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# Divine Names of Arunachala

## 13. ॐ मुखरांघ्रिपतये नमः

om mukharāṅghripataye namaḥ

Prostration to the Lord from whose Feet Sound comes forth.

According to the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, the primordial sound OM, is *Brahman*.

AUM stands for the supreme Reality./It is a symbol for what was, what is,/And what shall be. AUM represents also/What lies beyond past, present, and future.<sup>1</sup>

Timeless Hindu scriptures and modern rational science both agree that the world was created from sound and light. A devotee once asked Bhagavan which was created first, to which the Master responded: “All these things, which you say have been created have to be seen by you before you say they exist. There must be a seer. If you find out who that seer is, then you will know about creation and which was created first.”<sup>2</sup>

When the devotee asked, “How has the unreal come? Can the unreal spring from the real?” Bhagavan answered, “See if it has sprung. There is no such thing as the unreal, from another standpoint. The Self alone exists.”<sup>3</sup>

Arunachala is OM. Thus states Bhagavan, boldly and joyfully, in *Akṣaramaṇamālai*, verse 13: O Arunachala, import of the sound OM, unequalled and unsurpassed, who can know you (as you are)?<sup>4</sup>

Who, indeed, can comprehend you? It is beyond the mind, sings Appar:

Lest you saw through the eye of His own grace,/that such was his nature, such his hue and form,/you could not draw of Him an image, saying,/‘This is God, this his nature, this his hue, this his form.’<sup>5</sup>

— BKC

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Eknath Easwaran.

<sup>2</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 20-4-46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-1-46.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by Sadhu Om.

<sup>5</sup> *Tevaram*, 6:97, v.10. Translation by Robert Butler.

## Signs

A question asked by many who first come to Sri Ramanasramam is where can they find someone who can answer their doubts and queries for it is said that there is no authentic living guru at Sri Ramanasramam who can guide those who seek assistance. Some leave to find what they believe is of greater importance, while others who persevere soon realise that there is a presence in the ashram that provides the answers to their problems without, it seems, appearing to do so, as was in fact Bhagavan's habit when he sat in the hall inhabiting his physical body. For it is not so much intellectual answers that settle their perplexity but a profound sense of peace which overrides all concerns and even makes one's questions seem irrelevant. One outgrows the pattern of thoughts. Whoever it was who asked the questions discovers that the so-called person they assumed themselves to be, is but a ghost.

Let us explain. Our mind consists of a package of thoughts (or *vasana*-s) that endlessly loop and with which we identify. We slowly discover that those thoughts which we think we are, are just that: thoughts that have no independent existence. Nobody thinks that the clothes they wear are them. They may express who one is in the

social context but by themselves they are simply appendages with no life of their own.

It is not so much that we gain something by practising self-enquiry or *ātma-vicāra* but that we slowly lose our identification with thoughts and emotions, which in our ignorance we thought we were.

The answer to the second puzzle which faces the newly arrived is the assertion that what need is there for an external guru when Bhagavan Ramana who shed his physical body in April 1950 is ever available to those who ardently need help to assuage their suffering and to show them the right path to liberation?

It may be baffling for some to make sense of Bhagavan's statement near the end of his physical life:

“Some of the devotees made it a plea for their own welfare. ‘What is to become of us without Bhagavan? We are too weak to look after ourselves; we depend on his Grace for everything.’ And he replied, ‘You attach too much importance to the body,’ clearly implying that the end of his body would not interrupt the Grace and guidance.

In the same vein he said: ‘They say that I am dying but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here.’”<sup>1</sup>

To ask a seemingly foolish question: If he is here at the ashram then why does he not reveal himself to all who genuinely ask for his intervention?

To those who persevere the answer is self-evident. He does reveal himself. Not in the form that encourages us to say, ‘we have seen him!’ but rather as a silent breeze that cannot be captured by the net of our mind. Bhagavan does not indulge our spiritual materialism by which we mean some certificate to say how great or virtuous we are. Quite the contrary, Bhagavan refuses to indulge us. He strips us of our pretensions by an ever so subtle recognition he mysteriously instils in us that our fantasies are just that: toys of the mind. Whatever we think of as ‘me’, is simply erroneous. Our true nature is beyond the limitations of our mind that is tied up with its knots of confusion and half-knowledge. It is imperative that we realise that we can never truly know who we are by using the mind. It is simply an inadequate

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<sup>1</sup>Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p.221.

instrument. We require something higher and more subtle. Bhagavan shows us the way:

“Not to desire anything extraneous to oneself constitutes *vairāgya* (dispassion) or *nirāsā* (desirelessness). Not to give up one’s hold on the Self constitutes *jñāna* (knowledge). But really *vairāgya* and *jñāna* are one and the same. Just as the pearl-diver, tying stones to his waist, dives down into the depths, and gets the pearl from the sea-bed, so every aspirant, pledged to *vairāgya*, can dive deep into himself and realize the precious *Ātman*. If the earnest seeker would only cultivate the constant and deep contemplative ‘remembrance’ (*smṛti*) of the true nature of the Self till he has realized it, that alone would suffice. Distracting thoughts are like the enemy in the fortress. As long as they are in possession of it, they will certainly sally forth. But if, as and when they come out, you put them to the sword the fortress will finally be captured.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not unusual for a lineage to continue without the physical form of a breathing, moving guru. Consider Sai Baba of Shirdi whose impact in India is phenomenal. There are so many stories from such a divergent range of people about a divine intervention in their lives, traced back to Sai Baba of Shirdi, that it cannot be doubted.

This world is not the only world of manifestation. In traditional *sanātana dharma* there are said to be some fourteen worlds. The seven above, of which we are the first in ascending order, are heavens (*svarga*) with increasing degrees of intensity and purity the higher the level. There are seven worlds below, which continue until one reaches the bottom most hell realm called *pātāla* or *nāga loka*. The word ‘Pātāla’ is also employed to indicate the whole seven hell levels. It is interesting to note that Bhagavan Ramana sought sanctuary in the Patala Lingam in the thousand pillar *mantapam* during his earliest days in the Arunachaleswara Temple. We, in our spiritual journey, also travel through the various hell realms created from our *sañchita karma* (collection of past *karma*-s) that finds expression in our present *prārabdha karma*. The wonder of our journey is that though each of us is unique, the journey follows certain common tell-tale signs, just as when we travel say to Chennai from Tiruvannamalai, we inevitably

<sup>2</sup> *Words of Grace*, ‘Who Am I?’, p.9.

pass through certain towns. If we don't then we know we are not on the right road. In the same way, Bhagavan created a path for us that has clear signposts. If we deviate and crash or get lost it is not Bhagavan's fault but ours for not reading the signs correctly.

Which brings us back to how we should read the signs. If Bhagavan is not physically manifest then how are we to proceed? Firstly there are the teachings in the form of writings; secondly his words as recorded by those around him; and thirdly our disciplined approach to putting the teachings into action. It is we who have to walk the path. Idle talk is of no value. Words are empty if we do not sincerely apply them. Consider the quotation above from *Who Am I?* Bhagavan is always practical. There is a purpose in his words which we should apply to our lives; otherwise we are just wasting our time and his, because Bhagavan will not pay attention to dilettantes. If there is one overriding characteristic of Bhagavan's teaching it is his emphasis on resolute perseverance.

Once we have imbibed the teachings then the next stage of our development is to see in our everyday lives the possibility of learning from everything that surrounds us. Be it a person, an animal or a situation, or be it our emotional or mental response to something that happens. The possibilities are endless. The trick is to be aware and learn from them for they are signs that show us the right way forward.

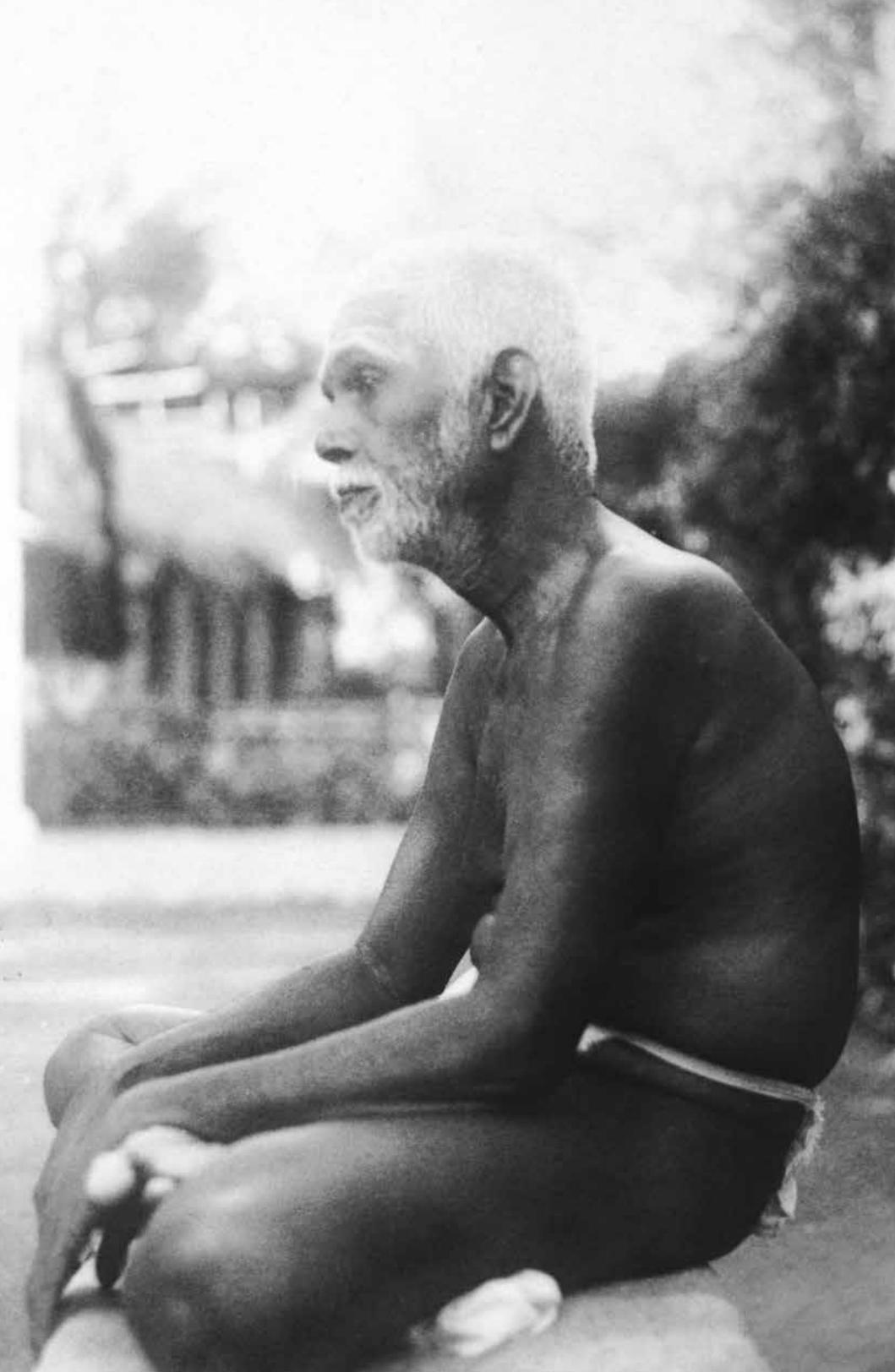
There is the famous story of Lord Dattatreya who began with nothing and had no external formal teachers but through his observation of nature attained liberation. It is said he had twenty four principal teachers from whom he discerned and learnt. *The Avadhuta Gita*, one of the primary *sannyāsa* texts, is attributed to him. It is the ultimate traditional text that asserts there is no difference between the various manifestations of reality, that all is one interconnected reality.

If all is of the same one reality then everything has the potential to tell us the truth (*satya*). We need to learn how to look. It is this profound insight of Dattatreya that can show the way to learn from all that surrounds us. For example, some of his teachers were the earth, the wind, the sky, water, the moon and so on. For those who are interested they may do some research into the life of Dattatreya and learn about all his teachers but for the purposes of this short editorial let us take just a few:

The moth is attracted to fire and it madly gravitates towards it despite knowing it will be burnt. Who has not at one time or another experienced the insanity of being on a roller coaster ride of events over which we have absolutely no control? We should learn to question our senses when they are attracted to glitter. We should also question when we feel an unusual compulsion that has the potential to blindly drive us towards destructive behaviour. Our five senses can deceive us. Our senses are under no obligation to tell us the truth. They are messengers, not teachers. It is up to us to discriminate between what is real and what is false.

A deer is constantly on the alert for danger. It is governed by fear and its weapons of survival are speed and agility. However, it is deceived by fear. It is easily confused by hunters who make noises that scare the animal to blindly run into a trap. Its example shows us that we should not be afraid of confusion and agitation and that we should definitely not be pressured by others into doing things that are detrimental to our well-being. How often have we been persuaded to do something we ultimately find is foolish and that a heavy price is paid to find release from the unpleasant predicament?

And lastly, the maker of arrows (the fletcher) was so absorbed in his skilled work that he failed to notice the king had passed by in a procession. Dattatreya tells us that if we concentrate on what we love, then this intense concentration becomes the way to self-realisation. Who has not noticed the absence of time when fully absorbed in what one finds fascinating? Time seems to stand still and one's entire being is captivated by something meaningful, beautiful and worthwhile. How often have we been disgusted with ourselves when we have wasted time doing activities of no interest or which we know are inherently worthless and yet we mindlessly continue to perform against our better judgement? Our sense of discrimination is functioning correctly but it is up to us to act decisively on it and not whittle away our precious time with the inconsequential. It requires resolution and courage to go against the grain and exercise one's intelligence. For there is nothing our conventional dream-like existence wants more than for us to be sheep that are afraid to break free of the pen, the rigid mesmerism of daily life. ▲



# An Insight into Surrender

## Part Three

N.S. RAMAMOCHAN

### 7) Acceptance of 'what is' constitutes surrender

Sri Bhagavan explains the relationship between the *sattvic* mind and the rising of the ego and the world thus: "There is a screen. On that screen first a figure appears. Before that figure on the same screen other pictures appear and the first figure goes on watching the other pictures. If you are the screen and know yourself to be the screen, is it necessary not to see the first figure and the subsequent pictures? When you don't know the screen you think the figure and pictures to be real. But when you know the screen and realise it is the only reality on which as substratum the shadows of the figure and pictures have been cast, you know these to be mere shadows. You may see the shadows, knowing them to be such and knowing yourself to be the screen which is the basis for them all." (*Day by Day* 6-3-46, Afternoon) Thus this knowledge of 'what is' forms the most important basis for

Nanduri Sri Ramamohan read Sri Bhagavan's biography *Self Realisation* and understood that Sri Bhagavan's state, life and teachings were unique. He decided to understand and practise His teachings. He has written *Pointers To Self Realisation*, and its translation into Telugu, *Atma Sakshatkara Sutralu* which are published by Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

‘Self-surrender’, wherein we are always experiencing our Being, and we also become aware of the arising of the ego, the projection of the world and the commentary of ego/intellect. ‘Know yourself to be the screen’ means, know that it is your own state of ‘Being’ (peace or silence), wherein the attention which is consciousness itself remains centred in the source.

Explaining *sphurana* Bhagavan says, “*Sphurana* is the foretaste of Realization. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If the man mistakes himself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from him. They are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject’s enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion, and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self.” (Talk§62)

Thus, in the case of the *jñāni*:

<i>Sattvic</i> mind, the screen (Own Being or peace/ silence)	+	Ego (that binds) is absent	+	projection of world (knowledge of the world)	⇒	Undistracted ‘what is’
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In the case of the *ajñāni*:

<i>Sattvic</i> mind the screen (Own Being or peace/ silence)	+	Ego (that binds)	+	projection of world (knowledge of the world)	⇒	Arising of subject and object and loss of ‘what is’ due to non-acceptance of ‘what is’
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Bhagavan says, “The *ajñāni* sees the *jñāni* active and is confounded. The *jagat* is perceived by both; but their outlooks differ. Take the instance of the cinema. There are pictures moving on the screen. Go and hold them. What do you hold? It is only the screen. Let the pictures disappear. What remains over? The screen again. So also here. Even when the world appears, see to whom it appears. Hold the substratum of the ‘I’. After the substratum is held what does it matter if the world appears or disappears? The *ajñāni* takes the world to be real; whereas the *jñāni* sees it only as the manifestation

of the Self. It is immaterial if the Self manifests itself or ceases to do so.” (Talk§65)

It is important to note that there can be situations in which our thoughts and memories take us into the past or the future and we experience pain or pleasure, which we may call a daydream, wherein we lose ‘what is’. There is a total mismatch between what we see or perceive in our conscious space which is in front of us, as ‘here’, and we are oblivious of what is going on in our mind (as if we were unconscious). In the daydream the screen is totally lost hold of. We may attempt to regain the screen only when we wake up from the daydream.

### **8) Birth of ego distracts attention from ‘what is’ (Ego feels incomplete, desire arises, and wants more, leading to agitation of mind)**

Bhagavan says, “You admit your existence in sleep. You did not function then. You were not aware of any gross body. You did not limit yourself to this body. So you could not find anything separate from your Self. Now in your waking state you continue to be the same Existence with the limitations of the body added. These limitations make you see other objects. Hence arises desire.” (Talk§520) “The fact is that the man considers himself limited and there arises the trouble. The idea is wrong. He can see it for himself. In sleep there was no world, no ego (no limited self), and no trouble. Something wakes up from that happy state and says ‘I’. To that ego the world appears. Being a speck in the world he wants more and gets into trouble.” (Talk§63)

### **9) Ego seeks to change ‘what is’ (influenced by *vāsanās*)**

Sri Bhagavan says, “There is a difference between the intellect of man and that of other animals, because man not only sees the world as it is and acts accordingly, but also seeks fulfillment of desires and is not satisfied with the existing state of affairs. In his attempt to fulfill his desires he extends his vision far and wide and yet he turns away dissatisfied. He now begins to think and reason. The desire for permanent happiness and peace points to such permanence in his own nature. Therefore, he seeks to find and regain his own nature, i.e., his Self. That found, all is found. Such inward seeking is the path to be gained by man’s intellect.” (Talk§502)

### **10) Purpose of the intellect and ego's relationship to intellect**

“The intellect itself realises after continuous practice that it is enabled by some Higher Power to function. It cannot itself reach that Power. So it ceases to function after a certain stage. When it thus ceases to function, the Supreme Power is still left there all alone. That is realization; that is the finality; that is the goal.” (Talk§502) That is, the *sattvic* mind which is Self itself, is experienced when the ego ceases to function, as no distraction arises. When Janaka gave up all that was not Brahman, he at once fell into *samādhi* and realised Brahman.

“It is thus plain that the purpose of the intellect is to realize its own dependence upon the Higher Power and its inability to reach the same. So it must annihilate itself before the goal is gained.

“What is wanted for gaining the highest goal is loss of individuality. The intellect is coextensive with individuality. Loss of individuality can only be after the disappearance of *buddhi*, good or bad.” (Talk§502) We have seen above how ‘what is’ is not distorted when the ego is not binding (non-functional) as in the case of the *jñāni*. When the intellect is non-functional, the ego too is non-functional. It is important to note that in both the paths of Self-enquiry and self-surrender the pure intellect is the main aid to progress. Bhagavan in *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam* uses the words ‘*Ati amala dhi* (very pure intellect), *Twayi arpita manasa* (the mind offered to you, meaning Arunachala, the Self). As the differentiating intellect/ego recedes, another important feature of the Self gets revealed or uncovered. Love natural to the Self gets reflected in everything that we perceive, which is an observable and important sign in the progress of self-surrender, besides silence/peace.

### **11) Giving up ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is surrender of ego to the Self**

Bhagavan says that peace is our inherent nature and suffering is not. (Talk§633) In a situation of suffering one is forced to look at ‘I’ and ‘mine’ to know the cause of suffering, its depth and what is at stake. In most cases it may be the loss or fear of loss of some possession, including the body. Ego acquires objects to feel complete. So, in the egoic structure, the ‘mine’ gets integrated with ‘I’, because possessions signify the fruits of egoic effort to overcome ego’s incompleteness. Or ego’s assumed completeness includes the possessions. They become some sort of extended part of its body. So, when a possession is lost,

even though it is not integrally a part of the body, and not a threat to the survival of the body, it is reflected as distress in the body, and pain/suffering ensues. Thus to the ego, the loss of possessions (forming an extension of the body) means the momentary loss of 'I' or the death of 'I' (because 'I' means the body). Therefore, the fear of 'non-existence' or 'non-being' ensues. At some point suffering provides us with an opportunity to recognize that we are still continuing to live, with occasional experiences of peace in our encounters and experience of peace every day in sleep wherein we have no possessions whatsoever. So, we realise that the loss of 'I or mine' is not loss of our being, and thus suffering compels us to choose between peace and possessions. When this understanding arises, bodily pain may be inevitable, but suffering is optional.

Bhagavan says, "You give up this and that of 'my' possessions. If you give up 'I' and 'mine' instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus the evil is nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion (*vairāgya*) must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do it must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life." (Talk§28)

The *Avadhuta Gita* brings out this point beautifully. A bird catches a small fish. Other stronger birds attack and torment it for that fish. It drops the fish and becomes peaceful. They stop tormenting it.

We may look at a situation where a person is sitting and watching the people moving about on a road. He happens to recognize a person amongst the crowd. This simple situation is 'what is'. His intellect calls the person unfriendly, takes him through past memories. He fails to notice the arising of the intellect/ego, goes through mental reactions and loses his peace. We may note that he is powerless to prevent the person appearing on the scene and so powerless to alter 'what is'. Simple 'what is' is lost in the subject-object split that arose in the mind. Thus, the ego may have an internal stimulus namely, thoughts, memories etc., or an external stimulus such as some perception triggering egoic reaction. In either case the background peace is lost. But with some practice and inward attention, he is able to notice the arising of the reaction of the intellect/ego. It becomes possible for him to see his own tendencies, to see the futility of 'what is' getting altered, to accept both and to remain peaceful.

The intellect, after continuous practice, realises that the real source of happiness or peace is the Self and begins to look for it within. It also realises, that it is powerless to alter ‘what is’, that ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are the root cause of suffering, and that suffering can only be surmounted by giving up the hold on them. Once ‘I and mine’ are given up, the urge to alter ‘what is’ does not arise any more. ‘What is’ becomes perfectly acceptable even in seemingly unacceptable situations and peace prevails. It does so by dropping the concepts it had been holding on and accepting ‘what is’ by merely ceasing to function. When it accepts ‘what is’, peace ensues. Intellect being co-extensive with ego, and ‘what is’ being the Self itself, accepting ‘what is’ amounts to the surrender of the ego to the Self and thereby merging in it.

### **12) We are prisoners of our own concepts**

The story of a monkey trap illustrates this point. A monkey noticed a few nuts in a narrow-mouthed jar. It inserted its hand and held the nuts. Its closed fist holding the nuts did not allow the withdrawal of its hand. It could not withdraw its hand until the nuts were released by opening up its fist. Such is the trap that we may create for ourselves.

When the intellect is active, thoughts, objects, and situations provoke it to react, pushing the body into action and to experience the pleasure and pain of the consequences. When the intellect surrenders by accepting thoughts, objects, and situations within and without as they are, by ceasing to judge them or wanting to alter them, the Self, the screen, which is ever present, becomes obvious, peace prevails and the attention remains centered in the source. Thus acceptance of ‘what is’, as it is, is surrender.

### **13) Surrender can take effect only when done with ‘full knowledge as to what real surrender means’**

Bhagavan says, “Surrender can take effect only when done with full knowledge as to what real surrender means. Such knowledge comes after enquiry and reflection and ends invariably in self-surrender.... Such entire surrender comprises all: it is *jñāna* and *vairāgya*, devotion and love.” He says, ‘If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently (Talk§43)’. “*Jñāna mārga* and *bhakti mārga (prapatti)* are one and

the same. Self-surrender leads to realization just as enquiry does. Complete self-surrender means that you have no further thought of 'I'. Then all your predispositions (*samskāra-s*) are washed off and you are free. You should not continue as a separate entity at the end of either course." (Talk§31)

#### **14) From partial surrender to total Surrender**

Complete surrender, as Bhagavan says requires non-attachment to the world and giving up the notions of 'I' and 'mine'. Bhagavan grants that complete surrender may be impossible in the beginning. (Talk§244) So, He suggested partial surrender to start with. Thus we have an opportunity to surrender considering the situation as it arises, by accepting 'what is' (or God's given) and giving up the urge to alter it. There must have been moments in everyone's life which seemed hopeless. And, beyond one's comprehension, there comes a solution and relieves the distress. The faith that there is such a power which has taken care of them (and is not mere chance), comes to those who are observant of their hopeless situations, their suffering, their own inadequate capabilities and resources, their thoughts, the consequences of their actions and their limitations and finally the mysterious arising of the solution that relieved their distress.

These may be the moments when one may note the functioning of the intellect in recognizing its own inability, and the silent prayer that was made to the Lord and His benevolence. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him and I was helped." (Psalm 28) finds its way into the heart. That is the starting point of their serious worship of the Lord, not for a trade-off for another favourable occurrence, with a genuine prayer seeking His Grace, abiding in 'His Will', and treating the situation itself as His Grace. That then, is the real Surrender. Bhagavan encapsulates this saying, "Distress often leads men to faith in God." (Talk§43) To start with it was partial surrender, but reinforced by faith it blossoms into complete surrender.

Thus, in the practice of Surrender we may recall Bhagavan's words, 'In surrender, there is advaita. In reality, there is neither dvaita nor advaita, but That which is, is'. 'By constantly keeping our aim on our source, our ego is dissolved in its source like a doll of salt in the ocean' 'Complete surrender comprises *jñāna* and *vairāgya*, devotion and love', and note and resolve any short comings.

a) We may practice an inward attentive outlook so that we are able i) notice the play of ego/ intellect and ii) experience undistorted 'what is'. In 'what is', the *svarūpa* of Self, we are experiencing our own Being. If we observe correctly, the love natural to the Self is reflected in what we perceive as 'what is'. Just as *nāma japa* of the beloved Lord is done with devotion and love to the Lord, love reflected in the perception of 'what is' amounts to seeing the Self in everything. We may note that in the example above of seeing a person moving on a road, love was absent and all that was present was the unrest triggered by egoic reaction.

b) Presence of pain or anxiety implies that we are unable to accept 'what is' because i) we are unable to accept what we are perceiving in 'what is' or ii) we are lost in fear of some future loss (in a daydream of a future unacceptable situation), and surrender has not taken place.

c) In any situation we are seeing in 'what is' the world which is our own conscious space. We are powerless to alter it. Thus, accept it first, as it is (as if we chose it), and let the course of action emerge as necessary just as we accept a person too, as he or she is. We may remind ourselves that even a seemingly unacceptable situation is the Grace of the Self/Lord. Reasoning cannot solve that puzzle. One such example is that of a person who missed an important flight and was upset, and later learnt that that plane had crashed.

d) We may look at the cause (attachment to 'I and mine') behind the pain in that situation. It implies that *vairāgya*, which symbolises surrender, is not adequately present. We may look at our devotion, love and faith in the ability of the Self/Lord to take care of us.

e) We may gain strength recalling the teaching of Bhagavan that "Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent." And thus we should act in surrender and acceptance.

### **15) Can surrender relieve pain and suffering?**

Sense organs do their function of sensing pain, if it is there. But, after surrender, the 'I am the body notion' weakens and so the sufferer, being absent, pain seems to lose its intensity. Talking about the way Bhagavan felt his pain, Devaraja Mudaliar said, "Once, when I was concerned over some physical pain of his, he told me that he feels pain

as if it was a passing and faint experience like that in a dream. These are clues to the sort of life Bhagavan leads in our midst, seeming to act and move and feel as we do, but really living in a world of his own where the things we experience don't exist." (DBD 31-3-45, Afternoon).

Bhagavan says, "If you surrender yourself to the Higher Power all is well. That Power sees your affairs through. Only so long as you think that you are the worker you are obliged to reap the fruits of your actions. If on the other hand, you surrender yourself and recognize your individual self as only a tool of the Higher Power, that Power will take over your affairs along with the fruits of actions. You are no longer affected by them and the work goes on unhampered. Whether you recognize the Power or not, the scheme of things does not alter. Only there is a change of outlook. Why should you bear your load on the head when you are travelling on a train? It carries you and your load whether the load is on your head or on the floor of the train. You are not lessening the burden of the train by keeping it on your head but only straining yourself unnecessarily. Similar is the sense of doership in the world by the individuals." (Talk§503). When we surrender in troubled situations, it gives us the strength to face these situations. The solution that comes up may not be what we want, but it will give us peace.

Finally, Bhagavan says, "All that we need to do is to keep quiet. Peace is our real nature. We spoil it. What is required is that we cease to spoil it. We are not going to create peace anew. There is space in a hall, for instance. We fill up the place with various articles. If we want space, all that we need do is to remove all those articles, and we get space. Similarly if we remove all the rubbish, all the thoughts, from our minds, the peace will become manifest. That which is obstructing the peace has to be removed. Peace is the only reality." (DBD 31-1-46, Morning). ▲

*Sri Ramanarpanam*

Note: My grateful thanks to Sri K.V. Subrahmonyan for his valuable suggestions.



భక్తులకు ప్రత్యేకం చేయవలసిన భక్తులకు  
అర్చనలు చేసే విధానం ప్రత్యేకం చేయవలసి  
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# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Twenty Eight

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

26<sup>th</sup> September 1978

**Sadhu Om:** Among the various *bhāva*-s or devotional attitudes towards God, one is to take him as our faithful friend and servant who is willing to do everything for us. This is why I often say: ‘Why should you think that you should serve God? Who are you to serve him? He is always serving you, fulfilling every need of yours, so why should you do anything? He is all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful, so he knows all your needs and fulfils them far better than you could for yourself. So when he is doing everything for you, why should you plan anything or even think of anything? Why don’t you just keep quiet, resting with full faith in him? Leave it all to him and be calm. This is the only way you can truly serve him’.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, [happinessofbeing.com](http://happinessofbeing.com).

This is what Bhagavan implies when he says in *Nāṇ Yār?*:

Even though one places whatever amount of burden upon God, that entire amount he will bear. Since one *paramēśvara śakti* [supreme ruling power or power of God] is driving all *kārya*-s [whatever needs or ought to be done or to happen], instead of we also yielding to it, why to be perpetually thinking, ‘it is necessary to do like this; it is necessary to do like that’? Though we know that the train is bearing all the burdens, why should we who go travelling in it, instead of remaining happily leaving our small luggage placed on it [the train], suffer bearing it [our luggage] on our head?

If we train ourself to cling fast to this attitude, giving up all our cares and concerns by trusting him entirely to provide whatever we need, that will save us the trouble of thinking so many countless thoughts that we would otherwise believe are necessary for us to think. Only when we are firmly established in this attitude will it be possible for us to surrender ourself entirely, because self-surrender is not complete until we give up thinking of or attending to anything other than ourself, as Bhagavan says in the first sentence of the same paragraph of *Nāṇ Yār?*: ‘Being *ātma-niṣṭhāparan* [one who is steadily fixed in and as oneself], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any *cintana* [thought] other than *ātma-cintana* [‘thought of oneself’, self-contemplation or self-attentiveness], alone is giving oneself to God’.

This is the *bhāva* that Sundaramurthi [a renowned Tamil poet and one of the sixty-three saints whose stories are recounted in the *Periya Purānam*] had towards God, whom he considered to be his friend and servant, believing that he would take care of all his needs. This is a very safe and sure *bhāva* to have towards God. Other *bhāvas*, such as the *nāyaka-nāyakī bhāva* [the attitude that God is one’s bridegroom or husband and that one is his bride], are not suitable for everyone. Only the very purest devotees like Bhagavan are fit to take God to be their lover and bridegroom. That is why he sang *Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* [the ‘Garland of Imperishable Marriage to Arunachala’] whereas I sang only *Ramaṇākṣara Malar Mālai* [the ‘Flower Garland of Letters for Ramana’], because for most of us it is better to consider Bhagavan to be our beloved father and *guru* rather than our bridegroom.

2<sup>nd</sup> October 1978

**Sadhu Om:** In one verse in *Śrī Ramaṇa Varuhai* [a poem of 361 verses that he composed in July 1955 pouring out all his anguish and praying to Bhagavan to come to him once again in name and form] I sang that though I know that all Gods such as Rama, Krishna, Siva, Devi and Subrahmanya are none other than Bhagavan, I do not want to see any of them; the only divine form I wish to see is that grey-haired old man with a walking-stick. That is the only form that is dear to my heart and that I will always revere.

18<sup>th</sup> October 1978

**Sadhu Om:** Mind has three powers, the powers of *icchā* [liking], *kriyā* [doing] and *jñāna* [knowing]. Of these, *kriyā-śakti* [the power of doing] is a distortion of *sat* [being] and is the function of *manas* [mind], *jñāna-śakti* [the power of knowing, which in this context means the power to know things other than oneself] is a distortion of *cit* [awareness] and is the function of *buddhi* [intellect], and *icchā-śakti* [the power of liking] is a distortion of *ānanda* [happiness] and is the function of *cittam* [will]. In essence these three powers are one and inseparable, just as *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* are one.

If we truly know that something is good, we will like it and do it. If, however, we say that we know it is good but do not like it or will not do it, we are not really convinced that it is good. In other words, we lack the strength of conviction, which is *jñāna-śakti* [the power of knowing, understanding, discernment, discrimination or judgement]. For example, if we say that we know that touching fire is harmful, yet we like to touch it or do not avoid touching it, we have not truly understood how harmful it is.

Likewise, if we were deeply and firmly convinced that our real nature is happiness and that everything else is misery, we would not like to attend to anything other than ourself, and we would have the power to do nothing but attending only to ourself. If, on the other hand, we find that we are unable to attend only to ourself, that means that we do not yet have sufficient liking to do so, and the reason why we do not have sufficient liking is that we are not truly convinced that happiness is our real nature and therefore cannot be found in anything other than ourself.

However, even if we lack the ability to cling to self-attention firmly and steadily, we should not be disheartened, because what is more important than our ability is our liking to do so. If we truly like to do so, the ability will certainly follow in the tracks of our liking. Therefore we should pray to Bhagavan with all our heart to give us unshakeably firm conviction that happiness is our real nature, because the more we are convinced of this, the more we will like to attend only to ourself, and the more we like to do so, the more we will be able to do so. To succeed in this path, therefore, *bhakti* [liking or love], *vivēka* [discernment, discrimination or judgement] and the practice of self-attention must all go hand in hand. If we truly like to follow this path and thereby surrender ourself entirely to Bhagavan, who is God, *guru* and our own real nature, he will do everything else for us.

19<sup>th</sup> October 1978

**Sadhu Om:** As Bhagavan said, the mere presence of a *jñāni* on earth benefits all people. However, very few *jñānis* have what Ramakrishna called the ‘badge of authority’ to be *guru*, as Bhagavan had. Of course, there are no differences in *jñāna*, but since *jñānis* appear to be individuals, outwardly there seem to be differences between them, so they each have their own role to play, and some seem to play no particular role at all.

However, acting as a *guru* is not the only way in which a *jñāni* can help others. Even if a *jñāni* acts just as a simple disciple, the full power of grace will flow through him. There is so much we can learn from a true disciple.

Though Bhagavan never considered himself to be a *guru*, because in his view there were no others, his outward role was clearly to be a *guru*, but he nevertheless also exemplified the role of a humble devotee and disciple of Arunachala. Because he is the *guru* of all who are attracted to his teachings and aspire to follow the path he has shown us, there is no need for any disciple of his to act as *guru*, and anyone who does act as *guru* is not a true disciple of his.

This was exemplified by Muruganar, who was his foremost disciple, yet who never accepted for himself the role of a *guru*. Whenever anyone told him that they considered him to be their *guru*,

he would respond passionately: ‘Who am I to be a *guru*? Bhagavan alone is fit to be a *guru* for all of us. He alone can save us, so take him alone to be your *guru*’.

20<sup>th</sup> October 1978

**Sadhu Om:** Though Seshadri Swami was a *jñāni*, it was not his role to be a *guru*. This is illustrated by the following story. He had one devotee who often begged him to give him *brahma-jñāna*, and though he told that devotee that he was not yet ripe enough, the devotee persisted saying, ‘I may not be fit enough, but I know that you can nevertheless give it to me’. One day, perhaps to make him understand his unripeness, Seshadri touched him, but though his touch induced in him a blissful experience of detachment from his body, it toppled his balance of mind, so he ran out of the temple, tearing off his clothes and behaving like a lunatic.

Hearing about this, his friends and family were very upset, because he was a rich man and widely respected, so they caught him and brought him back to Seshadri Swami, asking him to cure him of his madness. He explained that he had been asking for *jñāna*, and by coming too close to the fire of *jñāna* he had eventually caught fire, but since he was not ripe enough, it had resulted in this seeming madness. He said he could not do anything to cure him, but assured them that within a few days he would return to normal. After returning to normal, the devotee told Seshadri Swami that he now understood that he was not mature enough to receive *brahma-jñāna*, but prayed to him to first give him the necessary maturity and then give him *brahma-jñāna*.

Such an experience and loss of mental balance will never happen to those who take refuge in Bhagavan and his teachings, because he is the perfect *guru*, so he is working within us, rectifying our *vāsanās* and preparing us to be willing to surrender ourselves entirely. Since he knows us so well, he will not give us anything until he knows we are ready for it, so if we rely entirely on him, he will lead us gently, smoothly and as quickly as possible to our final destination without ever letting us lose our balance of mind.

When he finally reveals himself within our Heart as the light of pure awareness, he will have prepared us perfectly, so it will happen

## MOUNTAIN PATH

so smoothly and naturally that it will seem as if nothing has happened, and instead we will see that we are just as we have always been.

**Question:** Since Bhagavan has always been the one *guru* in the Heart of everyone, now that he has appeared in the name and form of Ramana, what special benefit do we get by taking this name and form to be our *guru*?

**Sadhu Om:** Ramakrishna used to say that though milk pervades throughout the body of a cow, in order to obtain it we need to take it from the udder. Likewise, though grace is shining in all places, at all times and in the Heart of each one of us, so long as we are looking outwards we can obtain it only from appropriate outlets. From some outlets, such as Seshadri Swami, the flow is not so strong or well regulated, because they have a different purpose, but because the sole purpose of the name and form of Ramana is the eradication of ego, he is the perfect outlet from which grace flows eternally, steadily, with full power and perfect control. If we rely entirely on this one outlet, we will be consumed by him in the quickest possible manner and without undergoing more than the least amount of trouble. ▲

*(To be continued)*

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

She glides among stars,  
so haughty, her head thrown back,  
her great eyes glowing  
with such pride, that you,  
*Garvita*, have wrought these sacral fields.

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

## KEYWORD

# Pancha Kosha Viveka

JOHN GRIMES

The Advaita Vedanta philosophical system lays down an oft quoted, well-known, preliminary four-fold requirement (*nitya anitya vastu viveka*) qualifying a spiritual aspirant to pursue the direct path of knowledge. These qualifications are: 1) discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal; 2) non-attachment to the enjoyment of the fruits of one's actions either in this world or in any other; 3) possession in abundance of the six virtues, viz., calmness, equanimity, turning away from sense-objects, forbearance, concentration, and faith; and 4) a longing or extremely intense desire for liberation.

Discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal is for the purpose of revealing the real nature of the individual. According to Ramana, the individual, as such, conditioned or limited by the body, the senses, and the mind is not the Self. Owing to ignorance, not only do individuals not know their real nature, but also incorrectly think

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<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§28.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. in Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

of it as the body, mind, etc. The five sheaths are the not-Self and the Self must be discriminated from them.

The Self (*Ātman*) or Absolute (*Brahman*) is neither a mentally constructed object nor a transcendent concept but an ever present fact. An analysis of the five sheaths (*pañca kōśa viveka*) will reveal that the Self alone is present throughout and persists in all the five sheaths while they vary and undergo change. This analysis consists in revealing that what is grosser and more external and less pervasive is less real than what is subtler and more internal and more pervasive. Thereby the Self will be revealed as the subtlest, inmost being and therefore the most real.

From the physical body (*annamaya kōśa*), which is the grossest sheath, to the subtlest sheath of enjoyment (*ānandamaya kōśa*), will be found impermanence and objectification. But the foundation of all these, the Self, is the subtlest, most pervasive of all. The Self is not an object of knowledge; it is self-luminous and requires no other source of illumination. It is not an object to be experienced. When all objective elements are removed from the five sheaths, what remains is the Self, pure Consciousness, Awareness. Even to say that nothing remains after dismissing all objective names and forms, requires a consciousness that witnesses the absence of all names and forms. This, the Self, is the subtlest of all and incapable of ever being removed.

The method of *pañca kōśa viveka* has been mentioned in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*,<sup>1</sup> the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and the *Pañcadasi*<sup>2</sup> among others. This method analyses the individual into five sheaths (*kōśa*): *annamaya kōśa* (food sheath), *prāṇamaya kōśa* (vital air or energy sheath), *manōmaya kōśa* (mental sheath), *vijñānamaya kōśa* (intellectual sheath), and *ānandamaya kōśa* (bliss sheath). Like the peels of an onion each subsequent sheath completely permeates the prior one. Thus, this method leads one to knowledge of the Self as this analysis leads one deeper and deeper, from the familiar to the unknown.

Analysing the five sheaths that cover the Self reveals that the Self persists in all five sheaths. It reveals that what is most subtle, more internal, and more pervasive is the Self.

These five layers seemingly veil the Self. But actually nothing can veil the Self. However, due to one's excessive focus on and the

<sup>1</sup> *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 3-21-37.

<sup>2</sup> *Pañcadasi*, Ch 3, 1-7.

importance given to these sheaths, they appear to veil the Self. The food sheath is the first sheath which individuals erroneously believe to be their Self. However, it is made of inert matter and later disintegrates,

There are numerous reasons for one to believe that one is not this physical body. It is an ‘object’ of one’s consciousness. We as a ‘subject’ objectify our body, so we are naturally something different from it. We all know that a subject is always different from an object. Secondly, when a person dies, the body remains while the person is declared dead and gone. Something that was present in the body is no more. So it is evident that there is some ‘I’ that is different from the body.

People say, ‘my body’, ‘my hair’, etc. ‘My’ is a personal pronoun indicating possession. Who possesses the body? An individual is not their possession. To declare, “I am fat or thin, male or female, etc.,” refers only to various aspects of the food sheath. Obviously one is not one’s physical body.

The inert food sheath is sustained and energized by an energy sheath. All physical activity requires energy. In order to act the body and the mind require energy. For conscious activities there are rest periods, but unconscious activities are continuous. Breathing, the heart beat, blood circulation, digestion, etc., all happen continuously and demand energy.

The moment the *prāṇa* leaves the body, all activities come to a halt. However important this sheath is, it is only a sheath, not our real Self, for it is inert. It is not something conscious; *prāṇa* neither has intelligence nor feelings.

All *prāṇa*, all vital energy is sustained and directly affected by our mind. Lord Ramana in his *Upadeśa Sāram*<sup>3</sup> says that the mind and *prāṇa* are like two branches of one tree. The *manōmaya kōśa* is that layer of the individual that is called ‘mind’. The mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts.

Every thought has a great inherent power that affects one’s physiology, moods, physical body, responses, and relationships. In short one’s thoughts determine what one really is.

The *vijñānamaya kōśa* is where the roots of bondage and liberation reside. This intellectual sheath includes one’s intellect (*buddhi*) where

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<sup>3</sup> *Upadeśa Sāram*, verse 12.

decisions are made. It is these conscious decisions that give direction to one's thoughts and desires. What prompts these thoughts? That which motivates the *buddhi* is the *ānandamaya kōśa*.

Everyone in the world shares one basic desire – to be happy, full of joy. Joy or happiness is the motivating factor in all actions. It prompts all faculties to work and be active. Realising this, everyone should be clear about their fundamental motivation. Ramana said, “That which is called happiness is only the nature of the Self; Self is not other than perfect happiness. That which is called happiness alone exists. Knowing that fact and abiding in the Self, enjoy Bliss eternally.”<sup>4</sup>

The *ānandamaya kōśa* sustains the *vijñānamaya kōśa*. Desire for *ānanda* alone motivates the latter. Deep down in one's *buddhi* is this realm of 'joy'. *Ananda* is basically one but depending on the intensity of its manifestation it is categorized in three kinds. *Priya*, *moda* and *pramoda*. *Priya* is the intensity of joy that one experiences when one thinks of a cherished object or person, *moda* is that intensity which one experiences when one is near a desired person or object. *Pramoda* is the joy that one experiences when one is with one's object of love.

Yet, even this is not the ultimate because however much individuals experience *ananda*, they basically still remain seekers and remain in bondage. Ramana said, “You can have, or rather you will yourself be, the highest imaginable kind of happiness. All other kinds of happiness which you have spoken of as ‘pleasure’, ‘joy’, and ‘bliss’ are only reflections of the Bliss (*Ānanda*) which is your true nature.”<sup>5</sup> The desire to hold on to all that gives one *ananda* is indicative of one's insufficiency. Thus even *ānandamaya kōśa*, is not the ultimate state. Experiencing ecstatic *ānanda* is not *mokṣa*. The final step is the realization that ‘I am That’. Sri Ramana said, “Liberation is our very nature. We are That.”<sup>6</sup> One who has this knowledge is liberated. Ramana said, “That which underlies all names and forms is the Reality. It underlies limitations being itself limitless. It is not bound. It underlies unrealities, itself being real.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Guru Vāchaka Kovai*, v.1029.

<sup>5</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 15-5-46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-12-45, Evening.

<sup>7</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§140.

# The Esoteric Significance of Darshan at the Annamalaiyar Temple

PHILLIP LUCAS

*When the mind moves even a little, that is saṁsāra (worldly bondage); when the mind abides firmly and motionlessly (in the state of Self), that is mukti (liberation). This is certain. Therefore know that wise ones must hold their minds firm by supreme Self-awareness.*

Devikalottara, v. 10

The Annamalaiyar\* Temple in Tiruvannamalai is a significant pilgrimage destination for millions of Śiva devotees each year, including pilgrims to Sri Ramanasramam. Built over a thousand year period between the 9th and 19th centuries, it is part of a circuit of five Śiva *sthala-s* in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh known

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\* The temple deity's Tamil name for Lord Śiva. His consort the Goddess Pārvati is called Uṇṇāmulaiyār in Tamil.

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as the *Pañca Bhūta-s* (five elements). Each of these temples is associated with one of the five elements of Indian cosmology. These elements, including earth, water, fire, air, and *ākash* (space) are seen as the constituent building blocks – along with the three *guṇa-s*, or modalities of energy – of the phenomenal universe. They also make up, in varying combinations, the subtle and gross bodies of human beings. Pilgrims visit these *sthala-s* – the earth/Ekambareshwarar Temple at Kanchipuram; the water/Jambukeshwarar Temple in Thiruvanaikaval; the fire/Annamalaiyar Temple in Tiruvannamalai; the air/Srikalahasti Temple in Srikalahasti; and the space/Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram — in search of both material and spiritual blessings. The intense *bhakti* (devotion) expressed in the various *pūjā-s* and other rites purifies the mind and heart while the *darśan-s* at the Lingam shrines balance and purify the five elements active in the pilgrims’ physical and subtle bodies.

Each of the *Pañca Bhūta sthala-s* lies about 120 kilometers from the next temple in the circuit, and three, Srikalahasti, Kanchipuram, and Chidambaram, are located at 79E70 longitude. Thiruvanaikaval and Tiruvannamalai are located on a longitudinal line that aligns with Kedarnath in the north and Rameswaram in the south, two of the 12 Jyotirlingam temples. These last three temples are significant for Śiva devotees as they celebrate Śiva’s manifestation as a pillar of fire, the *Liṅgodbhava*. Pilgrimage to them is seen as a particularly auspicious and holy undertaking. The symbolism of the *Liṅgodbhava* reveals the deeper significance of the Fire Lingam temple at Tiruvannamalai, as we shall see.

Many pilgrims to Sri Ramanasramam visit the Fire Temple and are overwhelmed by its architectural grandeur and profound spiritual atmosphere. This article attempts to orient devotees to the temple and its traditions by addressing three questions: i.) What is the spiritual significance of the Fire Lingam at Annamalaiyar temple?; ii.) How do the temple and its shrines and rites embody the deeper spiritual significance of Arunachala itself?; iii.) How is the temple’s symbolism and power reflected in the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi?

According to various traditions (including the *Skanda* and *Arunachala Purana-s*), the Annamalaiyar Temple is a *mukti sthala*, a sacred precinct where one can gain *mokṣa*, or final liberation.



Phillip Lucas

A verse in the *Skanda Purāṇa* declares, “I truly abide on earth in the form of an effulgence named Arunachala for (bestowing) the attainment (of Liberation). Know that it is the heart of the world. It is truly Śiva himself! It is his heart-abode, a secret holy region.” In the *Śrī Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* Nandi declares, “What cannot be acquired without great pains – the true understanding of Vedanta (Self-realization) – can be attained by anyone who looks at (this sacred hill) from where it is visible or even mentally thinks of it from afar.”

It has been the testimony of saints and sages, including Bhagavan, that Arunachala is the distillation of *jñāna*, the fire of Self-knowledge that burns away *avidyā* or ignorance of Reality. Bhagavan also spoke of Arunachala as the spiritual centre of the world. Some traditions claim that Sri Adi Shankara spoke of Arunachala as Mount Meru, the birthplace of the created universe. Geological surveys attest to the fact that this part of Tamil Nadu contains some of the oldest rock formations on the planet.

The Annamalaiyar Temple represents the element fire, and the *tejo* (fire) *lingam* in its *sanctum sanctorum* is a microcosmic replica of the Mahalingam behind it, the fire mountain Arunachala. The temple’s *lingam*, like the mountain itself, is considered *swayambhu* (or self-born), meaning it manifested without human agency. Tradition holds that the Fire Lingam is a concentrated form of Arunachala situated within a sacred architecture designed to amplify the Mahalingam’s all-consuming fire of *jñāna* for serious *sādhaka-s*.

Temples in India are always connected to stories in the *Puranas* that explain why a particular place was chosen for a sacred enclosure. It is important to keep these sacred histories in mind as we attempt to understand the significance of the fire temple for devotees.

The Annamalaiyar Temple is located at the eastern base of Arunachala. Several *Puranas* describe the origin of the mountain. In the distant past Brahma, the creator god and Vishnu, the preserver god, contended for supremacy. Their contest threatened the cosmic order. Out of compassion for all living beings, Śiva, the god of destruction and regeneration, appeared as a pillar of fire before the two contending gods.

Out of the blazing light Śiva’s voice challenged Brahma and Vishnu to find the pillar’s upper and lower limits. Whoever did so would be

acknowledged as the Supreme God. Vishnu took the form of a boar and began tunneling into the ground to find the pillar's lower limit. Brahma took the shape of a swan and soared high into the heavens looking for the pillar's upper limit. After a thousand years, neither could find the limits.

Humbled by his failure, Vishnu acknowledged Śiva as the Supreme God. Brahma lied and claimed he had seen the summit of the pillar. His lie was exposed and he stood humbled before Śiva, acknowledging him as the Supreme Reality.

Vishnu and Brahma then asked Śiva to remain visible as a *tejo* (fire) *lingam* in the place where he had appeared as the pillar of light. With this tangible sign, they and other devotees could worship him, overcome their negative tendencies, and attain final liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Śiva agreed to this request and remained visible as a pillar of fire at the place of his manifestation, Tiruvannamalai. Over subsequent *yugas* (world ages), humanity lost the capacity to see with spiritual eyes and out of compassion, Śiva changed his appearance to the present-day red mountain, Arunachala. The figure of Śiva appearing as a pillar of fire, the *Liṅgodbhava*, is found in many carvings and statues throughout the Annamalaiyar Temple, emphasizing its significance for understanding the temple's deeper spiritual meaning.

Before looking more fully into the symbolism of this story and image, we first need to consider the Advaitic teaching concerning the nature and makeup of the human *jīva*, or apparent individual self. In Advaitic understanding the *jīva* is comprised of five *kōśa*-s, or sheaths, each made of progressively more refined grades of subtle matter. The sheaths are both vehicles of manifestation and veils that cover the Self (*Ātman*), the *jīva*'s true nature. As described in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, they are: i.) the *annamaya kōśa*, or physical body, composed of the food we eat – related to the earth element; ii.) the *prāṇamaya kōśa*, or subtle energy body, which organizes and directs the *prāṇa* (life energy) to the mind and biological functions like breathing, digestion, and blood circulation – related to the water element; iii.) the *manōmaya kōśa*, or mental body, which processes input from the five senses and governs our habitual responses, including desires, emotions, passions, ambitions, attachments, and activities relative to this sensory input – related to the fire element;

iv. the *vijñānamaya kōśa* or sheath of intellect, which empowers us to judge, discern, discriminate, and choose the best course of action based ideally on spiritual understanding and moral reasoning – related to the air element; and v. the *ānandamaya kōśa*, or bliss sheath, which reflects the essential nature of the Self, which is pure enjoyment and beatitude – related to the *ākash* or space element.

Temple complexes like Annamalaiyar reflect this understanding of the archetypal divine human. The temple is subdivided into five *prākāram-s* (courtyards), each embodying one of the five *kōśa-s*. The pilgrim's progressive movement from the (outer) fifth courtyard to the (inner) first courtyard, where the Fire Lingam resides, reflects attention turned gradually inward from the physical world to the very core of the *jīva*'s being, the *Ātman* or divine Self that is one with *Brahman*.

Most pilgrims enter the temple complex through the great eastern tower, called Rajagopuram, which rises 217 ft and was built in 1516. Its eleven registers are a masterpiece of elegant sculptures rising like a mountain, a place of residence for divine beings. Entering through this grand tower clearly lets visitors know they are entering holy ground. In the outermost fifth courtyard – related to the *annamaya kōśa* – there are shrines that focus on more mundane concerns. The first shrine, to the left of the entrance to the fifth *prākāram*, celebrates Murugan, the patron of Tamil literature, language and culture, and protector of the Tamil land. As the son of Śiva and Pārvati and the ideal of strength, courage, and wisdom in a young man, he is prayed to for assistance in finding a proper husband or wife.

Just behind this shrine is the Bangle *maṇḍapam* (pillared hall), where women come to pray for the safe birth for their children. Every summer, Śiva's consort Ambālī is adorned with bangles here on the final day of her 10-day *Āḍipūram* festival (between July 15 and August 15). The glass bangles offered to Ambālī by the priests are then given to women devotees hoping for protection during their pregnancies.

Also in this outermost courtyard are two marriage halls, where couples are married at special times of the year. In these halls Śiva and Pārvati are portrayed as the ideal married couple and supporters of the *dharma* of the householder. A final shrine in the fifth courtyard, the Kalyana Sundareswarar temple, is used for celebrating the autumn rice harvest. During the rites at this time the Śiva *lingam* is adorned with

rice and flowers demonstrating the pilgrim's gratitude for the divine gift of fertility. The shrine also houses an inner wall that features *nāga* stones. These snake deity statues are common in Śiva temples and are believed to grant petitioners fertility and protection from snakebite.

As pilgrims enter the fourth courtyard, symbolizing the *prāṇamaya kōśa* or subtle energy body (connected to the water element), they immediately see to their left the Brahma *tīrtha* or bathing tank. The *tīrtha* is host to special rites on the four days of the annual solar and lunar eclipses as well as an abundant fish population. Pilgrims can buy feed for the fish, and children enjoy tossing the pellets into the water and watching the fish swirl around them. Devotees also encounter the Bhairavar Temple, dedicated to the Lord of Time, and the fierce protector of the temple precincts from evil spirits. Pilgrims ring a bell in this shrine to ask forgiveness for their errors and thus purification from psychological states of guilt and regret. These states are believed responsible for blockages in the flow of *prāṇa* through the body and thus the impaired function of breathing, digestion, and blood circulation.

It is notable that the fourth courtyard also houses the temple *gośala*, or cowshed, and the hundred-pillared horse *maṇḍapam*, where horses were stabled in a past era. The hall was, until recently, the day shelter for Rukku, the late temple elephant, who blessed pilgrims as they moved into the third *prākāram*. These animals are connected with *prāṇamaya kōśa*, since it is the sheath that governs the autonomic nervous system and thus the instinctual part of human existence. These animals are all considered symbols of strength, vitality, and dedicated service.

Two other shrines in this *prākāram* are connected to the restoration of health, the amelioration of negative karma, and the enlistment of powerful demigods to overcome obstacles. The first is the Vidyadhreshwarar shrine, located on the west side of the Brahma *tīrtha*. *Vidyādhara*-s ('possessors of knowledge') are benevolent spirits of the air, demigods who attend Śiva. They are believed to possess great magical powers and are prayed to for assistance by pilgrims.

The second is the Naleshwarar Shrine, named after King Nala. Tradition has it that the king worshipped Saturn (Śani) to be freed

from the Lord of Karma's inauspicious influences in his life. Śiva then released the King from all of Saturn's negative effects. Pilgrims ask for Śani's assistance when facing heavy karmic burdens and ill health.

The pilgrim now passes through the Kili or Parrot tower into the third courtyard. At this point the spiritual atmosphere becomes more highly charged, as the devotee is very close to the second and first *prākāram-s*, which house the main temple *mūrti-s* and the Fire Lingam. The third courtyard symbolises the *manōmaya kōśa*, the mental sheath that takes in sensory stimuli and responds with conditioned desires, aversions, passions, ambitions, attachments, and mental chatter. This conditioned mind (*manas*) is in thrall to the world of objects and to entanglement with the drama of possessions, relationships, power struggles, and self assertion. Related to the fire element, it is with *manas* that the *sādhana* necessary for liberation becomes a conscious striving.

It should be said that fire has other associations which are relevant to this inquiry. *Agni*, the god of Fire, is of primary importance in the Vedas. The Rig and Sāma Veda Samhitas each begin with the word *Agni*. *Agni* symbolises the Supreme Being itself, omnipresent and immediately perceptible in fire. In the Vedic vision, *Agni* is the messenger between the divine and human worlds, which is why its name is omnipresent in *homa-s* and *pūjā-s*. It symbolises aspiration for liberation and the fire of *tapas*, which burns away ignorance and attachment in the all-consuming fire of Self-awareness.

In the third courtyard are important shrines which symbolise *sādhana* and *tapas*. Walking around the courtyard in a clockwise direction, the first shrine is the Pannīr (Rosewater) *mandapam*, a four-pillared hall. During Vasantha Utsavam, the Spring Festival, a form of Śiva and Pārvati known as Lord Somaskanda is carried from his home shrine in a palanquin and installed at the hall. Then a celestial nymph descends from heaven to hover before Somaskanda. The rites reference the story of Kāma, the God of Love, who arouses Śiva from his thousand-year meditation and is turned into ash as punishment. Later Śiva relents and brings him back to life. The story symbolises the dangers of romantic passion and attachment, which disturb the mind's equilibrium and turn it away from interior focus on the Self. Even though equilibrium is



disturbed, disciplined effort and the grace of Arunachala can turn the mind inward and reawaken Self-awareness. In a similar vein romantic passion can become passion for the Divine, the bhakti that purifies the *manōmaya kōśa* and prepares the *jīva* for sustained *sādhana* and abidance in the Self.

Continuing around the courtyard, the pilgrim encounters a Lingam platform that features two shrines to Dakshinamurti. This form of Śiva is related to a Puranic story that begins with the four sons of Brahma renouncing the work of creating and sustaining the world so that they can pursue *moksha*. Moved by the single-mindedness of their quest, Śiva appears as a youth sitting under a banyan tree and facing south. Though his eyes are open, he is silently absorbed in Self-awareness with his hand in the *cinmudrā* pose, symbolizing the unity of the individual self and the supreme Self. The four sons, drawn to sit around the youth, spontaneously realize the Self through his wordless presence. These two *mūrti*-s are just the first of many shrines and *mūrti*-s to this form of Śiva that can be found within the 3rd and 2nd *prākāram*-s. This is a significant signal to pilgrims that both inner silence and the interiorization of attention is what is now needed to realize the full potential of the Fire Lingam's *darśan*.

The next important shrine sits directly behind the Fire Lingam, and is dedicated to Yogeshwara, Śiva's form as Lord of Yoga and the ideal monk, *swāmi*, and *sādhu*. Here he is known as Arunagiri Yogeshwara, the master yogi who lives on Arunachala and sits under a great banyan tree that it is forbidden to approach. There is a small *mūrti* of the great yogi inside the shrine. The shrine's placement just behind the Fire Lingam shrine is a reminder that tapas, detachment and withdrawal of the mind's attention from the outer world of objects is the necessary precursor to union with the Supreme Self.

A unique aspect of the Annamalaiyar Temple is that it has shrines to each of the four other elements (besides fire) in this third courtyard. Each of these shrines has a *liṅgam* in its interior and tableaux above the entrance referencing the central Puranic story regarding the *liṅgam*-s at the temples of Srikalahasthi (air), Kanchipuram (earth), Chidambaram (*ākash* or space), and Thiruvanaikaval (water). There may be a subtle hint here that the Annamalaiyar Fire Temple offers a smaller scale version of the pilgrimage to the Pancha Bhutas for

those who are unable to make the full pilgrimage to the other four temples. As a *mukti sthala* (temple where final liberation can occur) it is appropriate that the other four elements are represented here, so that recalibration and purification of the five elements and *kōśa*-s can take place during the pilgrim's movement into *darśan* in the inner sanctum.

We can now proceed to the second and first courtyards, where devotees enter gates that direct them to the Fire Lingam shrine as well as other major Śiva-related *mūrti*-s. What do worshippers experience at the Fire Lingam and other shrines around it, and how is what they experience related to the element fire and its related sheath, the *manōmaya kōśa*? And how do the *darśan*-s and meditations that take place in this central shrine resonate with Bhagavan's teachings on Self-realisation?

We can start with Bhagavan's own experience at the temple, which took place the day of his arrival in Tiruvannamalai on 1st September 1896. His biographers report that the first place he went to was the Annamalaiyar Temple. Because of special cleanings that were happening on that date, the temple was nearly empty. The young Venkataraman moved easily through the five courtyards and entered the Fire Lingam shrine's interior, where he experienced a complete merging with the Supreme Reality. It is said that from that moment forward, the mind of duality was extinguished in the young sage and he lived in uninterrupted Self-abidance. This highly significant event reveals the potential power of Annamalaiyar Temple for the pilgrims who go for *darśan* and meditation at the Fire Lingam sanctum.

The gift of the *darśan* that devotees experience at this inner shrine is related to the *manōmaya kōśa*. Remember that this sheath relates to the conditioned mind that takes in impressions from the five senses and reacts with conditioned (*vāsanā*-directed) thoughts, desires, emotions, passions, ambitions, attachments, and activities relative to this sensory input. It manifests as a rambling torrent of thoughts that are related to the seeming objects brought to our awareness by the five senses. The ego function, memories, and the intellect (fourth sheath) also get involved, personalising these extroverted thoughts and desires and constructing a complex identity from these elements. This egoic identity lives in a world of binaries – duality – and attempts to

survive and flourish amongst a host of perceived allies and enemies. As Bhagavan tells us in his *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*,

Talk§80: Thoughts are predispositions accumulated in innumerable former births.

Talk§68: Thoughts are our enemy. When we are free of thoughts we are naturally blissful. The gap between two thoughts is our true state, it is the real Self. Get rid of thoughts, be empty of them, be in a state of perpetual thoughtlessness. Thoughts, desires, and all qualities are alien to our true nature.

He also alerts us to the ephemeral nature of ‘mind’:

Talk§221: Mind is a bundle of thoughts, having its origin in consciousness or Self. Thoughts are not real; the only reality is the Self.

Talk§238: There is no entity by the name of mind. Because of the emergence of thoughts, we surmise something from which they start. That we term ‘Mind’. When we probe to see what it is, there is nothing like it. After it has vanished, peace will be found to remain eternal. The thinking (*manas*) or discriminating (*vijñāna*) faculty are mere names. Be it ego, mind, or intellect, it is the same.

To accomplish this reorientation of the ‘mind’s’ attention, Bhagavan advises four means:

- a. The mind should be diverted from its objects, the objective vision of the world must cease;
- b. The mind’s internal operation also must be put an end to;
- c. Thus the mind must be rendered and must continue characterless.
- d. Finally, it must rest in pure *vicāra*, or self-inquiry.

This is a continuous *sādhana* for seekers of liberation, but there are occasions of grace along the way. One of these is *darśan* of the Fire Lingam sanctum. With a mind purified by *bhakti* at the shrines preceding it, the devotee, for a brief moment – depending on the crush of pilgrims at any one time – stands with rapt attention in front of the Lingam. The mind simply stops, its rush of thoughts is suspended, and a flood of Self-awareness is experienced. The Fire Lingam consumes the flow of thoughts like wood sticks in a fire pit.

As pilgrims leave the direct *darśan* of the Fire Lingam, they are given *vibhūti* (ash), symbolizing Śiva’s renunciation of the world, and the turning of attention toward the Divine Self. The next two shrines they encounter – which sit directly adjacent to the Lingam sanctum

– deepen and reinforce this silencing of the roaming *manōmaya kōśa*, if the pilgrim remains in the introversion of awareness initiated there. The first is the shrine to the silent sage, Dakshinamurthi. It is here that *darśan* deepens inner tranquillity and Self-awareness. No words or thoughts are necessary, and the devotee becomes one of Brahma’s four sons, brought to stillness and Self-abidance by this south-facing form of Śiva.

The pilgrim next arrives for *darśan* and perhaps meditation at a small alcove just behind the Fire Lingam, the *Liṅgodbhāva* shrine. The symbolism of the *Liṅgodbhāva* reinforces the spiritual process instantiated and engendered in the Annamalaiyar Temple. The boar form of Vishnu (Varāha Avatāra), representing the *manōmaya kōśa* with its orientation to sensory impressions and bodily identification, performs *pranām-s* (obeisance) to the feet of Śiva, the Self, at the bottom of the pillar of fire. Attention is now fully on the Supreme Reality and no longer on the sensory-based world of objects and forms. The swan/*hamsa* form of Brahma, representing the intellect sheath or *vijñānamaya kōśa*, sits at the upper edge of the pillar, singly attentive to the Self. Both are now subsumed into the Supreme Reality. The pillar of fire itself, with Śiva’s image in its midst, is the fully self-realized *jñāni*, the divine human, fully awake in the light of Self-knowledge.

Because Bhagavan is such a *jñāni*, visitors to Sri Ramanasramam can experience this same inner stillness when they visit his *samādhi* shrine or the Old Hall. And because Arunachala itself is the Maha Fire Lingam, devotees can bathe in this stillness when they perform *pradakṣiṇa* or meditate in Virupaksha Cave or Skandasramam.

The last temple shrine that pilgrims visit is entered as they exit the second courtyard. It is the shrine honoring Śiva’s consort/wife, whose Tamil name is Uṇṇāmulaiyāl Ambāl. The worship here offers thanks for the beauty and sustenance of the phenomenal world, now perceived as the raiment of the Supreme Reality. Just as the symbolism of the Fire Lingam and *Liṅgodbhava* references the vertical union of devotees with *Nirguṇa* Brahman, Reality beyond qualities, the symbolism of the Ambāl *mūrti-s*, with their birds, flowers, and other natural forms, references the devotees’ horizontal union with *Saguṇa* Brahman, the Supreme Reality in its modes of manifestation. This

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is poetically expressed in the image of *Ardhanārīśvara*, Śiva as half male and half female.

The *Arunachala Puranas* relate the story of Pārvati's penance for a playful indiscretion that threatened the created universe. The final phase of her tapas is coming to Arunachala, defeating a demon army that was terrorizing *sadhu*-s and pilgrims, and walking around the holy mountain. Śiva is so pleased with her penance that he appears and grants her request to be eternally unified with his cosmic body, so that she can never be separated from him again. It is no doubt significant that the main *darśan* for the *Ardhanārīśvara Mūrti* occurs at the moment the flame is lit at the top of the mountain at the climax of the Deepam festival. Just before the full moon rises, she is brought out to the sixteen-pillared *Kāṭci maṇḍapam*, which faces the entrance to the second courtyard. From there she can witness the annual commemoration of Śiva's fiery appearance as the fire mountain, Arunachala. The symbolism is now complete. For those pilgrims who are mature, the mind can merge with the great stillness that is the Self, the dualities of the phenomenal world are both celebrated and transcended, and the *mukti sthalam* of Annamalaiyar has fulfilled its purpose. ▲

### **Documentary on the Annamalaiyar Temple**

This documentary film explores the famed Annamalaiyar Temple of Tiruvannamalai. The temple is one of five special Śiva temples in South India, collectively called *pañcabhūtā*, each of which embodies one of the five elements in Hindu cosmology. This temple, which lies at the base of Annamalai, represents the element fire. The film also examines the temple rites during the annual festival of Karthikai Deepam. The links below are newly revised.

Part One can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tuo3f-lyI0>

Part Two can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn1b4PLrtXY>

# The Bhagavad Gita Saram

## Chapter Ten, Verses Ten and Eleven

SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

### Preface

*Early in the year of 2006, during the weeks that lead up to Mahā Śivarātri, Swami Shantananda Puri of Vasishtha Guha gave a long series of lectures in English on the 42 verses from the Bhagavad Gītā that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi selected to portray the sara or 'essence' of the entire 700 verses spoken to Arjuna by Lord Krishna. These lectures were recorded and transcribed, then edited to render the sentence structure more cohesive.*

*Contained in this work are many of the most remarkable aspects of spiritual instruction ever shown in the vast collection of commentaries on the Gītā. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has beautifully selected and arranged these śloka-s that point the reader to the very essence of what has come to be known as the cream of the Upaniṣad-s – the*

Swami Shantananda Puri, was born on 6th May 1928. At age four, he came into contact with the Paramacharya of Kanchi. In 1957 he met his Guru Sri Purushottamananda Puri, a direct disciple of the great Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal Maharaj) of the Ramakrishna order. Swamiji attained *mahāsamādhi* and was absorbed into Arunachala Siva on 14th October 2014.

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Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā. *He has done it in such a way that approaches each major teaching of the Lord systemically from all three mārga-s or ways. Bhagavan Ramana has shown that in essence the Lord has instructed Arjuna in the Way of Liberation according to all three of the karma, bhakti and jñāna mārga-s. Thus with perfect clarity Sri Ramana has shed abundant light on the darkness of philosophical squabbling which argues that the Gītā is a work of 'this or that' mārga alone. Now in truth, this quintessence of sanātana dharma can be seen as a synthesis of all mārga-s, into essentially what should be called the 'Lord's Mārga'.*

*This fine work will be presented as a series for publication in the Mountain Path. This entire work is too voluminous to be published in its entirety, therefore the topics and verses chosen are considered the most applicable to our readers. We have retained as much as possible the flavour of Swamiji's original presentation. We begin with the two verses chosen by Bhagavan Ramana from Chapter 10. The English translations for verses from the Gītā are from The Bhagavad Gītā, Winthrop Sargeant, State University of New York Press, Albany 1994.*

*teṣāṃ satatayuktānāṃ bhajatāṃ prītipūrvakam |  
dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ taṃ yena māmupayānti te ||*

To those who are constantly steadfast,  
Those who worship me with love,  
I give the yoga of discrimination  
By which they come to Me.

10:10

Lord Krishna praised those 'who are constantly and ceaselessly united with me in the mind and who are engaged in devoted service to me', and yet God does not require any service, so what service can we render to the Lord? The only service that we can render to the Lord is to ceaselessly remember Him. The word ceaseless – *satata* – is repeated often. The key to the entire spiritual life is *satatasmaraṇa* – to ceaselessly remember.

In the book *The Way of the Pilgrim* the mission and purpose of the pilgrim or seeker in the story was to know what is meant by *constant remembrance*. It does not matter by what method or religion, it is vital

that you might be united – *yukta*, by using the mind and then later through perseverance you become He. This is why Lord Krishna says that when they are in *constant remembrance* of Me then I will give them the final *jñāna*.

The *buddhi* here does not mean the intellect alone. The word *buddhiyoga* can be interpreted in many ways. One way shows how the *buddhi* can be utilised in the practice of *yoga*. As long as you think you can catch the Lord intellectually, you may use logic and reasoning to identify the Lord but you will never reach Him.

Finally you come to know that after exhausting all of your mental resources you still cannot discover Him and that it is impossible for your mind to solve your conundrum. It is then that He reveals Himself to you. I used the word exhaustion because in that state of fatigue when you have given all your energy and time, you are completely obsessed with the Lord and the Lord alone, and you forget everything else. At this stage, after you have reached the limits of the intellect by just trying to use the power of the intellect and when at last, you know that this is not the way, then that profound insight that seems like despair but is actually closer to humility and surrender, that *bhāva* (attitude) becomes the way. Lord Krishna calls this *buddhiyoga*.

The second type of *buddhiyoga*, according to those who know, is the revelation that He decisively gives to those who are qualified, the *jñāna* or knowledge that proclaims you are That – ‘you are Me’. So, to find out ‘Who am I?’ and then is revealed the knowledge of the real Self – of who He is – which we now know, this is also called *buddhiyoga*. We come to understand that the *buddhi* does not mean intellect it means *jñāna*.

The Lord says those who are continuously engaged – how? It is with love! It is not a dry routine. It has to be done with love, but how can you love God? When once you know that ‘He is I’, that whenever you say, “I am going” or “I am coming”, He is my inner spirit and He is the one who runs the show. My Lord is my very boss who is seated right here within and you know you have to please Him and love Him. When you know that the Lord is your own Self then the love automatically comes because you love yourself the most and everybody else is always next in line.

By considering Him as your Self then you can love Him. You can only love a person when you have seen, known and been with. You

can love an unknown person only when you know that he is ‘Myself’. I can only truly find him out when I realise that he is me. In this way, I am trying to find out who is the real me. This is how love arises. It is for such seekers that Lord Krishna as ‘I’ ultimately gives the *jñāna*. By continuously remaining in that state, because initially it appears as if it is ‘I’, who is very much seated here, and yet we discover that there is no individual called Shantananda. In reality it is the totality called the Lord who is working here, and it is He who is engaged everywhere just as it is the very same electricity that is supplied to the various light bulbs in a house. It is only when we come to that knowledge do we finally reach Him.

In between then when we are neither here nor there, what is the process? It is by constantly thinking of somebody that we become ‘That’. Even when for two minutes if I think of this I become the transistor that transmits light. The moment a mother thinks of her child she has forgotten her body and only thinks of the child’s body. That is the same thing which happens with the Lord. When you think of the Lord as Krishna or Brahman then the mind becomes the *Krishnakaravṛtti* or the *Brahmākāravṛtti* but both of them are after all *vṛtti* – meaning a chain of thought. But by constantly thinking of the Lord with form it takes you beyond form because when everything disappears that which remains is the existence – *chaitanya* – which cannot disappear and that existence is the Lord. Thus you go in search of Him and this is what happens.

In the next verse He says:

*teṣāṃ evānukampārtham aham ajñānajaṃ tamaḥ |*  
*nāśayāmy ātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā ||*

Out of compassion for them, I,  
Who dwell within their own beings,  
Destroy the darkness born of ignorance  
With the shining lamp of knowledge.

10:11

Lord Krishna has explained that He has given us *buddhiyoga* and then goes on to explain a secondary clarification of the term but how does it remove the ignorance? How does it help us by knowing that

you are He? The moment you say pot – the image or idea of the pot comes before your mind. When you say radio transistor then the radio transistor appears before you. Similarly when you constantly think of Him and when the *Brahmakaravṛitti* comes, it is not a simple thought. The one who is thinking is ‘That’ – he is that *chaitanya* – that consciousness, and what you are thinking of, is that consciousness. A thought is only a link. This so-called entity which is thinking is consciousness, that which is thought of is consciousness and the totality is also consciousness. So He comes and resides in your Heart and removes the ignorance of Himself. It is not actually the *vṛitti* because the *vṛitti* is only *jaḍa*, that is, insentient and as such cannot at any time do anything independent because the power that activates it, is that which is behind — it is He.

Lord Krishna says that due to his compassion for them [‘them’ here refers to those people who are constantly engaged in remembrance of Him to whom He has given the *buddhiyoga*. And to explain this I had to start with chapter 10 verse 10]. The word *anukampa* means compassion – see how these words come about. When somebody is suffering he is shaken or disturbed and the dear one seeing that person suffering is also shaken. My distress resonates with the person that I am directly relating to who is suffering. The root of this word *anukampa* comes from the idea that one suffers in resonance (*anu*) with the suffering of another (*kampa*).

Q: Does that mean God’s compassion is stirred by our suffering or yearning and our fixing our mind on Him?

A: Exactly! The word compassion itself means that when He feels your suffering, only then it is called compassion (*com*: with; *passio*: to suffer).

*aham ajñānaḥ tamahaḥ nāśayāmy* – who finally removes ignorance, *ajñāna*? It is the ‘I’, The ‘I’ who as Myself removes the veil of ignorance. *Aham nāśayāmy* – I destroy it completely. By only removing it means that it can come again. Destruction means it is definitive and it cannot come back. Then what does He destroy? *Ajñānaḥ tamahaḥ* – the darkness which has veiled the ultimate Lord; the darkness which is due to the ignorance. It is because you do not know who you are that there is veiling and results in darkness. And it is this darkness which makes you unable to perceive things clearly.

Then how does He do it [remove the ignorance]? The seeker is consumed by *ajñāna* in his mind and therefore the Lord is seemingly somewhere else as a result of this ignorance, so how can He destroy it? I come in close contact with it but am in conflict with it – *aham ātmabhāvastha*.

Lord Krishna says that ‘I am there when he is thinking of the Self – the Lord – and it is in that stream of thought that ‘I’, the Lord, come and live’. The thought here refers to the thought of the form of the lord, that is, one of the various *ākāravṛtti* whether it may be *Brahmākāravṛtti*, *Rāmākāravṛtti* or *Kṛṣṇakāravṛtti*. It is not an empty thought of Ram. Lord Ram himself or Brahman or the Self comes and lives in that heart and destroys the ignorance. The seasoned spiritual aspirant understands that the ground work needs to be prepared. Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one’s thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady.”<sup>1</sup>

When once you become a thought full of God His power will break the veil of ignorance. This is the meaning of *ātmabhāvastha* – remaining in the Self. To probe ‘Who am I?’ is the meaning of *ātmabhāvastha* (you are neither the Self or the Brahman). He says in the *Gītā* that the person who resides in *ātma bhāva* and by remaining in that state will bring about *aham nāśayāmy*.

This refers to *teshām*, which means – to them, and there is no word or pronoun called he or she. This is actually meant to refer to the Lord – *aham ātmabhāvastha* which can be split into *ātma* – Self, *bhāva* – thought and *stha* – seated. The Lord says that the thought is empowered fully by His power because He comes and exists in that thought out of compassion for *teshām*, that is, us who seek the Lord.

How does he do it? *jñānadīpena bhāvata* – He Himself is *jñāna* because the Lord is nothing but the very knowledge ‘I am That’. This knowledge was already present but it was asleep and the moment it manifests, which means it has been lit – *jñānadīpa*, the lamp of knowledge reveals itself. Lord Krishna says that He comes and dwells there with His lamp of knowledge. But how? *Bhāvastha* – this *dīpa* is shining. It is not a dim spark. The Lord says that the luminescent lamp

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<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§91.

of knowledge which He holds in His hand overwhelms the thoughts of those who continuously think of Him.

*Teṣām evānukampārtham* – why does the compassion come about? The ardent seeker becomes tired and dispirited after making strenuous efforts to think of Him. Naturally the Lord feels for the poor souls who spend all their time in remembrance of Him, and therefore compassion arises. Then what is *anukampa*? It is the Grace which comes as a result of your effort. Your efforts may not ensure your success and it may fall short but it is a fact that you are making the best effort possible which is important for the Lord. If He is satisfied that you have spent your time for Him alone then the compassion and Grace arrives. Nobody can, out of their efforts alone, attain *mukti*. Therefore the Lord comes to finish what the devotee has started. There is a parable in the Bible which talks about a woman who had just two *annas* and nothing else, and even though we think it of no value to us it was all she had and when she surrendered it to the Lord, the Lord accepted her completely. We can be likened to beggars who beg for their food because in the search of happiness we go about knocking from one door to another, one birth to another.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem about a beggar who goes begging for his food from door to door and receives very little. Despondent he stands on the street when the king of kings comes along in a golden chariot and the beggar thinks that his day is made because if he asks for alms this king would give him a lot. But when the chariot stops the king of kings gets down from the chariot and extends his hand for alms. The beggar is astounded and though he has collected a bag of rice he very reluctantly takes but one handful from that bag and from that one handful he takes a single grain and ashamedly gives it to the Lord and walks away. When he goes home and empties his bag he discovers one grain of gold. ▲

# ASHRAM CALENDAR 2019

Pongal	Tuesday	15th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Sunday	20th January
Sundaram Iyer Day	Saturday	23rd February
Maha Sivaratri	Monday	4th March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	15th March
Telugu New Year Day	Saturday	6th April
Sri Rama Navami	Saturday	13th April
Tamil New Year Day	Sunday	14th April
Sri Bhagavan's 69th Aradhana	Thursday	2nd May
Maha Puja	Tuesday	28th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Saturday	13th July
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Tuesday	16th July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Sunday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Sunday	29th September
Saraswati Puja	Monday	7th October
Vijayadasami	Tuesday	8th October
Deepavali	Sunday	27th October
Karthigai Festival Commences	Sunday	1st December
Karthigai Deepam	Tuesday	10th December
Sri Bhagavan's 140th Jayanti	Saturday	11th January 2020

# The Efficacy of Devotion

LAKSHMI SREEDHAR

**H**ow does devotion help in ending the ego? Egolessness is the nature of Arunachala and Bhagavan. Whoever comes to Arunachala or Tiruvannamalai with reverence for Arunachala and Bhagavan, their ego will get suppressed the moment they enter the orbit of Arunachala which the scriptures say is three yojanas, which is about 30 miles. When they keep coming to Arunachala with devotion and earnestness, slowly their ego will begin to evaporate. Also, each time one thinks of Arunachala or Bhagavan, a slice of their ego will be removed.

That is why Bhagavan says in the opening verse of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, “O Arunachala, you destroy the ego of those who think of You (steadily) in their mind.” Bhagavan has said that if we take but one step towards Him, He will take ten steps towards us – such is

Lakshmi Sreedhar lives in Hyderabad and is a long-standing devotee of Bhagavan. She first came to the Ashram when she was just a baby in the year 1964. After a long gap, she returned in 2003 and reconnected with Bhagavan. Since then she and her family are frequent visitors to the Ashram. She is also a committee member of the Chinmaya Mission, Hyderabad.

His compassion. He that has come under His gracious look shall be saved and will not be forsaken like the prey that cannot escape the tiger's jaws. But we have to fall a prey to Him and not to the world of maya and ego. Ego is our greatest enemy. A mind devoid of it is our greatest friend. An egoistic person hurts a number of people and leads a very wrong life.

A virtuous person who bears hurts patiently is wholly praiseworthy. Sage Tiruvalluvar says that a person who harasses another gets but fleeting joy, whereas one who bears the harassment gets glory for all time (*Kural* 156); just as the earth bears with the people who dig it, so too it is best to bear with those who hurt our feelings (*Kural* 151). Thus sages have advocated patience as an important virtue to be cultivated in life. If we enquire as to who is hurt, we will be able to realise that it is only our ego that is hurt, not the body or Self.

The ego is not me but something apart from me. Such an enquiry will help us to attain a proper understanding and end our hurt feelings speedily. Thus Bhagavan's method of enquiry is the fastest way to bring an agitated mind under control. If the mind becomes emotional it becomes weak and loses control. Thus we should strive to end all emotions and agitations that weaken the mind.

Bhagavan lays a lot of emphasis on 'giving up' many things we cling to in life — not just desires and attachments but also hurt feelings, unwanted memories of the past, fixed notions, expectations, bad habits, unwanted things in the house, etc. We should not load our mind with unwanted thoughts and information which will only make it heavy. When we can leave off all unwanted things in the mind, the mind will always be light and will die off fast.

The art of living is truly the art of leaving off things which are detrimental to our spiritual progress. The more we learn to leave, the greater will be our inner peace and happiness. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kural* 341: "From whatever things you get detached and leave off, through them you will certainly not suffer." The ability to leave off troublesome matters quickly to Bhagavan in a spirit of surrender and trust is the key to peace and spiritual progress. When we leave off problems to Bhagavan, He has an astonishing way of making things happen at the right time in the right manner. It may appear to be easy but is the most difficult thing to do. One has to have a lot of

trust, understanding and devotion to Bhagavan. It is only the ego and attachment that makes us cling to unsolvable problems. Ego makes us think we can solve them and attachment makes us hold on where we have to leave. Whoever can leave wins as in the game of tug-of-war. When we let go with understanding, for which the spirit of enquiry must be kept alive always, we go above the karma and evolve and all conflicts cease.

There are three ways to learn in life:

1) One who is alert and has less ego learns and corrects himself by just seeing others.

2) One who has more ego learns and corrects himself when he is pointed out and he listens. Fortunate are the ones whose mistakes are pointed out. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kural* 448, “The king who is without the protection of a wise man who can rebuke him boldly whenever he goes on the wrong path will perish even if he does not have enemies.”

3) One who has much more ego learns only when a blow comes to him. For example, a smoker who does not give up his smoking habit even when he sees others suffer or when he is told by his family, thinking that nothing will happen to him. But when he gets the symptoms of cancer, he gets scared and stops smoking or if he is a drunkard he gives up drinking when his liver is affected.

But there is a fourth category of incorrigible people who are most ignorant and egoistic. They do not wake up even when a blow comes to them. They are so dull that they cannot learn and correct themselves even from blows. So they commit the same mistakes again and again leading to more *karmas* and *janma*-s. They are like the rocks which break up only through repeated blows. Thus changes take place for them only slowly over a long period of time over several *janma*-s.

A wise man has a keen insight and is able to see his faults as and when he commits them or when they are pointed out, and is able to correct them. Sometimes, depending upon his mental maturity he can stop them at the thought-level itself before they become an action. As he is very alert, he is able to enquire and understand his mistakes.

Even in enquiry, we can arrive at the right understanding only if we enquire with an open mind setting aside our ego. But if we enquire with the feeling that we are right, we will not be able to see

our fault. Thus we have to somehow conquer this ego and destroy it for the mind to reach its source and merge in it. Only when the mind merges in the Self, there will be *mukti*.

Why are people so unwilling to change their way of life? For instance, if a person is habituated to smoking, drinking, gluttony, wrong eating and other vices and sense-pleasures, he will think that life would become a dreary waste if these were given up. As long as the soul does not get the right food it needs and deserves, it remains content to roam in the world and feed upon the base pleasures of the world. Thus until one realises the true purpose of life or seeks something higher in life than what he has already experienced and is saturated by, he will not be interested in giving up things that give him joy in the present even though they may be detrimental to spiritual progress. Unless one realises that it is meaningless to come back again and again to this world of impermanence and misery, one would not like to give up on things that one clings to at present. Bhagavan says in *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* stanza 8, “O Arunachala, show me your beauty so that by seeing you, my mind that is restlessly wandering in the world may (turn towards you and) subside.” ▲

## Mirrors

Suresh Kailash

Mirrors seduce to multiply,  
The vile ‘I-am-the-body’ lie,  
No matter what a mirror’s size,  
It has me firmly in its vice,

So, till this fiction I can forsake,  
Or it’s you I see and not my face,  
Less years of ill luck come my way,  
Ramana, may all mirrors break.

# Sri Mahaswami

## The Sage with Eyes of Light

SERGE DEMETRIAN

*The following is the first of a series of extracts from a manuscript titled Sri Mahaswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhātipati Jagadguru Śrī Sañkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994. At some point in the future the manuscript will be published in its entirety.*

*Serge Demetrian attained samādhi at Tiruvannamalai on 4th October 2018.*

### **Secunderabad, Monday, 16th August 1968**

**O**n the morning of the 16th August, I was welcomed at the railway-station by my hosts, two brothers, both university professors at Hyderabad, and by two friends from Madras who had come earlier, all of them Indians. The much anticipated meeting with the *Mahāswami* was to take place on that very afternoon by 4 pm at Secunderabad, the twin city of Hyderabad.

Unusually, Śrī Mahāswami was residing in the company of his successor, the Junior Swami, in Padmarao Nagar of Secunderabad. Although belonging to an order of itinerant monks who only walk

and frequently change their dwelling place, there is an interval each year, normally in the months of July and August, when *sannyāsin*-s reside in one place and devote their time to philosophical studies. This period commences with an important *pūjā* during which, by tradition, there is the worship of the great sage Vyāsa, a form of Śrī Krishna, and the Master of Wisdom par excellence.

There was a group of seven of us who started by car after lunch. In the party were our two hosts along with their spouses, my two friends from Madras and myself. All the men of our group wear a *dhoti*, the traditional dress of southern Indians; our shirts have been replaced by shawls that have to be wound round the waist or the chest when we stood or sat before Śrī Mahāswami or in the temples. The women wore traditional saris.

We stopped before a place that looked like a factory. On a large board was a sign: Swarajya Press, which was a printing press firm. We entered and passed through some office buildings and reached a narrow courtyard. We are invited to sit cross-legged on a large bluish carpet stretched at the feet of a five steps stair-case leading up to a narrow platform, about one metre above us. Behind the platform there was a door where Śrī Mahāswami would appear. One could see inside the door the beginnings of a large hall. From the position of the sun I draw the conclusion that we are facing north, that is the traditional way to sit or stand when one comes in front of a Sage ... was it by chance?

I looked across the opening of the door towards the hall behind, a dark space, black and deep as the abyss of time, when suddenly, quite far away, the obscurity faintly shivered. Its centre was transformed by a coloured undulation. A shade which progressively passed into orange developed. It became concentrated and all of a sudden in the middle of the threshold of the door there appeared Śrī Mahāswami.

He stood for a long minute in front of us. He is an exceptional being. Harmony, discreet power, and understanding: this was the bundle of the first impressions. There was nothing that shocked one's sensitivity, neither posture nor gesture. He seemed to possess a self-contained force effortlessly emanating from him while the sharpness of his mind was instantly apparent.



In stature, he was medium to under medium size, somewhat below 1 metre and 50 centimetres, but he looked taller due to the aura that surrounded him. He was lean and his more than 70 years did not seem a burden to him. The face was of an agreeable oval form and crowned by a high and even forehead that was dominated by the eyes. From the distance where I stood, they seemed bright, deep and penetrating. I guessed the expressive traits of the rest of the face, aside from a strong but well-shaped nose, were concealed by the short, white beard that framed the face and accentuated the high forehead. His long and fine ears were remarkable.

He was clad in a simple, hand-woven, drab, orange ochre cloth, which wound around his waist from the knees upward leaving uncovered the old gold skin of his slender legs. The upper part of the clothing was wrapped like a cape over the shoulders and the head. In the right hand was kept a water-vessel made out of polished brown wood. He held to his chest in the interior angle of the left elbow his monk staff, *daṇḍa*, with an ochre folded-up cloth (*brahma-sutra*) near the top that, being very sacred, contains the concentrated power of the *sannyāśī*. The fingers of his left hand touched a simple string of *rudrakṣa* beads round his neck. This simply dressed monk demonstrated the powerful continuity of a direct spiritual line established more than two thousand years ago. Śrī Mahāswami seemed to come directly out of an ancient bas-relief carved in granite by his spiritual ancestor who had established the monastic order to which he belonged.

Śrī Mahāswami, the spiritual head of hundreds of millions of Hindus did not wear any emblem of his position. Only the radiance of his personality would distinguish him from the barefooted and saffron clad monks or *sadhu*-s, whom one frequently observes on the roads of southern India.

We were all standing with our hands in *añjali*; some bowed and put down in front of him an offering of large plate-like baskets of flowers or fruits. Then, because the yard was small and cramped, everybody looked for a place to fully prostrate; I half prostrated on the ground.

He patiently waited for us to finish, then through a gesture invited us to take our place on the large carpet spread over the ground. He sat down easily, legs crossed on the narrow platform where an

assistant had spread a little yellow mat of wrapped herbs and then had immediately withdrawn. Śrī Mahāswami, facing south, and five steps above the yard in which we are seated, allowed us to see him without any hindrance. He deposited carefully his *danḍa* against the wall on his left side and the water vessel on the ground on his right side.

The leader of our group, the elder of my friends from Madras, who will be the interpreter, stood on the left side of the platform. The introductions started. I was the first:

“Mister Demetrian is a research fellow in philosophy; he comes from Romania”, he said in English as I came up to stand in front of Śrī Mahāswami.

Śrī Mahāswami tilted his head on one side so as to better hear and asked my name to be repeated. I stood straight, exactly in front of him, at about two metres distance. His eyes pierced me and his sight reached the bottom of my heart.

“Demetrian, Demetrian,” he pronounced clearly. Then, after a moment, when he seemed having searched in his memory, he shook his head approvingly and showed by a sign that I was to sit once again. I felt his piercing eyes directly penetrating me as I went back to my place, slightly behind the group, but exactly in front of him, and only then he passed to the next person in the audience.

All the members of the group were introduced in turn. Each one stood, spoke his name and that of his spouse, stated briefly who he was and sat again. They were speaking Telugu, the local language. The round of introductions came to an end at the left of the Mahāswami. Although my friends from Madras were well known to the Mahāswami since a long time at the *math* they have still repeated their names.

We are sitting now on our places on the carpet and we wait. Śrī Mahāswami is thoughtful; he does not seem in a hurry. Then he addresses, in Telugu, each one of our group in front of me. As the discussion proceeds slowly, in a sustained but leisurely manner, I made good use of my vantage point in front of him and at some two and a half metres distance, by taking my own time observing him closely.

As he is placed above us, his ochre robe is outlined sharply against the dark space of the doorway and of the hall behind him. Śrī Mahāswami sits crossed-legged and straight, but with an ease

and distinction that does not intimidate his interlocutors. His attitude helps them to open themselves up. He vaguely resembles a dear and respected professor in biology who had impressed me in secondary school at Bucharest.

I observe that, unlike the majority of the Indians, his skin is fair towards gold and his robe seems to accentuate this particular shade. His gestures are restrained but quite vivacious as all his mobile body takes part in the discussion. He possesses an animate language of the hands; the movements of his fingers accompany, enlarge and underline his words. Especially when he questions or when he wants to stress an idea he uses some characteristic signs that render the talk more alive and comprehensible.

He is attentive at every word of his questioner and rarely smiles. Often he stops asking for a phrase to be repeated and he remains thoughtful a while before answering, especially when someone puts a question or submits a demand. From time to time he looks above us and around us.

Suddenly he observed how some young boys who were in the yard had come too near on his left side, and could topple his *danda*. He stopped talking, seized his stick – I noticed the mobility of his fingers, which easily revert backwards – and by a discreet but effectual gesture he warned them, as if he wanted to strike them. The boys quickly moved away.

There is the Indian story of a too gentle young sadhu, who was manhandled by a lout, which came into my mind. When the disciple reported the facts to his master, he received an unexpected scolding:

“Why did you not protect yourself?”

“Oh, master, replied the disciple, is it not yourself who had enjoined us to be gentle toward every living being?”

“That is true,” was the reply of the master, “but I did not stop you from making a gesture as if to defend yourself!”

Śrī Mahāswami continued his enquiries with the members of our group. There was a royal composure in his attitude, his gestures and his way of speaking. Is it that he was accustomed to the practice of these types of encounters after more than sixty years of going up and down the Indian sub-continent? Is it his extended culture or his vast human experience?

One could remain at these questions, if there were not his eyes ... I could not stop admiring them. They were incomparable wells through which a force seemed to run in two directions: towards the exterior penetrating everything, seeing everything, understanding everything, and also towards the interior when the force returned to its source, to the heart of Śrī Mahāswami, loaded with what it could have chosen to take from observing our hearts. Those eyes had the capacity to embrace our whole heart if they so wished. To try to comprehend the mystery of this double current would involve a total and permanent devotion, but on the strict condition that he would accept it. However, the time was running short; Śrī Mahāswami had reached the last but one of the visitors who preceded me.

I threw a short look behind, when I heard some commotion. Some workers and officers of the factory stood in close array perched on boxes, benches and some even climbed up a ladder. This gathering at the feet of Śrī Mahāswami was an uncommon event and the audience granted to a foreigner only enhanced their interest.

Śrī Mahāswami took a longer time with the last visitor before me. Now he had the choice between two eventualities: to address me or to overlap me and address my friends from Madras, at his left side. I was alert waiting for any of these eventualities. The moment of the choice came. He leaned over with his forehead in front and allowed himself a pause for reflection. The corner of his cloth covering his head had slipped. I was surprised by the position of the hairs on his head. In the middle, from front towards the back there was a white and brilliant crest two inches in width and six inches in length: this crest was connected behind with the hair on the occipital bone and on the temples. One could have thought that he was wearing the sign of a trident on his white silvery short hair with the spikes turned to the front.

Śrī Mahāswami lifted his head and called the elder of my friends from Madras, Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan; he spoke to him in Tamil while pointing his hand at me. In-between their exchange I stood up.

My Madras friend addressed me in English: “Śrī Mahāswami enquires when did you arrive in India?” In this country it is a courtesy introduction question as soon as you are known a little.

“In this life on the 16th December, 1967 round 5 o’clock in the morning in Bombay at the Santa Cruz airport,” flashed my reply. I did not add that it was raining, a totally out of season event.

Śrī Mahāswami attentively listened and repeated in English: “In this life ...” A smile brightened his face which until then had been mostly serious and concentrated. The members of our group laughed and commented among themselves with a knowing look: “In this life ...” They translate my words into Telugu to their spouses. Behind me, where the number of employees of the enterprise had swollen in size, I could hear the English speaking ones doing the same for the benefit of the non-English speaking ones. So my first reply scored the bull’s eye; that is, I did not miss my entry cue for the beginning of an exchange with the Mahāswami. But I reminded myself: Let us keep a cool head: as per my information, Śrī Mahāswami is an expert in the art of questioning.

“Since when are you interested in India?”, he asks me in Tamil through my friend who translated into English.

“I had always a specific interest in India and its culture but my enthusiasm arose when, at the age of seventeen, in Romania, I came across the book *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton.”

“Did you study this book?” he continues.

“Yes, I read it thrice and I had been struck by the audience granted by Śrī Mahāswami to the author at Chenglepattu, then by the author’s devotion towards Śrī Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai.” I stopped for a while, but, encouraged by his benevolent look, I restarted: “... by that time I wanted to come immediately to India, but the war had stopped me; I had to wait for twenty seven years.”

Śrī Mahāswami wore a serious air; he showed a discreet sign of blessing with the palm of his open right hand towards me.

“What did you do in the meanwhile?” he resumed.

“I studied in the secondary school, then Medicine and Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. I have worked as a medical doctor until the age of forty, when unexpectedly I started writing on Indian culture.”

“Did you write a lot?”

I listed my articles, translations, books and other works published or, due to the war not published. I then spoke about my first book, a



new edition of an anthology of Indian literary fragments by a great Romanian poet. I mentioned that it is in print. As a proof I brought out of my bag a copy: a small but smart brown book which I was able to smuggle out of Romania despite the severe border checking imposed by the then totalitarian regime. I offered it, feigning indifference, on the plate placed at the bottom of the staircase. Someone lifted the basket-plate to within the reach of Śrī Mahāswami, as following the traditional rules one should not give anything directly into the hand of a *sannyāsin*. He takes the book, brings it very near to his eyes and reads loudly:

“*Antologie Sanskrita* by George Cosbuc.”

We can be sure that since the foundation of the monastic order of Śrī Mahāswami, more than two millenaries ago, it was the first time that the Romanian language was uttered by the mouth of a head of this *math*. I was happy that the word ‘Sanskrit’ was pronounced by him along with the name of an important Romanian poet. My friends from Madras seem pleased, although I did not inform them about my intention to offer a book to Śrī Mahāswami. Admiring whispers arose in front, from the circle of the intellectuals and behind me, in the group of workers.

“What sort of language is the Romanian, is it not akin to French?” enquired Śrī Mahāswami, keeping the book in his hand.

“Yes, I replied. The French and the Romanian languages derive from Latin; but even Latin was a language of the Indo-European group of languages that is close to Sanskrit.” I added some philological remarks on an original language common to Sanskrit and to the majority of European languages.

Śrī Mahāswami listened with great interest.

“That explains the similarities between the European languages and Sanskrit”, he concluded.

Then he started to leaf through the book commencing with its last pages, a sound choice as there laid the table of contents; he brought the book close to his eyes and was effectively reading, in Romanian, line after line; and this for several minutes. He chose to comment on the excerpts of the Rāmāyaṇa. This great epic, known and beloved in all of India, has been translated from Sanskrit and interpreted for centuries in almost all the languages of the Indian sub-continent.

“Are the Romanians interested in the Rāmāyaṇa?” asked Śrī Mahāswami.

“There is a growing interest as people discover the richness of the Indian culture. Before leaving for India I have translated myself from English the condensed rendering of the Rāmāyaṇa written by C. Rajagopalachari. The book had just come out, in Romania, but I do not yet have the copies.”

“You had translated then the Rāmāyaṇa into Romanian?” inquired Śrī Mahāswami with a nuance of amazement.

The name ‘Rāmāyaṇa’ created a surprised reaction both with the intellectuals before me, and with the workers, behind me. I heard comments and whispers. My friends from Madras do not show it, but one can guess how much they are pleased: ‘We have not introduced an ordinary person ...’ As for me I wear a modest and detached look, that, I am sure, befits me! Śrī Mahāswami seems to have appreciated my statements. Was it only to flatter me? I do not think so, he sees further than that.

He changed the topic. “Now you are working at the Madras University. What is the subject of your research?” he continued.

I hastily replied:

“The philosophy of a contemporary French thinker, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, considered from the point-view of Vedānta.”

“What is the importance of this work?”

A question that hits the point, I am thinking, and then I try to make myself clear.

“Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was a renowned palaeontologist who died in 1950; he thought deeply about the fundamental data of the discipline he practised. His broad conclusions come very near to Vedānta principles although he never studied Indian Philosophy systematically. Being a Jesuit father, he was a follower of Christian spirituality. The life and the work of this scientist is a worthwhile subject of research to me, as both his activities, spiritual research and scientific research in the realm of natural sciences went hand in hand.”

Śrī Mahāswami listened attentively to the translation of my friend from Madras; he made him repeat some expressions; then he thought a while and asked:

“Did you have some personal interest in this study?”

Here once again he hit the bull's eye. It was true that for some time I had identified myself with this scientist who had become a philosopher while practising a spiritual life. I had to state it now in public.

“Yes, I must declare that for some time I have been captivated by his way, as a man of Religion, to explain the Creation of the Universe and the Appearance of Man.”

Śrī Mahāswami seemed to await for the rest of my confessions. I had to continue:

“However the spiritual research gained the upper hand and now I am at a point where only a Master of Wisdom can guide me.”

Shri Mahāswami remained silent. I felt that I should let out the last thought kept secret until then:

“I came to India in order to find my guide ...” and I heaved a great sigh of relief.

He did not show any surprise; he simply enquired:

“And did you search for a long time?”

Really one cannot conceal anything from him! ...

“I have visited several famous places and I was impressed by the sanctity of those areas”, I said, trying not to go too far in my appraisals.

It was true that during my peregrinations, before I met him, I had come across, here and there, the disciples of other disciples who had closely known a Great Master. Have I been too demanding? Did I search without much conviction? As to the burning point of the personal Master I felt I should not stress it now. I had arrived in India for a long stretch of studies, and ready to settle down in India, if necessary: I had no ties elsewhere and I liked the general atmosphere. It was as if I had all the time before me. I gave out some personal details:

“I am a bachelor, a vegetarian....”

“Purely vegetarian,” chimed in my friends from Madras, “And he cooks alone his food”.

A large smile brightens up the face of Śrī Mahāswami. Both groups, the intellectuals in front of me and the workers behind, seem impressed. All comment, laugh and show surprise: a European who has translated the Rāmāyaṇa into an exotic language; who is serious about the high spiritual tradition of India; a bachelor, vegetarian and who in addition cooks for himself – this is not to be found every day!

Some turn admiring looks towards me, the others bend forward in order to see me better. Those from behind call their friends and point with their fingers towards the rare bird, giving a résumé about what they have heard.

Śrī Mahāswami stares at me for a long period once again. I try to hold onto his look but it is too powerful for me: I have to lower my eyes. He shows once again the open palm of his right hand in a calming gesture. He shakes his head gently in a sign of approval and points to me that I can sit. He turns towards the next ones, my friends from Madras, who stand at his left. The discussion continues in Tamil. He seems aware of every important cultural event from this important town.

I have once again the opportunity to contemplate him, to my heart's content. He seems in perfect harmony with himself, with the world, with God. Without any doubt, I was in front of an exceptional being. Is he a saint? More than a saint, I think. I feel he is one of those very rare ones, who can lead a worthy seeker to the Wisdom. He fits exactly with the image I had about a Great Sage.

I am already dazzled with his sharp mind and the power he radiates.

The audience neared its end. Śrī Mahāswami looked at us and across us, I would say, perhaps dwelling a little more on me, or rather in me. The leader of our group stood up; it was the signal for us to stand too. Everyone tried their best to do their prostration, as a parting greeting, I observed how Śrī Mahāswami waits. I perform, stretching myself with all my length in the very traditional prostration, which I had carefully rehearsed before leaving Madras. This was a surprise to the onlookers, who, perched as they were at their vantage points, saw everything. When we had all finished, Śrī Mahāswami bent a little and chose in the plate of gifts near him two oranges among the fruits offered by the visitors. He puts them on the stair just below the platform on which he was sitting, and by his finger he indicated one to me and by a circular movement of the hand he allotted the second to all the other members of our group. I hasten towards my orange and held it like a treasure.

Shri Mahāswami stood up with a surprising ease for an elder person who had just been sitting for two hours. He took his water vessel in the right hand and the *danda* under the other arm; with his left fingers

he touches his necklace of *rudrakṣa* beads. He stands for a long while, thoughtful. His old golden hue and his orange cloths contrast sharply with the obscure hall at the back. The same restrained presence, the same measure in his gestures. At last, a short look over us, stopping perhaps for a short second over me, then he turns without haste to his right towards the space that was waiting behind, black and deep as the chasm of eternity. He slips inside slowly. His aura of matt light dissolves and the pale orange undulation fades away. There is a last vibration in that obscurity from which he took shape by his own will, and he melts away, as if in his own element.

I had come nearer the door on the right side of the staircase with five steps; in front of me on the platform, the little yellow mat was still warm with his presence. The plate with offerings had been taken away but some little white flowers had fallen on the ground. I pick up one; it has more than a faint fragrance, perhaps more like a surplus of light. Who is the mysterious being who has been here and who seems so perfect? An overwhelming urge, almost childish, pulled me into an introspective mood to try and know him; as if to surround and thus determine who he was. God listens to children. Some even say that He is Himself a great child who plays with *māyā*, the toy of the eternal Illusion, creating and absorbing constantly universe after universe.

I was unaware of what was to happen in the years to come. It was a holy insouciance that protected me. I turned towards the friends and onlookers who were discreetly waiting for me. All wanted to congratulate me, touch me and hear my voice. I smiled, greeted and spoke to as many people I could. When the majority seemed satisfied I thought it was possible to retire from the scene. I cast for the last time a look over the narrow courtyard, now empty, with its bluish carpet left alone in the subdued light of a day's end. How empty it was now.

Who was this marvellous being? For all that I heard about him is less than a clod of earth before a majestic mountain.

Who can know him, who would limit him?... Perhaps only his equals. But who equals God?...

Moving slowly away, still uplifted and possessed by the feeling of permanence at the touch of the Permanence Itself, I have the certitude

the one I just met is none other than That. The One about whom the sages speak when they return from their ecstasy. Yes, he was that one, who, through his mere goodwill appears sometimes among men and reveals Himself by shaking the foundations of civilisation.

Along with the unspeakable bliss of having been able to touch him with these mortal eyes (and mind), I have a single doubt: shall I be pure enough and worthy to always keep in my heart His blessed image as long as I have to wander in this transitory world?

My friends from Madras and myself took us to our place of residence in the spacious Indian car of our hosts. We had forgotten to change our clothes for the more formal town dress. At the silent dinner later, we kept the same clothes that we had worn for our momentous meeting; after all, they reminded us all of Śrī Mahāswami. ▲

## Sonnet

Upahar

In childhood, on a night aflame with stars,  
gazing in wonder from a lonely hill-top  
at drifting galaxies remote and vast,  
you knew, with a sudden turn of joy: the sky  
belonged to you, was spun from your own love.

Youth was a flood of mysteries and gifts,  
the heart forever broken and renewed;  
great nature moved you to forgetfulness,  
the fire sang and cast a dancing shadow.

All in good time, a journey ripened in you,  
like being born, like dying; a silent light,  
a dark unknowing; and, wondrous now, the presence,  
simply forever yours, of Love itself  
shines as the single and eternal sky.



# Brahma Vidya

## A Commonsense Approach

I.S. MADUGULA

In my village in India, in the ‘good old days’ of the ’40s and 50’s, whenever someone wanted to demystify a semi-complex idea or process, they would start by saying that it was not ‘*brahma vidyā*.’ The implication, of course, was that the issue could be tackled rather easily. The more important underlying notion was that *brahma vidyā* was the most difficult form of knowledge that there was.

Today, when we downplay the complexity of an issue, we would say that it’s not rocket science.

I aim to show in this piece that, while rocket science may be tough for most of us to crack, *brahma vidyā* is not. By this I don’t at all mean that it is as easy as a-b-c. But I mean that by following the obvious a-b-c’s of our intuition, our common sense, we can get a pretty good idea of what it is and how it works. The subject is lofty, but it can be largely comprehended via the simple means of reasoning that we already have at our disposal.

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What does *brahma vidyā* entail? What do we mean by the expression? It is the knowledge of Brahman. So, what's Brahman? And how do we know it? So it's a two-part investigation.

We will seek the help of scholars for the first part, Brahman.

The word used in the Upanishads to indicate the supreme reality is *brahman*. It is derived from the root *bṛh*, 'to grow, to burst forth.'... Śaṅkara derives the word *brahman* from the root *bṛhati* to exceed...<sup>1</sup>

The German Indologist, a friend of Swami Vivekananda who liked to call himself 'Deva Sena' describes Brahman as the

creative principle which lies realized in the whole world. Brahman is a key concept found in the Cosmic Principle. In the Upanishads, it has been variously described as *sat-cit-ānanda* (truth-consciousness-bliss) and as the unchanging, permanent, highest reality.<sup>2</sup>

Vedanta tells us that we are trying to define the undefinable, *anirvacanīya*. For our purposes, however, we need a working knowledge of the concept. We've got to start somewhere.

While trying to get a handle on Brahman, let's introduce the related (we will presently say, identical) concept of *Ātman*.

"The word '*ātman*' is derived from the root word '*an*' which means to breathe. It is the breath of life... When we cast the self free from all outward events, there arises from the inward depths an experience, secret and wonderful, strange and great. It is the miracle of Self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna*... As Brahman is the eternal quiet underneath the drive and activity of the universe, so *Ātman* is the foundational reality underlying the conscious powers of the individual, the inward ground of the human soul. There is an ultimate depth to our life below the plane of thinking and striving. The *Ātman* is the super reality of the *jīva*, the individual ego."<sup>3</sup>

So the same Reality is called Brahman at the cosmic level and *Ātman* at the individual level. When dwelling inside the human body it is *Ātman* or soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Radhakrishnan, S., *The Principal Upanishads*, HarperCollins India, 2000, p.52.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, 'Brahman.'

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., Radhakrishnan, pp.73-74.

Now, let's take a quick break from the scholarly definitions of Brahman. If we but focus briefly on our daily lives, this is what happens.

Man is a thinking creature. He will never stop thinking as long as he is awake. The process, slightly modified, continues in his dreams. The mind carries on no matter what he is doing. So much so that we are scared to think of what happens when we don't think. We are so programmed to keep thinking 24/7, that it is frightening to imagine what it would be like if we stop thinking for a moment. We are so used to noise that silence would be deafening. Thinking of course is necessary to perform some tasks, but the mind continues to jump from thought to thought in an unbroken chain. We do this all our lives habitually, and probably lazily, and never even think to stop thinking and see what it feels like.

But, unbeknownst to us, there is an inner urge in each of us to stop thinking, to be silent, to be still. How do we know it? From experience. When we are tired at the end of the day or after finishing some physically demanding activity, we just want to lie down, close our eyes, and just relax. We feel so exhausted that even thoughts exacerbate our fatigue. Of course, sleep follows in no time and, after a few hours, we feel refreshed and ready to tackle the world once again.

One of the reasons we go to the temple is to get away from the noise pollution of the outside world. That it is a house of God helps our effort to focus our minds on a single subject, God. That focus drives away all other thoughts and helps us concentrate. Once out of the temple, we feel so visibly refreshed and energized.

So there's got to be something to shutting down the mind. Then, again, once we exit the temple, it's the same story until the next temple visit. This is so because we have a fear of the mental void called silence. Is it rational? On the one hand, we like to de-clutter our mind, give it a rest, and enjoy the peace and quiet of a perfectly calm mind. On the other, we are scared that we are missing something and are ceasing to exist if we don't think.

Something like this thinking prompted the 'rationalist' French philosopher Descartes to prove his existence by means of the formula *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Really? We don't exist when we don't think? Of course, he meant a lot more by this formula than

what we are saying here. He was referring to the interconnectedness of all truth and the need to unify them to arrive at the single Truth.

So it looks like our basic problem is our fear of a mental vacuum. We don't know what to do with an empty mind. We feel lost. Addressing this issue, Sankara says,

When you think of an object, your mind becomes that object.  
When there is no object, it becomes void. So practice perfection  
by filling your mind with Brahman.<sup>4</sup>

Let's think it out a little more. What do we mean by void when we say our minds become empty when we stop thinking? It is a blank only in the sense that there are thoughts based on an object or idea. But suppose we focus on that very blank as much as we can. Then we become that blank. What happens then? We begin to see that blank without thinking about it. That is, the seer fills that blank fully and the seer begins to take a tangible existence. This is what Sankara means by perfection, existence, consciousness, Brahman. Brahman is another name for this plenitude of consciousness together with its inherent bliss. An easy way to practice this is to see only Brahman, the Supreme Being, or a favourite deity *wherever the mind goes*.<sup>5</sup>

The second part of our subject is *vidyā*, roughly translated as knowledge. We run into a tricky situation right off. By definition, Brahman is unknowable; it is not a subject of knowledge. So how do we deal with it? Since we cannot directly acquire that knowledge, we can gain it through the destruction of its opposite, *avidyā*, ignorance or nescience. But then only *vidyā* can destroy *avidyā*. Is this a vicious circle? Luckily, no. We already possess the *vidyā* that is needed to destroy ignorance. It is innate. All of us have it. We just have to apply it.

How do we do that? What is the nature of our ignorance? Our ignorance lies in our failure to see what is in front of our noses. In our inability to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the permanent and the impermanent, the Self and the non-Self. We just have to get rid of the notion that the world is real and permanent. It is not real because it is brought into temporary existence through our mind and

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<sup>4</sup> *Aparokṣānubhūti*, 129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

the senses. It is clearly subject to continual change and annihilation. Here now, gone tomorrow.

We get rid of our ignorance by realizing the evanescence of creation. What we see is not what we get. It is the shadow of some other underlying substance. It is a projection on the screen of our consciousness. It is only an object and can never be the subject, the seen and never the seer. Who is the seer? The ever-present ever-shining 'I' (*aham*) in each of us. It is the 'I' who sees everything, not the body-part eye. All perception is possible because of the seer, the 'I'.

Bhagavan explains this phenomenon in his unique way:

*Aham* ('I') is known to everyone. Brahman abides as *Aham* in everyone... The 'I' is already Brahman.

... Think 'I' 'I' 'I' and hold to that one thought to the exclusion of all others.<sup>6</sup>

Having explained how we can realize Brahman as *Aham*, he goes on to show how it can be achieved in practice:

'I am Brahman' is an aid to concentration. It keeps off other thoughts. That one thought alone persists. See whose is that thought. It will be found to be from 'I.' Wherefrom is the 'I'-thought? Probe into it. The 'I'-thought will vanish. The Supreme Self will shine forth of itself. No further effort will be needed.<sup>7</sup>

As we start delving into our inner being, soon we will feel a sense of empowerment that cannot be explained but that informs all our activities and pursuits. We will become convinced that we can do whatever we set out to do.

Bhagavan clinches the argument by showing that there is nothing but Brahman/Ātman by an example from a Upanishad:

There is always consciousness and nothing but that... If there is only consciousness and nothing but it, the meaning of the scripture *ātmanastu kāmāya sarvān priyam bhavati* – (All are dear because of the love of the Self) – becomes clear.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§266.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Talk§202.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Talk§340. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.5.6.

Once we realize that ‘I-ness,’ or Brahman-ness or Ātman-ness is our natural state, the bliss we enjoy is immediate and unmistakable. We can face life boldly and fearlessly, because nothing will faze us. Because we are Brahman, there is no other and, as they say, fear arises only if there is another. We can accomplish anything we set our minds to, including rocket science. Our powers will be limitless, our joy boundless. Paraphrasing the words of Sankara,<sup>9</sup>

After we realize Brahman, there is nothing else to be realized; there is no further knowledge to be gained. After we have seen Brahman, there is nothing else to be seen; when Brahman is known, there is nothing more to be known. The one Non-dual, Infinite, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss fills the entire universe. All objects and actions are suffused by Brahman like butter in milk. The sun and the moon are illuminated by Brahman, but it is not illuminated by them. It is neither large nor small, neither short nor long, it is birthless, changeless, formless, and devoid of attributes like name and colour. Brahman is the opposite of the world; there is nothing other than Brahman. All that is perceived by the senses is Brahman only and nothing else. Though Brahman as Pure Consciousness is omnipresent, one can see it only through the awakened intellect and not through blurred vision.<sup>9</sup>

He exhorts us:

O noble soul, this is how you must pass your days – see the Atman everywhere, enjoy the bliss...Know that you are the Atman, ever blissful...and find the ultimate peace. Remain absorbed in the joy which is silence...in which the intellect ceases to occupy itself with the unreal.<sup>10</sup>

What is the root cause of all our *samsara*-related pain? It’s our ego – our wrong notion that we are doing and we are suffering. But are we, really? If we are the transcendental Atman/Brahman by definition as asserted in *aham brahmāsmi* and *tattvamasi*, it is the mind/ego that thinks it is suffering. Once it is zapped through real knowledge, the

<sup>9</sup> *Ātmabodha*, 54 ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Shankara’s Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, 3rd ed., tr. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1978). p.120. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 524 ff.

*samsāra* vanishes. Therefore, we should always abide in our own pure Self, untainted by the mind/ego. Look at the kind of fun such a ‘knowledgeable’ person, the *brahmavid*, has:

No matter what he is doing – walking, standing, sitting or lying down – the illumined seer whose delight is the Atman lives in joy and freedom...He no longer needs sacred places, moral disciplines, set hours, postures, directions or objects for his meditation...the knowledge that I am Brahman does not require any proof...He who knows the *Ātman* is free from every kind of bondage. He is full of glory. He is the greatest of the great. He gets his food by begging alms, without anxiety or care. He drinks from the clear stream. He lives unfettered and independent...The earth is his bed. He walks the highway of Vedanta. His playmate is Brahman, the everlasting...He bears no outward mark of a holy man. He remains quite unattached to the things of the world...He lives desireless amidst the objects of desire. He sees the *Ātman* in all things...The knower of Brahman, who lives in freedom from body-consciousness, is never touched by pleasure or pain, good or evil.<sup>11</sup>

So the ‘knowledge’ of Brahman is directly acquired through discrimination and practice. It is thus *aparokṣa*, non-indirect. Notice this unique usage to precisely characterise the impact of the experience. It is analogous to the term *advaita*, non-dual, not monistic, which may be lame in comparison. The relative world is full of dualities, which are absent in Brahman. We may experience Brahman indirectly through *bhakti*, visions, etc. But realising that we are already *That* and that there is nothing to realise is the most powerful state to be in.

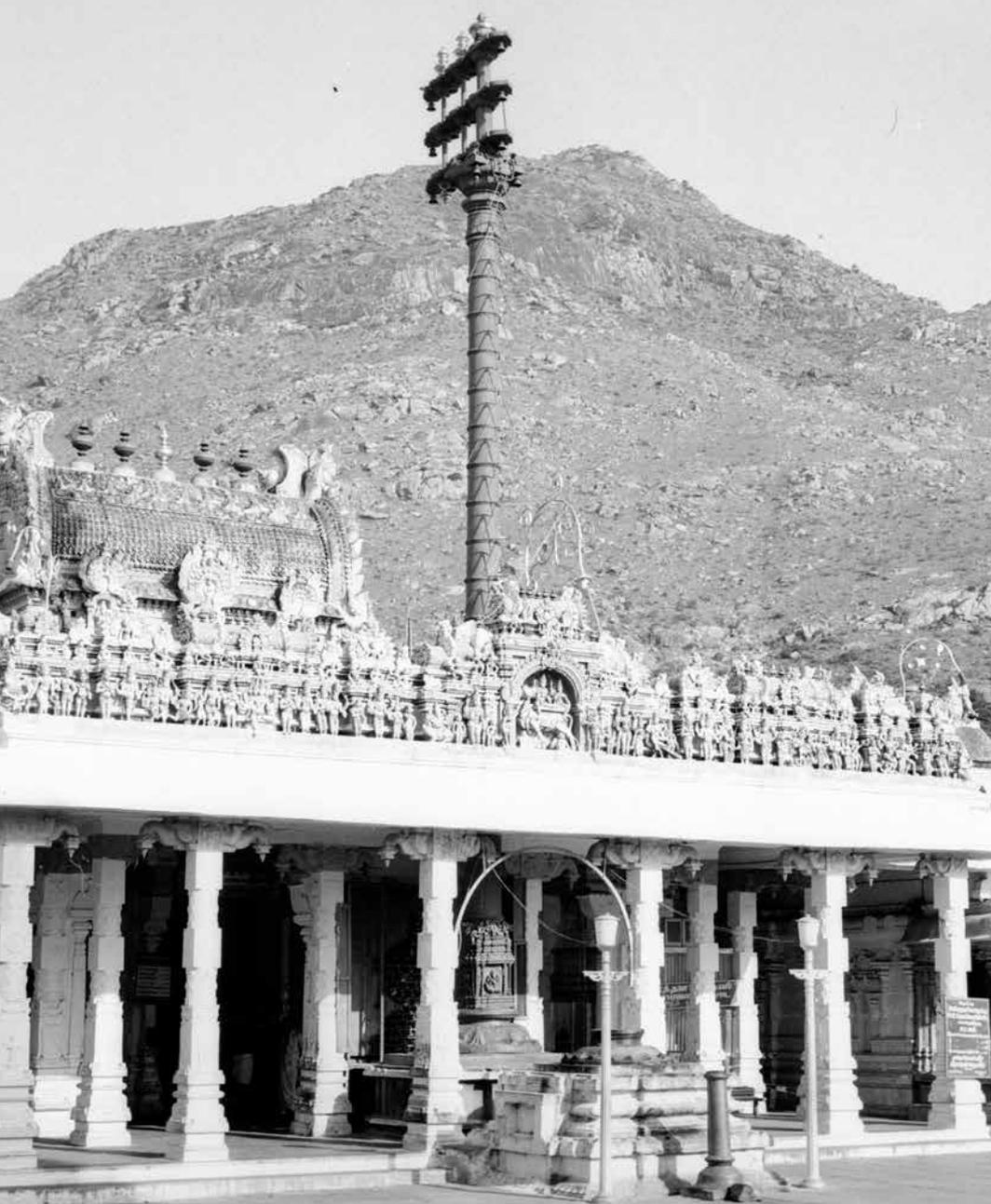
This indeed is a foretaste of liberation in its true sense – total renunciation of the world of wants and desires. Because nothing matters except our identity with Brahman, nothing interests us any more.

We have to learn rocket science. *Brahma vidyā* we are born with. Nothing is more natural and more immediately gratifying – if we go about it commonsensically. It does not depend on place, time, or faith. It can be experienced here and now. We just have to tune out the world and tune into our ever present *caitanya*, Consciousness.




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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 528 ff. p. 120-123.



## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# Home the Hunted to the Hill

K.V. SUBRAHMONYAN

**H**onestly, I cannot pinpoint when I came to Bhagavan. Moreover, one may ask how there can be an 'I' after coming to Bhagavan. In this regard, I recall a couple of lines from a poem of Bhagavan's Swiss devotee, the late Henri Hartung which reads as follows: 'Sitting before Arunachala/Me, my meditation, my goodness?/Shut up.' Well, I can say when and how I came to Sri Ramanasramam: here it goes.

I was at The Valley School, Bangalore of the Krishnamurti Foundation India from 1984 to 1986. The very brilliant, versatile and committed Kabir Jayatirtha and highly original Amarendra Roy who taught in the School, on one of their visits to Vasanta Vihar, Chennai, where I was working at the office from 1983, suggested that I relocate to The Valley School at Thatguni, Bangalore as a sort of guiding presence among the students and be free to render some service only if I so wished. Pamaji and Sunandaji Patwardhan kindly let me go and I moved to Thatguni in the summer of 1984. At 54 I was much older than the other teachers except the evergreen Sripada Rao. Kabir suggested that I take classes but I declined. I am not sure if I told him why. It was a wonderful time there. I did all the typing work, interacted

with the students and teachers and a few parents, wrote a few pieces in the School magazine and explained the etymology of words, using them in sentences and having artistic boys and girls append a suitable illustration. The highly qualified and creative Librarian Usha Mukunda encouraged me and would pin them on the Library's Notice Board.

Krishnaji (K) was a great world teacher, now reminiscent of Socrates, now of the Buddha but he was nothing if not original. He was a pastmaster in the art of living – the Germans call such a person *Lebenskuenstler* (life-artist) – and in the art of dying – may I name him a *Todeskuenstler*? A few days before he passed away, even amidst groans, he is said to have laughed out loud. Live and die from moment to moment, he said. As his life-long associate Mary Lutyens wrote, K's teachings have stood the test of time and as René Fouéré, K's French interpreter at Saanen, Switzerland, and author of some perceptive little books on him, wrote: "I have verified it, the teachings of Krishnamurti are within the ken of the man on the street."

K passed away on 17th February 1986 and I told Kabir and others that, though very reluctantly, I needed to go somewhere and live in solitude. Sri Achyut Patwardhan, Quit India hero of 1942, a wonderful, forthright, upright, affectionate, wise man, who went to K with the whole-hearted consent of Gandhiji after India won her freedom, told me "The Master is gone and people want to leave." K was not a great judge of men. He was critical of Gandhiji, like he was of almost all well-known masters except perhaps the Buddha. Achyutji told me that he said to K, "Krishnaji, you are a great man but not perfect. You have too many likes and dislikes.... You don't know Gandhiji. I knew him, I have been with him. He was a very great man."

After the timeless, unique teachings of the incomparable Bhagavan Ramana, it was the teaching of K which had the greatest impact on me, but, as a man, after Bhagavan, it was Gandhiji whom I admired most.

I lived in fellowship with fishermen on the seashore of Pondicherry. I also helped a school run by an extremely gifted and dedicated young couple Sankar and Sarada, not as a teacher but by doing free service for a few hours daily at the printing press run by them in order to earn money to pay their teachers' salaries. Their school gave free education to children of fishermen and former leprosy patients. Again, it was a wonderful period lasting 30 months of my life when

I learnt many things of the inner world from the fisherwomen who could beat Job hollow in their patience. Sarada suddenly passed away and inconsolable Sankar just disappeared leaving his mother and his child of 4. His colleagues, highly capable Ramdas and Rama ran the school and the press.

One evening my Sri Lankan friend Susunaga Weeraperuma and his Swiss German wife Claudia came to my room in the fishermen's colony. Weeraperuma is a fine writer and has written a number of books on K, including the fantastic two volumes of Krishnamurti Bibliography which he did single-handedly. They were on their way to Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai and suggested that I join them. Why wouldn't I?

That was early in 1987. We stayed for two days at the Ashram. I decided to leave the shores of the Bay of Bengal and the company of the fisher folk at Vaithikuppam at Pondicherry and move to the presence of Arunachala renting a small room near the Ashram. I told Weeraperuma that I would soon visit my elder brother and his family at Ajmere in Rajasthan for a few weeks and as soon after my return as possible I would move to Tiruvannamalai near the Ashram.

I came again to the Ashram in the early summer of 1988 and started looking for a room nearby within my limited means. Sri V.S. Mani, the Administrator of the Ashram and grandnephew of Bhagavan Ramana invited me to stay instead within the Ashram and render some service like guiding visitors around. I was delighted and soon returned with my effects from the fishermen's colony at Pondicherry.

I was not new to Ashram life. I had spent seven years from 1970 to 1977 in an Ashram at Delhi. It had quite a few rules and they multiplied over the years and when I left them in October 1977, there were nearly 700 rules. Perhaps I was the only inmate who followed the rule of not having any money. It was easy enough for me because between 1953 when I graduated and then, I had held very small jobs, often part-time and temporary and earned very little and I enjoyed being as close as possible to *akinchanatva* (not to own anything) my main inspirations being Jesus and Gandhiji, though, to tell the truth I did not have much choice because my academic and other qualifications were far from being impressive even for a small job. Physically, I had a joke of a body and mentally I was full of complexes. I told the Secretary of the

Delhi Ashram that I would do any work that I was capable of, it would be enough if they gave me food and lodging, there was no question of accepting the Babaji or anybody else as Guru for I had problems. Earlier I had told the Babaji that I had a severe nervous breakdown in January, 1952. Babaji asked me not to talk about it to others.

In 1957, a visiting Austrian neurosurgeon had diagnosed my condition in Calcutta as functional disorder of the brain and had suggested taking the help of a psychiatrist as it was not due to an organic lesion, etc. I spent the whole of 1960 in a psychiatric clinic at Madras and, on the doctor's advice, found a job in the city as part of the therapy. Physically, emotionally and mentally I was slightly challenged but there were some compensations. In life, when one door shuts another opens.

The psychiatrist had, besides other degrees from Indian universities, a doctorate in psychiatry from an American university. He was a man of amazing culture, courtesy, humility and empathy. On many days of the week, I had a 30 - 40 minute talk with him. He was a perfect listener but would intervene to correct me whenever necessary. I talked about my anxiety, obsessions, phobias, desires, passions and repressions, ambitions, pretensions, frustrations, etc. Being a much saner and freer person than myself, he gave me sage guidance. It was a psychological counselling preparing the ground for later spiritual flowering. He declined fees saying that he hardly treated me but at the end of the year, before leaving, I thrust the money I had saved in his hands entreating him to at least accept the cost of food provided during the year at the clinic's canteen. At the end of my stay there, my dread of insanity had vanished though I cannot claim even now that I am one hundred per cent free from the fear of a painful death.

Plato said every philosopher should meditate on death. Without necessarily being a philosopher, I have always kept death as a close companion. American poet Walt Whitman sang: "Nothing, nothing is more beautiful in life than death." There is a German proverb, "Death is Life, Life is Death." Gandhiji said: "Death is my Friend." He also said that if one cares for Truth, one should be ready to keep one's head on the lap of death. Rabindranath Tagore sang: "O Death, you are like Shyama (Krishna) to me. "Come," K would say, "Sir, we should invite death." He also said: "If you fear death, it means



you have not lived rightly.” Mother Teresa said that we fear death because our hearts are not pure. Bhagavan Ramana said that one fears death because of identification with the body. He showed that to know oneself is to realize one’s immortality. Well did Rumi say, “Death is my wedding with Eternity.” Giving the last word to Mirza Ghalib, he said, “If there was no death where is the fun at all in living?”

I spent the Sundays and other public holidays at the clinic where I had ample time to interact with some fellow-patients. (I was the only patient who could go out and come in at will. Whenever any other patient moved towards the gate, out of nowhere an assistant would appear and bring him back.) A few would never talk, for example a high State government medical officer who suffered from depression. Only one patient was kept locked in a room as he was said to be violent. A nurse would place his food at meal times at an opening in a grilled window and run away. I wish the admirable practice of Ho’oponopono of Hawaii was known at that time though, I am sure, like all great men, the highly cultured, humane psychiatrist naturally practised it to some extent. For more details on Ho’oponopono, go to Google.

There was a narcissistic patient who looked at his face admiringly in a hand mirror all the time. One man kept repeating some obscene words and all newcomers, including me, were deeply disturbed. The doctor told me that we are all like that, it is only a question of degree. There was a teacher who thought that he was responsible for India’s freedom because he hoisted the national flag at a school function. He would often say “Geniuses like Einstein and me....”. There was a young man who would hurl to the ground any object that came into his hands. He thought that the doctor was crazy, he could cure him but he avoided him. There was a district magistrate who could not work after a car accident. He thought he was a great spiritual guru and found a willing disciple in a young man in a neighbouring room who, for his part, claimed that he was the grandson of a former Governor. There was one man in his forties whose anxiety was much more severe than even mine. He was super-frisky and even thinner than me and his inner torture showed on his face. He could hardly sit and eat. He would stand and swallow a few balls of rice and bolt. The snake pit, a metaphor for madness, is veritable Hell. One cannot be out of it till there is not even an atom of ego.

There is no mental disease, mind itself is the disease. The I who creates you, he, she, etc., is the origin of all problems. Vedanta talks about *manonāśa*, destruction of the mind. Bhagavan Ramana says in verse 17 of his *Upadeśa Sāram*, “When unceasingly the mind scrutinizes its own form, [it will be seen] there is no such thing as the mind. This is the direct path open to all.” I realized the truth of this many years later. My mind was morbid and yet I was in love with it. Dr. D. was a very good psychiatrist, he helped me a lot, but I had to come to the sanest, freest of men for a breakthrough. As the doctor rightly said, I was born with the problem and perhaps will die with it but will learn to live with it. That is exactly what happened

The Sadguru does not treat the illness, he shows that you are not the one who suffers. He is *non pareil*. He teaches in silence and is a constant Presence without a body now as then.

Physically and mentally I didn't flower but Bhagavan Ramana has taught us that it is hardly a handicap for *mumukshu*-s, those who seek liberation. The body and mind are the tips of the iceberg. I am not even the iceberg, we are the Ocean of Pure Consciousness.

The Babaji and the Secretary were indeed God-centered people and seekers of Truth. Babaji showed me great personal love but, from my early days, maybe partly due to my psychological inadequacies, I could neither give nor take personal love. No attachment, please. How well did K put it: “Attachment to one denies love for all.” However, he would tell his associates not to predecease him. Arthur Osborne wrote that if at all there was any attachment in Bhagavan's life, it was to Arunachala. Yes, but was his Arunachala the same as ours?

In retrospect, there was an undercurrent of anxiety, OCD and a self-punishing nature in me right from my boyhood. Those days, especially in small towns far down south from Madras, one hardly heard about psychiatric help and few of my kinsmen suspected that I had a mental problem though everybody wondered when instead of growing strong and attractive, I was becoming weaker and weaker, looking more and more haggard. My morbid mental condition could have turned a Hercules into a weakling.

The Babaji, who was once a nature-cure practitioner and an avid meat eater, body-builder and hunter of man-eaters (he claimed to have

shot dead 77 man-eaters and then stopped counting) told me – I was 37 then – that he would put me on Salzburg Diet which included meat and make me strong. I was a strict vegetarian and so was the Ashram, but some inmates ate eggs privately. I told the Babaji that I did not think any food regimen could make me strong. I enjoyed being skinny and unattractive and was I not working literally round the clock? Babaji used to say “Subrahmonyan works 25 hours a day.” There was a strong prophet-motive in him. His mother had told him that when she conceived him, their ancient Prophet entered her womb. He loved his mother deeply and never forgot what she had told him. If only she had refrained, he might have flowered into a perfect saint totally free from self- love. His excessive and active interest in politics intrigued some visiting western devotees. Once a German devotee cried out in despair: “Babaji, we come all the way and you talk about Punchaap, Gucharati!”

Babaji referred a few times to a vague sense of fear arising in his mind now and then. It was not fear of a specific object or person but a nameless fear. K said that one could be totally free from fear. He related fear to our carrying the past with us and being conditioned by it and letting it lord over us. When there is bondage and conditioning, how can there be fearlessness? He advised listeners not to let anything register on the brain but to have a free, empty mind. He would say, “Sirs your mind should be empty and the heart full of love but your minds are full and the heart is empty.” As Khalil Gibran wrote, K was indeed ‘the Lord of Love’. But I was soon to have once and for all the *darśan* of the total Love in which K’s great love was included, even as, as Professor K. Swaminathan wrote, the total goodness of Ramana included Gandhiji’s great goodness too.

When I came to the ever-reigning Presence of Bhagavan Ramana, I realized that his total freedom from fear, desire, attachment, etc., was a natural result of his absolute non-duality. The Upanishads say *dviteeyaad vai bhayam bhavati* (there is fear when there is the other, a second). There was nothing other than him. The last experience of fear he had was at Madurai in July 1896 as a boy of 16 when he felt death was nigh. He went through death and that was the end of all fear. How could there be fear when he went beyond the *pañca kōśa*-s (five sheaths)? All that remained was the non-dual, blissful *Pratyagātman*, the Self that is Truth, Love.

I was to realise later that there is no ego, no *jīva* and no world. Prior to this on a late evening in 1965 or 1966, I had first realised that the world of names and forms was just a dream. It was around 7 p.m. I was standing in front of the Rabindra Bhavan in Delhi on a dimly lit street. I was awake but could see that I was dreaming. Later, I learnt about *jāgrat svapna* and *jāgrat sushupti*. Bhagavan's teaching made everything crystal clear for me; much clearer than years of Vedantic study could have.

One day towards the end of 1976, my friend Rangarajan who was an officer at the Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works, New Delhi, of which Professor K. Swaminathan was the Chief Editor, rang me and said that he was translating into Tamil the Professor's book on Ramana Maharshi and that he wanted me to translate a few of the last chapters. I took permission and worked on the translation each night after finishing all the day's work. It was then that I realized that it was Bhagavan Ramana that I was looking for deep within my heart.

One early wintry night I walked out. There was no question of taking permission. When I joined them in 1970, I donated to their little library a few hundred books. Otherwise I came empty-handed and was quitting empty-handed.

The Babaji was indeed one of my *upaguru*-s who prepared me, consciously or otherwise, for the *Sadguru*. When the *Sadguru* comes into your life, he comes as a spiritual tsunami, it is *Viśvarūpadarśanam* (cosmic vision). He need not be in a physical body.

Back in Tamil Nadu, I started visiting a home at Chennai for the mentally challenged where a cousin of mine was an inmate. He was taller and much stronger than I but closely resembled me in facial features. The organisation had homes near Calicut in Kerala, at Bangalore and at Calcutta. Over a period of three years I stayed in all those places with intervals between two centres. They were run by deeply religious Catholics and there was a Gandhian flavour because the Canadian French founder was an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. In the Kerala home, spread over ten acres on a hill with no dearth of scorpions and snakes, and in the Bangalore home, there was a low mass on Sunday mornings officiated by a visiting Father and I gladly participated. To me it was a spiritual experience to live in fellowship with the so-called mentally handicapped. They are

certainly not spiritually handicapped. They have an innocence and goodness which few so-called religious people have. I washed dishes, cleaned toilets, drew buckets of water from wells, cleaned cashews, cultivated ginger, turmeric, etc. During that period I lived in Madras briefly among the so-called Dalits (downtrodden, oppressed) whom Gandhiji lovingly called Harijans, just as Saint Eknath of Maharashtra had done centuries earlier. This term had fallen out of favour as it sounded patronizing to their leaders.

I had to move. I was silently on the run, running away from my neurotic mind. I was desperately in search of complete sanity, a state in which you feel whole, fully healed, filled with peace and love, free in the knowledge of Truth. But Truth is where you are when you are not, the I is not. How well did Franz Kafka put it:

“To know the world and its reality, you don’t have to go anywhere, nor do anything, you just sit in your room and wait. You don’t have even to wait, for it is already there.”

But I was not just running, I was running amok. Then three happy years with institutions of K but then on the move until I came to the seashores of Pondicherry and lived with fishermen.

So I was at Sri Ramanasramam. What Amir Khusro said of Kashmir (“*agar firdausi zameenast, ameenast ameenast*” – if there is heaven on earth, it is here, it is here), was and is true for me of Sri Ramanasramam, though in a much deeper sense. I had not had the darśan of Bhagavan though my father, my uncle and his son had in the early 1940’s, but there is uninterrupted *darśan* of Bhagavan at Sri Ramanasramam and as you flower in Bhagavan’s teachings, you see him within your Heart and everywhere. I stopped being a tour guide in the Ashram and starting assisting Sri Ganesan who was then the editor of the Mountain Path, the Ashram magazine.

He moved me to a self-contained room next to that of Sri Kunju Swami in the Major Chadwick Memorial. Swamiji came to Bhagavan in 1920 at Skandasramam and never looked back. He was one of those who had totally surrendered to Bhagavan. Endowed with a photographic memory, he was a goldmine of anecdotes from Bhagavan’s life and was a walking encyclopaedia of Bhagavan’s collected works. He was 93 when I became his neighbour and I was astounded by his physical and mental energy. He was ever willing to

speaking about Bhagavan and explain his teachings and many visited him daily. He was also a superb listener. He would never interrupt when the interlocutor spoke. He used to tell us what an incredibly patient and attentive listener Bhagavan was. Occasionally, very learned people would come and harangue for an hour or more before this supreme master of silence: Bhagavan would be all ears, even as he sat in his inalienable *sahaja* state, smiling, nodding. At the merciful end, when as George Bernard Shaw would say the subject was not exhausted but the audience was, Bhagavan would courteously ask, "Have you said all, or is there more that you want to say?" and he would answer all the queries raised. Kunju Swami liked me and liked me not. I was not surprised by the latter sentiment. I had miles to go before sleeping in wakefulness.

Ganesan and I hit it off very well and we worked together for nearly 18 months. Ganesan, like his brothers and sisters, is a very friendly, kind and loyal person. There is no smallness of mind in the family. Bhagavan was perfect with countless great qualities and the devotees imbibe, with or without effort but certainly by his Grace, one or more of these qualities in a small or great measure. Kunju Swami had Bhagavan's *saulabhya*, easy accessibility and he and Kanakammal had Bhagavan's patient listening, Nayana Ganapati Muni had Bhagavan's prodigious memory and intellect, and his precision and economy in words, Muruganar his *ekabhakti*, poetic prowess and beauty of expression, Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer his incomparable lyrical genius, Balarama Reddygaru his most welcoming smile and nature, while Mastan Swami was, in Bhagavan's own words, the ripest of all the aspirants who came to him who did not take any time to be transformed, Yogi Ramaiahgaru his meditative calmness, Major Chadwick his majesty, Arthur Osborne his subtlety and former President of Sri Ramanasramam, T.N. Venkataraman some of Bhagavan's fearlessness. Similarly, other devotees, Western and Indian, had certain qualities reminiscent of the Master. Let me stop here the impertinent cataloguing and calibrating. Where are the others in Bhagavan's life? As Professor K. Swaminathan told me, "Bhagavan is pure non-dual essence."

Old Ashramite Sri Balarama Reddy, who was in Sri Aurobindo Ashram for some years, came to Bhagavan in 1933 after getting the consent of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with some difficulty. He

came, saw and was transformed. He told me once, “Bhagavan was always in Brahman.” While he respected all spiritual teachers, he felt that Bhagavan was incomparable. He found in him the *Sarvesvara*, the Almighty. He also told me “Bhagavan is Brahman, the Ashram is *māyā*.” He was not belittling the Ashram which is indeed the freest and the most egalitarian place one can think of. He only meant to say that while it is one thing to live in the Ashram, it is a totally different thing to live by the words of Bhagavan. It is not as though all you have to do is to become a resident of the Ashram. Did not Bhagavan, in 1922 or 1923, tell a devotee: “Those who are here cannot be favoured and those who are not cannot be ignored; this is a universal Ashram!” And did he not much later, in the Old Hall, declare: “Some people think that because they are here, they are graced more. It is not so?” When I joined the Ashram in 1988, Ramaswamy Pillai, the longest-living direct disciple of Bhagavan, told me, “Being in the Ashram is not a guarantee that you will reach the goal,” and when I took his leave while leaving for the Himalayas two years later, he said “This is your place, you will have to come here one day.” I reminded him of what he had said 27 months earlier. He laughed.

Bhagavan had trapped me. Lives of search had come to an end when I came to him. There was no question of having any more questions and seeking answers. Bhagavan had laid his axe of Grace to the root of my problem. I looked upon the entire cosmos as his ashram. Though everything was going very well for me at the Ashram, I felt the urge to go to the Himalayas and spend some time as a *bhikshu* in contemplation of Bhagavan’s words. Ganesan, Mani and their father, the then President, ever-cheerful and courageous Sri T.N. Venkataraman, (later Swami Ramananda), suggested that I could lead a contemplative life free from work at the Ashram itself but I told them that I would return after a brief interlude in the Himalayas. They gave me letters of introduction to Swami Krishnananda of the Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, which were helpful to me.

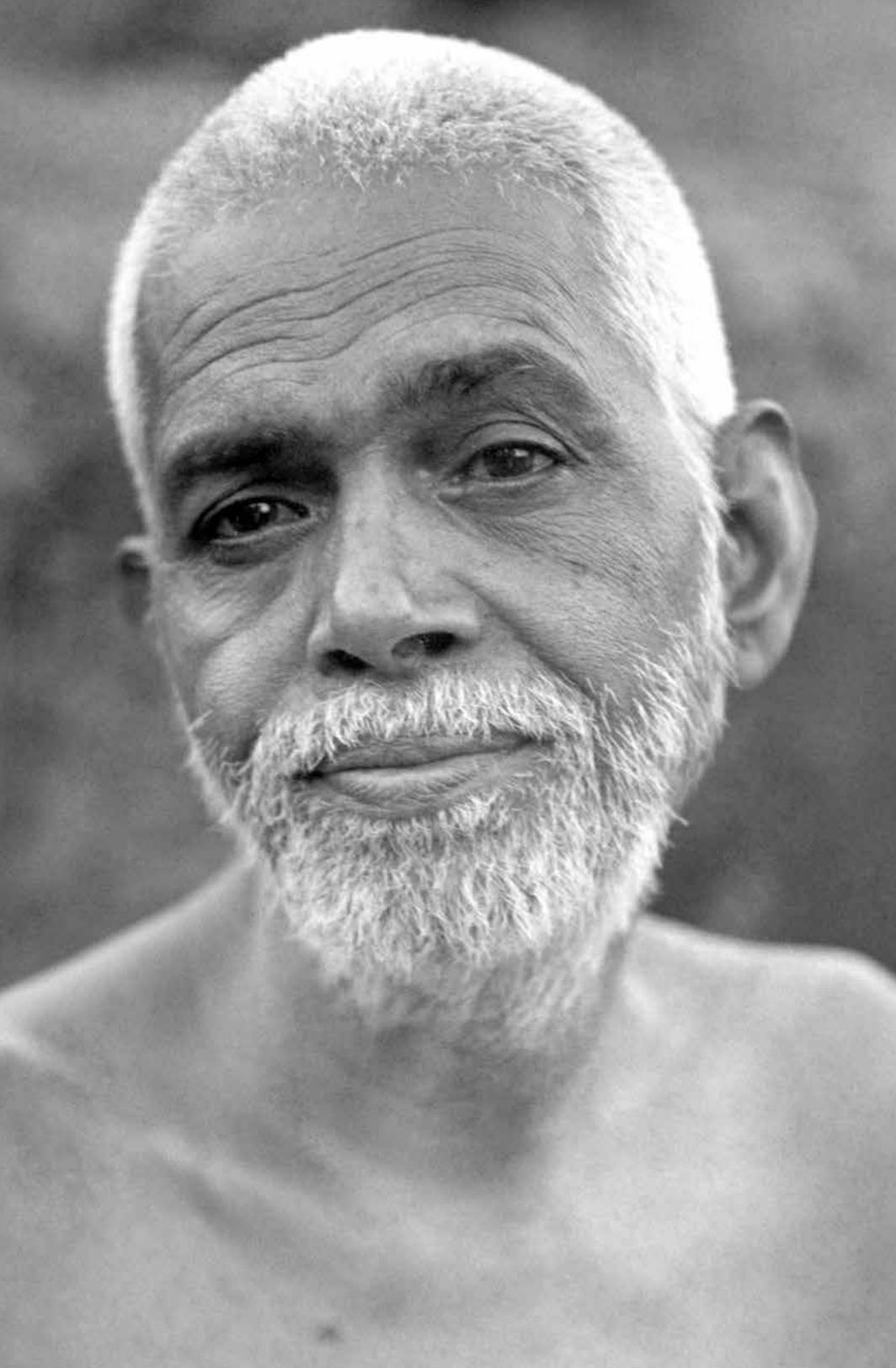
A month at the Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh; five years at Haridwar in a Vanaprasth Ashram where most of the inmates were septuagenarian bachelors from Bengal and soon to reach three score, everyone free to follow his own Guru; several months at a Sevashram at Vidur Kuti near Bijnore in U.P. and then I reached Uttarkashi in

Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand). It was there that I was able to lead the life of a *bhikshu*, receiving food from centres meant for monks. The *sannyasi*-s of Uttarkashi are earnest spiritual aspirants who spend their time in meditation, *satsang*-s and study of scriptures.

It was at Uttarkashi that I had the great good fortune, thanks to the kind, hospitable Swami Premananda Saraswati, of having the *darśan* of Swami Chidananda Saraswati, then International President of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, and getting to know him. He was a born saint. Of him, his great Guru Swami Sivananda said: “He should have been my Guru and I his disciple.” This amazing remark reveals the greatness of both the saints. Both were great admirers of Bhagavan Ramana. I had the good fortune of frequently seeing another great disciple of Swami Sivananda Saraswati, – Swami Chaitanyananda also a great admirer of Lord Ramana, who had moved to Uttarkashi with his Guru’s blessing after being with him for a few years. He was a very wise, humble, kind man, a very ripe soul. It was a great joy to be in his company.

I also had the good luck of having the fellowship of many Swamis, young and old, who had much happier dispositions and freer minds than I. One of them had taken *sannyāsa* at the age of 13, four years before I met him, and, now 39, he is the most admired of them all. I was told that even when he was of the age of 5 or 6, the villagers came to him for advice.

I went to Delhi in 2005 for a cataract operation at the invitation of Bhagavan’s devotees Anjani Kumar and his wife Urmila. I casually told Ganesan who was on a visit that it seemed to me that Bhagavan was calling me back to his Ashram. He lost no time in relaying my remark to his elder brother, Sundara Ramanan, the Ashram President who wrote to me to “pack up and return immediately.” After 15 years of self-exile, I returned to the Ashram in November 2005. The British poet Robert Louis Stevenson wrote: “Home is the sailor from the sea/ The hunter from the hill”. In my case, it was ‘Home is the hunted to the Hill.’ I don’t have to name the Hunter or the Hill. ▲



# The Eternal Ocean of Grace

## A New Flower in the Garden of Bhagavan's Books

M.R. KODHANDRAM

In 2007, the late Captain A. Narayanan, who was a great devotee of Bhagavan, brought out a compendium of Bhagavan's teachings in a set of eight volumes titled *Arunachala Ramana — Boundless Ocean of Grace*. This publication included the biography and teachings of Bhagavan and various articles written about him. This was indeed a great collection meticulously compiled from the existing publications and presented in a chronological order. When the first edition of the books went out of print, the Ashram decided to expand this publication and bring it out in a different format based on six categories: Biography, Teachings, Devotees, Reminiscences, Dialogues, and Articles. The dialogues with Bhagavan are spread over two volumes and thus the whole publication is in seven volumes. This new prestigious publication is titled *Arunachala Ramana — Eternal Ocean of Grace*. It was released on Bhagavan's Advent Day on September 1, 2018.

The Biography tracks Bhagavan's life right from his birth at Tiruchuzhi in the year 1879 till his *Mahāsamādhi* in 1950. This is an exhaustive work of 464 pages and reading Bhagavan's life will surely inspire readers to develop a greater *bhakti* towards Bhagavan and thus

bind themselves further to Him. When we strengthen our bond with Bhagavan, it automatically loosens our bonds with the world. And when the bonds with the world are loosened, we are able to walk the spiritual path with greater fervour and thus fall into the tiger's jaws of Bhagavan from which there is no escape. Thus, we are able to fulfil the purpose of life which is to realise our true Self within our Heart and to never come back to this world of impermanence and misery. This is the goal of life for all and Bhagavan's teachings help us to achieve this goal in the shortest possible time.

The second volume comprises his timeless teachings both in prose and poetry along with their English translations. Bhagavan's main emphasis was on discovering the real 'I', namely on Self-Realisation. Bhagavan's first work *Who am I?* gives us a proper understanding about our true nature. Who is this 'I' with which we have identified ourselves? We have identified ourselves with our body and have developed a sense of individuality or ego. Thus, we see different 'I's everywhere. Bhagavan says that the numerous egos we see in the world are only ONE in essence. It is the one Self that manifests as the numerous forms we see in the world. The different egos are only the numerous waves of the same ocean. As long as we live at the periphery, we see ourselves and others as only waves and this is the basic ignorance which brings about our repetitive births in *samsāra*. We are yet to see ourselves as the ocean or water which is our true essence. The goal is to realise that real 'I' in us and abide as that.

Bhagavan's technique of finding this true Self is known as Self-enquiry or *ātma-vicāra*. This technique is based on his own experience and it is easy for us to understand and practice. Bhagavan says that it is the direct method for realising our true Self. Though *ātma-vicāra* is also taught in the Upanishads, the method of practice is not easy to infer in the scriptures. Bhagavan was able to realise his true Self without any outer guidance as he was a ripe soul. But we need a lot of guidance and Bhagavan has shared his knowledge and experience through his teachings in the form of prose and poetry.

How did Bhagavan get to realise his true Self? It happened as a consequence of his famous death experience when he was only 16 years old and studying in the 9th class at Madurai. The fear of death

made him enquire about his true nature and he realised that death occurs only to the body and that he was not the body but the ‘indweller’ who is imperishable. This experiential knowledge or Realisation brought about a total transformation and within a few weeks he left his family and came to Arunachala to fulfil his destiny as a *sadguru* and a *jagadguru*. Thus a new world teacher was born.

The third volume is on reminiscences by devotees who were directly in touch with Bhagavan. Their experiences with Bhagavan are of immense value to us in the practice of His teachings. Thus, after studying the teachings of Bhagavan in Volume 2, these valuable inputs from his direct devotees give us a first-hand experience of Bhagavan’s life itself. The way Bhagavan lived and conducted himself at Tiruvannamalai for 54 years gives us the essence of his teachings in practice. The experiences of the devotees transport us to His direct presence even now and give us great joy. Most of these devotees lived with the Master for considerable lengths of time and have much to share with us. Their experiences are particularly instructive because we get such wonderful insights about the life and teachings of the Master through their everyday interactions with Him. Who were these wonderful devotees to whom we are so grateful for sharing their reminiscences of the Master? Their biographies are given in the next volume.

The fourth volume is on the devotees who had the good fortune of meeting and living with the Master and directly learning from association with Him, which is the greatest *satsang* possible. The scriptures say that *satsang* is the greatest aid to our evolution, leading to Self-Realisation. Adi Shankara in his famous work *Bhaja Govindam*, Stanza 9, extols the importance of *satsang* in achieving Liberation. These fortunate devotees of Bhagavan were able to evolve much faster under the direct glance of the Master and were able to get all their doubts clarified. By reading this volume, we will be able to get to know the devotees of the Master so that we too can emulate them. It was Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who first learnt the process of doing Self-enquiry directly from Bhagavan. Subsequently, many others, like Sri Muruganar also learnt this from Bhagavan. Thus, the lives of these great devotees greatly inspire us to walk the spiritual path and to practise the teachings of the Master.

Among these devotees, there were some who took notes of what transpired particularly in the Old Hall where Bhagavan clarified the doubts of the numerous devotees who flocked to him. These dialogues have been presented in volumes 5 and 6. The compilations were done by Munagala Venkataramiah, Suri Nagamma, and Devaraja Mudaliar among others. These dialogues help clarify our doubts so that we are able to practise and progress on the path.

The final volume 7 has 108 articles by devotees of Bhagavan, which serve to guide us further on the path. This seventh volume has been titled *The Guiding Presence*. The articles include a spectrum of topics which go from ‘How I Came to Bhagavan’, to commentaries on the teachings of Bhagavan and detailed accounts of daily interactions with Him. Each person’s experience with Bhagavan is unique. Some of them are instructive and others are devotional. The contributors include Westerners and people from all parts of India. Some of them spent a great deal of time with Bhagavan, some were passing through but were greatly touched by Bhagavan, and some others never saw Bhagavan in his body but felt greatly connected to Him. Even if we have not met Bhagavan, we can still connect to Him through *bhakti* and the practice of His teachings. After all, Bhagavan is not a mere body He is the imperishable Self that is eternal. Therefore, His guidance to his devotees continues uninterrupted. That’s why Bhagavan said at the time of his leaving his body, “Where can I go, I am here?” He is always here, everywhere as he is the Self of all. He is omnipresent and all we have to do is think of him to come into His Presence.

These seven volumes on Bhagavan’s life and teachings will surely help any devotee to understand and practice His teachings better. His Grace is always there for those who want to practise enquiry to overcome their negative qualities and purify their minds. When we practice the sadhana of Self-enquiry, He helps us to overcome the obstacles on the Path and to reach the Heart and unite with the Self and thus fulfil the purpose of our lives.

May the unfailing Light of Bhagavan guide us always and protect us from the pitfalls of *samsāra* so that we are able to reach His lotus feet in our own Heart where he dwells as the Self! ▲

*Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya!*

# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter Eleven

### Kabir Prevents the Slaughter of the Calf

NABAJI SIDDHA

**K**abir, imbued with enthusiasm, fired with inspiration, freed of sorrow and hankering, high in dispassion and steadfast in his goal of life, carried on his spiritual ministry by awakening the ignorant, kindling the lamp of Knowledge in them by cutting asunder bondage, slaying the tiger of egoism, showering struggling souls with compassion and steering many to the shore of immortality. He also restrained animal-slaughter. He shone in the city like the moon among stars, wish-fulfilling Kamadhenu among a herd of cattle and Karpagam among the trees. His way of life was as commendable as righteousness in men, harmlessness in austerities, mental worship amid all kinds of worship and patience among all virtues. Thus, he reigned supreme among Brahma-jnanis.

One day, Kabir's uncle invited his parents and his wife for a function in his house but left him out. Kabir felt hurt at this rejection. Undaunted, he followed them to his uncle's house to find out why he was left out. He was surprised to see a big crowd there. On closer look, he saw a calf tethered to a pole and four persons holding it tight

for slaughter. The mute calf seemed desperate, eyes filled with tears and desperate appeal, ‘They are hungry for my meat. This terrible fate is due to my evil deeds of the past. I must quieten the mind and accept this end.’ With these thoughts, the calf seemed to be absorbed in God-remembrance.

Kabir sweated profusely with anguish on seeing the plight of the helpless calf. He ran to it and holding it close to his chest said, “I have given you refuge. Do not be afraid. I will save you even at the cost of my life.”

At that very moment, he espied the devil, Iblis, in the guise of an old man with long beard, ready to flee the place, seeing his evil intent of slaughter about to be thwarted by Kabir. Rushing at the devil and slapping it hard, Kabir roared, “You corrupt the mind of these folks, making them butchers and denying them passage to liberation. You, the personification of evil, hold them in your power and lead them to purgatory. I am going to throw you into this blazing fire now and put an end to your evil ways.”

Pretending to be afraid, Iblis said, “It is good to die at your hands. O shoreless ocean of compassion, friend of all beings, my terminator, refuge of all! O Suka, don’t you know the secret of *karma*? The calf is here on account of its previous *karma*. Come on, O kazi, get down on your knees and sever the head of the calf. Praise be to the Almighty!” The gathering taking him for an old wise man of their clan was about to plunge into action.

Somehow, Tamal guessed that the old man was a *malafide* person and cautioned his people, “O friends! I don’t think we should trust this old man. Kindly listen to me and abstain from your heinous act.”

The old man scoffed at him and said, “O Tamal, though you are one of us, you speak against our practices and denounce the words of our scriptures. God has created all lower forms of life for the use of mankind. The cattle are meant for our food. Our kazi and maulvi here are learned in our scriptures. Are you two, father and son, more learned than them? Our priests are competent enough to enlighten you fools on the secrets of holy words. Don’t act too smart.”

“O cunning devil, you are talking rubbish. You are leading these people, whom you have put under your spell, on the path of destruction. Whatever you do is against their welfare. You are the enemy of the righteous. Don’t get in our way,” retorted Tamal heatedly.

## KABIR PREVENTS THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CALF

Kabir spoke to the calf endearingly, “You need not be assailed by thoughts of past karmas, if you take refuge in the Lord. Take the name of ‘Rama, Rama’ with faith. You must have performed great good karma in the past even to hear the Name of the Lord! Have no doubt about the efficacy of the Name. I have established its glory in this city already. Iblis is mere straw before me. I will kill him with this stick. This stick punishes people with evil designs like killing dumb creatures.” Kabir decorated the calf with garlands and sandal paste and flung the stick at the devil. As the stick started chasing him, the devil tried to take cover behind the maulvi.

Tamal became excited on seeing Kabir’s power and challenged the devil to catch hold of the stick and save himself, “You talked heroically like a warrior earlier. Where is your bravery now?”

This infuriated the relatives who jumped at Kabir and shouted, “Why did you drive away the elderly wise man? You are not content at being an outcaste yourself, you intend to corrupt others also. You even stoop to attack the eldest of our clan. O traitor, betraying our Faith, you have taken to Hindu ways. Why do you come here without invitation and harass us?”

“O evil men, you are cruel-minded like hunters,” reproached Kabir, “how you strike terror in the hearts of dumb animals! You torture poor animals pitilessly. Killing is the most heinous of the five sins. One who engages in this evil act does not stop at anything. It is never too late to mend your ways. Non-killing will give you easy access to mukti.

“O kazi, O maulvi, you are breaking the law of the Supreme with this act while you attribute mercy and compassion to the Almighty. Being learned in scriptures, you should understand the suffering of others and protect them from harm and misery. Why don’t you talk good sense to these people? Every being experiences the same fear and suffering in the face of death. Why has your heart not melted in pity? Do you enjoy being a terror to animals and birds? Are the words, ‘kill, kill’ sounding like music to your ears?”

The maulvi said, “Kabir, don’t go too far. Slaughter performed in a specific way is permitted, giving it religious sanction, i.e. halal. If you can drink milk from the cow, which is like its blood, then what is wrong with eating its flesh?”

“O heartless priest, just because you drank your mother’s milk, would you eat her flesh too?”

“Kabir, there is a difference between humans and animals. Further, God created the animals for our sake and so there is nothing wrong in eating meat.”

Kabir queried, “Can the Lord who has equal vision towards all in the universe, be partial and have less love for animals and more for humans? Do we have the same intelligence as the animals or can we understand them? If they also become crafty and evil like humans, is there any way we can survive? It is with the help of cows that we harvest grain, get milk and butter for our consumption and fertilizer for the fields and so on. Can we stab our benefactor? We humans are insensitive and self-centred; we are not terrified of our sins. Why can’t man treat other lives like his own? Harmlessness is supreme among all austerities. You utter the name of God before slaughter to absolve yourselves of the sin. But it doesn’t work that way. You should take his Name with purity of mind and devotion to earn his grace, not to escape your sins.”

Maulvi spoke defensively, “We utter prayers before slaughter because such consecrated food only is fit for our consumption.”

“You perform this ritual on four-legged creatures. What about offspring in the womb and eggs?” countered Kabir.

“God has not ordained them to be covered by the ritual,” said the maulvi.

“How can the All-merciful single out some creatures for torture and killing? Then, labeling Him as all-merciful or equal-visioned will not befit Him. You are using fallacious arguments to justify your selfishness.”

“O Kabir, we see in Nature strong animals killing weaker creatures for their food. How do you explain it?”

“The way of life of animals and birds is different. For example, they mate even with mother, father or siblings. Will you endorse such a way of life for human beings? Don’t bring in unsuitable comparisons.”

“If killing is a sin, then don’t Hindus also offer animal sacrifice in their rites?”

Kabir said in a voice tinged with sadness, “The commoners follow this heartless practice to get their worldly desires fulfilled through lesser deities. Such people, be they Hindus or of other Faiths will end up in hell. The higher gods like the Trinity are worshipped with flowers, fragrant perfumes, the waving of lights, etc.”

“What about Hindus offering animal sacrifice in *yajña*-s like *aswamedha*, which is said to be partaken of even by higher gods like Vishnu?”

“There are five kinds of sacrifices or *yajña*-s – of Godhead accompanied by Vedic chants, gods through sacred fires, subhuman beings through animal sacrifice, *manes* (ancestors) by offering sesame and water and human beings through poor feeding.

“So it is the nature of subhuman beings to be propitiated by animal sacrifice. Desire-ridden devotees also please lesser gods with animal sacrifice.

“In the case of *aswamedha yajña*, sacrifice of the *jīva*, i.e. horse, accompanied by Vedic chants, is offered to holy fire and its ashes are accepted as *prasad*. It is also ordained that the animal should be brought back to life with *mantra* chants or it should be enabled to evolve to a higher plane. Only those who are capable of ensuring these two conditions should engage in such *yajña*-s. If you cannot resurrect the animal or ensure it a higher birth, then you have no authority to kill it. Further, the priest who officiates has to observe fasting and forego sleep till the *yajña* is over.

“Nevertheless, this kind of *yajña* is for fulfilling worldly desires, done at the behest of people given to drinking and meat eating. However efficiently done, it is still in the realm of delusion and lower deities. They can get worldly desires fulfilled through such *yajna*, but they can never attain liberation.

“The purpose of describing this kind of *yajña* in scriptures is to forbid such sacrifice and not to encourage it. Whereas you aver that the scripture expressly permits killing and there is no sin involved in such acts. You spread such wrong messages and mislead people. One such *aswamedha* sacrifice is performed in a thousand years, whereas you are on a spree, killing dozens of animals every day, as if it is as easy as crushing small ants with fingernails.

“It is enjoined that if a cow trespasses into others’ fields, you should pat it gently and drive it away or scare it off with noises and not strike it. If, by any chance, a hair drops from its body while driving it thus, he incurs an offence. When such is the case, will God sanction killing of creatures for the delight of your tongue?

“What is pleasing for lesser gods can never be agreeable to the all-compassionate Lord. You are an Absolutist. Do you think that

the nameless, formless, Impersonal God is gratified with the blood and flesh of animals? Is It pleased with the torments and piteous cries of the slaughtered? Do such heartless acts issue forth from the all-merciful God or from the imagination of flesh eating gluttons or the temptation of the devil? This is indeed the conspiracy of human beings under the spell of maya.”

Maulvi replied, “This practice is in vogue even from the time of our ancient Father.”

“Let me enlighten you on how it started. When God asked our grand ancestor to sacrifice his son to test his faith and the father set off to comply with it implicitly, he found a goat tethered in his son’s place at the time of sacrifice. This was later adopted in our lineage as a ritual under a mistaken notion.

“Whatever the origin, these practices have sprung from crystallized selfishness for one’s own indulgence. Harmlessness is the supreme *dharma*. There is no greater virtue other than looking upon all beings as one’s own self. Let me prove to you now the fate of slaughterers.”

Placing his hand on the head of the calf, Kabir commanded it to verify the truth of his statement.

Bowing at Kabir’s feet, the calf started speaking with tearful eyes, “Please listen to my story attentively to get a glimpse of the truth. This body filled with impurities of flesh, bones, blood, mucus, etc. is verily hell on earth. The terrible and painful diseases attacking the body are the punishing rod of Yama on erring souls.

“Now you will be struck with wonder and anguish to listen to my story. I was a learned brahmin in my previous birth. Once when I was passing through a forest, I saw a group of people hunting a deer. After killing it, they were cooking and eating its meat with great relish. I watched the scene intently. The power of maya created a deep desire for meat eating in my mind.

“Then I rebuked myself, ‘O mind, every creature has the same love for its life, like you have for your own. How long is your body going to last, for whose pleasure and palate, you torture or kill the poor creatures, making them tremble with fear for life? Making an innocent animal suffer to fatten your body is not going to let you off the claws of retribution.’

“You are born in a caste which abhors killing and considers non-violence far more virtuous than merits earned through millions of

*Rajasuya yajña*-s. Yet you have desired to eat the venison. Did you not at first empathize with the suffering of the deer as if it was inflicted on you? It is also said, a meat eater's share in the evil deed is eight times more than the sin incurred by the killer. The very trace of the desire has defiled my soul. Can I ever become worthy of the Lord's grace?"

"This lamentation uttered loudly by me was heard by the meat eaters, which brought about a transformation in their heart. They were overcome by compassion and remorse.

"They looked in my direction and tossed the left over at me and said, "O brahmin, fill your stomach with what you hankered for."

"As I stood rooted there with a feeling of revulsion at the meat flung at me, the male deer searching for its mate reached the scene. Taking me for the hunter, the deer lunged at me and hurt me badly with its horns.

"With unbearable pain, I reached slowly the cave of a yogi. He asked me how I was injured. I narrated the incident to him. Shying away from me in disgust, he attacked me with his trident and flung me far, lest he should also be tarnished with the sin of my association. I fell onto a thorny bush. I wept and begged him to redeem me from sin and free me from the pain.

"Overcome by pity, he came near me and said, "O brahmin, though I know non-violence is a supreme virtue I attacked you in anger for having harboured the desire to eat meat. Forgive me. My anger has depleted my austerities; thus I have hurt myself. I will go to Varanasi and perform severe penance to earn the lost merit. However, if I impart any teaching to you, more sin will befall me."

He left the place soon, leaving me alone. As my mind dwelt on the Lord of Varanasi, life departed from my body. My soul reaching Varanasi incarnated in the womb of a cow. I forgot the past as soon as I took birth. The sin of desire for flesh has brought me to the hands of cruel slaughterers and I stand here trembling with fear. You, the Lord himself, have come to my rescue. On getting your holy darshan, I recollected my past, shed tears of contrition and turned to God with heartfelt prayer. When you placed your hands on my head, all my sins were burned, just like the magic of alchemy on base metal wrought by the touch of the philosopher's stone, turning it into gold. This good fortune, the shower of your grace on me, has ensued from the darshan

of a yogi at the time of my death. O supreme Suka, bliss-incarnate! Don't give up your crusade against killing of animals." As the crowd stood stunned listening to its tale, the calf breathed its last and attained the highest realm.

Touched by the scene, the gathering broke out into adoration of the Lord. Recovering from this wondrous occurrence, Kabir said, "O virtuous men, now I will acquaint you with another strange story that happened in Nepal.

"A king and his minister had been worshipping the Divine Mother Kali for twelve years in a forest-temple for fulfilment of their worldly desires. The Mother appeared to the king at midnight during worship and asked if he would offer a human sacrifice. The king looked at the minister.

"The minister said, 'By the time we go to the city to arrange it, it will be daybreak. Therefore, you offer me to the Mother without hesitation and get your desire accomplished.'

"O minister, it is not right as both of us have been worshipping the Goddess together for our welfare. Let us consider the old brahmin priest who performs worship in the temple."

"O king!' counselled the minister, 'killing a woman is sinful. More sinful is killing an infant, much more heinous is cow slaughter, more than this is the evil of slaying one's Guru, but the worst sin is killing a brahmin.'

"In a way, you are right,' the king continued, 'but, we will wash off our sin of killing the old brahmin by sharing half of my kingdom and treasure with his son.'

The king called the old priest and apprised him of their decision and assured him of giving half the kingdom and treasure to his son in exchange for his life. What could the poor man do against the order of the king?

Highly agitated, the priest entered the sanctum of the Mother and slapping the idol, he vented his anger against the Goddess, "O Betrayer, I have been performing worship to You from my seventh year to my seventieth year. Is this how You reward me? May calamity overtake Your temple."

The Mother Divine appearing before the priest said, "In your previous birth, you were of lower caste. To achieve your worldly ends,

you sacrificed two innocent goats to Me. Thereby, you incurred the sin of two killings for which you have to be killed twice. Now, they are reborn as the king and his minister. If they don't offer you together to Me, you will have to take one more birth and discharge the debt a second time. Their joint sacrifice will absolve you totally in one birth itself. Therefore, it is in your own interest to submit to the situation."

The priest emerging from the inner chamber briefed them of the Mother's words and asked them both to kill him jointly. On hearing this, the king and the minister became absorbed in deep thought, "If the sin of slaughter has chased this man even after he has been born as a brahmin and worshipped the Mother for seventy long years, what will be our fate then? Let us not desire any boon or treasure."

However, the king said, "This brahmin is destined to die at our hands, if not now, later. Then why don't we finish it now itself? I will find a way out of this predicament to remove our sin." Thus he convinced the minister and both severed the priest's head jointly with the sword.

Immediately, the Divine Mother appeared and asked what boon they desired. The king said, "O Mother, please restore the priest's life. And bestow Your boon of treasure on my minister."

Pleased with the king's noble nature, the Mother wished to grant one more boon to the king. The king said, "O Divine Mother, please grant liberation to all the three of us."

Granting the boon, She initiated them into a *mantra* instructing them to meditate on it and then disappeared. The three reached the city immersed in a sea of bliss.

The king announced that if any citizen indulged in slaughter, he would be offered as sacrifice to Goddess Kali. Thus he brought into force harmlessness in his kingdom. After living a righteous life for many years, they attained *mukti*."

Tamal embraced his son affectionately and said, "Your nectarine words have given great joy to the assembly here."

O Siddhas, Kabir thus brought about a change in the hearts of many people with his wise and sweet words in the city of Varanasi. How great was his power and charm!" exclaimed Nabaji. ▲

*(To be continued)*



# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

The biographies of Sivaprakasa Swamigal relate that his father Kumaraswami's conversion to the Virasaiva movement had occurred through the intervention of Lord Siva himself, who had appeared to him in the guise of a Virasaiva sadhu as he sat in meditation. The sadhu instructed him to take *dhāraṇā dīkṣā*, the *initiation of investment with the liṅgam*, from a teacher called Gurudevar in Tiruvannamalai. Accordingly Sivaprakasa and his two brothers were brought up in the Virasaiva tradition. After Kumaraswami died Sivaprakasa and his brothers returned to Tiruvannamalai and, according to one account, continued their studies under the tutelage of one Gurudevar, who resided in a math in the western street of the town. It is not clear if this was the same Gurudevar who had formerly initiated their father. It was during this time that Sivaprakasa composed the work that is the subject of these articles, *Sonasaila Malai*, during a single *pradakshina* of the mountain Arunachala. At some point the

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nāṟpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṅikkavācakar is now available at the ashram bookshop. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

brothers decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the south to further their studies of Tamil. Arriving in Turaimangalam they enjoyed the patronage of a local ruler called Annamalai Reddiyar for two and a half years. Then, determining to continue on their journey south, they took their leave of Annamalai Reddiyar and departed for Tirunelveli.

There, after taking *śaiva sannyāsa*, Sivaprakasa approached the head of Dharmapura Athinam Math, Velliyambala Tambiran, with a request to teach him Tamil grammar. He in turn, in order to gauge Sivaprakasa's literary prowess, requested him to compose a *venba* verse ending and beginning with the syllable 'ku' and containing the phrase 'ūruṭaiyāṇi.' In response Sivaprakasa composed the following verse:

kuṭakkōṭu vāṇeyīru koṇṭārku kēlal  
 muṭakkōṭu muṇṇamaṇi vārku — vaṭakkōṭu  
 tēruṭaiyāṇ tevvukkuṭ tillaitōl mēṛkoḷḷal  
 ūruṭaiyāṇ ennum ulaku.

*The world declares that,  
 for Him who broke the teeth of the Sun  
 who flees to the west,  
 for Him who once wore as an ornament  
 the curving tusk of a boar,  
 for the Enemy of Kāma, who flies north  
 on the chariot [of the southerly breeze],  
 Tillai is his home,  
 [tiger and elephant] hides are his attire  
 and a young bull is his mount.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> The most likely meaning for the words *ūr uṭaiyāṇ* is *the one who possesses, the master of a city, town or village*, just as indeed the words *tēr uṭaiyāṇ* in the previous line mean *possessor of a chariot*. But Sivaprakasa puts a very clever twist on them, taking them as three separate nouns *ūr* – *town*, *uṭai* – *attire* and *āṇ* – *bull* and employing them in a *poruḷ kōḷ* – *poetic device* called *niraṇṇirai* (*niral niraṇṇirai*) which means *arrangement in rows or ranks*. In this, elements of speech, in this case three subjects and their respective predicate nouns, are 'stacked' within the same sentence on either side of the same verb, here the verb *to be* understood. Hence the meaning of the words *tillai tōl mēḷ koḷḷal ūr uṭai āṇ* is [The world declares that for Lord Śiva] *Tillai, hides [and his] mount [are] [his] home, [his] attire [and a] bull*.

Velliyambala Tambiran was deeply impressed and proceeded to instruct the three brothers in the five branches of Tamil grammar, consisting of letters, words, prosody, subject matter and rhetoric.

*(Biography to be continued in the next issue)*

Will there ever come a day  
that, freed from body,  
senses and faculties of mind,<sup>1</sup>  
with the veil of *anavam*'s  
dark illusion rent,  
I see you without seeing,  
within myself,  
I, a flower, and you the scent?

Flayer of elephant and lion  
you came [from Kailash's Mount],  
and now upon your slopes  
great herds of these you raise  
too numerous to count,  
their burning hatred to assuage,<sup>2</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(17)

For me who languishes in the heat  
of delusive charms  
of pretty girls whose heavy braids  
are decked with flower wreaths  
where swarms of humming insects feast,  
will there ever come a day

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<sup>1</sup> The faculties of mind, *karaṇam* are the intellectual faculties of which there are four *maṇam* – mind, *putti* – intellect, *cittam* – will, *volition*, and *ahamkāram* – egoity.

<sup>2</sup> Siva wears a tiger skin which belonged to the tiger that the rishis in the Daruka forest conjured up to destroy him, and also a blanket of elephant skin which belonged to the *asura* Gajāsura who attacked him in the form of an elephant. Seeing him come from Kailash dressed in this way, the tigers and elephants of Aruṇācala might understandably be somewhat aggrieved.

MOUNTAIN PATH

that you draw me in, me safe to keep  
in the cool shade of your holy feet?

Just as his shining locks do hide  
the holy Ganga's silvery tide  
that flows down from his jewelled head,  
white torrents roaring,  
tumble down your glittering sides,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(18)

Grant me now your holy grace  
to remove that poverty of mind  
whereby I idly waste my time  
in lauding those whose deeds are base,  
like Murugan who roaming goes  
from peak to peak  
or Kama with his cruel bow.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst great Mount Meru  
cannot even bear to think  
how he in days of yore  
below the shoulder  
of the Lord did, bending, shrink  
and daily bows his head in fame,<sup>4</sup>  
waxing great, do you arise,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(19)

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<sup>3</sup> The reference here appears to be to the pre-Vedic Murugan, who is the Lord of the *kuriñci tinai* – hilly tracts in the pre-Vedic Tamil culture, before he was adopted into the Hindu pantheon as the son of Śiva. Murugan and Kāma are here used to represent those who are drawn towards worldly pursuits by youth and beauty.

<sup>4</sup> When Śiva used Mount Meru as a bow to destroy the aerial cities of the *asuras*, its topmost summit would naturally have been drawn down to around the level of his shoulder. Verse 7 refers to a variant version of the story in which Lord Śiva does not even use his bow, but destroys the cities with a laugh.

Will that day come  
 that, through your grace,  
 you grant  
 to such a wicked one as I  
 the noble poverty that comes  
 from offering feasts  
 to sages great  
 who wear the holy ash,  
 and a body wasted  
 through exercise of holy fasts?<sup>5</sup>

The *kuvalai* flowers, where beetles suck,  
 that flourish on your spreading tanks  
 are not for any of the gods  
 but are for Canticuvarar<sup>6</sup> in joy to pluck,  
*Flowering Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (20)

<sup>5</sup> Service to the servants of the Lord is considered equal to, or even superior to, direct service to the Lord himself. Indeed a great number of the *nāyaṅmār*, whose histories are recounted in the *Periya Purāṇam* gained their status through just such indirect service. In his *Marital Garland of Letters*, v. 104, Sri Ramana goes even further and begs to be a servant of the servants of those servants:

ṅāmaṅkē! aṅpartam aṅparuk(ku)  
 aṅpaṅāy iṅavaru! aruṅācalā.

*Arunachala, grant through your grace that I may become a devotee of the devotees of the devotees who hear your name with love.*

<sup>6</sup> Caṅṭēcuvarar is another of the 63 *Nāyaṅār*. He was born into a Brahmin family and given the name Vicāracarumar. His devotion to the Lord caused him to slay his own father. Accordingly Lord Śiva declared that henceforth he himself would be his father and made him the chief of his devotees saying, 'We confer upon you the rank of *Chaṅṭican*, such that all the vessels from which we have eaten, all our apparel and all our adornments are yours alone.' Since the water lilies that grow on the tanks of Aruṅācala qualify as *nirmālya*, that is to say offerings of food and flower garlands that have originally been offered to Śiva, Caṅṭēcuvarar is the only one who has the right to pick them. Caṅṭēcuvarar, or Caṅṭikēcuvarar as he is commonly known, has a unique place in south Indian temple worship. During the *Kartikai Deepam* festival in Tiruvannamalai it is he who, as the devotee-god, accompanies the main temple deities Śiva, Parvatī, Vināyakar and Murugan on each of their daily processions around the temple.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Like a kingfisher that spies its prey  
great Yama stands and waits the day  
to steal my very life away.  
Please grant to me your grace 'ere this,  
and drown me in your sea of bliss.

For those who see you [only]  
as a great and towering Mount,  
you bring forth trees,  
venkai,<sup>7</sup> asoka<sup>8</sup> and sandalwood,  
covered all in honeyed flowers.  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(21)

My worthless words have not the power  
that dispatched you as an emissary<sup>9</sup>  
to the maid whose words are pure and sweet,  
as the hosts of heaven rained down flowers,  
and holy sages weeping floods of tears,  
damped down the dust upon the street.  
So ranting on, I languish here.

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<sup>7</sup> The *venkai* is the Indian kino tree, *Pterocarpus marsupium*. It is a large deciduous tree which can grow up to 30-40 metres tall. It has yellow flowers that are worn as garlands and used in the worship of Murugan.

<sup>8</sup> The *acōka*, Skt. *aśoka*, *Saraca asoka* is prized for its beautiful foliage and fragrant flowers. It is a small, erect evergreen tree, with deep green leaves growing in dense clusters. The *asoka* flowers are bright orange-yellow in colour, turning red before wilting.

<sup>9</sup> The maid is Paravaiyār, one of the two celestial handmaidens, whom, in their human incarnations, Lord Śiva granted to Sundarar as wives. Previously Sundarar had been a devotee of Lord Śiva at his court on Mount Kailash. Therefore Śiva had decreed a human birth for him, in which he could satisfy his love for the two women in their human incarnations. In the *Periya Purāṇam* it is simply stated that the Lord instructed his devotees to conduct the marriage of the couple. There is no mention of the Lord going as an emissary to request Paravaiyār's hand or of gifts of horse and elephant as stated in v. 41 later. However the story of Lord Śiva going in disguise to plead on behalf of his devotee is prevalent, possibly stemming from a variant version of the *Periya Purāṇam*.

‘Though I came clad in a form  
of surpassing greatness  
that [all] might know me,  
those Two knew me only  
inasmuch as I did make them know,<sup>10</sup>  
thus declaring you rise on high,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!* (22)

Obeying slender maids  
whose words are sweet,  
I did not serve those who crave  
the lotuses of your holy feet,  
renouncing all desire,  
not squandering birth,  
like nectar poured  
on dry, cracked earth.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord,*  
where the *simbul* bird<sup>11</sup> in plumage rich  
swoops to snatch a lion which,  
gripping with its powerful claws,  
has leapt upon the head  
of an elephant drunk in the must,  
down whose temples juices pour,<sup>12</sup>  
and clutching it, prepares to skyward soar. (23)

<sup>10</sup> Although, as Aruṇācala, Lord Śiva is accessible to all, even the great gods Viṣṇu and Brahmā were unable to know him when they arrogantly assumed that they could know him by their own efforts. Only when they abandoned their arrogance and bowed down to Him did he graciously reveal his form to them

<sup>11</sup> The *cimpuḷ* is a fabulous eight-legged bird which figures in the Purāṇas and other scriptures. It is credited with being more powerful than the lion and elephant, and is often depicted as part lion and part bird. The name appears to be a combination of the Sanskrit word *simha* – lion and the Tamil word *puḷ* – bird. Its Sanskrit name is *śarabha*, *carapam* in Tamil. The beast has a strong connection with Śiva in that this was the form that he took to defeat Viṣṇu’s lion-man avatar, *Narasimha*.

<sup>12</sup> The elephant is held to live in fear of the lion, whilst the lion in turn is held to live in fear of the *cimpuḷ* bird. There is a Tamil proverb which says, ‘The elephant dreams

Shall I ever cease to lust for pretty girls  
whose tresses soft like dark clouds swirl,  
small of brow with wanton eyes,  
like Kama's flowery darts, dark  
with fine veins in the white,  
with tiny waists, and rounded breasts,  
whereon a flower garland rests?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
who men applaud, saying,  
'Bright boar's tusks<sup>13</sup> and serpents  
as your matchless ornaments  
you liberally afford.  
Yours is the light  
that illuminates the world.'

(24)

To see you, Visnu did not think  
to sweetly sound with all his power  
the conch he carries in his hand,  
nor did Ayan deign to shower  
libations from his nine-jewelled pot<sup>14</sup>  
Thus trying to reach you, they could not.<sup>15</sup>

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of the lion, and the lion dreams of the *cimpul'*, the moral, presumably, being that however great someone is, there will always be someone greater for them to fear. However if one puts one's faith in Aruṇācala, the Self, there is no one to fear or to cause fear in someone else.

<sup>13</sup>Śiva is on occasion described as wearing a boar's tusk, possibly as a memento of his defeating Viṣṇu in his *varaha* – *boar incarnation*, or representing the tusk of the boar form abandoned by Viṣṇu after his doomed attempt to reach the Lord's feet. In the following verse 11 from chapter 59 of the *Tiruvilaiyāḍal Purāṇam*, the evening sky is compared to Śiva's body, the boar's tusk to the crescent moon and the necklace of Brahmā's skulls to the stars.

The heavens turned red, as if the most beauteous Lord had appeared in person to dispel the suffering that beset his devotee [Māṇikkvācakar]. The crescent moon resembled the white boar's tusk that hangs upon his chest, and the stars in the heavens were like the necklace of Brahma's skulls [that he wears around his neck].

You who, with mercy overflowing,  
 the mighty elephant to guard us gave  
 with five arms but a single tusk,  
 and the six-faced lion [Murugan],  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(25)

At that wedding feast I could not be,  
 in the marriage pavilion  
 of the Lord of Cīkālī,<sup>16</sup> over whom  
 his deeds had power none.  
 That time [alas] is now long gone.  
 So now to you I direct my plea:  
 to grant your holy feet in grace  
 and all my suffering efface.

Unlike great Mount Pothiyam,<sup>17</sup>  
 home of Tamil rich and sweet,

<sup>14</sup> Brahmā is depicted as having four arms, one of which holds a water pot, representing the primal waters from which he caused the universe to evolve. The *nine jewels* are given in the Madras Tamil Lexicon as *onyx, sapphire, coral, emerald, ruby, pearl, topaz, lapis-lazuli* and *diamond*.

<sup>15</sup> Brahmā and Viṣṇu became carried away by their own egos, believing that they could reach the head and feet of the Lord by their own efforts when all they needed to do was to use the implements they already held in their hands, the *nava maṇi nīr karakam* – *nine jewelled water pot* and the *nantu* – *conch*, to pay homage to him and thus gain *darshan* of him. The implication is that the same fate awaits all those who, employing the ego, attempt to gain realisation through their own mental efforts.

<sup>16</sup> *Pukali*, the name used in the verse, is another name for Cīkālī, is the birth-place of Jñānasambandhar. See v. 1, note 3. His poems constitute the first three volumes of the *Tirumuṟai*. At the time of his wedding the Lord caused a vast effulgent light to appear, with which the bride and groom merged and attained liberation. All those who witnessed his wedding are said to have merged with the light and attained *mukti* also. The poet bemoans the fact that no such ‘fast track’ to *mukti* is available to himself!

<sup>17</sup> Mount Pōthiyam is a mountain in the Pāṇṭiya country, abode of the sage Agastya. Agastya is said to have learned the Tamil language from Śiva himself and then to have settled on Mount Pōthiyam where he wrote a Tamil grammar and taught it to twelve pupils, thus founding the language and causing it to prosper.

you do not melt to music's tones,  
but only to the daughter  
[of the Himalayas'] dulcet speech,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (26)

'Ambrosia you are,  
a jewel amongst maids!  
thus flattering foolish girls  
I wandered, all to no avail.  
Yet you I did not praise,  
though I knew that those  
who string together words  
to call you even 'madman'<sup>18</sup>  
in harmonious verse,  
are granted your reward.

Though you concealed from our view  
your beauteous limbs, our eyes' delight,  
you did not hide your cooling hue  
that sheds a hundred thousand crores  
of shining [golden] rays of light.<sup>19</sup>  
Thus rising up, you tower on high,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (27)

To me, deluded by those maids  
with slender waists like threads,  
and flowery braids,

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<sup>18</sup>See note to v.16, in the previous article for the explanation of this reference to Sundarar, who did indeed refer to Lord Śiva as a *pittan* – *madman*, albeit at the Lord's own behest.

<sup>19</sup>This reference here appears to be to the golden form of Aruñāchala, the form the mountain took after first manifesting as an immeasurable pillar of fire. The word *katir*, here translated as *rays*, could also mean *suns*.

In the first [*Krita*] yuga it was a Mountain of bright red flame, then, in the *Treta yuga*, of ruby. In the *Dvapara yuga* it shone with the lustre of pure gold, and in the *Kali yuga*, in which we now dwell, it is formed of stone. Its name is *Arunachala*, the Red Mountain.

— *Aruñācala Purānam*, Ch.1. v. 52.

and wounded by the sting  
of Venus mounds  
like cobras' jewelled hoods,  
when will you vouchsafe  
the cool balm of your holy foot  
and end this madness  
with your grace?

In fair Cikazhi's noble town,  
seemly and of great renown  
you gave unto that Brahmin's son  
a booth, covered all in shining pearls<sup>20</sup>  
And now you dwell beneath  
a canopy of pearly stars on high  
that glitter in the vast and open sky,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(28)

Grant me now your grace, I pray,  
that I may pass my days away  
at the feet of true devotees,  
tending to their every need,  
studying the glorious Agamas' word,

<sup>20</sup>The story is told in the *Periya Purāṇam* of how Jñānasambandhar was given a palanquin and parasol encrusted with pearls. He was on pilgrimage and had just arrived at the *sthala* of Māraṅpāṭi. As they approached on foot, Jñānasambandhar was reciting the five syllabled mantra '*namaśivāya*' to ease the distress of his devotees who were suffering from the heat of the sun. Accordingly Lord Śiva ordained that a palanquin and parasol encrusted with pearls be provided to alleviate the suffering of his devotee.

The Lord who joyfully wears the enduring holy ash would graciously furnish him with a palanquin to ride in, a parasol to shade him and shining clarions to announce his approach, all set with flawless pearls.

Jñānasambandhar's destination the next day was the nearby *sthala* of Tirunelvāyil Aṟatturai. Lord Śiva therefore appeared to the Brahmins of that place in a dream, informed them that the aforementioned items had been placed in the temple's inner sanctum and told them that they should deliver them to the saint on the following day. Lord Śiva also apprised Sambandhar himself of what he had done. Thus the next day the precious items were duly delivered to him.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

and bringing flowers, blooming new,  
to make puja in praise of you.

You upon whose mountain slopes  
maidens of the hunter clans<sup>21</sup>  
cast pearls and jewels  
from the cobra's hood<sup>22</sup>  
to scare the parrots from the land  
where swathes of ripened millet stand,  
*fair Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(29)



*(To be Continued)*

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<sup>21</sup> In the Sangam literature the words in this verse *eyiṅ maṭavār* apply more properly to the women of the hunter-robber clans of the *pālai tiṅai* – *desert tracts*. What are being described here are the womenfolk of the *kuṟavar*, the *hill tribes* of the *kuriñci tiṅai* – *hilly tracts*, who, in addition to hunting, cultivate crops of millet on the upper slopes. The theme of young girls being delegated to guard the ripened crops in this way with slings and rattles is common in the literature, often involving the intrigue of clandestine lovers' meetings.

<sup>22</sup> Hooded snakes were believed to carry a precious jewel in their hoods. As for pearls, they were said to be produced in a number of ways, other than in an oyster shell. These places include the snake, the bamboo and the tusks of elephant and boar, all of which would have been plentiful on the mountain as imagined by the author.

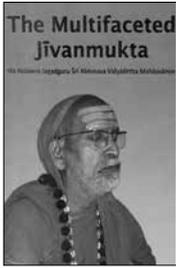
## Abundance

Suresh Kailash

Cupped hands for a food bowl,  
Matted hair to wipe them clean,  
Wearing the sky as a robe,  
Barefoot you strode the streets.

Ramana, king in beggar's guise!  
I too, come begging for alms.  
Shower on me with your eyes,  
Your abundance of no want.

# BOOK REVIEWS



THE MULTIFACETED JIVANMUKTA. His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamin, the 35th Jagadguru Shankaracharya of the Sringeri Sri Sharada Peetham. Pub: Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation, Chennai; 2017. (HB) 3kg. ₹300/800, 1030 pp pages. ISBN-10: 8193570022. ISBN-13: 978-8193570029. Priced at ₹300, copies of the volume are available at Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri, and branches

and Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation (phone: 9003192825). It may be accessed from <https://www.sringeri.net/2017/11/17/affiliate-news/vidyatheertha-foundation/free-download-book-multifaceted-jivanmukta.htm>.

For those who had the privilege of meeting His Holiness it was an experience that would remain with them for ever. As a callow young man I visited Sringeri in early 1978 and stayed for three days in a guest house in the Math. I had *darśan* of His Holiness a number of times at his residence. His kindness and understanding towards a somewhat scruffy westerner who had been travelling around India for the past ten months visiting holy sites and gurus was, when I look back on it, remarkable. This inconsequential someone who sat as far back in the room as possible because he felt out of place among the devotees in their immaculate dhotis and silk saris, was so touched that even to this day it breaks my heart to think of the kindness of His Holiness as he deliberately walked to me and dropped a fruit in my open palms. So bearing this in mind dear reader, I am not an objective reviewer of this monumental tome. The book has my vote a hundred times over! It is huge and weighty at 3kg and some 1,030 pages in expensive art paper. The layout, the photos and the text by Sri Umesh are a delight. It is a tribute to the printers Sudarshan Graphics that I spotted only one minor graphic typo. The book is also available for free download.

Srinivasa Sastry was born on the 13th November 1917, the second child of Sri Rama Sastry, a primary school teacher and Venkatalakshamma of Bengaluru. As a child he was known for his compassion and kindness towards all. It was a characteristic he

retained all his life. Highly intelligent, he was quick to learn and with his extraordinary memory he could take in information at a glance. The soft spoken Srinivasa had a strong sense of justice and is recorded as once going to the rescue of a weak boy, who was being bullied by a lout.

The boy's inclination to pray and meditate soon came to the attention of Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati, the senior pontiff of Sringeri Math. Srinivasa's upanayana occurred at the Sringeri Math and Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati who was actively searching for a successor, took a close interest in him. He spoke with the boy who readily agreed when asked if he wanted to stay at the Math and study at the patasala. Soon after, with the consent of his parents Sri Srinivasa Sastry was initiated into sannyasa. He was given the name, Abhinava Vidyatheertha.

The succession ceremony took place on May 22, 1931. With Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha's initiation there now begins the highlight of the entire tome. The author writes with great restraint and sensitivity about the remarkable bond between the guru and his disciple. The senior's unmistakable affection for his disciple is very touching. Like a father he watched over his spiritual son, who was known to go for long walks in the forest, climb trees and swim in the river Tunga, apparently much like his *paramaguru*, Sri Nrisimha Bharati. If Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha was late returning from walks or meditation in the forest, the Jagadguru would patiently wait for him. The sweetness in the relationship is shown too in the letters they exchanged when away from each other. The author brings out the mutual respect and affection of their relationship that was revealed more in their individual gestures than any words could convey and it is a joy to read.

We learn of Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha's meditation and yoga sessions. Soon after initiation we read of the swamiji's lucid description of his practice — a sequence of subtle experiences in which he is transported to Kailash where Lord Siva appeared and taught him various asanas, which He Himself demonstrates. Swamiji also easily masters the meditation techniques so much so that it becomes effortless and he can remain in *samādhi* for long periods.

Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati eventually brings him back gently to normalcy. He makes him understand that he has a destiny before him:

“You are not a solitary sannayasi... but the head of this huge Math, which calls for relentless work. I was afraid that I’d lose you.” Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha accepts the advice and remains rooted in this reality in which he is being prepared for a great task.

What is surprising is that his formal study in Vedanta commenced later after the initial years of tapas, when his guru expounded the Bhagavad Gita Bhashyam, Brahma Sutra Bhashyam and other traditional texts revealing the truth of Advaita. Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha’s unshakable faith in his guru is the thread which runs through the entire book.

From among the hundreds of photographs in the book the one abiding image that stays in my mind is of His Holiness frolicking in the ocean with his attendants. There was such delight and exuberance on his face.

One could write much, much more but suffice to say that Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha fulfilled his duties admirably, restored the affairs of the Math and expanded its reach. He attained *mahāsamādhi* on September 21, 1989 at the Sringeri Math. For those who wish to be inspired by the life of a divine soul, they need look no further.

— Christopher Quilkey



PLURALISM: THE FUTURE OF RELIGION. Kenneth Rose. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 50 Bedford Square London, WC 1B 3DP, UK, 2013. 190pp., ISBN: 978-1-62892-526-5.

The reader may recall the work of the American linguist Noam Chomsky. His syntactical structures took the field of linguistics by storm in the 1960s and demonstrated that all languages share a common grammatical basis. At the surface-structure level, he argued, languages are different, have varying lexicons, phonologies, and rules for grammatical formation. So a speaker of French will not understand a speaker of Japanese unless they communicate in a language both understand. But Chomsky asserts that French, Japanese and indeed all tongues are undergirded by an innate inborn ‘universal grammar’.

Today this is a widely accepted view of language among specialists. Could we adapt this idea to the question of other faiths? Could the same

be said of religions? At the surface-structure level, say, at the level of liturgy, symbol, and formal theology, religions vary one from another. But at a deep-structure level, they may, like language, be governed by a shared (mystical) ‘grammar’. It is not so far-fetched. At the surface-structure level, most of us are inextricably confined to our own faith. But one can imagine that at a deep-structure level when, for example, a Saivite recites the words *Om Namah Sivaya* (“Praise be the name of the Lord”), he or she is saying essentially the same thing as a Christian when he or she prays, *Praise the Lord*. One could further imagine that that which is being prayed to is the very same Reality.

Kenneth Rose’s *Pluralism: The Future of Religion* is an insightful piece of theological writing that seeks to make the case for religious pluralism as the only acceptable counterweight to overly particularistic views. In the age of globalism, particularism — the religious understanding that a single faith might claim sole access to absolute truth — seems not only naïve but impolite, even indecent.

Rose consults Eastern traditions, not least of all, the Upanishads, and argues their language extends beyond particularistic assumptions. The Upanishads are not Hindu scriptures trapped in the cultural and linguistic embeddedness of India, but are *chants of the millenia* seeking to go beyond cultural and historical particularities to point to the universal ground shared by all humanity. The same might be said of John 14.6, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*, if understood rightly. Ironically, this verse through the centuries has been made use of as a banner for sectarian polemics to underscore the apparent uniqueness of Christ and Christianity’s privileged place in the pantheon of world religions. And yet, what if the verse were read this way: *The Way, the truth and the life is ‘I AM’*? Rather than proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ, the text might actually be bearing witness to a universality that transcends dogma, creed and sectarian boundaries. The ‘I AM’ knows no name, form, time, place, culture or people but is outside of time, like the Purusha of the Upanishads, and is thus the fundamental endowment of all religions.

In chapter 5 of Rose’s book, *Hinduism, the Upaniṣads, and Apophatic Pluralism*, the author writes:

*[S]ince the largest number of relevant passages in the Upaniṣads appear to teach an apophatic pluralism that strains to move beyond naming and which is thus necessarily beyond the limits of any one tradition or sect, the Upaniṣads can plausibly be seen as embodying*

*a non-exclusive, self-emptying pluralism. This distinctive variety of pluralism, which is one of Hinduism's many religious gifts to humanity, has long helped Hinduism to be among the most tolerant of religions and to serve as an example of how a religion may, certainly not without struggle and lapses, overcome the noxious and inevitably false idea that it is the last indispensable religious word to humanity. There are fewer more edifying sights in the history of religions than to see a religious tradition embody the insight that it is but one expression in the pluralistic human quest for beatitude.* (pp. 99-100)

Kenneth Rose's book is thoughtful, rigorous, penetrating and compelling, a must read for students of comparative religion, cross-cultural studies and those wanting to take up interfaith dialogue theory at an advanced level.

— Michael Highburger



ULTIMATE TRUTH Sri Ramakant Maharaj. Zen Publications, Mumbai. 2018. ₹550. Abroad: INR 1350.00 (Shipping Price ₹700), pp.416. ISBN : 9789387242142.

Sri Ramakant Maharaj was a direct disciple of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. According to the information available, in 1962 Ramakant Maharaj was introduced by relatives to his future guru. After a few months Ramakant was initiated with the *naam mantra*, the guru mantra. From then on he regularly attended Nisargadatta Maharaj's discourses. In 1965, he attended the prestigious Elphinstone College, Bombay, at the behest of his master. He graduated from Bombay University in 1972, (M.A. in History and Politics). In 1976, he obtained his LLB qualification from Siddhartha Law College, Bombay. He worked in the legal department of a bank from 1970 until his retirement as manager in 2000. He was present at the *mahāsamādhi* of his master in 1981. Later Ramakant founded an ashram in Nasik introducing seekers from around the world to the teachings of the Incegiri Navnath *sampradaya* lineage and giving initiation in *naam mantra*. He attained *mahāsamādhi* on 31st August 2018.

The reason for the extensive biographical details at the beginning of this review is to highlight that Ramakant lived in the world and was

not inspired to renounce the world but rather to embrace it with the blessings of Nisargadatta Maharaj. This is in accord with the Incehigiri Navnath *sampradaya* which does not urge renunciation of the world. However, we do see here an example of a wider trend in India for the new wave of educated teachers to be fully conversant with worldly matters and to help their devotees live in and learn from it.

*The Mountain Path* reviewed one other book of Sri Ramakant Maharaj titled *Selfless Self* in the Advent issue 2016. The present book contains three parts: Talks from Ranjit Ashram, Nasik, Maharashtra between March and November 2017; Talks from Maharaj's visit to the USA in 2016; and finally a 'How the Master Changed my Life'.

What strikes one when reading this book is the sense of authority and clarity of thought. Ramakant Maharaj seems to be stating the obvious for those who have read many books on Vedanta but in his hands the teaching takes on an obvious simplicity that leaves one thinking can it be that easy and understandable? Yes, it can with total faith in the guru's words, the lineage and the serious application of the practice of mantra and self-enquiry. The questions by devotees are commonplace and yet interesting for they are of the type that one would want to ask. The Vedantic philosophic element is minimal as one is expected to know sufficient not to be perplexed by some of its doctrinal positions, which are self-evident to most educated Indians, and one need not be intimidated for Ramakant has a kindly manner unlike the searing fire of his master. One could call Ramakant Maharaj an encourager. He is not interested in systematically dismantling people's ignorance so much as encouraging those who came to him to dive within themselves whatever the external or internal obstacle and seek with the aid of the *naam mantra* the real source of their being.

"Don't expect anything from anyone: 'Oh! Please do something for me.' 'You Can Stand On Your Own Feet.' Don't depend on anyone. Bow down to you, mmh! That is Reality. How can you bow down to yourself? By taking what is given to you. By accepting that you are the Source, the only Source. By accepting that you are All! Value your invaluable Presence. Respect yourself, and respect everyone!"

Though one hears these admonitions again and again in other books in different ways, there is an authenticity in Sri Ramakant's words that resonates.

— T.V. Ramamurthy

# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## Navaratri

While Navaratri means ‘nine nights’, the number of nightly *pujas* can vary from eight to ten depending on the way the *tithis* fall. This year’s Navaratri consisted of ten nights of *pujas*. On 8th October (*Amavasya*), the *utsava* Goddess Yogambika was taken out of the Sri Matrubhuteswara Temple in procession. The night of the following day began the first of ten successive nightly *alankarams*. The *alankaram* on the first night was Meenakshi, avatar of Parvati, consort of Lord Siva; the second night was Gaja Lakshmi seated on a lotus, flanked by two elephants anointing her in *abhishekam* with water from their trunks; the third, Rajarajeswari, a form of Goddess Parvati also called Tripura Sundari; the fourth night, Linga Puja, depicts Parvati in worship of the linga of the Lord. The fifth night was Rishabha Vahanam, the great bull-devotee of Lord Siva, whose legs are the four Vedas; the sixth night Tapas, a tribute to Mother’s great austerities, especially those she practised at the foot of Arunachala; the seventh night, Sesha Sayanam, ‘the Lord who sleeps on Sesha’, the serpent-king of the Nagas. Devi (Parashakti), who dwells within Lord Vishnu, who rests on the serpent, the archetypal symbol of wisdom and immortality; the eighth night, Venuganam, ‘the song of the flute’, hints at the fact that even Lord Krishna’s powers have their origins in Parashakti; the ninth night, Saraswati, goddess of knowledge, music, arts and science, the consort of Brahma by whose wisdom Brahma was able to create the universe; and the last night, Mahishasura Mardini, the ‘slayer of the buffalo-demon’. The *asura* Mahishasura was invincible to all male forms, so the devas created Durga, who possessed the combined strength of all the Devas. Durga and her army fiercely fought the demon and his forces for nine days until she finally killed Mahishasura on *dasami shukla paksha*, the tenth day of the waxing moon. Thus the last night is Mahishasura Mardini. Vijaya Dasami has no major *puja* but is a holiday for all in India. On that night Goddess Yogambika was again taken in procession round the Matrubhuteswara Temple and the *Samādhi* of Bhagavan, and restored in her rightful place followed *arati*, cheers and celebration.

## Kathikai Deepam

This year's Karthikai Deepam festival got under way with the flag-hoisting at the main shrine of the Arunachaleswarar Temple on the morning of Wednesday the 14th November. Traditionally on the previous three days, there was also the Durgai Amman, Pidari Amman and Vinayakar *utsavas*.

The Holy Beacon, the Deepam, was lit at 6 p.m. on Friday the 23rd November 2018. At the Ashram the devotees gathered under a rainy sky and awaited the crowning moment of the lighting of Deepam atop Arunachala. At Bhagavan's Shrine, after the evening puja, priests brought the Ramana Mahalinga puja flame outside to join the devotees gathered round the image of Bhagavan. Devotees started chanting Bhagavan's *Arunācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* and they had to wait for twenty minutes to get a brief glimpse of the Deepam lit at 6 pm. sharp and roar in joy. Approximately 2 million devotees walked around the Hill during this Deepam festival.

## Obituaries

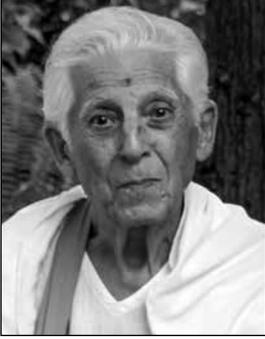
**Smt. Padma Venkatakrishnan** was born in 1927, and brought up by her aunt Yogambal who had settled in Tiruvannamalai with her husband to be closer to Bhagavan. Padma attended Municipal High School, Tiruvannamalai, and visited Bhagavan each evening with her aunt. She studied music with Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer who composed the famous 'Saranagati' song among other worthy songs on Bhagavan and Padma was blessed to be able to sing regularly before Bhagavan. Subsequently she married Sri R. Venkatakrishnan, the only son of Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer, who later became the President of Ramana Kendra, Mylapore, and thus maintained a life of devotion to Bhagavan till the end. She visited Sri Ramanasramam during Navaratri recently and participated in Sumangali puja. Padma Venkatakrishnan attained the feet of Sri Bhagavan on the third day of Navaratri, 11 Oct, 2018 at the age of 91.



She is survived by her husband, son and daughter.

**Dr. Serge Emile Demetrian (Narayana)** was born in Bucharest, 29th April 1923. He graduated in medicine and taught anatomy at the Faculty of Medicine and worked as a practising doctor in Romania.

He simultaneously published articles on Indian subjects in the area of comparative literature, followed by a Sanskrit Anthology in 1966 and *The Ramayana of Valmiki* in 1968. An exhibition of Indian art at Bucharest inspired him and sowed the idea of his future life in India at the feet of a master, free of the oppressive communist regime. Prior to leaving Romania, he translated S. Radhakrishnan's *The*



*Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (900 pp.) from English and Sanskrit into Romanian. He came to the University of Madras in December 1967 where he worked as a senior research fellow at the Centre of Advanced Study in philosophy (1968-1971) and completed his Ph.D thesis on P. Teilhard de Chardin and Vedanta (Madras, 1971). His Sanskrit study proceeded in a traditional manner under the guidance of reputed pandits. It was in August

1968 that he was introduced to the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, and he realised at long last he had found his master. Subsequently he obtained permission from the Paramacharya to accompany him on many of his *padayatras*. His profound and whole-hearted surrender to Mahaswami resulted in some 12,000 pages of notes of his experiences and observations. Demetrian became a French citizen in the 1970s and taught anatomy at the Sorbonne in Paris and wrote, in his own words, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* in French. During this time he returned to India every year to be in the presence of the Paramacharya. His knowledge of Romanian, French, English, German, Latin, Sanskrit and Tamil aided his scholarly pursuits. Two years after the Paramacharya's earthly departure in 1994, Demetrian finally took up residence in the vicinity of Sri Ramanasramam. On his regular visits to the Ashram for evening Tamil *parayana*, he won the hearts of Ramana devotees with his warm, affectionate greeting, 'Narayana, Narayana', earning him his nickname. He had a profound and limitless devotion to Sri Ramana Maharshi and Arunachala and he often quoted the Mahaswami whom he had heard state quite clearly: "The Maharshi and me are one." His humble and discreet behaviour concealed the profound wisdom he had received from the Mahaswami whereas those who knew him to some degree, saw in his radiant calm presence, an indication of what had

been accomplished. In the last month of his earthy existence he had a foot infection but firmly rejected any medical intervention. He was totally immersed in thoughts of his master, the Mahaswami. At the age of 95, he was peacefully absorbed at the feet of Holy Arunachala on Pushyami/Dasami, 7pm Thursday, 4th October, 2018.

**Smt. Vanajakshi** passed away on 22nd October 2018 at the ripe old age of 103. She was the sister of the wife of Krishna Ghanapāṭhigal who was our Vedapatasala Teacher for several decades including in Bhagavan's time. Her late husband Ramaswamy Iyer had helped in making special items in our kitchen during festivities. Smt. Vanajakshi was residing in Ashram quarters in Ramana Nagar with her son, the Ashram's Chandrasekhar, popularly known as 'Madappalli' Sekhar, who has been in Ashram for 50 years first as a Patasala student and now in Puja section.



**Suvarna R. Nathani** was born as Suvarna Divekar at Pune on 8th November, 1963. Her schooling was predominantly at BARC school in Mumbai and she did her medical education from Grant Medical College, Mumbai as a pathologist. She was married in 1990 to Dr. Ranjan R. Nathani and had two children, Ruchi and Ajinkya. Mr. Sharad Hazareji, who had *darśan* of Bhagavan in 1948, introduced them to Bhagavan. She visited Ramanasramam along with her family in the year 2000. Her



first reaction on reaching there was that of peace and contentment. Thereafter, she used to visit the Ashram at least twice a year and slowly absorbed the teaching. The turning point came when she met Ganesanji, the grandnephew of Bhagavan in 2004. With his guidance and regular spiritual sharing via email, she slowly but steadily started absorbing the teaching. In the last two years of her life, there was a marked shift in her attention from the routine day to day affairs to her inner silence.

She was always smiling and peaceful especially in her last few days. She was healthy except for occasional bouts of asthma. She passed away in her sleep early morning, on the 23rd of October, 2018.

