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Ramana Ashtottaram

42. ओम् पूर्णाय नमः

Om pūrṇāya namaḥ

Prostration to the perfect one.

Free from body-consciousness, free from any trace of ego, He is firmly established in the perfect state of Pure Awareness. Like the full moon or the bright unclouded sun, He shines in His own intrinsic splendour.

To be in the presence of Bhagavan in body, spirit and mind is to be radiated with the pure light of consciousness. This light is harmonious and complete. We feel at one in His presence and all doubts and conflicts are resolved in this spontaneous state of perfection.

43. ओम् रचिताचल तान्दवाय नमः

Om racitācala tāṇḍavāya namaḥ

Prostration to the dancer dancing the dance of stillness.

Like the still foot of Nataraja, the state of pure Being, the bliss of Awareness, is a joyous, vibrant *sphurana* which is both rest and movement. Siva as Arunachala is the Master of this dance of stillness.

This stillness cannot be compared to activity; it is not relative to movement. It is that state which is not dependent upon anything other than itself for its existence. ▲

Inner Guidance

For devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi who sincerely follow his teachings, there is a conviction that they are subtly and actively guided by the invisible influence of the guru. It is difficult for those who do not feel this umbilical connection, to comprehend and accept this fact and until they too experience it for themselves, explanations are inadequate.

Ever since the physical demise of Bhagavan, devotees have adjusted to this new reality with varying degrees of success. Bhagavan was aware that after his departure from this world many would feel lost because they had attached overwhelming importance to his physical presence. He joked once when a statue of him had been created that those who were enamoured of his form could worship it.

If Bhagavan is not there to be worshipped in a physical form anymore then how is it that we can communicate in our hearts with this mysterious presence?

Though it is difficult to understand, we should realise that Bhagavan's original nature is an expression of our own heart. A devotee who sat before him once explained to me that when he was graced by a long direct look from Bhagavan, he felt and understood that it was his own self looking at himself. The impact of this revelation, surely the essence of non-duality, opened his eyes to the understanding that he should seek Bhagavan in his own heart and not be attached to the external form of the guru.

We all have felt at least once the overwhelming certainty that Bhagavan is guiding us. People in general do not continue following a line of thought or action unless there is something in it for them. We are all driven by our own hunger to know the truth, and though we may be fooled some of the time, we stick to that which satisfies a deep craving for fulfilment within us. The fact that so many people continue to have an implicit faith in Bhagavan testifies to the truth of this fact. There is something alive and available we call Ramana, which nourishes us, and on some subtle level we intuitively understand this miracle.

The innumerable questions our mind throws up can only be resolved by a decisive experience and our purpose in practising the teaching is to be at one with this pure beingness exemplified by Bhagavan. Until we make the effort we shall never know the truth. We have been instructed time and again that Bhagavan is nothing but the expression of our own heart. As the inner guru, he pulls us in to the source and as the external guru, he pushes us back to the point from where we came. Being in touch with Bhagavan is being in touch with our true self. We spend our lives endeavouring to achieve harmony and eventually realise that the truth is embodied in this simple statement.

When we recognise that our minds are limited and our emotions confused, how then do we focus our attention on Bhagavan in order to gain his attention? How do we create a permanent line of trust and communication with that which eludes our heavy-handed grasp? If we cannot see nor clutch this elusive being, then of what use is it to us?

There are many pitfalls and delusions to transcend before we arrive at a point of pure consciousness. If we trust the guru we will be guided

aright, but to do that we must first deliberately surrender our own will and wholeheartedly trust the power and sagacity of the teacher. We can do that either by careful reasoning, emotional resonance or more likely a combination of both; but most importantly there must be a living act of mutual recognition between the guru and the seeker which normally occurs in an unexpected moment of transcendent silence. This crucial event is as unmistakeable as it is decisive. There may be doubts about many things, but this moment is irrefutable and not even the busy mind can explain it away. We just know. On this basis we start the journey.

It is our inner yearning for the truth about ourselves which brings us into contact with Bhagavan. No prayer is unheard; no call for help is unanswered. We may not be aware of the forces we have set in motion and it may be many years before our wishes reach fulfilment and even then it is often in a way we had not envisaged, but that is no reason not to place our faith in a higher power. After all, what other choice do we have? When we know that we are incapable of comprehending all the events which act on us, it seems logical to recognise that a greater intelligence is at work. For our lives do reveal moments of epiphany which lessen, at least temporarily, the crushing burden of ignorance we carry. They open up for an instant the wide horizons of peace and at-oneness. They give us hope that we are not alone and forgotten. They give us the strength and conviction to renew the contract initiated by Bhagavan, when he recognised our sincerity and reached out to us after we took that first, significant step.

We come into touch with the grace of the guru by admitting to ourselves that really we do not know who we are. We sincerely ask for help. This simple procedure diminishes the grip of our sense of narrow identification (*samskaras*) if only for a second, and allows a chink of light to penetrate the barriers of conceit. We have unconsciously developed strategies to protect our false self from every event, thought or emotion which we are afraid might interfere with our sense of apparent well-being. A sure sign of ignorance is the inability to be open and flexible. Suppleness of mind and heart is not a weakness but a mark of intelligence.

After the initial burst of spontaneous grace diminishes we slowly begin to realise that, having once tasted it, we naturally want to repeat it, until we live constantly with that lightness of being. We begin to focus if but for a moment, on our sense of I-ness by using that neat tool, atma-vichara, or we remember the form of the guru, which in this case is Sri Ramana. Holding our attention on his compassionate countenance purifies the mind and heart and lessens the gap between the wayward fantasies in which we indulge and which have no basis in reality, and the stillness where we expect nothing, where we live in the present, the only moment there is.

To make the connection permanent calls for dedication, sincerity and perseverance. We bear responsibility for our own actions. And the road is long — a lifetime's worth of effort lies before us. There is no easy course and no short-cuts. When we do encounter the guru, be it inner or external, it gives us a powerful and irresistible impetus to live: to discover who we are in the midst of life's uncertainties. Who has not looked up at the stars at night and wondered at the mystery of life and at our purpose in being alive? The guru is like those distant stars which fascinate us. In that calm, vast silence of outer space we see the universe before which our minds have no choice but to surrender in wonder and we hear the deep resonance of measureless time which swallows up all our petty notions.

When we realise that this grace is so subtle that we cannot grasp it with our ordinary minds, we learn to purify our thoughts and emotions so that we may 'listen' with the spirit. The answer is not to be found in books, or in this magazine, or in visions, or in journeys, or in people; but fortunately one or more of these can be a signpost along the path. These are aids which seek to catch that which, according to the Upanishads, eludes all knowledge. The guru is not in these conceptions but is like the unexpected breeze which brushes us and effortlessly disappears despite our attempts to hold on to it. We are always too slow, not from lack of effort but the reverse — because we are endeavouring to catch the wind. If only we could learn to remain truly still in order to flow with the wind! The inner guru is not separate from us and can touch us at any moment.

Unfortunately we are held captive by the apparent reality of this body and mind, but if we can learn to hear the deep inner throb of the heart, it tells us we are alive and free. Our sincere and persistent efforts eventually enable us to stop for a moment and we see that, despite the evidence to the contrary, we can hover as birds do on the winds of change, fearless and curious.

When we realise there is no solid ground to clutch and rest in naked space, we see too that, like the wind, we can move through life without any notion that can bind us. When we are still we naturally listen and become a vehicle for the sound of that silence.

Arthur Osborne wrote some wonderful lines in a poem entitled *The Wind* which illustrates this.

I am the pipe the wind blows through,
 Be still, it is the wind that sings.
 The course of my life and the things that I do
 And the seeming false and the seeming true
 Are the tune of the wind that neither knows
 Good and ill, nor joys and woes.
 But the ultimate awe is deeper yet
 Than song or pipe or storm;
 For the pipe and tune are the formless wind
 That seemed for a while to take form.
 And words are good to escape from words
 And strife to escape from strife,
 But silence drinks in all the waves
 Of song and death and life.





Vichara and the Turning Word

Overcoming the Resistance to Questioning

MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

When asked about specific methods for making progress on the spiritual path, Sri Bhagavan gave only a few. Among them was *atma vichara* — enquiring into one's nature through the question 'Who am I?' — which, in time, proved to be central to his teaching. "Are there no other means for making the mind quiescent?" a devotee asked Bhagavan. The Master replied: "Other than enquiry, there are no adequate means."¹ And: "In order to gain that happiness which is one's nature... where there is no mind, one should know one's Self. For that, the path of knowledge, enquiry [in] the form [of] 'Who am I?' is the principal means."²

Bhagavan made numerous similar comments on other occasions, in terms that were powerful, direct and unhesitating, extolling vichara.³ When one considers how much store Bhagavan set by vichara, it is

¹ *Who Am I?*, no. 12.

² *Ibid.*, Introduction.

³ Such as Talks 251: "Vichara is the ultimate route." And Talks 532: "To enquire 'Who am I?' is the only remedy for all the ills of the world." *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

rather remarkable how few of us actually seem to make the effort to practise it. Why is that? Newcomers to the Ashram hear older devotees say things like, “Vichara is for great souls like Bhagavan but it is too difficult for an ordinary person like me.” Evidently quite a number of devotees over the years have bowed out of ever even attempting vichara. For his part, Bhagavan never forced anything on anyone. If asked an honest question, he gave a truthful answer. When asked how to bring peace to the mind, he said that one should trace the mind’s first mode, “the ‘I’-thought”, to its source, which is the Self.⁴

If vichara is unapproachable and beyond the reach of ordinary devotees, then why did Bhagavan regularly urge us to take it up? Is it not a lack of faith on our part to think he didn’t intend it for us? Is it not a lack of confidence in Bhagavan’s teaching ability if we question the relevance his teaching has for us?

While the merit of guru bhakti can hardly be overestimated and while the path of self-surrender is also eminent among Bhagavan’s teachings⁵, one still has to wonder why followers of Bhagavan don’t take more interest in enquiry, the principal method he gave us. On the question of practising vichara Bhagavan once asked rhetorically, “Will a person become a high officer by merely looking at him? Is it not by steady effort in that direction that he becomes a highly placed officer?”⁶

As for effort in vichara, have we exhausted every available means to put it into practice? Is it really so inaccessible or are we just resistant?

These questions are the subject of the following pages where we will examine Bhagavan’s instructions pertaining to enquiry. We will consult other enquiry traditions, such as the *turning word* in Chan monasticism, to see what clues they hold for beginning practice. Those who are already practising vichara may not find here much of interest. But for those who, like the author, are newcomers to vichara — just beginning or wanting to begin enquiry practice — the following pages serve as an exploration into practical means for getting started.

⁴ T. M. P. Mahadevan paraphrasing Bhagavan, *Self-Enquiry*, Ramanasramam, 2005, p. iv.

⁵ “Self-surrender leads to realisation just as enquiry does.” But “surrender can take effect only when done with full knowledge. Such knowledge comes after enquiry.” (Talks 31&462).

⁶ *Self-Enquiry*, p. 31.

What is Vichara?

Before going further let us ask, *what is atma-vichara*? While atma-vichara is most frequently rendered as ‘self-enquiry’, some have pointed out that ‘enquiry’, though perhaps the most meaningful, is but one of many possible translations of ‘vichara’: ‘reflecting’, ‘pondering’, ‘considering’, ‘investigating’, ‘being fascinated with’, ‘worrying,’ ‘wandering’ and interestingly enough, ‘coming to an end’⁷ offer additional flavourings.

Beginning with Max Mueller in the 19th century, ‘atma’ has been routinely translated as ‘Self’. But it has been suggested that ‘Self’ as applied to ‘the formless awareness prior to thought’ carries a lot of unwanted baggage with it; it implies, first of all, *someone* or *something* — a person or an entity — while ‘atma’, allowing for that⁸, accesses a broader semantic field which includes ‘soul’, ‘essence’, ‘nature’, and points to ‘Brahman’, the transcendental reality beyond all attributes.

Even in Sri Bhagavan’s ‘*naan yar?*’ the first person Tamil pronoun *naan* has a different grammatical feel to it than the English ‘Self’ or ‘I’: the Tamil first person pronoun has much less the sense of agency or doership.⁹ In enquiring into It, those of us who are newcomers will do well to carefully consider how we cognise That which is being enquired into. We will want to leave open all possibilities as vichara may be as much a ‘what’ or ‘where’ question as it is a ‘who’ question.

⁷ In the Japanese koan tradition, ‘coming to an end’ is a metaphor for enquiry’s double-bind, where habits of the mind are exhausted through the quandary of questioning, a process likened to a mouse struggling in the hollow end of a cow’s horn.

⁸ ‘Atma’, like ‘self’, functions as a reflexive pronoun in Sanskrit and other Indian languages.

⁹ In Tamil, which is a highly inflexional language, the first person pronoun *naan* may be, and regularly is, omitted, personhood being marked by verb affixation. More significant is the prevalence of verb constructions that function like the passive, where the agent of the action is not indicated. By their nature, such verb forms deemphasize agency. In some Asian languages, it is considered impolite, even self-indulgent, to regularly opt for the grammatically *allowable* first person pronoun ‘I’, (or ‘me’) when neutral, passive, or subjectless verb constructions permit non-indication of agency. The grammatical necessity for the use of ‘I’ and the relative importance of agency in English and most European languages, raise questions about cultural difference. Arguably, because of the grammatical emphasis on doership, the native speaker of a European language may be at a handicap in approaching vichara.

Elucidating the Term

We will also want to remember that ‘atma-vichara’ is Sri Bhagavan’s term, the English ‘self-enquiry’ coming only with subsequent translations. While the English designation approximates Bhagavan’s Sanskrit term, many English speakers may not appreciate the latter’s subtleties: ‘investigating the Atman’, ‘pondering the subject-self’, ‘probing essence’, ‘seeking the hidden mystery’, ‘I-wondering’¹⁰, ‘drowning in Consciousness’¹¹, ‘losing oneself in the vastness of the Self’, etc., are phrases that may help one get a better feel for atma-vichara’s broader signification. While not adequately conveyed in the English word ‘enquiry’, this aspect of *immersion* in seeking and searching is essential for true vichara. Indeed, enquiring into the Self is *seeking* the unseen by means of the probing power of questioning; it is the earnest *search* for the hidden essence and source of Being.

The Perplexity of Questioning

So we who are starting out in vichara practice will want to put forth effort in making our questioning sincere. But what constitutes true question-asking, one might ask? How does one formulate a sincere question? And how does one avoid falling into a mechanical routine?

Experienced persons tell us the secret is allowing oneself to be beset by a pervading sense of perplexity — a sensation of doubt and wonderment — and overcoming the natural disinclination to being in a state of *not-knowing*. What would such a state of mind be like, you ask? Adepts say it is very simple and not unknown to the average person; it is not unlike searching for a lost valuable in one’s house or, at a critical moment in conversation, trying to recall a name or phrase just on the tip of the tongue; it is a state of fascination and absorption where the whole world is momentarily excluded in order to allow one to focus on the matter at hand. In the method Bhagavan imparts to us, this is among the most essential ingredients. In the following pages, we shall see why.

¹⁰ This coinage from Rustom P. Mody.

¹¹ “Like one who, to find a thing that has fallen into water, dives deep down”, *Forty Verses*, v. 28.

The Steep Staircase of Vichara: Overcoming a Resistant Mind

As questioning can be said to be the core orientation in vichara, it is also the root cure for any obstacle that might impede the method. When unwanted mind-states intrude, one simply comes back to the question. If the question gets interrupted, one simply uses the same questioning to recover it. Sri Bhagavan puts it this way:

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire, ‘To whom do they arise?’. It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, ‘To whom has this thought arisen?’. The answer that [will] emerge [is] ‘to me’. Thereupon if one inquires, ‘Who am I?’, the mind will go back to its source and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source.¹²

Now, the utter simplicity of the technique is probably also what makes it maddeningly abstruse, at least for those of us just starting out. But if we reflect on what Bhagavan tells us about the nature of the mind¹³, it is no surprise that we find vichara so uncomfortable. By its nature, Bhagavan tells us, the mind habitually thinks; it loves random thoughts and concepts, doubts and positions, opinions and views. What it does *not* like is anything that prevents it from thinking, least of all, unfathomable questions. This being the case, it is easy to see why the mind repels vichara: it turns the mind back on itself, prohibiting it from doing what it loves best, namely, to think, analyze, conceptualize, label, worry and discriminate. Through questioning, Bhagavan emphasizes, all these activities are brought to a halt. This being so, the reason we resist vichara is plainly and simply this: it is effective.

Indeed, one can say that it is the sheer potency of ‘Who am I?’ that works against those of us who are beginners. Vichara is a steep path — a lot of ground is covered in a short distance. But, as many who have gone ahead of us will testify, it is tough going, at least at the start. Might there be some way for novices and the uninitiated to start this practice incrementally and work their way up?

¹² *Who Am I?*, no. 11.

¹³ “Thought, indeed, is the nature of the mind.” *Ibid.*, no. 12. See *Upadesa Undiyar*, v. 18.

Preparing the Ground: The Turning Word

In other enquiry traditions such as Chinese Chan, beginners are urged to use a variety of basic questions as stepping stones to more direct questioning. The initial stages involve accustoming the mind to the process of questioning, and regularly confronting it with gradual (and increasingly uncomfortable) states of not-knowing. This is an important first step where one acquaints the mind with the disconcerting feeling of groping in the dark without firm handholds; it is the stage of loosening up the mind's insistence on conceptual anchors and the inner world of forms.

What are some of these stepping stones? Within the *k'an-hua* or 'saying contemplation' Chan of the 12th century Master Ta-hui, the preparatory techniques employed were called *turning words*. These were sayings borrowed from the dialogues of Tang dynasty Chan masters or taken from the classical mystical poetry, scriptures and sacred texts used by such teachers. Turning words are opaque phrases or expressions containing both ordinary and transcendental signification, adapted to the meditation setting, and often taking the form of inscrutable questions. The mainstay in some Chan, Son, and Zen lineages even still today, monks often have as the central occupation of their meditation practice contemplating some ineffable phrase-question. They are urged to unravel its deeper meaning by becoming intimate with it and working with it, as far as possible, both day and night. And they might continue with a single phrase for months or even years.

'What is the root of Awareness?' 'Where is Awareness to be found?' 'What is the Light of Awareness spoken of by the ancient sages?' Such questions could be called turning words. 'That which hears' or 'the realm of no boundaries', though not questions, still direct the attention towards that which precedes thinking, and thus could be called turning words.

Though their approaches are different, 'Who am I?' and the aforementioned questions point to one and the same reality. 'Who am I?' covers it all at once, pointing directly to that which is being enquired into. But if we take a question like, 'Where does hearing and seeing come from?' it is not immediately clear that the place one is being directed to is one's very own Self. Of course this also has a



certain usefulness to it; because 'I' is so prominent in our everyday thinking, the question 'Who am I?' is arguably difficult to get a handle on. At the same time its elusiveness is part and parcel of what makes it so effective in unravelling an obstinate mind. The important thing is that beginners allow themselves to use the line of questioning that most stimulates engaged probing, putting off more direct approaches for the appropriate time. That the perplexity of questioning be activated — this is the crucial thing. In genuine questioning, even if the enquirer

clearly perceives that in reality she does not know *who this I is* or *where hearing actually comes from*, all the while she longs to find out.

Ramana-Vichara

Finally, we cannot compare Bhagavan's vichara with other enquiry traditions: they are distinct and have divergent contexts. Yet, as beginners in the trial-and-error stage and feeling the lack of Bhagavan's physical teaching presence, we will want to take whatever hints we can. Adapting the turning-word method to Bhagavan's teaching is simple and innocuous; it is a matter of selecting key phrases from Bhagavan's writings and putting them into a question format for enquiry in the meditation setting. Examples: *What is the nature of the Reality within? What is this Self where there is absolutely no 'I'-thought? What is the nature and essence of that Awareness which alone remains?*¹⁴

These turning-word style questions all essentially ask the same thing — *who am I?* Their purpose is two-fold: to penetrate a word's deeper meaning and thereby gain insight into Bhagavan's teaching; and to train us in the art of questioning in preparation for 'Who am I?'. The essential thing is doing whatever it takes to initiate active, lively questioning. This is the basis of vichara.

Direct Experience

Now it should be emphasized that successfully responding to any phrase-question, whatever its source, has nothing to do with giving concrete answers or 'cracking the code', as it were. Rather the key component in questioning is maintaining openness, and allowing feelings of ambivalence and mystification engendered by the enquiry, to arise in oneself. Early Chinese meditation teachers called this *cultivating the doubt sensation*. They would say that not-knowing is the goal; by allowing mental structures to be dislodged from the mind, one is unburdened of what one *thinks* one knows — one's conceptual ideas and fixed opinions — thus enabling the receptivity that is the hallmark of true enquiry. Interpretations and analyses, on the other hand, no matter how creative, reflect our old mental patterns and bind us to them.

¹⁴These three paraphrased from: *Forty Verses*, v. 1, and *Who am I?*, no.s 16&2, respectively.

In meeting the challenge of the phrase-question, tradition tells us that trying to figure it out, as though it were a puzzle to be solved, is a vain pursuit. Likewise, responding with memorized phrases or advaitic slogans is useless. Even quoting scriptures, exalted though they be, when done as a substitute for personal vichara responses, is trafficking in dead words¹⁵. Why? Because, like the bookkeeper tallying another man's riches, they are not our own¹⁶; they come to us second-hand, invariably getting us off the hook of doing our own questioning work.

By contrast, the enquiry Bhagavan enjoined us to do is direct: it beckons us to take our own steps, to make our own discoveries, and to put forth our own effort in order to become that 'highly placed officer'.

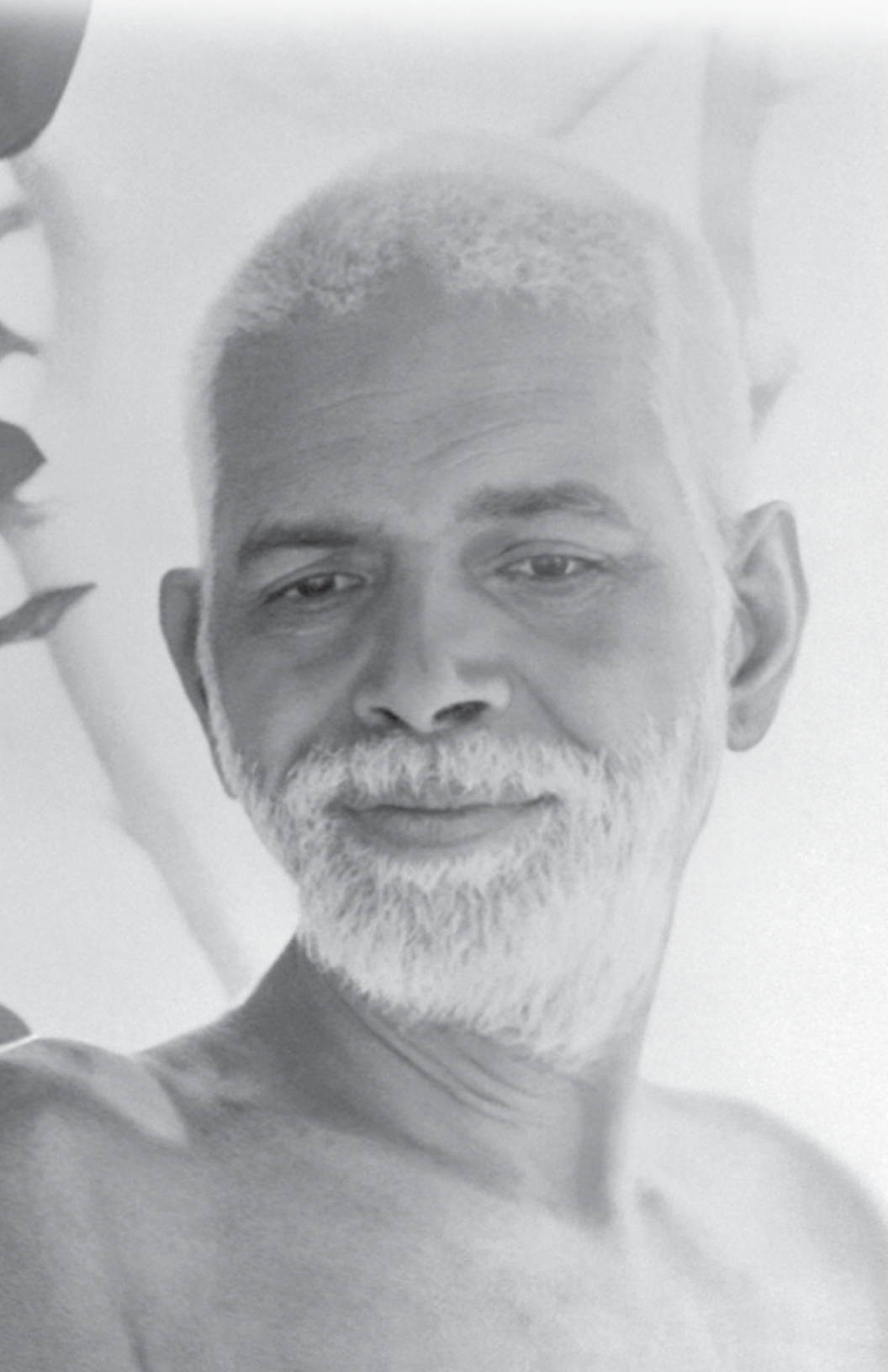
Conclusion

Once questioning is genuinely undertaken and one throws one's whole weight into it, the energy, strength and determination for further questioning comes of its own. Even in the routine of ordinary daily life, at work or among people, one may find oneself spontaneously, even if only intermittently, absorbed in the question at hand. At times the involvement becomes so thoroughgoing that it takes on an obsessive quality, the feeling of perplexity pervading the entire body and mind. All ideas and thoughts seem to be temporarily suspended. This is the moment when vichara seems automatic and little exertion is required.

To know the blessedness of questioning, if only briefly, provides the impetus for further effort. One discovers that vichara is available to all, even to those of us who are complete neophytes. When we discover that we can, by Bhagavan's grace, exercise *some* control over our minds, the apparent conflict between finding time for the interior recollection demanded by vichara and the external demands made by the world, is *itself* resolved in questioning. We discover that we are able — by Bhagavan's grace and, no doubt, by lots of repeated practice — to take vichara with us, *within* us, wherever we go and into whatever we do. ▲

¹⁵ While not a substitute for vichara 'answers', scripture is a great source for vichara questions.

¹⁶ An ancient Chinese proverb says, *the family treasure does not come in through the front gate*. See also *Who Am I?*, no. 23.



Supreme Love

The Example and Teaching of Bhagavan

MONICA BOSE

Bhagavan was often asked about the role of love in Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). Normally he would reply that the peace and joy of the Self is love.

How correct that is, as indeed was everything Bhagavan said. In the peace of pure Being-Consciousness there is no conflict possible since there is no 'other' seen as separate from oneself. Supreme Love is Impersonal Love. It is a Jnani's love that can only take root and grow in the awareness of truth. To attain true love we have first to find out who we are by following the Path of Self-enquiry to realise the God within us. When we know that we can and go on, by seeing beyond the veil of personality, to the God in others.

Monica Bose spent part of her childhood and adolescence at Ramanasramam during Bhagavan's lifetime.

Bhagavan's hymns to Arunachala — the Self — are spontaneously spoken from a heart overflowing with a Jnani's love. As in this beautiful verse from the Marital Garland of Letters to Arunachala:

"Let me melt with Love in Thee Who art Love Itself, Oh Arunachala!"

Yet once there was doubt among some of the devotees as to whether such expressions of love were those of a true Advaitin. An old devotee posed the question to Bhagavan, "Love postulates duality. How can the Self be the object of love?"

Bhagavan replied, "Love is not different from the Self. Love of an object is of an inferior order and cannot endure. Whereas the Self is identified with Love. God is Love."¹ Love is the Self loving the Self. There is no duality. Thus affirmed Bhagavan who knew, for unlike his questioners, he had realized the Self.

Yet the starting point for attaining true Love is ordinary love as Bhagavan once made clear to a young man who asked him whether God could be worshipped through the Path of Love. Bhagavan said: "Love itself is the actual form of God. If by saying, 'I do not love this; I do not love that,' you reject all things [in your mind], that which remains is Swarupa or the innate Self. That is pure bliss. Call it pure bliss, God, atma, or what you will. That is devotion; that is realization and that is everything."²

When the young man doubted that it was possible to reject anything saying, "This is no good, that is no good", unless from experience of them, Bhagavan agreed, "That is true. To reject the bad you must love the good. In due course that good also will appear to be an obstacle and will be rejected. Hence you must necessarily first love what is good. That means you must first love and then reject the thing you love. If you thus reject everything, what remains is the Self alone. That is real love. One who knows the secret of that love finds the world itself full of universal love."³

¹ Talk 433. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

² Section 39, The Path of Love. *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma.

³ *Ibid*.

Bhagavan's entire teaching was based on love because the Path of Jnana, which means Self-realization through the removal of the ego shadow which obscures the Self from our sight, is essentially the Path of Selflessness. Selflessness requires renunciation that is not just the giving up of worldly goods and attachments, or the subjugation of desires and passions, but rather the enlargement of one's potential for love until no trace of self-interest remains. To one devotee who felt he could not truly renounce while remaining in the world Bhagavan said: "No. One who truly renounces actually merges in the world and expands his love so as to embrace the whole world. It would be more correct to characterize the attitude of the devotee as one of universal love than that of a person forsaking the home to don ochre robes."⁴

To Bhagavan the true renunciate is not a malcontent who seeks to escape from a worldly life out of some disillusionment or disappointment; nor is it a person who doubts that he can love anyone and in safety prefers his own company. No, the true renunciate is firmly planted in the world but his desire to get closer to the God he loves is so great that all other desires fall down like ripe fruit from a tree.

Such was Bhagavan's teaching, but what were his actions with respect to his devotees? The answer is that Bhagavan radiated his deep experience of the God within — the Divinity that is Supreme Intelligence and at the same time Supreme Love. That is, seeing, protecting and caring. Of the many instances of Bhagavan's protection and care it is difficult to single out some for mention. But when Bhagavan was living in the caves of Arunachala we hear of his refusing for his own safety, to abandon a young boy in his care who was lying there ill with plague.

Then there is the touching tale of the low caste women who toiled at cutting grass on the Hill and carried heavy burdens in the hot sun, but were not allowed because of their caste, to drink water at a spring there. Water is hard to fetch and store for cave dwellers, but Bhagavan always had water for each one of them. We know too how he took into his cave-hermitage his mother and younger brother in their time of need. Few ascetics would have had the inclination to admit into the

⁴ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne, p.60.1970.

freedom of their lives the family cares they had left behind. A kitchen was eventually set up by the Mother and since those sharing Bhagavan's retreat were being better looked after, their number increased. There eventually came regulations, restrictions and organization: all that a renunciate expects to be free from. But Bhagavan exemplified the true meaning of renunciation and lack of ego by obeying all the rules which were made for the ashram and allowing no special exemption to be made for himself while still extending his love to all.

To us, his devotees who were with him while he was still physically present, his love was continuously transmitted through darshan. Throughout the many years that he was physically there for us Bhagavan placed the greatest importance on giving darshan, sharing with us the blessed presence of the Divinity embodied in him. Giving darshan can be a hard and demanding task. For him there were no holidays, no sick leave, no time set apart for himself. Not everyone today knows that he did not have a separate room in which to sleep or relax in. In the ashram hall he was all the time in the public gaze. Since he slept very little, some people approached him even at night, with a question or a problem and were never sent away. In 1949, from the time of his first operation to remove a cancerous growth, it was with great difficulty that Bhagavan was persuaded to take rest for a couple of hours in the afternoon.

His love extended to the humblest and poorest. The poor were fed every day in the front courtyard just within the gate, before Bhagavan and the asramam devotees and visitors. If by some mischance there was not enough food for the poor, Bhagavan would not go in for his own meal until he saw that food had been found for them and their feeding started. This applied equally to the animals at the asramam who, knowing that he loved them, loved him in return. He loved animals because he saw the Self in them as he did in all beings; he never considered them inferior. He also was concerned with feeding us spiritually. When Bhagavan was once asked by a devotee to prolong his life for the sake of all the devotees who needed him, he replied, "The body is like a banana-leaf...Do we not throw it away now that it has served its purpose?" When you have

had your meal do you keep the plantain leaf?" ⁵ The leaf was the body; the meal was his presence, teaching and care, offered to us with the generosity of true love.

It is said that once someone is drawn to Bhagavan and Arunachala, it is as if they are caught in the jaws of a tiger that will never let go; well, I have since childhood been blessed by being firmly caught in those jaws! My mother, a doctor, was Bhagavan's devotee for fourteen years. My grandmother was a frequent visitor to Tiruvannamalai and during my school and later college holidays I myself visited Bhagavan for ten years. The three of us felt protected and guided, my mother to deeper understanding and great peace. My grandmother, at a time when she was losing her sense of purpose in life, handed Bhagavan a little note on which were simply written the words, "Please give me guidance for the future." Bhagavan told her to go back to her religion, which in itself was extraordinary for she had told no-one that she had left it. She was to derive immense benefit from returning to her original religion, walking closer and closer to her Lord during the twenty-three remaining years of her long pilgrimage on earth.

And then, there is the mysterious evidence of Bhagavan's 'actionless activity'. Sometimes, a devotee who fervently prayed in secret to Bhagavan for his help would have his or her prayer granted, even when Bhagavan himself did not seem to know about it. Sadhu Arunachala, in *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, tells us about a gentleman from Kashmir who came to the asramam with his servant who could only speak Kashmiri. One night when the hall was almost dark the servant came into the hall and standing before Bhagavan chattered away in Kashmiri. Bhagavan simply reclined, looking at him. After a while the man saluted Bhagavan and left the hall happy, evidently he had got his answer. Next morning, his master came to Bhagavan and complained, "Bhagavan, you never told me you could speak Kashmiri, was it fair?" "Why, what do you mean?" asked Bhagavan, "I know not a single word of your language." Bhagavan asked the gentleman how he had got hold of this absurd idea and the latter explained: "Last night my servant came to you and asked you several

⁵ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne, p.172. 1970.

questions in his language. He tells me that you answered every one and cleared his doubts.” “But I never opened my mouth,” replied Bhagavan.

This incident evokes the miracle of the sick woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment and was cured instantly, although Jesus seems to have known about it only when he perceived that ‘power had gone out of him’. Bhagavan did not give formal initiation, but some people who longed to get the initiation from him said they had received it in a dream or vision, or by Bhagavan’s look or simply by being in his presence, and this when Bhagavan himself seems not to have deliberately bestowed it. The explanation given by Swami Abhishiktananda, himself a very saintly man, is that in a realized being like Bhagavan, Grace or Love is sometimes a spontaneous manifestation of the inner Reality. Swami Abhishiktananda held that between Master and disciple, initiation is a communion of Being from depth to depth, or in his words, ‘from abyss to abyss’.

As Bhagavan became physically weaker through illness, as the flesh was burnt out by cancer and the radical treatments applied to it, as if the disguise that was his body was wearing thin before us, the Love within him became more and more evident. In March 1950, after a visit to Tiruvannamalai I came to take my leave of Bhagavan before returning to college in Madras. In the final stage of his illness, he had been moved to a small cottage, and lying in the room facing the doorway he still gave darshan daily. By then there were a thousand devotees a day coming for his darshan. I joined the queue of devotees lined up before the platform of earth built in front of the room. When it came to my turn to stand in the doorway, I looked at him in astonishment. I had often seen him look tenderly or compassionately at someone, but had never seen him like this before; in his poor worn body there was Supreme Passionless Love. The sight is still with me, vividly real to this day.

In the experience of many people even today Bhagavan’s Presence is still there and his Love still acts in their lives. For Supreme Love is Undying Love. Vain pride bows its head, spurious thoughts, doubts and illusions are dissipated. An answering love wells up in the heart before Bhagavan’s revelation of the true nature of the Self — the eternal, unchanging, wondrous Love that excludes no one, even if the judgement of the world may find us unworthy. ▲

KEYWORD

Yoga

Sanskrit: union of *jivatma* with *paramatma*; *jiva-brahma aikya*; recognition of the oneness of the Self; absorption of mind in the Self; self-mastery; integration of personality; aligning of body, mind and speech in purity and truthfulness.

Yoga is a most popular word these days but not necessarily completely understood in its full scope and depth, partly because of its multiple limbs and partly because it carries many layers of meaning, unlike ‘*jnana*’ which has a single meaning, namely enlightenment. At its highest level, *yoga* has the same connotation as *jnana* because the ‘union of *jivatma* with *paramatma*’ can be only in the form of seeing the falsehood of individuality (*jiva bodha*) in the wake of Self-knowledge (*Siva bodha*). For there are no two selves to begin with and there is really no lower self (*jivatma*) that exists *independently*, in order to merge with the higher self (*paramatma*). *Jiva bodha* is merely a spurious notion that has arisen mysteriously from causal ignorance (*avidya*), and it evaporates in the light of knowledge of one’s true identity following self-enquiry.

Yoga comes from the root *yuj* which means ‘to unite’. The English word ‘yoke’ also derives from *yoga* meaning ‘union’; therefore the word

‘union’ is a metaphor (*aupacharikam*) to represent that enlightenment which bestows liberation from *samsara* (transmigratory existence).

However, *this recognition of the oneness of the Self can take place only in a pure and subtle intellect* and this prerequisite alone brings forth in full force the implications of the word *yoga* in the stage of *sadhana* for an earnest seeker and its due place in the scheme of things. The first classical compilation on *yoga* was given by the ancient sage Patanjali in his celebrated treatise, *Ashtanga Yoga Sutra* which remains the last word, by virtue of its profound treatment of the subject. To gain a pure mind and a subtle intellect capable of undertaking self-enquiry, one must necessarily possess a fully integrated personality. Sri Ramana was equipped with such a competent tool when he undertook self-enquiry as a 16 year-old lad and in a flash his spiritual journey was over in a single leap.

Yoga therefore means ‘integration of the personality’ and precedes *jnana*, which transcends the limited individuality by seeing its falsity (*mithya svabhava*). Thus it should be clear that without integrating the personality in all its aspects, transcending its limitations through knowledge (*badha*) will remain an unrealistic hope, much like a chimera. This is the rationale behind Sri Krishna’s tireless advice to Arjuna to strive to become a *yogi* first, as a preparation to gain *jnana nishtha*.

Patanjali outlines eight systematic steps towards conquest of mind and achieving self-mastery. The first two limbs, *yama* and *niyama*, are the foundations of spiritual life and lay great emphasis on ethical purity, unselfishness and devotion to God, the guru and scriptural study. The next two limbs focus on *asana* (body postures) and *pranayama* (breath control), which are extremely valuable in improving one’s physical fitness and sense of well-being, without which one cannot possibly meditate in depth and for extended periods. *Pranayama* in particular helps achieve *nadi shuddhi* (cleansing of the subtle psychic channels through which the life force is distributed all over the body) and this directly helps to pacify the mind and enhance the *sattva guna* that is so essential for spiritual advancement. Bhagavan has spoken highly of the value of

pranayama in making the mind one-pointed and fit to focus on *atma-vichara*.¹

These four steps come under the category of *hatha yoga*, while the next four steps come under *raja yoga* proper, as they exclusively deal with directly taming the mind. These are *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the habitually outgoing mind), *dharana* (concentration and focusing the mind), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (absorption of the mind in the Self). This leads to eventual recognition of *jiva-brahma aikya*, the liberating knowledge.

There is, however, a significant difference in approach between the traditional *Patanjali Yoga marga* and the *vichara marga* espoused by Bhagavan. This lies in the central role played by will power in the former, while the latter questions the very reality of the mind (of which the will is only a part) and is primarily attention-based. Wherever the will is involved, an element of control suggesting a fight or struggle with the opposing forces of baser nature is invariably present. *Yoga* aims at purification of the mind (*citta shuddhi*) and one-pointedness of the mind as a precursor to *samadhi* (absorption of the mind in the Self) and thus to begin with gives some semblance of reality to the mind (or the thought-world), and this persists till all the basic hurdles to meditation are overcome.

In the *vichara marga*, Bhagavan relentlessly denies reality to the mind right at the outset *and* all the way by questioning every thought as to its source, in the form ‘wherefrom arises this thought?’ or ‘to whom does this occur?’ and thus will-based *sadhana* with all its attendant frustrations and fatigue is neatly bypassed. Only a rudimentary element of will (in the form of a certain earnestness) is required in this path so that one does not slip into inattention from the state of alert witnessing. Bhagavan himself gives a nuanced criticism of the *yoga marga* by comparing it with controlling a rogue bull by the horns employing full force, whereas the *vichara marga* is like coaxing the unruly bull by showing it luscious grass for feeding and bringing it round to its abiding resting place with no confrontation or struggle or their attendant exhaustion.

¹ *Upadesa Undiyar*, verses 11 – 14.

Another way to put it is that *yoga* seeks to control the mind as if it were a genie and to make it a slave to do one's bidding; the danger is that if one is not vigilant enough, the demon can usurp control and threaten you with unpleasant consequences because it is treated as a conscious and independent entity. This risk is, however, averted if the intellect is trained in Vedanta so that one sees the conquest of the mind not as an end in itself but as an essential step towards *jnana* where one's identification with the mind automatically ceases.

Vichara marga, on the other hand, treats the mind as an inert instrument that is powerful and useful when *vyavahara* (transactional or everyday life) demands it, but is laid aside just like a harmless tool while one practises Self-attention, which denies it an independent conscious existence. One does not fight the mind. Here the whole trick is to cease to identify with the mind, though this is far more easily said than done. However, if one succeeds in practising this way, one abides in the goal already. This eventually becomes effortless (*sahaja*). The Biblical dictum "I am the Way and I am the Goal" is apt.

Since this is such a direct path, focusing attention solely on the sense 'I am', it is often called *Maha Yoga*. This is indeed valid because in the popular four-fold broad classification of *yoga*, the unquestioned ego survives (though progressively attenuated), as the doer (*karta*) in *karma yoga*, the devotee (*bhakta*) in *bhakti yoga*, the knower (*pramata*) in *jnana yoga* and as the one who attempts to unite (*yogi*) in *raja yoga*. In contrast, the *vichara marga* lays the axe to the root of the ego straightaway and thus subsumes all the four paths at one stroke, being the mother of all *yogas*. For those who lack the subtlety of mind to directly embark on this *sadhana*, it is safe to be guided by the *Patanjali Yoga*. However, the tragedy of modern times is that many seekers without the ripeness of mind required for the *vichara marga* label themselves conveniently as *jnana margis* and find it fashionable to jettison the primary *yoga* disciplines meant for integrating the personality and purifying the psyche.

Nowadays it is also unfortunate that *yoga* has come to be primarily identified with *asanas* and *pranayama*, intended mainly for health

benefits and its spiritual purpose relegated to insignificance for the targeted audience. Instead of being a precious tool for spiritual emancipation, it is promoted as an accessory to a successful worldly lifestyle. To reduce it to such a purpose is a distortion of *yoga*.

In this context we should understand the role of *yoga* in integrating the personality and divinising it. The conscious mind is under the control of a vast unconscious mind and these two parts are often incompatible in their movements. That is why our sincerity is not always true, as it is mixed up with subtle desires (*samskaras*). *Yoga* begins with purifying the unconscious first and making it compatible with the conscious mind governed by an enlightened intellect. The *Bhagavad Gita* defines different aspects of *yoga* as 'skill in action', 'equanimity under all conditions of dyads' and 'dissociation from all sorrow and pain' through intelligent and discriminating living. The ultimate skill lies in non-attachment to any manifestation of *prakriti* and total identification with *purusha*, the Self or pure spirit.² That alone is the goal and consummation of *yoga* in its final essence. ▲

² *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* 15 and 16.

MOUNTAIN PATH

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Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Fourteen

S. RAM MOHAN

14 When the sense of 'I' is present, then those of 'you' and 'he' also will arise. If by the quest for the Truth of the 'I', the 'I-sense' becomes extinct, then those of 'you' and 'he' also will cease. All will shine as one. This state of being, the one without a second, is one's true nature — the true Self.

Commentary

We have seen in verse 9 that the dyads and triads always subsist on the basis of the 'One'. In verses 10 to 13, one of the dyads consisting of Knowledge and ignorance was analysed. The analysis showed that the Self was their substratum. The present verse analyses the matrix or set of conditions, which provides the background for the relationship between the triad of entities.

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It is seen that the first person 'I', the second person 'you' (or 'thou') and the third person 'he', 'she' or 'it' constitute the triad. Of these, the second person ('you'/'thou') and the third person ('he'/'she' or 'it') are dependent on the first. 'I' here refers to the sense of 'I' as an individual person. It is contrasted with the egoity of other entities characterized as 'you', 'thou', 'she', 'he', or 'it'. Whether it is the 'I – thou' relation or the 'I – it' relation, it is clear that without the 'I', no relationship is possible. The 'I' is the basis for all relations. We see that all the plurality in the world arises out of the 'I'. If the plurality should end, the 'I' — the ego-sense — should also end. The direct way to end the ego-sense is shown by Bhagavan Ramana: it is the enquiry into the nature of the 'I'-sense. The enquiry starts from the upper most layer of the mind, which undergoes a process, when you persistently ask yourself the question 'Who am I?' whenever a thought arises. The final answer to this question will end the 'I' process itself. The ego 'I' then ceases. Automatically, 'thou' and 'he'-'she'-'it' will also cease, as they are dependent on the 'I'-sense. It is similar to the fact that when the dreaming 'I' is dissolved, all the dream-content also disappears.

We have already seen that the experience of the Self is the state of being the one solitary Self without a second, the state called *kaivalyam*. In that state the three, namely 'I', 'you' and 'he' are absent. That is, there are no individual souls, each distinct from the other. There remains only One, who shines as 'I-I' alone. The last sentence of the verse: "This state of being, the one without a second, is one's true nature — the true Self." conveys this meaning.

Here an objection is met with. If there be only oneself, then when one person becomes free by illumination, all must become free; but this does not happen. The answer to this is that *even now no one is bound*. The real Self was never bound and does not need to be made free. There is really no bondage. The 'Self' is described as ever-free, both here and in the Upanishads. Therefore, for the Sage, there is nobody who is ignorant, as Bhagavan Himself has stated.

Another answer is also given. This answer is not the final and ultimate truth, but is presented in order to answer the questions arising out of the questioner's ignorance. The so-called individual soul is only

a reflection, in the intellect-sheath (*vignanamaya kosa*) of the pure real Self who is One; it is this apparent 'soul' that is bondage. Thus there are innumerable individual souls, each being a reflection of the One in the intellect-sheaths. If any one of these reflections ceases due to the dawn of the right awareness of the Self, it is said that the person has become free. But only that One has become free.

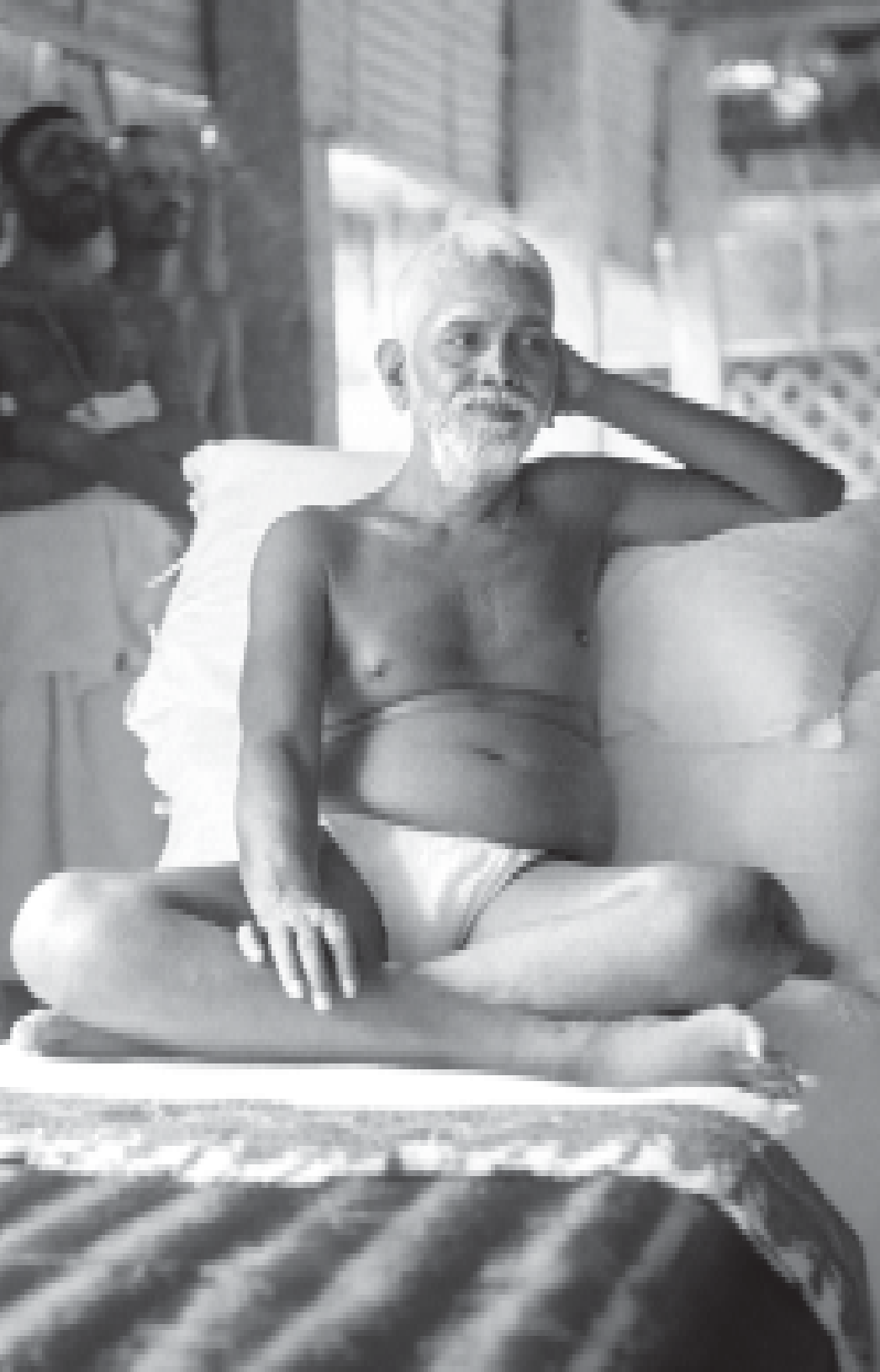
From the point of view of the ignorant, this seems to be the case. So long as each of the surviving intellect-sheaths continues, there is a reflection of the One in each of them and so, to the ignorant, the world-process seems to be going on. There is an analogy given to illustrate this survival: the numerous reflections of the sun or moon in water contained in a number of pots. The sun or moon is one, but the reflections are many. If one pot is broken and its water spilt, only that reflection is lost and the reflections in the other pots continue. It is now easy to understand that there can be a great number of 'souls', though the real Self is One. But this has been said only to make the teaching intelligible and acceptable to our dull intellects. From the standpoint of ultimate reality, the question itself does not arise.

The proper answer to the question would be another question which is Bhagavan's answer to all questions: "Find out who you are, you, the propounder of the question." The notion that there are other persons — 'you', 'he' or 'they' — is due to ignorance.

As we have seen above, the analogy of dreams is also used. In dreams, 'other' people are seen; but really they are merely mental creations and are not really different from the dreamer.

Thus, one begins to see that the world as a whole including both sentient creatures and the insentient things, is unreal.

It has been shown in verse 11 that these enquiries will be in vain. The same truth is here given out by Bhagavan in a different form. These enquiries proceed on the assumption that time — with its divisions into past, present and future — is real. The next verse analyses the subject by showing that all time is only present time and so it is the truth of the present that has to be sought and found, not of the past, not of the future. ▲



The Unexpected Feast

T. R. KANAKAMMAL

One day two destitute-looking Brahmins entered the hall. It was known that they earned their livelihood by the wretched and socially demeaning occupation of bearing the dead to the cremation grounds. Both were extremely hungry after having discharged their duties.

Custom demands that anyone entering a house recently visited by death should take a bath immediately upon leaving. This stricture applies particularly if one steps into the cremation ground, and more particularly if one is involved in removing and physically transporting the departed to this place.

A heated argument had ensued between the two men about the propriety of coming to the Ashram to have a meal without having bathed. While one of them keenly felt the unseemliness of transgressing this hallowed custom, the other dismissed it as impracticable in view of their acute hunger. Assured of a meal in the Ashram, which was on their way home, they thought they might

T. R. Kanakammal is a long-term and respected devotee who sat at Bhagavan's Feet. She is the author of a number of books in Tamil.

appease their appetite. They came to the hall and sat down. One of them excitedly and abruptly said to Bhagavan:

“Swami, I have been insisting on the customary bath before we sit for our meal. Is that not but just and proper?” Bhagavan responded in a very soft tone, “No one can say you are unjust.” The other at once, in a greatly agitated voice, burst forth:

“The pangs of hunger are so intense that our entrails are being devoured. Is it wrong to eat when hunger is so gnawing?”

Bhagavan quietly replied, “Who says it is wrong? Not at all.”

Shocked, looking at one another, they asked in one voice, “But then who is wrong?”

Bhagavan answered:

“Don’t think you alone are pall-bearers. All of us are carrying these lifeless corpses. This body is a veritable corpse. Everybody carries it saying ‘I, I’. Whoever has the ‘I-am-the-body-feeling’ is but a pall-bearer. As long as one has not gone beyond this, one remains as impure and polluted as a pall-bearer. The pollution of bearing this dead body cannot be washed away by a dip in any tank. Bathing in the holy waters of the Atman alone can remove this pollution.”

The Brahmins, though initially feeling vindicated, were now startled and stared at each other. In an instant, the entire complexion of the issue stood transformed. Everyone without exception was equally polluted! All people shared their fate!

Rid of their social inferiority they felt lifted up. The felicity with which *atma bodha* — the eternal truth — was transmitted to them and others in the hall, and the *sama drishti* of Bhagavan, that knew no distinction between regular devotees and stray visitors, however socially unsavoury their vocation might be, left those seated in the hall astounded. That we are all bound to die is known to everyone. But even before we die, if we have not yet bathed in the waters of the Atman, we are *already* as though dead, bearing with us lifeless corpses lost in ‘I-am-the-body’ consciousness. This was a revelation for one and all gathered in the hall.

The next minute, the two Brahmins were nowhere to be seen. No one knew where they had gone, to the dining hall for food or elsewhere. But one thing was certain; for their spiritual hunger, Bhagavan’s words had been an unexpected feast.

The exalted and unique greatness of a realized guru is sung gloriously in *Guru Gita* (Chapter 1, verses 25 and 26) from *Skandapurana*:

**काशीक्षेत्रं निवासश्च जाह्नवी चरणोदकम् ।
गुरुर्विश्वेश्वरः साक्षात्तारकं ब्रह्म निश्चयः ॥ २५ ॥**

kāśīkṣetraṁ nivāsaśca jāhnavī caraṇodakam |
gururviśveśvaraḥ sākṣāttāraḥ brahma
niścayaḥ || 25 ||

The place of residence of a guru is verily kashi kshetra. His charanamruth (water dripping off his feet) is verily the holy Ganges. He is verily Visweshwara, Taraka Brahman, the Saviour.

**गुरोः पादान्कितं यत्तु गयास्तेऽक्षयोवटः ।
तीर्थराजः प्रयागोऽसौ गुरुमूर्त्यै नमो नमः ॥ २६ ॥**

guroḥ pādāṅkitam yattu gayāste’kṣayovaṭaḥ |
tīrtharājaḥ prayāgo’sau gurumūrtiyai namo
namaḥ || 26 ||

His footprints are verily holy Gaya, Akshayavata (the imperishable banyan tree) and Prayag, the king of holy waters. Salutations to such a guru again and again.

The preceding story is not a mere instance of poetic flamboyance, but a stark truth in relation to a jnani like Bhagavan. No wonder that whoever had but a look from Bhagavan — being Brahman in manifested form — enjoyed the purificatory effect of oblations in the holiest of holy waters. Need we doubt that the two pall-bearers were purified the moment they came in for Bhagavan’s darshan?

For Whom is the Hundi?

It was the time of Ramana Jayanti and Devaraja Mudaliar desired the members of his family to join him at the Ashram to receive Bhagavan's grace on this special occasion. He sent them a post card intimating his wish. Prompt came the reply expressing helplessness due to a scarcity of funds. Mudaliar solved the problem this way: Break the family *hundi*¹ containing the offerings to the family deity, Venkataramana of Tirupathi, and use the funds to finance the pilgrimage to Bhagavan.

After implementing his plan, he went straight to Bhagavan and confided the nature of the correspondence between he and his family. Bhagavan neither approved nor disapproved. He appeared to have no reaction at all; there was not even the usual nod of the head but he merely maintained his customary silence.

On arrival of the family, all were duly introduced to Bhagavan. Then Mudaliar said, "Bhagavan, as for me, between Tirupathi Venkataramana and Tiruvannamalai Venkataraman, there is absolutely no difference."

Bhagavan replied with a smile:

"And did you not amply prove it by breaking the *hundi*?" ▲

¹ Keeping a *hundi* or offering box dedicated to the family deity in the pooja room is a sacred, time-honoured tradition in every Hindu family. Offerings are dropped into the hundi on days auspicious to the deity, to be finally transferred to the temple *hundi* at the time of pilgrimage to the temple. Hence breaking the *hundi* and using the contents for other purposes is unthinkable, regarded as sacrilegious and believed to invite divine wrath. The common experience of people of faith has been that such misuse brings in its wake inauspicious or even disastrous consequences.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

New Sri Ramanasramam Website and Email Addresses

Sri Ramanasramam has created a new website and a new series of email addresses for devotees who may wish to contact the ashram.

We invite readers to our new website: www.sriramanamaharshi.org. Any suggestions for its improvement are welcome.

The ashram may be contacted at the following email addresses:

- 1) General enquiries and accommodation:
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- 2) Communications directly to the president:
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- 3) Book orders and *Mountain Path* subscriptions:
bookstall@sriramanamaharshi.org
- 4) Articles and letters to *Mountain Path* magazine:
mountainpath@sriramanamaharshi.org

In future, we request devotees NOT to use
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Guru Ramana Prasadam

SRI MURUGANAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

In 1960 *Sri Ramana Anubuti* Part I was first published in Tamil by Sri Ramanasramam. It consisted of 755 verses in the main body of the work, and a Supplement consisting of a further 244 verses. Subsequently, with the help of Sadhu Om, Muruganar arranged the verses in a new order, adding titles for the various sections, incorporating the verses of the Supplement, and adding a further 40 verses that had not appeared in the original. This new edition, now containing 1039 verses, was finally published in 2004 under Muruganar's chosen title *Guru Ramana Prasadam*.

Meanwhile, in March 1998, a partial English version of the 1960 edition, translated by Robert Butler with the help of Sri H.

Robert Butler has devoted his life to the understanding and translation of classical Tamil spiritual works. He lives in England.

Vaidyanathan, and not including the Supplement, was published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore, under the title of *Non-Dual Consciousness – The Flood Tide of Bliss: Sri Ramana Anubuti*. In this edition, the verses of the Supplement were not included, and several of the more problematic verses were left untranslated.

The excerpt given here consists of previously untranslated verses from the Supplement to the original edition. It will eventually form part of a new English edition and translation of the entire work, in which the missing verses will be added, the original English text revised, and the whole reordered according to the new scheme mentioned above. The verse numbers are those of the current 2004 Tamil edition of *Guru Ramana Prasadam*.

5 Through the joyous power of the true love that took as its goal the feet of my guru, a life lived in the vast space of the Self that shines fearlessly within the heart burgeoned forth within me, as the unfailing awareness that is divine silence became ever more intense. Birth's suffering was abolished, and my eye became fearless as I obtained the vision of grace.

7 His true glance, the pellucid knowledge dispensed by the guru's grace, is the medicine to cure the disease that is the illusion of worldly bondage, inflicted upon us by the vagaries of the objective ego mind whose nature is to look at that which is alien to itself. How strange it is that we wander in this world illusion, instead of availing ourselves of that glance to go and win salvation at the feet of the true Lord who shines within the heart.

205 Destroying the dark void of base ignorance, the light of the grace-bestowing feet of my guru and master, whose nature is of the form of shining self-knowledge, revealed to me my true self, driving out entirely the degrading confusion of that false, delusional state, in which I wandered weeping and fretting over 'I' and 'mine'.

334 Reality, the supreme and unique nature of the Self, is nothing other than the heart in which the power of the mind to generate its false creations has died. If the aggressive ego is eliminated at its source, a joy will arise that the sorrows of the mind cannot touch.

195 When I became united with the feet of the sadguru, my worldly ties were cut away through the practice of absorption in His abiding Selfhood, with no longer any need to acquire empirical knowledge, and the lofty knowledge of Sivam ripened within me as the vast Supreme.

332 The wise declare that the beautiful light of pure Sivam that is free of objective traits, is simply the shining forth of the Reality that is consciousness. If the base, fraudulent and delusional 'I' of the defective mind is eliminated, the incorporeal nature of the Self, shining as all that is, will be revealed.

93 When the light of His holy feet, that tranquil shore that is so hard to reach, wondrously caused my heart to blossom, the ghostly dance of the 'I' with its wild antics subsided in the state of divine silence, an existence whose glorious nature is impossible to describe.

79 As the divine experience that is life at the grace-bestowing feet that ruled me became ever more intense, within my heart final liberation, a vision worthy to behold, granted in grace by true knowledge, flared up consuming all in the oneness of a single nature, so that the world became the supreme reality itself.

319 Know that the perfectly pure Self will well up as a flood of deep peace in the hearts of those who have come to know reality as it really is through enquiry. What is required is to perform worship of that Self with a collected mind, so

that thoughts melt away through the power of a true love that is free of guile.

358 I was without deep devotion, lacking in good qualities, a mere neophyte amidst the company of His devotees, yet within my heart my Lord bestowed the gift of grace, the limitless supreme bliss of divine silence, and I experienced a unique love for Him, welling up abundantly within my heart.

391 The mind that is intoxicated with the sense of 'I' is annihilated in the flooding bliss of the true knowledge of the Self. The consciousness that remains immersed in Sivam, unable to rise arrogantly [as 'I'], is my natural puja.

262 As I flourished through union with the pure intelligence of the Lord, who destroyed my mind's defilement and ruled me through His grace, I saw and grasped eternal life, the unsurpassed bliss of the auspicious state of liberation, the state which is none other than the subtle awareness that is the supreme expanse of divine silence.

52 When, with the unerring arrow of His glance of true knowledge,¹ my guru, the supreme Lord, sundered the knot between my body and soul, and my mind, transformed into the supernal sky of His grace, became clear and radiant, the veiling deception of bitter worldly bondage disappeared, and the truth I then saw was my own self.²

119 Through the grace of my Master who saw how my mind was bewildered, how I had, through the delusion of taking myself to be the ego, destroyed the integrity of Sivam

¹ 'The *Brahmastra*, the look of *jnana* that never misses its mark'. (Note by the author).

² *Kanda unmai naanee* : 'The truth I perceived was "I".' This is an emendation of the original 1960 version: *kaivalyam kantathee* - 'that which I perceived was final liberation' (*Anubandham* I v.17 of 1960 edition).



that shines as reality itself, I gained the clear realization of the truth in which false knowledge is entirely obliterated, so that I plunged joyously into union with that Sivam, the Self.

127 Self-realization is the primal reality, the bliss of divine silence shining free of the ego, as my very own form. Through merging in the heart with the Lord of that true realization, the vile delusion of worldly bondage, the ideas of 'I' and 'mine', disappeared completely.

268 Those in whose minds the grace of the Lord, whose glance dispels the darkness of ignorance, has sprung forth abundantly, freeing them from the bewilderment caused by delusion, will gain true understanding, as the 'I' shines as the real in the firmament of grace within the heart. This indeed is the perfection of the absolute.

291 Within my heart He kindled, as true realization, the auspicious flame of divine silence, growing ever more intense until the hostility of the ego grew weak and disappeared. Know that there, in the state of all-embracing realization of the Self that fills the heart like the empty sky, the knowledge that involves knowing objectively is a mere illusion.

236 Like fire rising up from the root, the supreme state of divine silence shone with a beautiful radiance within my heart as the awareness of being, driving out the imaginary concepts of time, space and doership, and revealing to me my very nature as peace, abundant and supreme.

378 Through the awareness in which I gave myself up as a prey to You, I have experienced in my heart final liberation, the grace of divine silence, as my greatest birthright, that which is most deeply to be desired. You it is I cherish as the good fortune that is my own self.

137 Sunk in darkness, my heart had become a battlefield through its entrenched self-conceit. But when the Lord brought me to dwell in peace at His grace-bestowing feet, I gained the state of transcendental realization,³ as one of the wise.

387 Through the miracle of grace that penetrated me in the form of true, all-embracing consciousness, so that the ghostly charade created by the evil ego was abolished, I perceived that there was nothing that I needed to learn employing the intellect. Learned as I was, that unique nature wherein I acted like an untutored simpleton, one who uses a mark to sign His name, became my own.

373 Through the glory of a nature that is not even aware of its own greatness, through a compassion whose nature it is to not even see my own unworthiness, He abolished all differentiation, transmuting all into His own Self, so that all my deeds, possessing a unique divine quality, excelled as His own.

194 The state in which one attains and becomes permanently established in limitless peace, the pure state of grace, the exquisite supreme bliss whose nature is delight, is none other than the holy foot of the guru, the tender flame of true knowledge that ever watches over those devotees whose love is true.

393 You shone within my heart, beyond duality, as my own self, and I, with a true love flaring up within me, worshipped You in a variety of ways, so that to others my worship appeared dualistic. Forgive me, I beg You, and do not reject me!

³ *Jnana samadhi*: The deeply peaceful state in which all phenomena are known to be mere appearances in one's own self.

380 Within my heart the one-pointed thought: *Apart from the Self there is for me no other protection!* was kindled and flared up. Then, as all other thoughts died away, unable to arise, I merged with You and wore You as my authentic form.

297 The absolute oneness of Brahman stands alone as the greater life of divine silence, the life of grace that is the direct experience of the knowledge of the real, entirely free from the life of delusion that is the mental creation of a mind deluded by desire. Other than through the grace of the guru, that greater life is impossible to attain.

85 Through inner renunciation, free of all desires except for the lofty desire for the flood of divine grace, purity arose within my soul, and as my mind, becoming perfectly pure, conducted its inquiry, the greater life of grace that nothing can mar, the reality of the Self, manifested within my heart.

172 When I surrendered myself saying: *Save for Your holy feet there is no salvation for me! Your grace is my only refuge!* with no thought in my mind other than the thought of Him, He united me with my own true nature as His very own.

275 The Lord bestows upon us the great wealth of meditating upon and worshipping the glory of His Self in thought and speech. The true, authentic consciousness that shines as one within the heart when we rely upon His grace, and investigate inwardly through the enquiry 'Who am I?' is the exalted state of Brahman whose nature is impossible to grasp.

303 Divine silence, the fullness of the Self whose lofty nature is the Real, consciousness itself, is simply to be immersed in love. Other than by knowing consciousness

through consciousness itself, the life that is the experience of love through divine silence, consciousness itself, will not come into being.

307 The pure and noble nature of the Self can be perceived only through the gaze of Him who, abiding as 'I am that', possesses the eye of grace.⁴ It is quite impossible for anyone to perceive and attain it through his own eyes, which are blind, being overspread by the distorting cataract [that creates the illusion] of worldly bondage.

308 Whatever comes through knowledge gained by study, unless the reality that is unalloyed pure consciousness shines in one's heart, so that the whirl of deluded desire, the knowledge that is caught up in mental imagination, is ended, the non-dual state of divine silence, the wondrous state of total knowledge, will not be attained.

28 As far as I am concerned, there is nothing apart from myself. As far as He is concerned, there is nothing apart from Himself. In the Oneness, the expanse of grace that possesses such a nature, to think these are two is an incorrect understanding that occurs at the level of limiting factors that are merely imagined.⁵

409 To maintain self-attention without a break is how I show my deep gratitude towards Him who brought about His victorious rule within my heart. Other than this, there is no other way. A benediction upon the glorious Self that shines alone within the heart through the non-dual truth of its self-nature! ▲

⁴ *Am kannan*: The Fair-eyed One. An epithet used to describe Siva as the bestower of grace. To Muruganar there is no difference between Siva and Ramana.

⁵ *Upaadhi unarvu*: 'Knowledge based on limiting factors'. These are factors such as the senses, mind and intellect which appear to limit the underlying substratum of the Self. Since these are fundamentally ureal, all determinations made at this level are bound ultimately to be false.



Suri Nagamma

MONIKA ALDER

Introduction

When I first entered the gates of Sri Ramanasramam six years ago I knew very little about Sri Ramana Maharshi and His teachings but after a few hours I realised that the most important event of my life was happening. In the bookshop of the ashram I later picked up the book *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. I read her letters with a mixture of astonishment and excitement and felt they were addressed to me — one woman speaking to another woman. She was speaking about feelings and doubts similar to those that I had. All her words took me a step closer to Bhagavan and almost made me forget that I lived sixty years later. While reading the book I had the strange feeling of hearing Bhagavan's voice talking to Nagamma, who was affectionately called as the 'ashram daughter' by many.

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the strange feeling of hearing Bhagavan's voice talking to Nagamma, who was affectionately called as the 'ashram daughter' by many.

Last November on the first day of my annual visit to Sri Ramanasramam some people greeted me with the warm words 'Welcome home'. Am I worthy of such a warm welcome? Yes, I said to myself, I am Bhagavan's daughter too. His fatherly love and divine grace accompanied me from the first moment, but my personal experiences were varied. All these years I have been sitting for some weeks each year in the various halls of the ashram, experiencing the extremities of ecstasy and despair. Every time I return home, something changes in my life, usually, momentarily, for the worse. But if I look back on these years I cherish every moment. Bhagavan is there in all my happiness and sorrow.

As Nagamma remembers in one of her letters, Bhagavan kept saying:

The jnani weeps with the weeping, laughs with the laughing,
plays with the playful, sings with those who sing, keeping time
to the songs. What does he lose? His presence is like a pure,
transparent mirror. It reflects our image exactly as we are.

Bhagavan demonstrated fatherly love and care for Nagamma and I feel His guidance in all my endeavours. Why? Because for me Bhagavan became father, guru and god at the very moment I stepped into the ashram.

In the following pages I would like to give a short biographical sketch of Nagamma, the ashram daughter. I offer this article with gratitude to my beloved Father, Sri Ramana and my beloved Sister, Suri Nagamma.

One of the most well-known biographers of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Suri Nagamma recorded in her book *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* events, discussions and personal experiences that happened around Bhagavan between 1945 and the *Brahmanirvana*.

Although the family didn't waste money on the education of the early-widowed young girl, Nagamma became familiar with Telugu poetry and became a sadhaka who soared to spiritual heights. She took each word of Bhagavan's for gospel and once he had revealed to Nagamma that cobras may be highly developed spiritual beings who

disguise themselves in this way so that they can participate in the worship of the gods. She was 52 years old when, putting her life into Bhagavan's hands, she kindly asked a giant cobra that came near her in a shrine to leave. By Sri Ramana Maharshi's grace Suri Nagamma came from the deepest bottom of despair to the place where each spiritual seeker wants to arrive, the feet of a sadguru.

Darshan in Dream

Her life took a sad turn already at the age of four, when her father died in 1906. She was ten when she lost her mother. At the age of eleven she got married and a year later she became a widow. To be a widow at such a young age was a life-long tragedy at the time because local customs prohibited the remarriage of widows.

She didn't leave her room for months, she hardly ate and became extremely weak. After a while, however she began to read religious books, such as the holy scriptures: *Bhagavatam*, *Bhagavat Gita* and *Mahabharata*. She wept through many a night. An intense desire awoke in her to meet a guru who would accept her as a disciple. One night in a dream she had the darshan of a sage who was seated in the lotus posture on a two-metre high pedestal facing south, with his hands in *mounamudra* like Lord Dakshinamurthi. When she saw this brilliant figure a thrill went down her spine. But when she wanted to stand up to pay reverence to him the dream disappeared. This vision left a vivid mark on her mind and every time she recalled it she prayed to God with passionate yearning to grant her the grace to serve a guru within her present lifetime.

Her prayer was granted when her brother, having visited Ramanasramam during a pilgrimage, immediately advised her to visit Tiruvannamalai where a saint was living.

The Second Darshan of Sri Ramana Maharshi

When somebody goes to a sage for darshan it is usual to take flowers, fruits or sweets as an offering. It came into Nagamma's mind at the last minute that she was arriving with empty hands. At that moment, however, an earlier poem of hers flashed through her mind:

"A realised soul does not desire wealth from those who approach him. So, give him the flower of your mind and obtain his benediction by devotion and service."

She sat down at the place designated for women in the hall where the Maharshi lived and closed her eyes. Ten minutes later, raising her eyes, she saw that Bhagavan was looking intensely at her. His look penetrated into the deepest core of her existence and all her worries vanished.

At that moment she knew that her prayers had been granted and that she had arrived at the place she had been longing for all her life. Her search had ended and as she used to say, she had found her haven. Shortly after her first visit she moved to Tiruvannamalai and spent the following nine years of her life with Bhagavan.

The Origin of the Letters

Nagamma considered her poems and writings a private matter so even her family members knew nothing about them. Taking courage because Sri Ramana understood Nagamma's mother tongue Telugu, she wrote eight verses titled *Saranagati* ('Surrender') and handed them to Bhagavan who read them with interest. "Look! Her name is Nagamma, it seems. These are verses on *saranagati*. Paste them in the book!" This was Bhagavan's first encouragement to the shy Nagamma to pursue writing.

Encouraged by her brother, Nagamma began to write letters to her family in 1945, in which she recorded what happened in Bhagavan's presence. When Bhagavan learnt this he asked Nagamma to read out her letters in the hall. At that moment she knew that his blessings were on her letters. She put aside her previous doubts as to whether she was worthy of this task and she worked through the nights to record what she heard and saw during the days.

During her work, she had to face serious difficulties too. All of a sudden the sarvadhikari of the ashram, Sri Niranjanananda Swami forbade her to continue writing her letters and ordered her to hand them all over to him. Crying bitterly, Nagamma handed over all her unpublished letters. However, her brother had wisely taken the originals with him to Madras. Sri Ramana usually did not intervene in personal conflicts in the ashram. But his invisible help restored Nagamma's hope. She did not enter the ashram for ten days but sent Bhagavan a poem in which she begged for his help. When the closest disciples of Bhagavan, among them Kunju Swami and Muruganar, encouraged

her to continue writing her letters, gathering her courage, Nagamma went to the ashram again. Bhagavan received her warmly with a smile and he recounted to her for an hour what had happened while she was absent. He gave details of what devotees and visitors had asked and what he had answered. Nagamma could not have received stronger encouragement to continue her job.

Some of her letters were published in book form during Bhagavan's lifetime and later all the letters came out in a five volume Telugu edition. A distant cousin of the author, D. S. Sastri, translated the letters into English and 241 of them were published in the book entitled *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*.

The letters give a true description of Sri Ramana's everyday life, his extraordinary being and the guidance he gave to seekers who turned to him. Through a woman's eyes, we get an insight into everyday life in the ashram. Numerous books and memoirs about the life and teaching of the sage have been published. However, Nagamma's writings are unique because of her personal tone, her sensitivity and her focus on detail. All her words are soaked with her love for Bhagavan.

Life in the Ashram

Women, particularly single women, had to face many obstacles at that time. They were neither allowed to travel without chaperones nor to live on their own. They also weren't allowed to stay in the ashram after six p.m. They had to sit behind the men, at the end of the hall, where it was more difficult to see and hear Bhagavan. Though Nagamma was reserved and shy, her silent but strong resolve and her unlimited love and devotion for Bhagavan aroused respect and recognition among several of the other residents of the ashram.

Having arrived in Tiruvannamalai, she first shared a home with Echemmal who had taken Bhagavan food for thirty eight years on each and every day. She listened to Echemmal's stories about the early days of the ashram. She got up at three a.m., had a wash, cleaned the room and cooked her food. She spent the whole day in the ashram. In the evening she wrote down what had happened during the day.

Besides writing her letters, Nagamma had other responsibilities in the ashram. She became the Telugu expert of the ashram and if poems had to be transcribed or notes had to be taken in this language, it was Nagamma's responsibility. Bhagavan had her read out all her poems, which were written in Telugu. During one period she looked after the ashram library and later on she assisted women and children visiting the ashram. She often accompanied visitors on giripradakshina.

Sometimes she visited her brothers and sisters but she was never away from Bhagavan for more than a few days. Bhagavan was both mother and father to her, and the residents of the ashram became the family for the woman who had lost her parents so early. The older generation still describes her as the daughter of the ashram.

Guru and Disciple

Though Nagamma knew from the first moment that she saw Bhagavan that she had come home, in the beginning she was shy to approach Bhagavan and was afraid of talking to him. However, encouraged by Echemmal she once went to Bhagavan and in shaky voice said: "Please somehow help me to attain liberation." Sri Ramana gave her a compassionate look to her and nodded. Nagamma understood that Bhagavan had taken her in his protection:

"Bhagavan's grace thus began flowing towards me steadily. It was like water flowing through a dry land and making it flower and blossom. I started my sadhana by enquiring into the origin of thoughts. My mind however used to be led away involuntarily through misconceptions and illusions. On such occasions, Bhagavan would look at me pointedly as if to scare off such thoughts."

Though never in an obvious way, Bhagavan followed carefully and with deep love the spiritual development of all the disciples who lived around him. Bhagavan showed the love of a father towards Nagamma. If she wasn't there at the usual time Bhagavan immediately asked: "Where is Nagamma?" Once, when they were preparing for a special occasion, Bhagavan kept saying during the day: "Nagamma will certainly be here. Nagamma wouldn't miss it."

Bhagavan was sometimes very strict with her, bringing her focus back towards the goal, namely attaining jnana. According to

Nagamma, her experience of the guru's grace, as in the Advaitic parable, was like an elephant seeing a lion in its dream and being afraid of falling asleep again lest it appear again.

Life Away From the Ashram

Bhagavan's sickness and suffering were a great trauma for each of his disciples who begged him in tears to transmit the disease to them. They would have died for his recovery. Bhagavan bore even the most painful treatments and operations with peace and detachment, giving his disciples *upadesa* (instruction) even through his sickness. He explained to them that the body was like a heavy burden for a jnani and that it was a relief to put it down at the end of the path. Anyway, where could he go? He would be here forever — he assured them.

Bhagavan gave his beloved disciple, Nagamma a teaching even on the day of his death. During the last darshan Nagamma read out the following message from his eyes: "Look at me! How long do you want to keep me in this injured body? When will you give up clinging to this body?" Nagamma understood this and sent Bhagavan a message with her eyes: "You don't need to bear this burden for us any longer." It was the farewell of the beloved daughter to her Father. Bhagavan left his body a few hours later.

Following the *Brahmanirvana*, Nagamma spent three more years in Tiruvannamalai. Then she became seriously ill and needed her family to look after her. After she recovered she lived alone with her beloved guru in her heart. Visitors often came to her and she used to read out her letters to them. Once a year she visited the ashram, usually on Bhagavan's birthday.

One of her last messages to the present generation is as follows:

"We should therefore pursue Self-enquiry and find out our reality. Among innumerable living beings, man is the only one endowed with spiritual apprehension. So it must be made proper use of to bring about freedom from the endless cycle of births and deaths. Sages like Ramana Bhagavan come into this world only to help people find out their reality. Taking this to heart, let us all press on and 'stop not until the goal is reached'." ▲



VERSE

Mahadeepam — The Inner Path

UPAHAR

In a moment unknown to time,
between the setting and rising of the worlds,
the Lord of all hearts
has crowned Himself
with His single, unthinkable
Fire.

He lets fall His cloak of night,
raises up the flowering moon
and unrolls beneath these ever-willing feet
the naked path of adoration

Auspicious on high the dancing constellation;
by ancient silent-most rocks
and mirrored in rare, enchanted waters
the pilgrim dreams the way

MOUNTAIN PATH

From a well-trod outer way
adorned with many a shrine
the chorus of a million circling souls
floats on the breeze;
and an inner laughing knowledge
that not even one step is taken
on the heart's round road...

And though at times falling among shadows,
as if pursued, or haunted —
yet in a sudden, absent recognition,
aloneness overtakes the traveller,
and night becomes a solitary Flame

Nameless You are;
even Your most beloved Name
returns this night to the unspeakable —

Formless You shine,
for who is here apart from You
to trace your beloved outline?

All being now is honoured and illumined,
all things prosper and delight;
Creation wonders and wonders,
every atom sings Your glory

You stand forever still,
You burn for pure Joy,
You burn at the core of all,
You burn at the core.



BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING

Poems

Lakshmana Sarma's Sanskrit Verses in Telugu Script

PREFACE BY SURI NAGAMMA

From time to time, whenever anything was written in Telugu, Bhagavan would, in response to my requests, give these precious papers in his own handwriting, to me to copy into special notebook in the ashram. The desire would arise in me, every time this happened, to retain those papers. And Bhagavan would invariably ask me, "Where are those papers?" I would stall him saying, "I shall give them back soon." If I delayed a little, Bhagavan would persistently demand them saying, "Give me back my papers. Should I not show them to others when they ask for it?" He thus would adamantly persist till I returned those papers. When I did give them back albeit a little reluctantly, he would, with a look of compassion, graciously say, "Alright. It does not matter. You keep them yourself." However, I did not retain them and felt it was right to return them each time.

At that time I wrote a poem and showed it to Bhagavan. It was as follows:

“When you yourself are shining in *Akshara* form (as the indestructible Self) inside my never-withering lotus-like heart, I have not been able to recognise you due to the dullness of my eyesight otherwise called karmic tendencies (*vasanas*). What a pity that I have been after the handwritten *akshara* (letters of the alphabet) which are subject to destruction!” [Editorial Note: There is a pun on the word *akshara* which has two meanings, ‘That which is indestructible’ and letter.]

Actually, Bhagavan had tried in many ways to wash away my innate *vasanas* which always made me desire to possess a manuscript in Bhagavan's handwriting. He patiently waited till he was satisfied that the bubbling impetus of my desire had calmed down and only then gave me a great gift.

Before I came to the ashram, in 1940 Sri Lakshmana Sarma had written in Sanskrit *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*. Those slokas were copied in Telugu script by Bhagavan in a small palmsize notebook. One day, it so happened that without any prompting, Bhagavan was so gracious as to give it to me as *prasadam*. I felt greatly blessed and preserved and treasured the notebook, as if it were my own life.

I often showed this precious possession to devotees who came to *Ramana Sadan* in Vijayawada. Amongst those who saw this book was Sri K. V. Narayana and he volunteered to get it printed with a facsimile of Bhagavan's own handwriting for the benefit of the various devotees. Sri Ramanasramam consented to this proposal. The meanings in Telugu were provided by Sri Akhanda Sitaram Sastri at our request. This book was printed in 1966, and subsequent editions were published by Sri Ramanasramam.

I feel blessed that this holy gift of the immense wealth of knowledge given to me by my father Ramana, has been made available and can be available for the benefit of devotees. I pray that Bhagavan should bless me to continue to have this generous attitude of the mind always in future.

- 3 -

౧. శ్రీరమణద్వాదశాక్షరమాలాస్తవః ॥

౧. ఓం తత్సదాఖ్యం పురుషం గుహేశం
భక్తార్చనాశాయ శరీరవంతం ।
గురుం గురుణామజమాదిదేవం
త్వామాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥

౨. ననోననోయోవిలసత్యజస్రం
పుమాన్పురాణోనిఖలాత్మభూతః ।
తంకాలకాలం పరిపూర్ణభావం
త్వామాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥

౩. మ్రాక్షార్తిలోకస్య శరణ్యమేకం
మౌనేన సంబోధిత భక్తలోకం ।
మోదస్వరూపం మధురస్వభావం
త్వామాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥

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౪. భ్రరం వహంతం భజతాం సుఖేన
దయాంబుధిం దీన జనేస్వభావాత్ ।
అజ్ఞాన మాగోక పృవిలోకయంతం
త్వమాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥

౫. గతం సమస్తస్మిచరాచరస్య
ప్రశాంత గంభీరతయా విభాంతం ।
స్తవ్యం స్తవేనాచలితస్వభావం
త్వమాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥

౬. వ్రతేణ్యమేకం తమసః పరస్తాత్
వపుష్పతా మాప్త తమం నతానాం
స్మితేన శాంతిం భజతాం దదానం
త్వమాత్మనాథం రమణం భజేఽహం ॥



Is a 'Human Guru' Really Necessary?

MICHAEL JAMES

This article is abridged and adapted by Michael James from a webpost that he wrote in the online forum that he recently started at www.happinessofbeing.blogspot.com, which is dedicated to discussing in depth the philosophy and practice of the spiritual teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

One idea that is nowadays very prevalent among spiritual aspirants is that a 'human guru' or 'living guru' is necessary, and this causes confusion in the minds of many people who sincerely wish to practise the teachings of Sri Bhagavan, but who never had the opportunity to meet him while he lived in his human form. Such people often ask, therefore, whether a 'human guru' or 'living guru' is really necessary.

We cannot answer this question without first asking what exactly we mean when we use such terms. If by the term 'human guru' we

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mean a manifestation of the one eternal *guru* in human form, then yes, for most of us such a 'human *guru*' is necessary, but that 'human *guru*' need not now be living in his human form.

Sri Bhagavan is such a 'human *guru*', and the fact that he cast off his human guise more than fifty-six years ago makes absolutely no difference to his ability to help us in our struggle to return to our original source, which is our consciousness of our own essential being, 'I am', and which is the true form of the *guru*. His grace and guidance are as real and as powerful now as they were when he appeared in his human guise, and they will always be so.

The real *guru* is our own true self, our essential being, which always shines within us as our fundamental consciousness – our non-dual self-consciousness, 'I am'. This fundamental consciousness of our own being is the original light, an illusory reflection of which appears as the individual object-knowing consciousness that we call our 'mind'. As such it is the light that illumines all other lights – both the physical light that illumines this world, and the reflected light of consciousness (our mind) by which we know that physical light and all other things.

Though it is the light to all lights, our fundamental consciousness of our own essential being, 'I am', is seemingly clouded and obscured by our deeply ingrained habit of attending to thoughts and so-called 'external objects', all of which we form in our mind by our power of imagination. Because our attention is thus habitually extroverted, being always directed towards things that we imagine to be other than ourselves, our own true self has to appear externally in the human form of the *guru* in order to teach us to turn our attention within, towards our own consciousness of being.

When we follow this advice of the *guru* in human form, we will discover the true form of the *guru* within ourselves. This true form of the *guru* is our own natural clarity of self-consciousness, which was formerly obscured by the dense cloud of our mental activity or imagination.

The sole purpose of the manifestation of the eternal *guru* in a transitory human form, is to teach us by words and example, thereby enabling us to understand the nature of reality and the means by which

we can attain it. Since these teachings of the 'human *guru*' remain and are available to us even after he has cast off his human guise, if we have understood his teachings correctly, there is absolutely no need for us to look for any other human manifestation of the *guru*.

Even when he was living in his human form, Sri Bhagavan taught us that he is not the human form that we mistake him to be, and that the real *guru* is within us. The sole aim of all that he taught us was to turn our attention within, away from all forms, both human and otherwise. Therefore, though we should revere his human form so long as we mistake ourselves to be a human form, we should always remember that the only true way to revere him is to do as he advised us, namely to turn our attention selfwards and thereby to drown our mind in the perfect clarity of pure self-consciousness, which alone is his true form.

Therefore the answer to the question 'Do we really need a human *guru*?' depends upon the sense in which we understand this term 'human *guru*'. If we understand it to mean the one eternal *guru* manifested in a human form, whether that human form is living at present or lived at some time in the past, then it is correct to say that we do need such a 'human *guru*' to teach us the truth that the peace, happiness, absolute reality and true knowledge that we all seek are our own essential self, and that we can attain them only by turning our attention inwards to scrutinise our own true being and thereby to know what we really are.

However, if we understand the term 'human *guru*' to mean specifically a '*guru*' who is currently living in a human form, then it is not correct to say that we need such a 'human *guru*' – or 'living *guru*' as some other people describe such a person. As Sri Sadhu Om used to say, if we want to depend upon such a 'living *guru*', we will end up being disappointed, because that 'living *guru*' will one day become a 'dead *guru*'.

The true 'living *guru*' is not merely a person who is currently living in human form, but is the ever-living reality, which exists within us eternally as our own true self. Only this ever-living *guru* can enable us to transcend the illusory duality of life and death.

Most of our misconceptions about the true meaning of terms such as 'human *guru*' or 'living *guru*' arise because we mistake the real *guru*

like Sri Bhagavan to be the human form in which he temporarily manifested himself. However, as Sri Bhagavan always emphasised, the real *guru* is not the human form that he appears to be, but is the infinite, eternal and ever-present reality, which we all experience as our basic consciousness of our own being, 'I am'.

The reason why we mistake the real *guru* to be the currently living or formerly living human being that he appears or appeared to be, is because we mistake ourselves to be a human being. This mistaken notion that we are a person, a finite individual being, is the root cause of all our ignorance and all the problems that we experience as a result of our ignorance.

This mistaken notion, 'I am a person' or 'I am this body', is precisely the problem that the real *guru* teaches us the means to transcend. Therefore no real *guru* will ever ask us to attach any importance to his own human form, because attaching such importance would only reinforce our mistaken notion that we ourselves are the human form that we imagine ourselves to be. This is the reason why Sri Bhagavan always emphasised that he was not the body that he appeared to be, and that the real *guru* is not a human being but is only the eternal reality, 'I am'.

Since Sri Bhagavan taught us that we should direct our attention inwards in order to discover the real *guru*, who shines within us as our own true and natural clarity of self-consciousness, if instead we direct our attention outwards believing that we need to depend upon some external *guru* who is currently living in a human form, we will be going in a direction diametrically opposite to that in which Sri Bhagavan taught us to seek the ultimate reality.

The real 'human *guru*' helps us by teaching us that we cannot attain true peace and happiness, or true knowledge, by directing our attention outwards, but only by turning it away from all external things, including even our own thoughts and mind, and focusing it keenly and exclusively upon our own essential being. Therefore if any so-called 'human *guru*' tells us that we need to have a *guru* who is currently living in a human form, such a 'human *guru*' cannot be a real *guru*, because he or she is failing to emphasise that all we need do is to turn our mind within to know our own true self. ▲

Lila

SHARADA BHANU

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi used to say that Adi Sankara, had explained Advaita using the analogy of a mirror, but if alive in Bhagavan's own times, he would have surely used the analogy of the cinema. Would it be temerity to suggest that if Bhagavan had known of the computer game he might have preferred it to even the cinema? Virtual reality seems to present a perfect metaphor in which to explore a Hindu view of life. Issues of fate and free will, attachment and detachment, good and evil, seem to arise 'naturally', when the computer game is considered in the context of such a vision. Desire is at the heart of the game and keeps it in motion — as long as there is delight in play, the *lila* is sustained. The game generates its own goals and offers its own rewards and these have to be renounced before the game can be ended. A player may lose a 'life' in the course of play but this does not end the game; to do that the player has to see the game through, refuse to play or both. The loss of a life only means that the player starts again. The game is governed by rules but these are often revealed only through play. Players can play against other players or

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against the computer. In the latter case the game will do its best to keep the player engrossed in the game, and prevent him from winning too easily and consequently, leaving the game. The whole universe of play comes into being at the moment of perception and as is the player, so the game; indicating the truth of *drsti-srsti*. The game may operate at different levels and often increases in complexity as the player gains familiarity and dexterity. As long as the player defines winning in terms compatible with the game's rewards, he is caught in the world of eternal repetition and variation, in the oscillation of *lila*. Spiritual struggle is impossible until winning is defined as escape from the game. This is easy in theory — one has only to stop playing. In practice, as those who succumb to the *moha* of game playing discover, detachment is difficult. Freedom is possible at any time and can happen in a moment, but it needs a radical act of rejection, a turning away from the unreal.

Lila

or

(This dumb game is really bugging me but I can't stop)

Insert disk; planet three; press any key
You are in cyberspace; play

No, I can't tell you the goal. Golden princess
Or Holy Grail or International Spy — it doesn't
Matter what you chase. You have sword and shield,
Body and soul. You can't keep them
Together but you have to try.

No, that thorn is of no use. And don't kill
That man. That ice is not firm enough.
Too bad. You're dead. Yes, it must have hurt.
But you have to remember it is only a game.
Oh, of course, you can have another life.
No it's not quite all over again
Nor is it exactly where you left off.
Well, I told you about the ice.

Be careful now. So you have the crystal.
Good, the smarter you are the better.

You killed, did you? You will pay,
Of course, but later. Those scuttling enemies
Are not just like you, they are you.
Projection and programmed blip
Sit playing a role
On either side of the screen.
What is real is intelligence.

Yes, you must set sail here
But you are before your time
And there is no ship. And if
I told you better go the way you came
You wouldn't understand. You're hooked.
So restart or exit?

No, exit is not the end and
To die is no solution.
In this game all exits are followed
By entries. So, go on, play. By trial and error
You at least avoid the same mistakes.

Whoops. Not the ice again!
Well, that's the theory. Some
Learn more slowly than others. The game
Assumes you will repeat.
Victory is useless but
Necessary. No, I can't say how long.

I can only tell you
When input and output
Cancel
And the goal is where you Are
Then...

But then is any time
You have only to get up

To be
Free — now.



Dhyana

JONATHAN BADER

In the ten Upanishads singled out by Sankara, the term *dhyana* is virtually synonymous with *upasana*,¹ or simply denotes ‘thinking’.² Sankara does not seem concerned with distinguishing *dhyana* from *upasana*. In the *Brahma Sutra Bhasya* (BSBh) 4.1.7 and 4.1.8, he repeats precisely the same explanation for each of the two terms: “maintaining a uniform train of thought”.

Yet despite their similarity there are obvious differences. Firstly, unlike *upasana*, *dhyana* does not necessarily entail a devotional attitude. Secondly, as *dhyana* comes to be associated with yoga practice, the term is specifically identified with techniques used in controlling the mind. *Upasana* does not connote a particular set of mental exercises. In *upasana*, the emphasis is on the object of the meditation, the deity

¹ See, for example, *Chandogya Upanisad* U 1.3.12.

² See *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 4.4.21.

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with whom identity is sought, hence the sense of ‘worship’. As the early Upanishads suggest, *dhyana* is indeed a kind of thinking. But it is a specialised mode of thought: a ‘way of attaining identity’, or ‘a means of true knowledge’.

It is only in the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* that *dhyana* begins to develop its characteristic connotation. It is also recognised as an essential component of a yoga practice which will be more fully elaborated in the *Yogasutra* (YS). When commenting on yoga, Sankara generally cites the authority of these three works, but relies especially on the *Yogasutra*. This is what we would, of course, expect if the *vivarana* on Vyasa’s *Yogasutra-bhasya* (YSBh) was indeed composed by Sankara. Many of his remarks on yoga and meditation reflect the influence of Vyasa.

Sankara illustrates the specific usage of the term *dhyana*, in a manner reminiscent of the *Yogasutra*: “The word ‘meditative’ [refers to] those whose minds are concentrated upon a single object, whose gaze is fixed, and whose limbs scarcely move.”³

The *Yogasutra* describes the practice of meditation as beginning with a firm and steady posture (*asana*). The steadiness is reinforced by control of the breath (*pranayama*). Each moment of the breath, comprising an inhalation, exhalation and cessation, is regulated and protracted. As the breath becomes ever more subtle, external movement is brought to a virtual halt. The fixity of his gaze suggests that the meditator has also put an end to the activity of the senses. This is accomplished by a withdrawal (*pratyahara*) of the sensory organs so that there is no longer any interaction with sensory stimuli. These three practices, *asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara*,⁴ go together with the requisite moral conduct.⁵ The YS provides details of the necessary

moral principles, which comprise the first two steps of the eightfold yoga practice (*astanga-yoga*). The first step, *yama*, designates a series of ‘restraints’: not causing injury to living beings, non-covetousness, non-stealing, truthfulness and continence (YS 2.30). The second step, *niyama*, involves a series of ‘observances’: purity, contentment, austerity, study and devotion to the Lord (YS 2.32). They constitute the foundation upon which meditation is based.

When the aspirant is thus prepared, he may then strive to achieve mastery of the mind. The mind is first fixed in concentration (*dharana*), focused exclusively on a single object. It is only then that the “uniform train of thought”, characteristic of *dhyana*, can be developed. Sankara likens this current of unbroken thought to the way oil pours: a fine, continuous stream.⁶ *Dhyana* culminates in *samadhi*, absorption. *Samadhi* occurs when all sense of separateness disappears. The one who meditates, the act of meditation and the object of meditation merge into one. This identity manifests itself by shining forth in the light of the object.

In the *Yogasutra*, meditation involves the whole of a process comprising *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. This can be expressed in terms of the traditional imagery cited by Sankara: first a lamp is firmly grasped, then filled with oil and lit, whereupon the light alone is seen to be shining forth. Collectively, these three aspects, known as *samyama*, are regarded as the direct means (*antaranga*) to the goal of yoga.⁷ The five preceding steps are only indirect aids (*bahiranga*), which prepare the ground for *samyama*.⁸ Meditation, then, represents the very heart of yoga practice.

The *Yogasutra* distinguishes between two different types of meditation. Strictly speaking these are *samadhi*-s. But ‘meditation’ is used here in the broader sense of the term which comprises *dhyana* and *samadhi*. The two are inseparably linked as components of *samyama*.

³ *Brahmasutra-bhasya* 4.1.8.

⁴ See *Yogasutra* 2.46 ff.

⁵ Sankara does not refer to moral conduct in BSBh 4.1.8. While he rarely enumerates moral principles, it seems that they were expected of his students. Sankara insists that the teacher should determine whether or not the student is possessed of the necessary qualities which are “well known from the traditional sources,” *Upadesasahasri, gadyabandha* 1.2.

⁶ *Bhagavadgita-bhasya* 13.24.

⁷ See *Yogasutra* 3.4 ff.

⁸ *Samyama* means self-control; combined practice. It designates the combined practice of the last three steps in *raja-yoga* or concentration, meditation and union (*dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*).

The six types of *samadhi* mentioned in YS 1.17 and 1.42 may all be attained by means of *samyama*. Sankara, for his part, does not seem particularly concerned to distinguish *samadhi* from other, more general, terms denoting meditation. In his comment on the *Brahma Sutra* (BS 2.3.29), he cites as examples of *samadhi* passages which prescribe *dhyana* and *nididhyasana*: those based on object-centred consciousness (*samprajnata*), and those which reject all contact with objects (*asamprajnata*).⁹

Samyama exemplifies object-based meditation, for it strives to establish an identity. *Prasamkhyana* best represents the approach independent of object-orientation. This meditation is characterised solely by *viveka-khyati*, ‘discriminative discernment’.¹⁰ The function of *prasamkhyana* is to discriminate between the pristine nature of the Self (*purusa*), and that of *prakrti*, the very source of all material objects. The aim of the meditation is to stop the fluctuations of the mind (*citta-vrtti-nirodha*), and ultimately, to be free from the bonds of *prakrti*. The YS clearly regards *asamprajnata* as the superior of the two ways of meditation. In the final analysis, *samyama* is but an external aid to the practice of a meditation which does not rely on objects.¹¹

Sankara too favours meditation which goes beyond the limits of object identification:

“Thus the sage identifies himself, by stages, with the vital force that comprises everything. Then, withdrawing this all-comprising vital force into the inner Self, he next attains the state of the witness, the transcendent Self that is described as ‘not this, not this’.”¹²

Sankara accepts the striving to attain identity only as a preliminary stage of meditation. When this stage is abandoned, the meditator becomes a mere witness (*drastr*) to all associations. He exercises discriminative insight by negating (*neti neti*) all which is other than the highest Self. Such meditation is a true reflection of the nature of

the Self, which, in the absolute sense, can only be identified as ‘not this, not this’. To assist his students on the path of Self-realisation, Sankara developed a process he calls *parisamkhyana*, a meditation closely resembling the *prasamkhyana* of the *Yogasutra*.¹³

Using this type of meditation as a model, Sankara establishes a new interpretation of *upasana*. An analysis of the sacred utterance, *tat tvam asi*, becomes the basis of a meditative process which discriminates between Self and non-Self, while reaffirming the essential unity of *atman* and Brahman. ▲

¹³ Both terms are formed from the root *khyā*, ‘to be known’. Monier-Williams defines *prasamkhyana* as “enumeration, reflection, meditation” and *parisamkhyana* as “enumeration, exclusive specification.”

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⁹ See *Yogasutra* 1.18.

¹⁰ This is James Haughton Woods’ translation, *The Yoga System of Patanjali*, repr. Delhi 1977, p.8. *Prasamkhyana* is described in *Yogasutra* 4.29 and *Yogasutra-bhasya* 1.2.

¹¹ *Yogasutra* 3.8.

¹² *Brhadaranyaka-bhasya* 4.2.4.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

A Sense of Peace

K. C. MOHAN

It was in 1947 that my parents shifted from Mangalore to Madras and I began an engineering course at Annamalai University. During the three years from 1947 to 1950, I had the opportunity of visiting Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai along with my mother, K. K. Kalyani Amma, who was a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. My mother's elder brother, K. K. Nambiar, and elder sister, K. K. Madhavi Amma were ardent devotees of Ramana Maharshi from the early 1930s, ever since they chanced to live in Tiruvannamalai for a few years. They influenced other members of our extended family to come and pay their respects to Bhagavan. My family seems to have had a connection to Bhagavan because another uncle, Dr. P. C. Nambiar, was posted to Tiruvannamalai as the Government Doctor for the District at that time, and as part of his routine he looked after the medical needs of Ramanasramam.

I distinctly remember my first visit to the ashram in the company of my mother in 1947. There was the arch over the front gate, then as

now, which announced that we were entering the ashram precincts. I still remember vividly, even after a gap of fifty years, the old wizened illupai tree which greeted every visitor.

Being young I did not sit for very long in the small hall where Bhagavan gave darshan. After about ten minutes my cousin and I left to climb the nearby Arunachala. But the short time I did sit on the cool floor in Bhagavan's presence made an indelible impression. There was a sense of quiet. Bhagavan mostly looked at people in a serene manner. When he looked at me I felt very happy and pleased. There was a sense of elation. I did not feel fear, anxiety or any other type of negativity in his presence. He was friendly and approachable.

My visits to Ramanasramam were exhilarating though brief. I would sit with folded hands, along with my mother in the hall, as near to Bhagavan as possible. My mother would tell me about how her worries disappeared while sitting in the hall in Bhagavan's presence, and quite often she would clear her doubts by seeking clarifications from him, which were always forthcoming. In spite of the large number of devotees present, the calm and peace that pervaded the place had a powerful effect on us. I would also spend considerable time walking on the hill and enjoying the tranquillity of the surroundings.

Bhagavan had a great sense of humour. There was one incident which illustrated this, when a nephew of mine saw the monkeys in the courtyard outside the hall, and being a mischievous boy, began to chase them. Bhagavan, who saw this joked, "They are all monkeys." It may not sound so funny now, but when he spoke with such affection, one could not but laugh with him at the comical sight of those scampering imps.

Altogether, visiting Ramanasramam was a great experience and affected the course of my future life. When I remember that time, it is with a feeling of overwhelming peace; more so even than when I visited holy temples such as Guruvayur. The peace was something you automatically took with you when the time came for departure. It lingered on for days and even now, so many years after these events of my childhood, there is deep down a prevailing sense of peace which has kept me safe and secure when times were rough and uncertain.

In 1949 we first heard about Bhagavan's illness that eventually proved fatal. My mother was shocked at the possibility that Bhagavan would no longer be physically present in this world. She had a dream about him and saw his body, which gave her some solace.

I did not realise it at the time, but the most important experience I had with Bhagavan occurred in April, 1950. My uncle K.K.Nambiar was sitting in his garden at night in Gandhinagar, Chennai, when he saw a comet streaking by, and immediately recognising the significance of it, told his family members that a great person must have passed away. Within half an hour he received a call from Ramanasramam informing him that Bhagavan had attained Mahanirvana. It was well known that Bhagavan had been suffering for some time, and all my family were alert to the fact that one day we would face the aching fact that our beloved Bhagavan was no longer within simple reach.

My uncle immediately passed on the distressing information to my mother, and we soon left for Tiruvannamalai by car and reached there by seven a.m. While the normal Hindu custom is to cremate the bodies of the dead, great sages and gurus are given the highest honour by burying them in a seated position. It was my uncle, K. K. Nambiar who selected the exact location for the burial, and amidst the chanting of prayers, the bathed and anointed body of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, seated in the lotus position, was lowered into the grave. Along with many of my close family members I was destined to witness this ceremony at close quarters, and to this day I have a dramatic memory of the events of that extraordinary day. In the evening I walked along the slopes of the hill once again and knew decisively that life would never be the same. Bhagavan's presence had permeated our lives and was the rock upon which we had depended, especially my mother who was now in profound shock. We feared for her and understood that even though we all felt the loss, my mother was particularly vulnerable and upset because she had given her heart and soul to Bhagavan. We returned to Madras the next day with heavy hearts knowing that life had radically changed and we could never go back to those carefree days. A door had closed. Even now I feel the emptiness of that moment.

I resumed my studies and eventually found a position within the fledgling steel industry. I believed in the philosophy of Swami

Vivekananda; that it is not so important to pander to ritualistic practices but better to concentrate one's effort in doing the right thing. 'Your God is in your work and it is more important to do one's duties correctly than to visit temples'. This quote from Swami Vivekananda struck a note with me and it has been the guiding principle in my life ever since. Because of this attitude I worked tirelessly in the steel industry and slept soundly because this feeling of great satisfaction infused my work. Because I felt satisfied that I had 'enough' for my needs, there was never the desire to have more than what life gave me.

Satisfaction meant the successful completion of projects on time and to the desired quality. The first major scheme I was involved with was the Bhilai Steel Plant in Madhya Pradesh. The due date for the completion of the project on the 2nd February 1959 and the president of India, Rajendra Prasad, was to inaugurate the plant. We worked day and night during the last couple of months. There was a sense of satisfaction for India, and it certainly wasn't for the money, which was a pittance. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru inspired the whole country with a pioneering spirit and a sense of sacrifice which are hard to understand today in this commercial world we inhabit. Nehru was a dynamic man, an idealist who inspired both us who worked for the Government and the people, with an honesty and sincerity. It was a unique inspiration felt by that particular generation of pioneers to bring the country forward.

The philosophy of Sri Ramana Maharshi and my parent's teachings influenced my code of values. As Chairman and Managing Director of MECON (Metallurgical & Engineering Consultants of India Ltd) from 1972 to 1980, I was involved in some of the largest steel projects in the country. By reading and understanding Bhagavan's teachings I realised there is more to life than the accumulation of power and wealth. Truth and service to the people are the most important factors one must take into consideration in life.

Now I am leading a retired life in Chennai, but part of my time is spent for social and charitable causes such as The Banyan in Chennai, a home for mentally disturbed women, the Cheshire Homes and Eye care institutions in Kerala. Let us keep the adage in mind: "If God has been kind to us, we should be kind to others." ▲

VERSE

The Names of Siva

RAMESH MENON

Auspicious One,
miraculous *Siva*,
purer than starlight.

The ancient munis,
older than the spinning world,
Brahma's first children,
heard it whispered among stars,
that you, *Aja*, are Un-born.

Among all currents,
you are the deepest eddy
in the silent heart;
plumbless *Mahahrada*,
vortex of eternity.

Your body of light
was once the night of the void,
dark *Vishwamurti*;
spiral nebulae bright pores,
upon your black, velvet skin.

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of 5 lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra 7-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.

MOUNTAIN PATH

With dance and with fire,
he recalls the universe
into the void;
to the end of time and place,
of dark and light, O *Hara*.

Khaga, you cross the
sea of the sky with a stride,
one shore to the other;
but, more, you traverse sorrow,
make the living from the dead.

Unshakeable one,
master of intricate fate,
Dridha of ages.

We infer you are,
by rumour of your lustre,
because there is light;
Alokasambhavya,
our eyes have not seen your face.

The quark's blush you are,
Heartbeat's heart, breath of breath;
light of the moonbeam
blazing in on sleep's dreamscape,
Sukshma, most subtle one.

You smear yourself with
ashes from the ghats of death,
grave *Smasananilaya*;
what heartbreak do you root for,
that you spend all your nights here?

Source of the rivers
of serenity you are,
which flow through the stars;
Shanta on your white mountain,
quiescent one, O peace.



What is Neo-Advaita?

JAMES SWARTZ

In the Eighties the Western spiritual world became reacquainted with Sri Ramana Maharshi, a great sage in the Vedic tradition who had achieved international recognition around the middle of the century but, though greatly respected, did not have a significant following since his death in the Fifties. The rediscovery of Sri Ramana roughly coincided with the rise of 'Neo-Advaita', a satsang based 'movement' that has little in common with Sri Ramana except the idea of moksha, freedom from the problems of samsara.

What accounts for the popularity of the Neo-Advaita movement? I think it would be fair to say that the secret lies more in the *sang* than the *sat*. The Sanskrit word *sat* means 'what is', in other words the non-dual Self. The word *sang* from *sanga* means an association or a company of like minded people. When *sat* and *sanga* are combined it means

James Swartz was a student of Swami Chinmayananda. He is the author of several books on Vedanta.

‘keeping the company of truth’, the Self, in other words an inquiring mind fixed on the Self. Since only a mind that is properly prepared is capable of achieving this condition and Neo-Advaita has no techniques for producing this kind of mind, we have to look elsewhere to understand its appeal.

The breakdown of the traditional family structure in Western societies since World War II has produced two generations of love-starved middle class people. The amazing popularity of Ammaji, the ‘hugging’ saint, testifies to this sad fact. So I think it is not unreasonable that the sense of ‘community’ provided by a sanga explains the appeal of Neo-Advaita, not its power to transform the mind or its teachings of enlightenment. Perhaps it would have an even greater appeal were it to teach that the inner Self is *parama prema svarupa* — of the nature of non-dual love.

Neo-Advaita then, it seems, is actually a lifestyle dedicated to solving the Western problem of alienation through providing social contact than a legitimate sadhana. In Vedic culture the lifestyle that prepares the mind is called *sadhana*, the ‘means of attainment’. *Sadhana* is a time honored method that creates an inner *sanga* between the various conflicting parts of the psyche. It is an evolutionary approach because the mind is a very conservative instrument, much extroverted by the pressure of the vasanas, the subconscious tendencies that produce the samsaric state of mind. So progress is incremental, if not downright glacial. It is not uncommon that many years are required to produce an integrated, clear and balanced mind, one capable of Self-realization. Neo-Advaita does not endorse *sadhana* because the children of the modern age are conditioned to the idea of instant gratification.

The Neo-Advaitic saying, ‘No method, no path, no guru, no ego’ seems to echo the ‘not this, not this’ approach found in traditional Vedanta; negate everything and the ever-free Self is realized by default. But here the apparent similarity ends.

Perhaps the best way to approach Neo-Advaita is not so much by what it teaches as by what it doesn’t. Probably the most obvious omission from the standpoint of traditional Vedanta is the notion of *adikara*, the qualifications necessary for enlightenment. Neo-Advaita is burdened with a democratic ethos, the idea being that anyone fresh off the street can

gain instant enlightenment. Traditional Vedanta disagrees, insisting instead that a seeker be discriminating, dispassionate, calm of mind, and endowed with a ‘burning’ desire for liberation along with secondary qualifications like devotion, faith, perseverance and so on. In other words it requires a mature adult not under the spell of his or her likes and dislikes, with a one-pointed desire to know the truth.

The reason for this insistence is based on the fact that enlightenment takes place in the mind. An unprepared, immature mind, buffeted by the strong winds of fear and desire, is incapable of grasping and retaining the knowledge “I am limitless Awareness and not this body mind.” And it is by this knowledge alone — to quote Ramana and Sankara before him — that freedom is realized. A Neo-Advaita guru espousing this view would find it difficult indeed to find disciples.

It would be impossible to underestimate the importance of Karma Yoga in the Vedic tradition. Karma Yoga is an attitude that one takes with respect to one’s actions and the results of one’s actions. It is based on the understanding that a person has every right to act with the idea of getting a certain result, but that the result is not under the control of the doer of the action. The result is a consequence of the appropriateness and timeliness of the action and the nature of the field in which the action happens. Because the results of one’s actions are not up to the doer, whatever result, positive or negative, comes, it should be gladly accepted as a ‘gift’ from God. Because it is the identification of the doer with the action and its result that produces binding vasanas, the Karma Yoga attitude reduces the vasana load and eventually causes the attention to turn inward and meditate on the Self. A mind prepared for Self-realization becomes peaceful, pure, and rock-solid. It takes pleasure in itself and is indifferent to the temporary joys that come from the senses and their objects. A mind prepared by Karma Yoga is well qualified for Self-realization.

Karma Yoga is not taught in the Neo-Advaita world not only because it dismisses the idea of doership outright, but because the application of the Karma Yoga attitude requires patience and diligence, qualities not in evidence in people seeking instant enlightenment. Karma Yoga requires continuous monitoring of one’s motivations and reactions to

MOUNTAIN PATH

subjective and objective happenings and the willingness to change one's attitude when observation reveals it to be vasana-producing. It requires great awareness and diligence because the vasanas continually divert one's attention away from Self-observation. And, as is the case with all spiritual practices, change is incremental and gradual.

Another glaring omission in the 'teachings' of Neo-Advaita is the Vedic idea of *yagna*. A *yagna* is a sacrifice. Sacrifice plays a central role in Vedanta *sadhana*; the vasanas extorting the mind need to be sacrificed to produce a mind that is capable of meditating on the Self, reflecting on the non-dual teachings and assimilating the knowledge. Neo-Advaita cleverly gets around this teaching by claiming that there is no 'doer' to make sacrifices.

Traditional Vedanta also deals with the vasanas by insisting that the seeker practise Vedika Dharma, a duty-oriented approach to life. When a person follows *vedika dharma* binding vasanas are neutralized. But when there are no teachings concerning the relationship between the pursuit of *kamya karmas*, desire-prompted activities, and the production of binding vasanas, is it any wonder that whatever non-dual experiences are acquired in *satsang* quickly vanish with the appearance of the next binding vasana...much less the knowledge 'I am non-dual Awareness' that sets one free? This is why the Neo-Advaita world is little more than thousands of people, including the teachers, who have had scores of non-dual experiences, but who, at the end of the day, are still prisoners of their conditioning.

Why are binding vasanas such a major problem for anyone seeking enlightenment? Because they disturb the mind to such a degree that one's contact with the Self, as it reflects in the mind, is broken. It is meditation on the reflection of the Self in the mind that allows the intellect to investigate the Self and gain the knowledge 'I am the Self' that breaks down the subject-object distinction and ends one's sense of duality.

Another essential component of any valid spiritual path, Vedic or otherwise, is bhakti, devotion to God or the Self. Ramana gave devotion to God equal status with Self-enquiry as a spiritual path, because devotion to God paves the way for Self-realization by breaking down the concept of doership. "Not my will, but Thine." It also teaches



that God, not the ego, is the dispenser of the fruits of one's actions. But Neo-Advaita sees devotion to God as 'duality' and has nothing to do with it. This shunning of the devotional aspect of life is based on ignorance of the value of devotion as one of the primary requirements for emotional happiness and Self-realization. In fact *dvaita* works just as well as *advaita* in preparing the mind for Self-realization because the Self understands the heart's yearning for freedom and functions through one's chosen symbol to prepare the seeker for Self-realization.

Some schools of Neo-Advaita subscribe to the notion that enlightenment can be transmitted in some subtle experiential way via the physical proximity of a master. Traditional Advaita disagrees with this view for the reason that ignorance is deeply entrenched in the aspirant's thinking and that it is only by constant reflection on the teachings that the ultimate assimilation of the knowledge is achieved. This ultimate assimilation is often called 'full' or 'complete' enlightenment. The 'transmission' fantasy on the other hand, fits nicely into the Neo-Advaitic conception of easy enlightenment as it does away with the need for serious *sadhana*. One need do nothing more than attend a *satsang* presided over by a 'master' and presto-chango!... one wakes up for good. If this were true, however, the tens of thousands who sit at the feet of enlightened masters everywhere would be enlightened.

An idea that has gained currency in the Neo-Advaita world is an experiential notion of 'awakening.' While sleep and waking are reasonable metaphors to describe the states of Self-ignorance and Self-knowledge, Neo-Advaita assigns to them a meaning that is not justified. Just as anything that lives, dies, anything that wakes, sleeps. But the Self never sleeps or awakens. This 'waking up' and 'going back to sleep'...all of which take place in the waking state ego incidentally...is a consequence of the play of the *gunas* in the mind. When the mind is *sattvic*, the reflection of the Self in it causes the individual to 'wake up' to the Self, but when *rajas* or *tamas* reappear, as they inevitably do, the mind is agitated or clouded and the Self experience is lost...causing the mind to go back to 'sleep.' Until the *rajasic* and *tamasic* *vasanas* are purified one is condemned to a frustrating cycle of waking and sleeping.

One of the most common Neo-Advaitic misconceptions is the idea that the ego must be surrendered or destroyed for enlightenment

to happen. But my understanding, through the study of scripture, reflection and experience, is that the realization of one's self as non-dual awareness does not destroy the ego but provides a limitless space in which it can relax and face life with equanimity.

Many Neo-Advaita *satsang* teachers use a picture of Ramana to lend legitimacy and gravitas to their *satsangs*, and promote the idea that silence is somehow the ultimate teaching. While understanding the nature of the Self in 'silence' may finish the *sadhana* of a few qualified seekers, experiential silence is not superior to the skillful use of words in bringing about enlightenment. This is so because silence is in harmony, not conflict, with Self-ignorance...as it is with everything. One can 'sit in silence' for lifetimes and never realize that one is Silence, meaning limitless Awareness. Knowledge, however, which is the result of Self-enquiry in line with scripture, destroys Self-ignorance like light destroys darkness.

Additionally no experience, including the experience of silence, can change one's thinking patterns. An experience of non-duality may temporarily suspend thought or increase one's conviction that one is limitless Awareness, but the notion that the 'I' is limited, inadequate, incomplete and separate is hard-wired. It is only by diligent practice of the knowledge 'I am non-dual Awareness and not this body-mind' in every life experience, that one's understanding of reality gets in line with the nature of the Self. I was informed recently by a friend with considerable knowledge of the *satsang* world that we have now entered the 'Post-Neo Advaita' period. Not surprisingly Neo-Advaita has not lived up to its promise as a quick and easy means of liberation and people are now looking for the next 'most incredible' path to enlightenment.

Does Neo-Advaita have any redeeming virtues? In non-dual reality everything somehow eventually serves the Self...appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Just as kindergarten is a prerequisite for grade school, people seeking enlightenment need to start somewhere and Neo-Advaita, imperfect as it is as a vehicle for spiritual practice or Self-realization, provides entry-level access to the idea of non-duality. And because *satsang* provides a sense of community it will probably continue in some form or other for the foreseeable future. It will, however, undoubtedly remain little more than a lifestyle fad...unless it investigates its roots and discovers the wisdom of the Vedas. ▲



Sri Muruganar, ca. 1930

Guru Vachaka Kovai

Garland of the Guru's Sayings

SRI MURUGANAR

In the 1920s Muruganar began to make a record, in short Tamil verses, of teaching statements that he had heard Bhagavan make. In the late 1930s, when Muruganar had composed more than 800 of these verses, Sadhu Natanananda arranged them into groups that had a common theme, and this newly arranged version of the text was then sent to the press. When the proofs were returned to the ashram, Bhagavan himself went through the whole work and revised many of the verses. He also added new ones that he composed especially for this work. Some of these new verses were either written in the margins of the proof copy, or in the spaces between the verses. Since this 1939 edition of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* is the only book of Bhagavan's spoken teachings that was both recorded in Tamil and also checked and revised by Bhagavan himself, it possesses a unique authority.

In the years that followed Muruganar continued to compose new verses that contained Bhagavan's teachings, and many of these were

incorporated in the next Tamil edition which appeared in 1974. This version of the work contained 1,254 verses composed by Muruganar and an additional twenty-eight that were written by Bhagavan.

Prof. K. Swaminathan began to translate the work into English in the 1960s, and his translation of the complete text was serialised in *The Mountain Path* in the 1960s and 70s. This particular version is now published in book form by Sri Ramanasramam. In the early 1980s Sadhu Om and Michael James also made a translation of the work. Their version remained unavailable to the public until it was finally published in 2005 by Sri Arunachala Ramana Nilayam. A third English translation of the book will shortly be published. T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and David Godman have spent the last two years making a new translation of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, and their rendering of this important text will be available in book form in the second half of this year.

Here is a selection of verses from this new translation. A further instalment will appear in the next issue.

The Unreality of the World

31 Like a spider that has the wonderful power to extrude the strands of its web from its mouth and then withdraw them back there, the mind unfolds the world from within itself and then withdraws it back into itself.

32 When the mind emerges first through the brain and then through the senses, along with it names and forms are pushed out from within. Conversely, when the mind rests in the Heart, they enter and subside there again.

33 Through names and forms the world appears in all its discordant diversity. When names and forms cease forever, it [the world] is *Brahman*. A person with a limited mind masks the true God [*Brahman*] with concepts of name and form, sees it as a world, and is bewildered and frightened.

34 The world that associates with us as an appearance of names and forms is as transient as a lightning flash. The faltering understanding ‘I am the body’ is the deceptive device that makes us desire the world as if it were real, [thereby] entrapping us instantaneously in the powerful snare of bondage.

35 This world phenomenon consisting of dualities and trinities, which shines because of the thoughts of the illusory mind, is like the imaginary circle traced in the air by whirling a firebrand, but from the point of view of *swarupa*, the fullness of intense consciousness, the dizzying spinning of the illusory mind is non-existent. This you should know.

36 You worldly minded people who do not accept as true the fair and reasonable teachings of supreme *jnana* that are declared by *jnanis*! If you thoroughly examine the world, this vision misperceived by a jaundiced eye, this bloating out of a great delusion, it is merely a deception caused by *vasanas* [the tendencies and desires of the mind].

37 What exists is the plenitude of object-free *jnana*, which shines as unconditioned reality. Like the erroneous perception of a person with jaundice who sees everything as yellow, this entire world appears as an object that is grasped by the concept that divides the world into seer and seen. It is a deluded view consisting wholly of a mind that has defects such as ego, deceit, desire, and so on.

The Reality of the World¹

49 God, the light of consciousness, shines as *Atma swarupa* [the real nature of the Self] to one whose attention is focused within. For those who look outwards, He is shrouded by the world, which is a collection

¹ In the previous section Bhagavan explained that the world of names and forms projected and witnessed by the mind is unreal. In the next section he propounds what appears at first sight to be a contradictory position: that when one knows oneself to be the substratum on which the world appears, one then knows that the world is real. Bhagavan resolved this apparent paradox by saying that the world

of *tattvas* [non-Self entities]. This is like a fire that glows brightly within but is covered on the outside by smoke. If, by divine grace, which is the very nature of God, the mind is cleared of the confusion that is objectifying-consciousness, the beauty of the world will not be a mental hallucination, an imaginary appearance, but ultimate reality itself.

50 To the steadfast *jnanis* who do not abandon the Self-consciousness that is the substratum for all the imaginary and differentiated forms of knowledge, these [forms of knowledge] are all wholly Self. From this standpoint they [the *jnanis*] declare that these [differentiated forms of knowledge] are also real. How is it possible for ignorant people who have not attained Self-knowledge to understand the true meaning of this statement?

51 True consciousness shines by itself, without limitation, and without clinging to the world. By the shining of this consciousness the power that the *maya*-defilement [exerts] over the mind perishes. Only those people who have a defilement-free pure mind, and who therefore know the transcendental consciousness, in addition to awareness of the world, can know with certainty the true import of the statement 'the world is real'.

52 If one corrects one's gross vision, transforming it into the eye of *jnana*, and if one attentively views [the world] with that eye of truth that is wholly *jnana*, then the world which was previously seen as the forms of the five elements, beginning with space, will be only the pure reality that is wholly consciousness.

53 If one corrects one's defective vision, transforming it into the form of true *jnana*, the Supreme, and if one then sees with that *jnana*

vision, the world that appeared as a sea of sorrows will exist as a sea of supreme bliss.

54 The *jnani's* vision matures into being-consciousness-bliss, the eye of truth, because the mischievous movements of the ego-mind have ceased completely. Since the nature of the seen is not different from the nature of the eye that sees, to the true *jnani* the world too is definitely being-consciousness-bliss.²

55 The world scene that unfolds like a dream is nothing other than the mind, a deluded perspective. Its true nature will appear as it really is only to the true awareness, the distilled being-consciousness that shines, transcending the mind-*maya*.

56 Foolish and deceitful mind, you who every day become greatly deluded upon seeing as different from yourself the dream [of the waking state], which occurs as wholly yourself! If you realise your true nature as it actually is, will this world be different from the reality, being-consciousness-bliss?

57 Just as the yolk of the egg of the many-hued green peacock is only one [in colour], the original state of this empty world, which appears to be distorted into teeming multiplicity, is pure and unalloyed happiness. By abiding in the state of the Self, know this truth now, even while that Self, appearing as an effect, takes the form of the world manifesting through the power of *maya*.

58 All the differences that, crowding together, accumulate to form the world are in truth only the sport of grace, the power of the one consciousness. Therefore, *jnanis* whose sole focus is the knowledge of the radiant reality will never perceive the world of many differences except as a mere appearance.

² Verses 51, 52 and 53 are, respectively, about *sat* (being), *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss). Verse 54 combines the components and expounds on the nature of *sat-chit-ananda*.

perceived as separate objects is a false and illusory world, but when one knows oneself to be the consciousness in which the world appearance comes and goes, one also knows that this world appearance, which is inseparable from that consciousness, has the same reality.

On Enquiry and Being Still

536 People of the world, you who go running again and again, seeking one thing after another, believing each to be the ultimate truth! The wise course is to investigate that one thing which, when investigated, results in all other things ceasing to exist.

577 Because the Self shines as fullness without any other thing existing apart from it, the differentiated view in which objects are known is, in truth, incompatible with the Self. This being so, if the *jiva*, whose form is the ego and who through delusion takes himself to be the seer of objects, enquires within himself, 'Who is the seer?' and realises his true nature as it really is, then the heart-knot will snap and the *triputi* differences [seer, seeing, seen, and knower, knowing, known] will flee rapidly and perish.

632 When the *jiva*, turning back and returning along the way it came, enters the source, it will drown completely in its intrinsic nature and, in so doing, as the bliss of its own nature manifests clearly within its own understanding, it will abide motionless in that state.

638 If you don't focus your attention on anything objectively but instead turn your attention onto itself, everything will flourish as one's own Self, as the [infinite] eye of [*jnana*]. Afterwards, objective knowledge becomes a madness.

640 Instead of investigating and realising the Self as the reality in which there is no coming or going, and experiencing [there] the ecstasy of the lofty heights of bliss, oh how marvellous it is that we wander and suffer deeply to attain the supreme bliss that would shine if we would only keep still!

643 Since the Self, that which exists, is clearly apprehended as the *aham* [the 'I'], the light of consciousness in the Heart, only that supreme reality, the eye of consciousness that is free of ignorance, is

directly perceived [*pratyaksha*], and not the objects that come within the range of the faculty of sight. Therefore, seek [that Self].

647 If you remain still, without paying attention to this, without paying attention to that, and without paying attention to anything at all, you will, simply through the powerful attention to being, become the reality, the vast eye, the unbounded space of consciousness.

698 *Prarabdha*, which, like a whirlwind, relentlessly agitates and spins the mind that has shrunk through the 'I am the body' idea, cannot, however slightly, stir the adjunct-free mind that shines as the extremely clear space of pure consciousness when the ego-impurity is destroyed by self-enquiry.

703 The truth of karma is only the realisation of one's true nature by the enquiry 'Who is the doer who is embarking upon the performance of karma?' Unless the ego, the performer of action, perishes by enquiring into and knowing [its real nature], the perfect unassailable peace in which all doing has ended will be impossible [to attain].

727 Let the aspirant not be in doubt as to whether or not the most important and estimable grace of God, that distress-relieving support, has arisen in him. The very fact that his mind is speeding along enthusiastically with *vichara*, longing for release from bondage, is sufficient evidence [that God's grace has manifested].

728 If one were to tell the truth [one would say that] both the divine grace of God and the enquiry 'Who am I?', which is the means to abide in the Heart, are mutually supportive aids that simultaneously convey the aspirant towards the state of union with the Self, the Supreme.

738 Meditation is only the mental imagination of conceiving oneself to be the Supreme Reality that shines as *sat-chit-ananda*. Enquiry is to establish the mind in the Self such that the seed of false delusion [the mind] perishes.

740 How can one's source, which can be experienced only after the ego-self has been completely annihilated, be thought of, via the ego, as 'I am That'? To remain silent in one's Heart, with the ego destroyed, is the proper [course].

749 The external universe, beginning with this world, exists in the absence of enquiry [into oneself] and does not exist when [properly] scrutinised. If, instead of paying attention to the world, a person enquires within and conclusively realises the reality in the Heart, then he need not think again of birth.

756 Other than superior *atma vichara*, there exist no other spiritual practices whatsoever that are capable of quelling the mind. If the mind is subjugated by other methods, it will appear to have subsided, but it will revive and rise again.

759 Since reality shines radiantly within you as the Self, only that Self deserves to be known by you. For enquiry into your real nature as it actually is in the Heart, the best guide is the true light of the Self ['I am'] that cannot be rejected.

764 Those excellent seekers who have completely renounced desires, realising that more and more afflictions result from them, will attain, through the direct path of self-enquiry that they embark on, the endless and supreme experience of the essence of the Self in the Heart.

771 Realising clearly that there is no permanence in any state other than that of resting in pure being, let [your] heart and soul abide in that pure being-consciousness, the supreme, with desires totally eliminated, and without animosity towards anything.

773 The method of true and supreme *tapas* that our Lord Ramana declares to be worthwhile and which the mind should firmly hold onto is this, and no more: 'Being still.' Other than this there are absolutely no thoughts to think, nor any duties to be contemplated by it [the mind]. ▲

RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



Children, this time you will find the answers to some mysterious questions. Do you think young Bhagavan (Venkataraman) cared for his siblings? Can the monkeys at the Ashram swim? Read on....enjoy...but also remember to practise what you learn!

We all know Bhagavan is the perfect Master, the perfect cook, the perfect poet, but only recently I learnt what an extraordinary brother he was! The following moving story was narrated with great enthusiasm by Swami Ramanananda Saraswati (former Ashram President).

Bhagavan as a young lad was known as Venkataraman. One day, Venkataraman, along with his family, was traveling from Manamadurai to Ezhuvankottai where Venkataraman's grandfather was working as a Peshkar, an administrator, in the temple. It was a hot, sunny day. The roads were scorching hot. In those days, it was not common to wear footwear. Venkataraman's younger sister, Alamelu, was finding it exceedingly difficult to walk, to even place her feet on the road. Venkataraman had a perfect solution for this. He made slippers for his dear sister using large leaves. His method was simple: he took the veins of the large leaves and stripped away the surrounding flat pieces of leaves. These veins were strong. He used these veins to stitch additional large leaves and created make-shift shoes. Venkataraman had evidently done this on other occasions too.

How many of you have siblings? Do you quarrel with them all the time? The next time a quarrel arises, STOP...reflect on this beautiful story about how our dearest Bhagavan took care of his sister! What a fine act of compassion! Maybe we could try being loving, being compassionate to our siblings too? You take the first step, and watch, soon enough, your sibling will cease fighting with you, and return the love you are showing.

Don't wonder about it! Just try it!

Quiz: Tiruvannamalai Animals

Try to answer the following fun questions about the animals in Tiruvannamalai!

1. *What is the name of the most common species of monkey in Tiruvannamalai?*

Your Answer: B _ _ _ _ _ M _ _ _ _ _

2. *What is the name of the temple elephant at the Arunachaleshwara temple in Tiruvannamalai?*

Your Answer: R _ _ _ _

3. *What is the place where cows are kept called?*

Your Answer: G _ _ _ _ _

4. *The Maharani of Baroda gave Bhagavan which of his beloved animals?*

Your Answer: W _ _ _ _ _ P _ _ _ _ _

5. *Can the monkeys at the Ashram swim? YES or NO?*

6. *Which Ashram cow (she recently died) was affectionately known as the Ashram's gentlest cow?*

Your Answer: P _ _ _ _ _

Bonus question: *What is the Arunachala Temple elephant's favourite food?*

* * * * *

Answers: 1. Bonnet Macaque. 2. Ruku 3. Goshala 4. White Peacock. 5. Yes, they can swim very well, watch them perform in the well. 6. Her name was Punitha. *Bonus question answer:* Sweet jam buns! She loves them! You will see for yourself when you feed her with one! ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



DATTATREYA: THE IMMORTAL GURU, YOGIN, AND AVATARA by Antonio Rigopoulos. Sri Satguru Publications, Indological and Oriental Publishers, A Division of Indian Books Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Delhi 110007, India. First Indian Edition 2000, 342 pp., Rs.300.

This book is the product of painstaking research demonstrating wide reading, and importantly, understanding of different spiritual and philosophical texts. This work does not carry the uncertainty of an earlier work by the same author *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi* in which—to believe or not to believe—was the troubling question that beset him.

The author's proclivities apart, the book under review is an extraordinarily scholarly work, one that deserves to be read for its dispassionate representation of the 'story' of Dattatreya.

The first and the penultimate chapters of the book stand apart. The first chapter deals with the genealogy of Dattatreya, tracing the several stories of his birth as the son of Atri and Anasuya in the different mythologies. The penultimate chapter deals with the iconography associated with this god, now most popular as a *tri-mukhi*, but with other (earlier) representations as an *eka-mukha*, with two arms, etc.

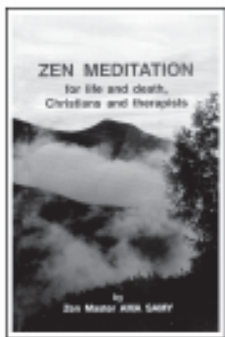
The seven chapters between these two trace references to Dattatreya in a range of scriptural texts — the Vedas (to a limited degree), the

Puranas, the minor Upanishads, *Tripura Rahasya*, the *Avadhuta Gita* and other literature up to modern times. Dattatreya is seen to be several different types of personality—a rishi, an avatara, a guru, a yogin, and indeed, in the Datta sampradaya, with avatars of Datta himself. This is a personality often with very unconventional and unorthodox attributes and traits. This very eclecticism makes him a part of different traditions, venerated by different groups, cutting across different social strata.

This complexity could lead one to argue that it is not one entity that we are grappling with but rather, a multitude of personalities who happen to have the same name. This the author seeks to argue against. He would rather see the personality as being adapted to different situations, cultures and ethos. Given his knowledge of the texts as well as Sanskrit, he succeeds admirably in his stated objective.

In the conclusion, the author is ambitious enough to try to trace Dattatreya's presence in the West, in particular, in the last section of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* by using the concept of the *bijaakshara* to invoke the subtle presence of a deity. While the author's argument is anticipated earlier in the text through his discussion of *bijaaksharas*, the attempt to trace the presence of Dattatreya in the West does strike a discordant note towards the end of the work.

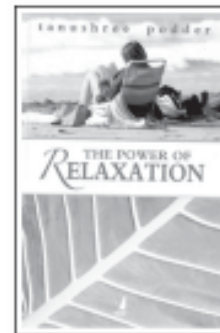
Other than this minor aberration, the work is invaluable to all those interested in this phenomenon. — Pingali Sailaja



ZEN MEDITATION FOR LIFE AND DEATH, CHRISTIANS AND THERAPISTS by AMA Samy. 2006, Pascal Travas and Peter Pinto for IJA Publications, Bangalore, 560 005. 170 pp., Rs.95.

The present collection of discourses and articles touches on a broad range of Zen experiences. It looks at Zen practice and awakening, Zen approaches to death and dying, contemporary psychotherapeutic thinking for Western Zen practitioners, Zen teaching vis-à-vis the Christian tradition as well as life issues such as suffering and the problem of evil. The collection

serves as an accessible introduction to Zen life and classical references and anecdotes are sprinkled throughout. The author, Fr. AMA Samy, is a Jesuit priest of Tamil origin and an authentically sanctioned Zen teacher in the Sanbo Kyodan lineage. He is the founder and guide of a small Zen Buddhist community perched above beautiful Perumalmalai (near Kodaikanal). *Bodhizendo*, as it was named, opened its doors some ten years ago to visitors of all backgrounds and faith traditions interested in acquainting themselves with Zen meditation. By the same author are *Zen Heart and Zen Mind* and *Zen: Awakening to Your Original Face*, as well as various articles on Zen teaching and practice, a number of which have been translated into other languages. Fr. AMA Samy teaches and gives retreats locally, as well as in Germany and Holland. — Michael Highburger



THE POWER OF RELAXATION by Tanushree Podder. 2006. Viva Books Private Limited, Delhi. pp.221, Rs.195. **DETOXIFY YOUR WAY TO HEALTH AND HAPPINESS** by Tanushree Podder 2006. Viva Books Private Limited, Delhi. vivadelhi@vivagroupindia.net, 300 pp., Rs.295.

There is a new trend in Indian publications towards an American-style presentation of self-help information cum spiritual literature and it is not necessarily shallow or irrelevant. There is much to commend a straight-forward discussion of diet, the control of stress and how to relax, emotional equilibrium and detoxification of the body. A great deal of spiritual life concerns plain common sense and this book has a refreshing insight into the ways we can help ourselves when confronted with the inevitable side-effects of modern life. Whether we agree with it or not, the world has changed and if we are to survive we can either bury our heads in the sand or be open to the new approaches to spiritual life increasingly available. This book is geared to the new young middle-class: the intelligent and hard-working.

As the title suggests the book's motivation is to show how we are faced with stress and what methods are available to alleviate the

problem. The author explains the power of relaxation and its benefits and then proceeds with various methods to overcome the disability from stretching, sleep, visualisation, the use of mantra and aromatherapy to the subject of meditation. This is a useful practical book notably free of sermonising or sentimental bombast.

The second book concentrates on the physical aspect of rejuvenating the body by identifying and expelling toxins from the body. This is one of the best books I have encountered not only for the plethora of invaluable information on foods, skin care, stress and breathing problems but also because the information is concise, relevant and stimulating to read. The author manages to enthuse her reader so that one wants to actually do something to improve one's physical health. The layout and presentation are professional and reader-friendly. Highly recommended.

— Amrit Ray

THE ASVAMEDHA, The Rite and its Logic, by Subhash Kak. Pub: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt Ltd., Delhi. 2002. 71 pp., Rs.195(HB).

This small book describes the Asvamedha rite and its symbolism. Several questions related to this Vedic sacrifice are answered according to Vedic epistemology. The rite has 3 important functions: i) it celebrates the rebirth of the sun; ii) it is symbolic of the conquest of Time by the King, in whose name the rite is performed; iii) it is a celebration of social harmony. Another Vedic rite Agnicayana helps in the understanding of several of its details.

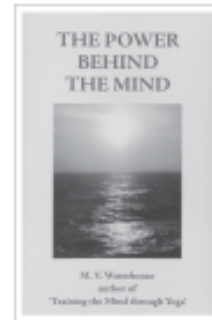
It is a solar rite. The number of animals used is related to the numerical symbolism of the earth, the atmosphere and the heaven. The Satapatha Brahmana says that icons were used by some in place of the animals. According to Chandogya Upanishad, the animals are the parts of a *saman*.

According to the Satapatha, the year began with the full moon of Phalgun, when the Asvamedha was performed. But the Mahabharata fixed it to the full moon of Chaitra. The rite was celebrated in the 3rd or 4th millenniums B.C. Asvamedha associates all classes of people in its year-long ritual. The sacrifice shows a way to transcend dichotomies of class and power. The power of the King rises to the heaven as the

sun ascends the heavens after its rejuvenation. The theme of a four-fold division of royal power runs throughout the rite, which refers to gathering together of the universe which is broken into many parts.

The domestic animals of the rite represent the physical centers, the wild animals the cognitive centers, writes the author. The horse is the imagined self, which should be transformed in resonance with the rhythms of *Rita*—is the concept behind the sacrifice. The animals represent the stars in the firmament of the inner and the outer skies. The rite operates at various levels simultaneously. It is a universal rite which is related to the renewal of the cosmic order. Notes of music were named after Vedic rites—*ri-ni-dha-pa-ma-ga* was known as Asvamedha.

The book certainly removes the wrong notions about the sacrifice created by western scholarship. — Dr. T. N. Pranatharthi Haran



THE POWER BEHIND THE MIND. By M.V. Waterhouse. Shanti Sadan, London. 2006. 214 pp., £6. Shanti Sadan, 29 Chepstow Villas, London W11 3DR, UK. mail@shantisadan.org

Shanti Sadan has been functioning for more than 60 years and promotes an understanding of the spiritual wisdom of India. It was founded in 1933 by Hari Prasad Shastri in England. This noble institution has a reputation for teaching Vedanta classics and distributing books of a high standard at a reasonable price. Along with the Ramakrishna Mission and The Self-Realisation Fellowship, it has disseminated the very best of Indian spirituality. Their publications are to be trusted for their integrity and faithful adherence to tradition.

The present book is a collection of edited talks by Marjorie Waterhouse, who was an early and close devotee of H.P. Shastri. She succeeded Shastri as leader of the group when he died in 1956.

We discover within these pages a direct, sharp and deep understanding of spiritual matters. It is a lesson for us all how spirituality can be simple and profound. We have here an example of practical spirituality that can be directly applied to one's life. The matter-of-factness of the text belies the power it contains to alter one's perception

about what spirituality is truly about. It is the antithesis of the neo-Advaita movement with its hazy grasp of doctrine and even lazier commitment to awaken from the lethargy of ignorance. There is a power within this book which is capable of transforming a person if they but open its pages and follow its observations and instructions. I would recommend this book to all who seek a practical way to transform their lives through spiritual practice. — Andrew Clement



THE GODDESS AND THE SLAVE: The Fakir, the Mother and Maldevelopment. By Rudrani Fakir. Indica Books, Varanasi. 2006. 533 pp., Rs495. indicabooks@satyam.net.in

This is an unusual and fascinating book. It is written by a French Canadian anthropologist who lived for an extended period with a community of village Bengalis who adhered to the Muslim Baul tradition. The author is also a practitioner of this tradition and we are given an inside view of the implications of their sadhana and the crisis faced by the community due to the pressure of modern secular life and the upheavals it creates with questions of identity and the adjustments necessary in order to survive in this changing economic and cultural reality. It is a long and complex book which weaves personal narrative and objective assessment together into a compelling tale of tragedy, hope and rejuvenation where there are no clear-cut answers. It is a rich, chaotic world as families cope with relationship breakdowns and the effect of modernization on perception and the family structure.

The focus of the study is on two principles: the fakir and the feminine, and in particular the mother in a society where her authority is accepted as the arbiter of behaviour. The author examines the dynamic tension between the tradition of maternal authority and the fakir tradition of transcendence through the Muslim faith and how these two forces coalesce. The author has immersed herself completely in this rich and fraught world. She has lived in close intimacy with her

‘subjects’ and has been accepted in their circle. One can only admire the audacity and perseverance with which she has pursued this little known world.

At the core of the book is a chapter which records descriptions by women who live in the village. In some cases they are just a series of notes but they convey something of the living circumstances and habits of the villagers and how the feminine in the form of the Goddess is worshipped and how it affects their thinking.

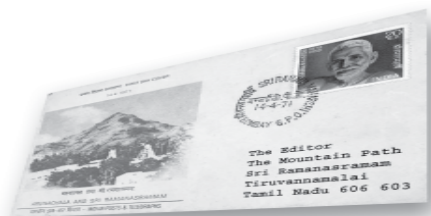
There is not just one book in this publication but several, and the book unfortunately suffers from a surfeit of information and ideas. For those who are willing to plough through some French intellectual hypothesising and turgid prose, there are gems to be found. A valuable research tool. — Peter Pichelmann

THE SUBLIME HOMECOMING. By Mukesh Eswaran. BookSurge, LL.C. 2006, 374pp., US\$17.99. www.booksurge.com and www.amazon.com and the author, mukesh_eswaran@hotmail.com

One of the new avenues opened up in the IT world is the possibility that authors can publish their own writings. Instead of writing yet another spiritual treatise, Mukesh has written a novel about the spiritual life which does not fall into the usual categories and has the charm of a fresh voice unencumbered by the demand to be sententious. He has composed a deft tale about an American in search of meaning after the tragic death of his wife. His search brings him to India and the ashram of a well-respected swami who, the protagonist thinks, will give him the solace and wisdom he needs. The descriptions of ashram life and the world around it are adroitly painted and I admired the skill in which he has seamlessly combined Indian and Western with points of view and thinking. It is an example of a new fusion of the East and West. There is wit, a sharp eye and an interesting story about self-discovery. There are passages which remind one of R.K.Narayan in their effective simplicity and directness. The book is well worth reading for its insights into the voyage of self-discovery.

— Chris Quilkey

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Words and Silence

This is with reference to the article *Effortless Meditation* published in *Mountain Path*, October-December 2006. Many points made by the author in the article differ from Bhagavan's teachings on the subject. There is no problem for us since every *sadhak* (aspirant) is in a different stage of evolution and has the right to express his views based on his knowledge and understanding. However, the author quotes Bhagavan out of context to support his views and therefore the following comments are made to highlight some of these contradictions.

The author states in para.2 on page 15 that the 'true meditative state' is co-existent with words and thoughts. He leads us to believe that it is the same as Silence (or mauna) by briefly quoting Bhagavan. Mauna (Silence), as explained by Bhagavan, in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book I, Ch.II, is the transcendental state and has nothing to do with thoughts and words. Bhagavan uses the term 'mute language' for want of a better term; sometimes Bhagavan uses the term 'to think without thoughts' in a similar context. Verse 1208 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (The Garland of Guru's Sayings) throws much light on the subject.

The word 'tension', for example, means different things in different contexts to people from different disciplines — mechanical force, psychological disturbance or electric voltage. The word is not the thing; it is only a pointer. Different Masters use the same word with different meanings and connotations. Trying to understand Bhagavan's words through the meaning implied by some other Master will lead us to misunderstanding rather than understanding Bhagavan. It is necessary

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

to be clear about the sense in which Bhagavan uses certain terms and His teachings are the best guide for this purpose. — M. Sahadevan

Thought and Deep Sleep

I refer to the article and the correspondence associated with *Effortless Meditation*. Now that Sri Bhagavan's statement has been established, I will address briefly the other points made by Madhurananda in his reply (ref January issue).

He states that reality and deep sleep are beyond the reach of the intellect and hence the words of the saints are relevant for our comprehension. I submit that deep sleep is an experience shared by everybody and in fact is enjoyed as a source of happiness and relaxation. Of course reality is beyond the ken of intellect. Having said that an understanding of the three states of experience, particularly the deep sleep is very important as it throws enormous light on the status of chidabhasa and sakshi. The author has raised many questions and for those interested in pursuing the subject and derive a clear concept I suggest *Sri Dakshinamurty Stothram* read with the commentary of Sureshwara (Manasollasam). There is another little known Tamil work *Anubhuti Rasayanam* by Sundara Swamigal, which deals exhaustively on deep sleep and the implications. Bhagavan's statements carry the authority of sastra and these references will help a better understanding.

Finally, I feel those seekers interested in meditation should peruse Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* again and again. It provides a direct and authentic method time tested by all saints. Of course, this statement does not in any form detract the value/intrinsic merit of the article *Effortless Meditation*. — N. Panchapakesan

The North Face of Mount Kailash

With reference to the article *Vision of Siva at Kailash* in January 2007, the photo of Sri Kailash Parvat on p.14-15 is incorrectly captioned. The photo is that of the *north* face of Kailash as seen from Driraphuk.

— Dr. Sushanta Roy-Choudhury

The north face is correct. — The Editor



Jayanti Celebrations at Sri Ramanasramam

The Ashram celebrated Bhagavan's 127th Jayanti on Thursday, the 4th of January. The Samadhi Hall was already decorated with garlands by the time Dhanurmasa puja began at 4am. Deeparadhana took place at 5am followed by recitation of *Vishnusahasranamam*, selections from Sri Muruganar's *Sannidhi Murai*, and Saturday Tamil parayana. At 6:45am the Ashram priests intoned *Chatvarimshat*, the moving verses in praise of Bhagavan by Ganapati Muni. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* was recited in full followed by *Mahanyasa Purvaka Ekadasa Rudra Abhishekam* with deeparadhana at 10:30am. As usual, a special pandal was erected at Kurangu Thottam for feeding sadhus. The afternoon programme started with an elaborate abhishekam commencing at 3:30 pm, with evening music by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore. Music on the previous evening was by Ramananjali led by Smt Sulochana Natarajan.

Jayanti Celebrations at the Kendras

Ramana Kendra Trust, Chennai, celebrated on the 4th and 7th of January in Mylapore. Programmes included *Mahanyasam*, *Ekadasa Rudra Abhishekam*, recitation of *Aksharamanamalai* and *Ramana Stuthi Panchakam*, *Vishnusahasranamam* and bhajans. The Sunday programme consisted of discourses by Professor V. Niranjan, Swami Ramana Chaitanya and Swami Vedatmananda.

This year's celebrations on 10th-11th February in Mumbai marked the 55th consecutive year of Jayanti celebrations in that city. In Ahmedabad celebrations on 30th December included discourses, chanting and puja and were attended by 700 local Ramana devotees. The 29th December featured pujas and discourses on Bhagavan in Hyderabad. The following day, *Rudrabhishekam*, *Sri Ramana Sahasranama Puja*, *Asthothara Puja* were performed.

Jayanti Programmes in the USA

On Sunday, 31st December, devotees from Arunachala Ashrama attended Bhagavan's Jayanti programme at the Hindu Temple of Southern Florida, near Ft. Lauderdale. In New York, on the 6th January, a large number of devotees gathered for chanting of Bhagavan's works and devotional songs. Prashanth Visweswaran spoke with deep devotion about his recent visit to Sri Ramanasramam as did Thiru Sivasamy of Toronto. On the 13th in California a large number of enthusiastic devotees gathered at the Milpitas Jain Temple in the San Francisco Bay area to celebrate. Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai* was chanted along with bhajans led by Srimati Sangeetha Swaminathan. Devotees experienced the infinite presence, the unfailing guidance, and the abounding grace of the Master.

Pongal

Bogi fell on the 14th January, the last day of Margazhi. The 15th was Samkranti Pongal, the harvest festival and liturgically the first day of the Sun's course change toward the northern hemisphere. Mattu Pongal, the festival of cows, followed on the 16th with special puja to Nandi in Mother's Shrine. At the goshala, the cows were bathed and adorned with tilakam and garlands. In the evening, the Tiruoodal festival took place near the big Temple. The next day, Arunachaleswarar's processional deity halted at the Ashram at 5:30 am on its circuit around the Hill.

Aradhana of Chinnaśwamigal and other events

The Aradhana of Sri Chinnaśwamigal, Bhagavan's brother and former Sarvadhikari of Sri Ramanasramam, was celebrated at his Samadhi on 1st February, (*chaturdasi*) with special abhishekam and puja. The month of Makara (beginning 15th Jan.) is auspicious for Holy Mother. Special decorations and pujas were performed each Friday, the day of Holy Mother, at Durga's Shrine in Matrubhuteswara.

Sri Vidya Havan

On Friday, 26th January, a large gathering of devotees was present to witness *Sri Vidya Havan*, the annual homa to rededicate the Meru-Chakra. The main items of the programme are: *Navavarana* puja, *Lalita Sahasranama* homa, *Lalita Trisati* homa, *Kanya* puja and

Suvasini puja. Ten varieties of offerings are made as oblation to the sacrificial fire and include coins, jewellery, newly purchased saris and cloth. The function concludes with purnahuti at 4 pm followed by abhishekam. Friday night Sri Chakra Puja was deferred to the following morning.

Maha Sivaratri

This year Sivaratri fell on the 16th February and was observed at the Ashram with pujas performed in Bhagavan's Shrine every two hours throughout the night. *Ekadasa Rudra Parayana* was chanted continuously from midnight until 2 am while devotees went for pradakshina.

Aradhana

The 57th anniversary of Bhagavan's *Brahmanirvana* will be observed on the 14th of May. The function is usually held on *Chaitra Masa Krishna Paksha Trayodashi* between mid-April and mid-May. Aradhana will also be observed on the evening of 14 April with recitation of *Aksharamanamalai*, movingly re-enacting the scene on this day in 1950, when devotees chanted this hymn in the final minutes before Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*.

Mahapuja

Mahapuja commemorates the liberation of Sri Bhagavan's mother Alagamma and is celebrated on *Vaishaka Bahula Navami* according to the Hindu calendar. Special abhishekam and puja to Sri Matrubhuteswara lingam is performed. This year the function falls on June 9th.

Sivaprakasam Pillai Samadhi Day

The Samadhi day of Sivaprakasam Pillai was recently celebrated. Plans are being considered for erecting a new structure at the site where he did sadhana. (Details are being discussed with the family descendents.) Sivaprakasam Pillai met with Bhagavan as early as 1902 and was instrumental in having Bhagavan write down his teachings on self-enquiry.

Bhumi Puja for Renovation of Mastan's Samadhi

Puja to break ground for the renovation work at Mastan Swami's Samadhi was performed by the Ashram head priest, Sri Appichi Mama, on the 6th of December and was attended by Ashram President, V. S. Ramanan, the Matam village Panchayat, local officials and Ashram devotees.



Douglas Harding (1909-2007)

The prominent teacher Douglas Harding passed away in early January at the age of 97. In the mid-1930s Harding worked in India as an architect. One day he came across a drawing by the physicist Ernst Mach. It was a self-portrait with a difference. Most self-portraits are what the artist looks like from several feet away but Mach had drawn himself without using a mirror. The portrait was from his own point of view. For Harding this was

the key that opened the door to his innermost identity. At the centre of his world was not an appearance but nothing at all. And this 'nothing' was a very special 'nothing' — for it was awake to itself, and full of the whole world. He wrote about the first time he saw his headlessness in his successful book *On Having No Head*. He contributed many articles to the *Mountain Path* and visited Arunachala in 1968.

Saraswathi Ammal (1910-2006)

Saraswathi Ammal saw Bhagavan for the first time when she was just ten years old. Later, her husband, Krishanaswami, worked as a teacher in the Tiruvannamalai Municipal School. She saw Bhagavan frequently but never felt the need to ask questions. She maintained that one look at Bhagavan was enough to clear all doubts. During Bhagavan's lifetime, the couple and their three children made it a point to be present at the Ashram for the Jayanti Celebration. After her husband's death in 1962, Saraswathi Ammal's visits to the Ashram became more frequent. She spent most of her time either meditating on Bhagavan or reading books on or by him. She passed away at 6.05pm on 15th December in Hyderabad. The late Dr. K. Subramanian, the friend, philosopher and guide of the members of the Hyderabad Ramana Kendra was her son. He emulated Sri Bhagavan in all ways. ▲

