining web only because it is rooted in the Rishi culture of self-knowledge, which concerns one's immediate –physical and spiritual– environment. It is a culture that builds national wealth by promoting symbiosis in communities by conditioning each to *think globally but act locally*. This encourages in each family, the aspiration to acquire social self-esteem, alongside its contribution to community wealth through pride in simple, sane, shared living. It thereby ensures that human communities respect the right-to-the-joy-of-life of all creatures, sub-human and under-privileged. There is today a resurgence driven, not by any group ideology, but by the globally suffered economic, social, and therefore political, desperation over preventing diseased and

tortured sliding into extinction of nature's 'dumb' lot. God-less technologies have been promising the earth, while actually crippling or eliminating every biological support system of our Mother earth. In preference to the empowering of localized solutions anywhere and everywhere, should those corporated technologies (acting globally in self-interest) be still trusted to deliver wholesomely shared solutions, when there is nothing in their record so far that improves on baboons licensed to manage banana plantation? —J.J.]

This pseudo 'auto-biography' set beyond future 2010, is a parody on politics, deftly painting the national fall in quality of rulership, kshatriya dharma, keeping with the Kali age. Although fictitious, and *doubly so owing to its ending*, the satirical and tongue-in-cheek narration covers the spectrum of behaviour that is glorious in an animal but is a shameful abuse of god-given intelligence by man. For man, who is freed from instinct's grooves, can sink to the diabolic when culture fails to condemn crass materialism, and will deploy his superior intellect for connecting with conduits of power, for seeking the 'good life' for the few at the expense of everyone else, and in such a way till all beings running ever faster just to stay in the same place, end up with no place to go to.

The author speaking as Ghoga Deen finds his insatiable desire to be the Prime Minister of India, resulting in his actually becoming one. All the 51 chapters are about manipulations, treachery, popular gimmicks, and cunning tricks that he employs to gain and then to remain secure in the PM's chair. He has to save democracy, culture, secularism, free enterprise, uplift the down-trodden; in short, justify accommodating every bit of ideology however conflicting, that he may keep the power.

The penultimate chapter details the PM's incognito visit, during a political crisis, to a bearded but benevolent Baba in Rishikesh, who Deen discovers was none other than his

employer in his pre-political days. The cryptic words of the 'boss' dismissed by the Deen of those days as nonsense, make prophetic sense to the PM now.

The hard-headed advice he receives at Hardwar is the turning point. "I knew Ghoge, even from day-one of your employment under me, that you were to become PM. For this reason I was ever telling you to *mend your ways and serve the people*. I do so even now. Carry on with nepotism and bribe, under compulsions and pressure. Manage your political foes the way you want to. The country needs a benevolent dictator. I know you cannot be an honest politician, but you can be a good politician with the good of the country in your heart. Try to serve the people. You have been a bad man all your life, *but you will soon find a change in yourself*. Go back. There is no need to come to me again".

The climax is reached when providence favours the PM. Through a bloodless *coup* the PM declares himself and his wife as the King Emperor and Queen of Bhārat. Justifying the ascension as Emperor, Deen quotes Benito Mussolini, "Democracy is a kingless regime infested by many kings who are sometimes more exclusive, tyrannical and destructive than one [king] if he be a tyrant".

In the role of the benign dictator, as exhorted by the selfless and practical Baba for the country's welfare, Emperor Deen gets busy ushering in many reforms. The sweeping character of many of them concerning government services, the judiciary, the media, education, socialist-pattern of ownership and so on, goes to show the deep meditation the author has accorded to a 'wishful' thinking based on a careful reading of the dominantly spiritual 'imperial-as-trustee' roots of this nation.

Does Ghoga succeed? Ah! What miracles can a benevolent dictator not accomplish through the power invested in his hands, when the common majority, in any land, would readily worship him for his open life of simplicity and accessibility. His interventions (often incognito), to evaluate the quality of the feed-back at his

command, enforce swift justice, and effectively ensure emulation of honour in action, all the way downwards from the top.

The narration is profusely intercepted with the 'punchy' quotes and aphorisms of famous men and women rationalizing every questionable act of the PM before turning Emperor.

—S. Krishnaswāmy

VEDIC PHYSICS: Scientific Origins of Hinduism: by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. 1999. Pub: Golden Egg Publishing, 1245 Dupont St, POBox 99045, Toronto Canada. pp248, \$19.95

The book under review is a bold attempt in a new direction. Within nearly 240 pages, the author takes us on a long journey through the universe of matter, mind and human evolution. Raja Roy is a doctorate in material science and engineering from a reputed American University, with a sound knowledge of Sanskrit. The Vedas are the foundation of Hinduism. The author feels that the Rig Veda is a book of particle physics and cosmology. Unfortunately this aspect happens to be the most ill understood today. The author tries to reveal the Vedic secrets of cosmogenesis through his interpretation of the verses.

The book has 20 chapters describing at length some of the important topics like Vedic legacy, time before time, Big Bang and expanding universe, fundamental particles and so on. There is a chapter comparing Vedic cosmology with Big Bang and steady-state cosmologies. The table at the end is as useful as the glossary of Vedic terms with their Vedic and modern scientific meanings. The author has taken much pains to establish these connections. His academic education and knowledge of Sanskrit have helped him achieve a feat not done by others before.

The author's effort deserves the support of all people who have faith in the ancient literature.

—Dr.R.Srīnivāsan

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