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Divine Names of Arunachala

12. ॐ दीनबन्ध विमोचकाय नमः

om̐ dīnabandha vimocakāya namaḥ

He who releases the lowly from bondage.

Dina means ‘poor, wretched, miserable’; *bandha* is ‘bondage’; *vimochakah* means ‘one who releases’.

This same idea of release from bondage granted to the lowly is found in verse 105 of *Aksharamanamalai*: “O Arunachala! Graciously live for ever protecting helpless devotees like me (in such a way) that they attain Bliss.” This is done naturally by Arunachala, as the sun dispelling darkness. It is not an attribute of the Supreme but Its innate nature.

How to interpret the poor, wretched, lowly? Surely what Bhagavan meant in this verse is the simple, the humble, the mature souls who more and more shed their ego and false sense of individuality. It’s stated clearly in verse 83 with an additional idea of exultation: “O Arunachala, by uniting with tender-natured devotees who are more and more humble, You have attained exaltation. What a wonder this is!” The Supreme excels all others in humility through service to lovers of God. We have only to think of Bhagavan working in the kitchen and tirelessly tending to the physical and spiritual needs of those who came to Him with sincerity.¹

What about bondage? Is it real? Bhagavan assures us that it is not. He states that clearly in verse 29 of the *Upadesa Saram*: “Transcending the duality of bondage and release (beyond the feelings of either ‘I am bound’ or ‘I am free’), attaining the form of Brahman, the state of Supreme Bliss, and inhering in It firmly without ever slipping away from It is abiding in the service of the Supreme or abiding, as enjoined by Him in humble homage to Him.”²

¹ Sadhu Om, *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, p. 96.

² Smt. T.R. Kanakammal, *Commentary on Upadēsa Nūnmālai*, p. 348.

The Old Hall

For some of us who came to Bhagavan the journey was as natural as breathing. It can happen because of the good fortune of one's family association with Bhagavan, timely spiritual education or early natural inclination. Sometimes it appears fortuitous as if by accident. But for most us it had been an arduous road to the base of that spiritual mountain we call Arunachala.

We came because after a time when we have had our fill of worldly experiences, realised the hollowness at their core, and asked that surely there must be more than this? One of our persistent thoughts is how can we escape from our painful predicament? How can we be free of the pressures that have become intolerable? Like the person who asked his guru what is required for one to turn to the spiritual path, the guru took him into a stream and held his head under the water. The disciple eventually ran out of breath and broke free of the guru's grip and surged to the surface. So too for us when we have had enough. We do not need anyone's permission to break free of the claustrophobic embrace of our daily life and fiercely reach for fresh air.

We each have our own destiny to fulfil and we should not pretend either by imitation or wishful thinking. But what is it we aspire towards? It is impossible to remain still and it seems impossible to move forward with obstacles at each and every turn. What we do know is that it requires a whole-hearted commitment.

You won't find the Truth
By crossing your legs and holding your breath.
Daydreams won't take you through the gateway of release.
You can stir as much salt as you like in water,
It won't become the sea.¹

So where do we find truth?

We all cherish places that have a special meaning in our hearts. We sometimes wish we could stay there forever. When we are in low-spirits we remember a particular place and all its positive aspects so that we may return to it in our hearts and allow it to revive us. For Ramana devotees the so-called Old Hall is one of them. Who has not felt the magic of that atmosphere with its palpably dense air almost like lead, so thick is the *pranic* energy established in the room? It is not possible to explain how it works but we all have experienced that subtle pull which, although almost unnoticed, has the power to plunge us deep within where we face and dissolve those normally unconscious currents of thought and emotion that govern our relationship with the external world. Sometimes it is beatific and sometimes it is horrible as we confront those forces, but all the time we know we are safe to explore because of the ever-present guidance and assurance that we call Ramana watching over us.

It is an eerie feeling at first and we wonder if it is real. When we resurface and leave the hall we at first think, is this true and how fortunate I am to at last have found a place where truth reigns and my thoughts and feelings are released from their tight bondage created by fear and desire. Soon enough we want to go back and enter that intimate deep space. We are impatient to relive that enchantment. This benign condition may continue for some time depending on how painful our inner damage may be, but sooner or later we are stuck as the inner door seems to be shut and we are left perplexed as to why it does not automatically open as it did before. We may gaze at the enigmatic photo on the couch for reassurance and wonder if we are fooling ourselves. What is true and what is false? Why am I here on this hard, unforgiving floor when nothing seems to be happening?

¹ *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*. Translated by Ranjit Hoskote. Penguin India, 2013, p.46.

Without knowing it at the time, we have arrived at the first major step in our redemption from the vicious wheel of *samsāra* that spins us helplessly.

The Old Hall is a place of purification and whether we are aware of it or not, a place of initiation. It is a necessary aspect of the journey for many devotees to sit there quietly and allow the energy of the presence – for there definitely is a presence – to transform us. The beauty of this is one does not need a special yogic pose, a *mantra* and knowledge. Just the ardent wish to be helped and the commitment to endure the obligatory pain that comes with the process of purification. The elixir that one feels as a result is incomparable. Such inner peace, such inner harmony!

Speaking to many who came to the ashram over the years each has their own story about being in the Old Hall. The underlying theme throughout them all is the sense of mystery and awe that comes with repeated immersion in the well of peace that reigns there. Each person has a special relationship with Bhagavan. Some simply sit there and ‘talk’ to Bhagavan. Some seek their favourite spot at their favoured time and ignore everything around them as they sternly enter into meditation. There are those who engage in ‘fan wars’ when the outside temperatures are high. If one thinks about it, it is rather odd for so many people to come into a room with an old couch with a photograph on it of an old benevolent man and automatically expect something ‘to happen’. It is hard to explain to anyone who has not sensed that magic as to what it is all about. We take it for granted just as we do after a time, many other qualities that we instinctively imbibe as members of the Ramana family. For it is a family with Bhagavan as the *paterfamilias*, the family head.

It is interesting to note that a new Old Hall has been built in Florida due to the efforts of one particular Ramana family. I have not personally been there but seeing the photographs of the new Old Hall generates an extraordinary feeling of familiarity and a spontaneous exclamation: “How can this be?”

The *bhoomi puja* for the exact replica of Old Hall in Tampa, Florida was on the 15th April 2015. Devotees had gathered to witness the ground breaking *puja* for the construction in the northeast corner of the area where the Old Hall would be. The facsimile was the dream of

a sincere devotee couple in Tampa who decided to build it in a suitable area where other Hindu temples already existed. Various sacred objects and substances were placed into the excavation including sands from Kanyakumari, and water from the Ganga. As well as *navaratna* stones and three stones from Arunachala. It was reported that many felt an outpouring of Bhagavan's Grace.²

The inauguration ceremony of the new 'Old Hall' took place on the 29th December 2016 after many challenges had been faced and surmounted. "A piece of floor stone that was recovered from the 1986 reconstruction of the original Old Hall was embedded into the new hall's floor near Bhagavan's couch, so that all devotees who prostrate before Him in Tampa might place their head on that stone, which Bhagavan once consecrated with his holy feet."³

The Maharshi online newsletter wrote that "When Suri Nagamma encountered many obstacles in the writing of her Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, she was told by a wise friend, 'śrēyāmsi bahu vighnāni' (Good works encounter several obstacles)." The same happened with this *sankalpa* (wish, resolution) by a Ramana devotee couple with the many delays and obstacles that they faced, yet all were overcome one by one. The remarkable building is testament to their dedication.

The Maharshi newsletter goes on to say – and it is worth repeating in full for the observation is profound – that "many were spellbound by the likeness to the blessed Old Hall sanctified by the presence of Sri Ramana and most particularly by the palpable presence of Bhagavan which they now experienced. It felt as if the Master had chosen to reside in His new abode in Tampa for the purpose of making our minds subside. More than one person commented that the moment they walked into the Old Hall they became totally disoriented, that their minds blanked out, their body numbed, and that they remained in total peace. Coming back to themselves they realised that, in reality, they had not been 'disoriented' but, rather, they had become 'reoriented' to their true Nature. The state that they had previously experienced was now understood by them to be the 'disoriented' one."⁴

² <https://www.arunachala.org/ashrama/events/2015/bhoomi-puja/>

³ <http://www.arunachala.org/newsletters/2017/Jan-Feb>

⁴ Ibid.



The Old Hall, Tampa, Florida

In the future who knows if it will be possible for devotees to easily travel to Arunachala from other parts of the world, particularly the USA where many Indian devotees now reside? What we do see is that other centres are slowly being established, mostly in family homes and on an informal basis. But with three specific centres now established in north America, in New York, Nova Scotia and now Florida, one wonders what further developments the future will bring.

It reminds one of the famous quote by the scientist JBS Haldane: “I have no doubt that in reality the future will be vastly more surprising than anything I can imagine. Now my own suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose.”⁵

It may be that this place in Florida is destined to become a major pilgrimage centre for devotees and sincere seekers. Only time will tell. Certainly in writing this editorial I never thought the article would turn out the way it did and all one can say is that it was necessary to draw readers’ attention to this new Old Hall as a holy site, and, to the evident conclusion that just as much as we are seeking guidance from Bhagavan, Bhagavan in turn is actively helping us and is making straight the ways for us to meet him that are beyond our present comprehension.

There are times when we think we are completely alone and there is no help in sight. It is in these moments of darkness and despair we should always remember that we are not abandoned and that though we cannot see the way forward a higher power is guiding and protecting us. To some people this may seem delusional but to us who have shared our troubles with Bhagavan as we sat in the Old Hall, whether literally or in our hearts and have felt Bhagavan’s infinite grace and compassion, it is just the simple truth. ▲

⁵ Haldane, JBS. *Possible Worlds and Other Papers* (1927), p.286.

An Insight into Surrender

Part Two

N.S. RAMAMOCHAN

4) The notions of ‘I and Mine’ and the shuttling between misery and happiness

When the notion of ‘mine’ is present, its loss results in pain and suffering. Conversely in a situation when we notice pain or pleasure arising in us, it indicates the ‘mine’ connection. It could be some form of fear, emotion, approval or disapproval associated with something in that situation that has a connection to ‘I/mine’. Sometimes this connection is hidden behind several layers of past impressions, and it may not at once be obvious or easy to discern. It is strange that even in situations that appear to be remotely connected we shuttle between pain and pleasure. Such are the subtle and nebulous notions the egoic entity holds (such as ‘I know’, ‘I am right’ to ‘my creed’, ‘my caste’, ‘my country’, etc.). There are stories of people suffering a

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.

heart attack because, their country's team has lost a football match or a cricket match of some prestige. The higher the value of possession, the more severe is the pain or suffering, the highest being 'I am the body' notion. It is this notion that in the first place that prompts acquisition of objects. To appreciate how suffering ensues or how peace prevails, it is worthwhile to look at the arising of the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'.

5) Self-surrender or Devotion to the 'Self'

Bhagavan points to the Self-evident truth shining in us which is described as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, and an approach to surrender that is available to us by paying self-attention with alertness. He says, "*Sat* (Being) is *Chit* (Knowledge Absolute); also *Chit* is *Sat*; 'What is', is only one. Otherwise the knowledge of the world and of one's own being will be impossible. It denotes both being and knowledge." (Talk§506) We experience every day in our deep sleep the peace of 'Self'. In waking state too we experience the same peace of the Self. Only when this peace or silence inherent to Self is recognized (experienced) will it be possible for one to watch the rise of ego and remain undistracted. Thus,

Self → 'What is' → Pure 'I Am' → Peace or Silence →
Being + knowledge of the world

5.1) Self-surrender means seeing the Self in everything

The fifth stanza of *Arunachala Pancharatnam* says, "He who surrenders his mind to You, and seeing You, always beholds the universe as Your figure, he who at all times glorifies and loves You as none other than the Self, blissfully merging in You, triumphs, Oh Arunachala." Explaining this verse Bhagavan says, "The stanza says that one should completely surrender one's mind, turn it inwards and see 'you' the Self within and then see the Self in 'you' in everything. It is only after seeing the Self within that one will be able to see the Self in everything. One must first realise there is nothing but the Self and that he is that Self, and then only he can see everything as the form of the Self. That is the meaning of saying, 'See the Self in everything and everything in the Self', as is stated in the Gita and other books." (*Day by Day with Bhagavan* or DBD18-4-46 Afternoon). The word 'you' above means 'Arunachala'.

5.2) There is nothing but Self and one is the Self

It is everyone's experience that when one wakes up the head rises. That is, the waking state arises when the light of consciousness from the ever present substratum, the Self, also called the Heart, illumines the head, the physical seat of mind, the mind arises (Talk§474) This illumination or reflected light, is Pure 'Aham' (Talk§474) or 'I' or the sense of 'I Am' that we experience. Upon waking from deep sleep, our very first experience if we may call it so (as, there is no experiencer as such), is that of the 'Self' in its full majesty, the state of Being, which is awareness-peace; a thought free mind called *sattvic* mind. *Sattvic* mind remains as a witness to the waking state experiences, as explained by Sri Bhagavan (in the later part).

It is also called the cosmic mind or Cosmic Consciousness (Talk§510). Again, when we enter the sleep state, our head nods off, the light of consciousness is withdrawn from the head, and the perception of our body and the world disappears (Talk§474, Talk§336, Talk§82, Talk§304, Talk§286).

Thus, Bhagavan points out, that our head, which we think is the basic instrument for our functioning, is itself not the seat of consciousness (Talk§336, Talk§402). It subsists on consciousness derived from the Self. The simple observation of head rising and nodding off points to this very fact, and a source due to which it happens. He also says that 'the mind can do nothing by itself. It emerges only with the illumination and can do no action, good or bad, except with the illumination' (DBD 28/6/46). Thus it is clear that we are entirely dependent on that source for our functioning, call it, the Self or Higher Power or God.

5.3) Arising of the Ego

The light of consciousness goes through another reflection, pure Aham is modified as 'Aham vritti' ('I-thought'). It is called 'ego'. It identifies with the body, and 'I am the body' notion ensues. The cosmic mind gets 'particularised' to a body (Talk§510). The infinite being shrinks to the limits of a body. It is known as the bond between the sentient and insentient, as *chit-jada-granthi*. The ensuing 'I' (the individual who calls himself as 'I', with 'I am the body' notion) becomes the subject and everything it perceives becomes an object. The infinite

being splits into seer and the seen. To transcend the self-imposed imperfection, the ego acquires objects and calls them ‘mine’, which further adds to that imperfection.

5.4) We are seeing the conscious space within us as if it is outside

To a question as to how the universe can be contained in the cells of the brain, Sri Bhagavan answered, “The world is seen when the man wakes up from sleep. It comes after the ‘I-thought’. The head rises up. So the mind has become active. What is the world? It is objects spread out in space. Who comprehends it? The mind.

Is not the mind, which comprehends space, itself space (*ākaśa*)? The space is physical ether (*bhūtākaśa*). The mind is mental ether (*manākaśa*) which is contained in transcendental ether (*chidākaśa*). The mind is thus the ether principle, *ākaśa tattva*. Being the principle of knowledge (*jñāna tattva*), it is identified with ether (*ākaśa*) by metaphysics. Considering it to be ether (*ākaśa*), there will be no difficulty in reconciling the apparent contradiction in the question. Pure mind (*śuddha manas*) is ether (*ākaśa*). The dynamic and dull (*rajas* and *tamas*) aspects operate as gross objects, etc. Thus the whole universe is only mental.

“Again, consider a man who dreams. He goes to sleep in a room with doors closed so that nothing can intrude on him while asleep. He closes his eyes when sleeping so that he does not see any object. Yet when he dreams he sees a whole region in which people live and move about with himself among them. Did this panorama get in through the doors? It was simply unfolded to him by his brain. Is it the sleeper’s brain or in the brain of the dream individual? It is in the sleeper’s brain. How does it hold this vast country in its tiny cells? This must explain the oft-repeated statement that the whole universe is a mere thought or a series of thoughts.” (Talk§451).

Bhagavan says that the world is in us, but because of the ‘I am the body’ notion it appears as if it is outside us (Talk§272). To a lady who wanted Bhagavan to come to Europe he said, “This notion that you are in India must go. India is in you. In order to verify it, look to your sleep. Did you feel that you were in Europe or in India while asleep? You were nevertheless existing then the same as now. Space

is in you. The physical body is in space, but not you.” (Talk§304) Thus, what we are seeing in front of us is our own conscious space within, projected as appearing outside (which is, ‘Here’ in the usage ‘Here and Now’). When we see with this inward attentive out look, we are seeing the Self in us and seeing the Self in everything. Just as we ordinarily have no capability to alter the dream world, we do not have any capability to alter the world appearance as it does in waking. In Self-surrender this point must always be kept in mind. As one progresses on the path, the truth that the world is within oneself firms up.

5.5) Recognizing that the ego/individual has no independent existence or capability

Further, that we are dependent for our functioning on that source the Self becomes obvious when we note that, a) the sense perceptions (the sense of touch, hearing etc.) are not in our control, they just happen, and we are powerless to prevent them from happening, b) our body organs function perfectly by themselves. Occurrence of the three states of waking, dream and sleep is not in our control. Bhagavan further says that “the body is designed for doing the various things marked out for execution in this life”, and that “the whole program is chalked out”, meaning, all the actions take place as ordained (DBD 4/1/46 Afternoon, Talk§41).

So, He asks us not to assume the doership of the bodily actions. Scientific studies too seem to point to the same truth (Ref: ‘Everything is Predetermined’ by Gary Weber, in *Mountain Path*, Vol. 47, No.1, Jan-Mar 2010). Experiments were carried out to determine the time gap between arising of a thought and beginning of the action by putting probes on the head, and the muscles of legs and hands. It was noticed that the movement of muscles took place first and the arising of the thought activity later.

For example, a person thinks of getting up and going to a water vessel to drink water. It was noticed that the muscle movement as sensed by the probes always took place first and thought activity as detected by the probes on the head later. The source of the signal that initiated the muscle movement prior to the thought activity could not, however, be traced.

Thus, our entire functioning happens in the light of the Self. A deep understanding of this truth, based on our own everyday experience, forms the firm basis for faith (devotion) and surrender to that source in us. We can then perhaps appreciate how every day we wake up in peace (reminding us of the Self within) and move into unrest as ego arises. Bhagavan says, ‘The ego submits only when it recognizes the Higher Power. Such recognition is surrender or submission, or self-control. Otherwise the ego remains stuck like the image carved on a tower, making a pretense by its strained look and posture that it is supporting the tower on its shoulders. The ego cannot exist without the Power but thinks that it acts of its own accord. (Talk§398).

To sum up, He says, ‘All talk of surrender is like pinching jaggery from the jaggery image of Lord Ganesa and offering it as *naivedya* to the same Lord Ganesa. You say you offer your body, soul and all possessions to God. Were they yours that you could offer them? At best, you can only say, ‘I falsely imagined till now that all these which are yours (God’s) were mine. Now I realise they are yours. I shall no more act as if they are mine.’ And this knowledge that there is nothing but God or Self, that I and mine don’t exist and that only the Self exists, is *jñāna*.’ He added, ‘Thus there is no difference between bhakti and *jñāna*. Bhakti is *jñāna mata* or mother of *jñāna*.’ (DBD 22-11-45 Morning)

5.6) Stillness of Mind is sign of surrender

Incompleteness that one feels due to the ‘I am the body’ notion gives rise to desire. Desire gives rise to doership. Doership means the ego’s effort to fulfil desire to feel the completeness. Bhagavan says, ‘Surrender once for all and be done with the desire. So long as the sense of doership is retained there is the desire; that is also the personality. If this goes the Self is found to shine forth pure. The sense of doership is the bondage and not the actions themselves. ‘Be still and know that I am God’. Here stillness is total surrender without a vestige of individuality. Stillness will prevail and there will be no agitation of mind. Agitation of mind is the cause of desire, the sense of doership and personality. If that is stopped there is quiet. There ‘Knowing’ means ‘Being’. It is not the relative knowledge involving the triads, knowledge, subject and object.’ (Talk§354)

6) Sattvic mind is the Self itself; it is ‘what is’, it is the witness, the ‘Now/Present’

Bhagavan says, “*Vṛtti* (mode of mind) belongs to the *rajasic* (active) mind. The *sattvic* mind (mind in repose) is free from it. The *sattvic* is the witness of the *rajasic*. It is no doubt true consciousness. Still it is called *sattvic* mind because the knowledge of being witness is the function of *ābhāsa* (reflected consciousness) only.” (Talk§68)

Sri Bhagavan says, “Talking of the ‘witness’ should not lead to the idea that there is a witness and something else apart from him that he is witnessing. The ‘witness’ really means the Light that illumines the seer, the seen and the process of seeing. Before, during and after the triads of seer, seen and seeing, the illumination exists. It alone exists always.” (DBD, 18/7/46)

“*Sattvic* mind is surmised of the *jīvanmukta* and of *Īśvara*. ‘Otherwise,’ they argue, ‘how does the *jīvanmukta* live and act?’ The *sattvic* mind has to be admitted as a concession to argument. The *sattvic* mind is in fact the Absolute consciousness. The object to be witnessed and the witness finally merge together and Absolute consciousness alone reigns supreme. It is not a state of *śūnya* (blank) or ignorance. It is the *svarūpa* (Real Self). Some say that mind arises from consciousness followed by reflection (*ābhāsa*); others say that the *ābhāsa* (reflection) arises first followed by the mind. In fact both are simultaneous.” (Talk§68)

“The essence of mind is only awareness or consciousness. When the ego, however, dominates it, it functions as the reasoning, thinking or sensing faculty. The cosmic mind being not limited by the ego has nothing separate from itself and is therefore only aware. This is what the Bible means by ‘I am that I AM.’” (Talk§188).

‘Witness’ implies that it is there for the full length of waking state (see above DBD, 18/7/46). Bhagavan compares it to the screen on which a movie is projected.¹ It is the ‘Being plus knowledge of the world’. It is the ‘Now’ or the ‘Present’. In an ordinary person, ego quickly interferes with ‘what is’. The attention which was centered in the source is lost when the ego rises and attention shifts to an

¹ The example of screen is given in *Talk with Sri Ramana Maharshi* in over 30 instances, and in *Day By Day with Bhagavan* in about 10 instances.

object. But, knowing (or experiencing) ‘what is’ (the peace or silence) provides us the opportunity to accept it or remain with it without allowing the ego to intervene.

‘Pure mind implies impure mind also. It is the *rajasic* or active mind or the ego; this too can be projected from the former *sattvic* mind through another reflection only; thus the ego is the product of the second darkness (*avidyā*). Then comes the tamasic or the dull mind in the shape of *antaḥkaraṇa*-s (the inner organs); this appears as the world’, says Bhagavan (Talk§323).

He says that ego rises in a *jñāni* too. “Both in the *jñāni* and *ajñāni*, ego is sprouting forth, but with this difference, namely the *ajñāni*’s ego when it rises up is quite ignorant of its source, or he is not aware of his *sushupti* in the dream and *jagrat* states; whereas a *jñāni* when his ego rises up enjoys his transcendental experience with this ego keeping his *lakṣya* (aim) always on its source. This ego is not dangerous; it is like the skeleton of a burnt rope; in this form it is ineffective. By constantly keeping our aim on our source, our ego is dissolved in its source like a doll of salt in the ocean.” (Talk§286) ▲

(To be continued)

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

You are the essence
of the sacred cadences,
the riddles in rhythm;
you are, *Chandaśaraa*, the
unlocking of the Veda.

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.

Bhagavan and Mother Azhagammal

Two Faces of the Divine

RAVI R. IYER

When the formless Infinite is impelled by its own free will to express itself into its own manifest creation, it does so as a divine pair. This primordial couple is recognized and declared by the scriptures as *Śiva* and *Śakti* and the workings of this dyad can be identified in many examples of divine manifestation. Whether it is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sarada Devi, Jesus of Nazareth and the Virgin Mary or Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Mother Azhagammal, the phenomenon of the dyad manifestation of the Divine into its creation is an intrinsic property that is conditioned by the fundamental relationship between Consciousness or Awareness as the Unmoving Witness, *Śiva* and Consciousness as Movement (*spanda*),

Dr. Ravi R. Iyer came to Bhagavan in 1976 at the age of 18 years of age through the medium of the book *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* during a period of great mental anguish and turmoil. He has been practising the Direct Path of Bhagavan ever since and is a visitor to Sri Ramanasramam since 1980.

or Shakti. These two aspects of Consciousness are inseparable and are considered separately only through the artificial construct of linguistic description and analysis.

In the realm of experience *Śiva* cannot be experienced without the experience of *Śakti* and neither can *Śakti* be experienced without the simultaneous experience of *Śiva*. When this fundamental truth is assimilated, it becomes apparent that Bhagavan and Mother Azhagammal are in actuality two sides of the same entity and thus what we now see in the blessed *sthala* that we know as Sri Ramanasramam is the unique shrines of *Śiva* and *Śakti* residing in vibrant juxtaposition as the *samādhi* of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and the Matrubhuteswara shrine of Mother Azhagammal.

The sacred *sthala* that we know today as Sri Ramanasramam is not merely a hermitage created by mendicant squatters on a defunct cemetery on the southern slopes of Arunachala. A closer examination of the circumstances that allowed this to unfold will demonstrate the hand of Divine will in the creation of a unique centre. A sacred *sthala* where the highest traditions of *jñāna mārga* will find seamless union with the most sublime expressions of *karma* and *bhakti mārga* in a way that allows seekers from diverse nations, creeds, ethnic backgrounds and cultures to find a niche where they can strive towards the highest spiritual goal without any conflict.

The direct path of Self-enquiry though simple in concept and principle is actually not quite so simple in execution, requiring considerable resources of self-discipline, strength of concentration and tenacity of faith to execute. Not every one of the multitudes of seekers who came to Bhagavan found themselves capable of immediate pursuit of the direct path. To these individuals, Bhagavan would suggest the preparatory paths of breath awareness and control, *mantra japam*, ritualistic worship, tapas etcetera as a prelude to pursuing the direct path. This latter preparatory path was exemplified by the *tapas* undertaken by Mother Azhagammal in her own path to liberation.

In this respect, it would be gross folly to consider the stature of Mother Azhagammal as merely an orthodox widow bound down by prejudicial notions of caste and race. Instead if one were to study the life course of this saint mother, one would realise the play of the Divine which would choose to mask its own unconditional compassion behind

the façade of prejudicial orthodoxy to demonstrate by example the path out of the mire of orthodoxy to everyone else. Indeed, how else can we reconcile the Mother Azhagammal who would serve as a birthing midwife to all women in the throes of labour irrespective of caste or creed in the village of Tiruchuzhi with the Mother Azhagammal who would shudder before an onion bulb?

Thus, what we see in vivid demonstration before us in the lives of this Divine dyad and in the present-day shrines of Sri Ramaneshwara Lingam and the Matrubhuteswara Lingam at Sri Ramanasramam is the play of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* as *Śiva* and *Śakti*. That subtle, mysterious and infinite dance between the unmoving impassive witness and the eternally moving Consciousness weaving through name and form in song, dance and ritual worship. So that we the multitude, mired and fossilized in the chains of name and form may eventually break free of our shackles and dance across space.

The play of the Divine is almost never linear in its unfolding. Rather it is the multidimensional play of a complex tapestry of events whose threads reveal a harmonious coherence only when viewed in retrospect. The Ramanasramam that we see today with its meditation halls, shrines, kitchen and dairy farm was not even in existence as an idea in 1916 when Mother Azhagammal laboured her tired frame up the Eastern slope of Arunachala to Virupaksha Guha (cave) to meet a small band of *sādhu*-s surrounding Bhagavan who lived a monastic existence of spartan austerity.

Though this was not her first visit, this climb up the steep hillside towards Virupaksha Guha signified an acceleration of a path of events that had taken her from the status of an envied wife of a successful pleader in Tiruchuzhi to a broken down widow bereft of husband (Sundaram Iyer), daughter-in-law (Mangalam), and brother-in-law (Nellaiappa Iyer). Thus crucified on the cross of sorrow and loss, Mother Azhagammal journeyed up Arunachala to the fountain of peace that beckoned her with the promise of refuge and rest. But the path of the Divine is the domain of internal transformation and seldom the province of external appearances.

The arrival of Mother Azhagammal as a daily participant in the events of the *sādhu*-s of Virupaksha Guha marked a transition in the lives of Bhagavan and the *sādhu*-s as much as it did in the life of the

Mother. Initially Mother Azhagammal stayed with Echammal in town, making the arduous climb up to Virupaksha Guha every morning and down back to town every evening. As time went on this physical ordeal was brought to Bhagavan's attention with a plea that Mother Azhagammal may be allowed to reside at Virupaksha Guha with all the other male monks.

This proposition was vigorously opposed by the male monks who zealously guarded their preferred access to Bhagavan, until Bhagavan who was a silent witness to the heated debate, abruptly got up and suggested to Mother Azhagammal to come with Him and that they could reside at some other place and let the other monks have their coveted privacy. Presented with the prospect of totally losing Bhagavan, all the monk's generosity of sharing equal access suddenly blossomed and Mother Azhagammal became a permanent resident of Bhagavan's group of monks. The stage was now set for the steady transformation of a group of monks into the monastery that we now know as Sri Ramanasramam.

Externally Azhagammal was being guided and steeped in the *sādhana* imposed upon her under the firm and unwavering eye of Bhagavan. The structured ritualism and presuppositions of castes and social stigma's governing purity and conduct were steadily peeled away, sometimes gently, sometimes harshly with sharp sarcasm in favour of the universal law of '*samatvam*' or equality towards all creation. Internally however, the entire group of monks was slowly being transformed by the presence of Mother Azhagammal into a formal structure.

The arrival of Mother Azhagammal marked the genesis of the Ashram kitchen. The nascent seed of the future Ramanasramam was taking root in the events at Virupaksha Guha and then onward at Skandasramam. It is said that one of the prime forms of the Universal Mother is that of Annapurna, the goddess of food. Not any mere food for mortals but food (*annam*) that brings about completion (*pūrṇam*) and hence Annapurna.

Surely the Divine in its wondrous compassion has crafted this drama of external façade of arduous tapas and transformation with internal manifestation of the primal form of the Universal Mother as the Annapurna that has from 1916 fed millions of lost souls the

ambrosia of *pūrṇa prasādam* from the kitchen of Sri Ramanasramam. The fire that was started thus by Mother Azhagammal to feed a small group of monks in 1916 has burned faithfully to this day as a testament to a unique sacrifice, an *agnihotra* that has no parallel in the world.

Śakti is described in *Śrī Lalitā Sahasranāma* as *Guhya priya* (lover of secrets). It is no surprise therefore that Mother Azhagammal should reveal her actions in such an indirect and subtle manner. A secret that reveals itself to only those who are able to approach Her with humility and awed respect. The Sri Ramanasramam that we all love and cherish today has its beginnings in Mother Azhagammal's cooking pot and its foundation is erected upon the temple of Her Samadhi in a living vibrant testimony of the promise of salvation that is guaranteed at this place to all who surrender. ▲

The Complaint

Suresh Kailash

Listen, oh elders!
He wed me in secret,
with his garland of grace.
Can he deny it?

He wore the garland I made,
with a flower for every breath,
and love its silken thread.
Can he deny it?

Comes the night,
he comes to me,
and ravishes me with light.
Can he deny it?

Isn't that why
you are silent,
Ramana, my Heart,
my life?



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Seven

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

12th September 1978

Sadhu Om: The first question that Sivaprakasam Pillai asked Bhagavan was ‘*nān yār?*’, which means ‘Who am I?’, to which he replied ‘*arivē nān*’, which means ‘Awareness alone is I’, so Sivaprakasam Pillai then asked, ‘*ariviṅ sorūpam eṇṇa?*’, ‘What is the nature of [such] awareness?’, to which Bhagavan replied ‘*saccidāṇandam*’, ‘Being-awareness-bliss’. From this we should understand that what ‘I’ really is is neither the ego nor any of the five sheaths [the physical body, life, mind, intellect and will, or the darkness of self-ignorance in which the will resides] that constitute the body or person that the ego takes to be itself.

This is why Bhagavan advised us to investigate ‘who am I’ in order to experience what we really are, namely pure awareness or *sat-cit-ānanda* [being-awareness-bliss]. However, not understanding that

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what 'I' really is is nothing but pure awareness, people often asked him, 'When you ask us to investigate who am I, which is the I we are to investigate?', to which he would generally reply, 'It is the ego' [as recorded, for example, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-45 Night and 3-1-46 Afternoon]. Why did he answer in this way?

After being told that what 'I' really is is just *sat-cit-ānanda*, no matter whatever else it may seem to be, asking this question, 'Which 'I' am I to investigate?', is like after being told that what seems to be a snake is actually just a rope and advised to look at it carefully to see for oneself, asking, 'Which 'it' am I to look at, the snake or the rope?' The appropriate answer to give anyone who asks this question is 'the snake', because they obviously have not understood clearly enough that there are not two different things there, a snake and a rope, but just one thing, a rope that seems to be a snake. Likewise there are not two different 'I's, a real 'I' and an ego, but just one real 'I' that seems to be the ego.

Those who ask which 'I' is to be investigated have not understood that there is only one 'I', so they imagine that the real 'I' is some other thing that is now unknown. Therefore whenever anyone asked this question, Bhagavan generally replied that the 'I' they should investigate is the ego, because they believed that that is the only 'I' they know.

There is also a deeper reason why he often described *ātma-vicāra* [self-investigation or self-enquiry] as investigating the ego. We need to investigate ourself only because we have risen as ego, so it is only as this ego that we are to investigate who or what we actually are. Our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*) does not need to investigate itself, because as our real nature we are always aware of ourself as we actually are. Therefore *ātma-vicāra* is the ego investigating itself.

Though our aim is to know our real nature, we are now aware of ourself as the ego, so we cannot attend to our real nature as it is but only as the ego that it seems to be. However, this does not mean that we cannot attend to our real nature, which is what is always shining within us as 'I', but only that we cannot attend to it except as the ego, because that is what 'I' now seems to be.

However, since there is only one 'I', if one investigates this one 'I', which is what now seems to be the ego, its real nature will be revealed,

just as if one looks carefully enough at what seems to be a snake one will see that it is just a rope. When one sees that it is actually just a rope, the snake in effect disappears or takes flight. Likewise when one investigates oneself keenly enough to see what one actually is, the ego will disappear or take flight. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and elsewhere that if one seeks or scrutinises the ego, it will take flight.

What remains when the ego takes flight is just our real nature, which as he says in verse 21 of *Upadēśa Undiyār* is always the true import of the word ‘I’, because we do not cease to exist in sleep, even though there is then no ego. This true import of the word ‘I’ is not something new that we did not know before, but is just the one ‘I’ that we have always known clearly, because whether the ego appears, as in waking and dream, or does not appear, as in sleep, we are always aware of ourself, our own existence, ‘I am’. However, though we have never been not aware of this one real ‘I’, we were previously aware of it as ego, the spurious ‘I’ that rises as ‘I am this body’, so when this imposter takes flight, we know only what we have always known, namely the one real ‘I’, but instead of knowing it as ego, we know it as it really is.

The ‘I’ that we are to know is not anything other than ourself, so when we know what we really are we will know that we have always known ourself. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 33 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘To make oneself an object, are there two selves? Because being one is the truth, the experience of everyone’.

The ego is just a wrong knowledge or awareness of ourself, which is superimposed on our awareness of our real nature, just as the snake is just a misperception, which is superimposed on our perception of the rope. Therefore when the wrong awareness called ‘ego’ is removed, what remains is the real awareness that we actually are, unobscured by the appearance of the ego, just as when the misperception called ‘snake’ is removed, what remains is our perception of the rope, unobscured by the appearance of the snake.

Just as the snake is nothing other than a rope, the ego is nothing other than our real nature. Therefore to see our real nature we just have to look at the ego very carefully. So long as we mistake ourself to be this ego, we need to investigate it, but our aim is not to know the

ego but only to know what we actually are. If we clearly understand the oneness of the ego and our real nature, we will understand that looking at the ego is nothing other than looking at our real nature.

However, if someone is unable to doubt the reality of their *jīva-bhāva* or sense of individuality, the false awareness 'I am this body', they will not be able to understand even at an intellectual level that what seems to be the ego is nothing other than their real nature. For such people it is necessary to say that the 'I' that should be investigated is only the ego, because they believe the real 'I' is something other than that, whereas for those who can understand that the ego is just a false appearance, like an illusory snake, it will be clear that there is actually no difference between investigating the ego and investigating one's real nature.

In the question 'Whence am I?' what 'I' refers to is only the ego, because the ego alone is the rising 'I', the 'I' that appears and therefore just seems to exist, so investigating whence am I means investigating the source from which the ego has risen or appeared, namely one's own real nature. In the question 'Who am I?', however, though what 'I' refers to may seem to be the ego, if one has a more mature and therefore a clearer and more subtle understanding it will be clear that from a deeper perspective what 'I' refers to is actually one's real nature, because one's real nature alone is the being 'I', the 'I' that actually exists, so it alone is what seems to be the ego, and hence though investigating who am I may seem to mean investigating the ego, what it actually means is investigating one's own real nature.

This is what I explained in *The Path of Sri Ramana*, but one person came to me recently and argued that what I had written there is wrong because Bhagavan said that the 'I' in the question 'Who am I?' is only the ego. Even when I explained to him why Bhagavan said so and that the ego and our real nature are not two different things, just as the snake and the rope are not two different things, he could not understand or would not accept my explanation.

What this person argued is like arguing that we should not look at the rope because Bhagavan said that we should look only at the snake. But how can we look at what seems to be a snake without looking at the rope? We may not recognise that it is a rope, but even when we look at it thinking it is a snake, what we are actually looking at is

only a rope. Likewise, even when we do not recognise it as our real nature, when we attend to the ego what we are actually attending to is only our real nature, because what seems to be this ego is nothing other than that.

No such thing as ego actually exists. We seem to be this ego only because we do not look at ourself carefully enough, so the ego seems to exist only when we do not attend to it keenly enough. This is why Bhagavan asks us to investigate ourself by keenly attending to the ego, which is what we now seem to be. Therefore understanding clearly that what seems to be this ego is nothing other than our real nature is necessary for us to go deep within.

How can we see what we actually are so long as we cling to the belief that the ‘I’ we are investigating is only the ego? The very purpose of investigating ourself is for us to see that we are not actually this ego, which we seemed to be till now, but are only the beginningless, endless (limitless or infinite) and unbroken (undivided or unfragmented) *sat-cit-ānanda*, as Bhagavan says in verse 28 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*. So when we attend to ourself we need to give up all ideas about two different ‘I’s, one of which we know, namely the ego, and the other of which we do not know, namely our real nature.

There is only ever one ‘I’, which is our real nature, but because we have not investigated it keenly enough, it seems to be this ego. This is why investigating this ego with eagerness to know what it is is the only means to know what we actually are. We cannot know what we actually are so long as we continue to believe that the real import of the word ‘I’ (what this word actually refers to) is the ego, so the sooner we give up this wrong idea the better.

Therefore we should think carefully and deeply about Bhagavan’s teachings in order to understand why he said whatever he said, and we should not assume that every answer he gave in reply to the wide variety of questions he was asked, often by people who were far from being able to grasp his teachings in a deep and subtle manner, was the final word he had to say on that subject. He answered at many different levels to suit the needs of those who asked him questions, so not everything he said represents the real depth and subtlety of his teachings. ▲

(To be continued)



KEYWORD

Prapatti

JOHN GRIMES

There is an Advaita tradition that states there are two ways to gain Self-realisation: *Jñāna* and *Prapatti*. The analogy presented is of a person in chains. On the path of knowledge one identifies with the Absolute thereby becoming larger and larger until the chains snap. On the other hand, on the path of devotion/surrender, one declares “not-me, O Lord, but you” and thus one becomes smaller and smaller until one is able to slip through the links of the chains. Either one becomes everything or else one becomes nothing – in the end, both are the same. Sri Ramana remarked:

The ‘I’ casts off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remains as ‘I’. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of *bhakti* – I approach *Īśvara* and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original ‘I’, perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the ‘I’ is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (*parabhakti*), surrender (*prapatti*), or the height of detachment (*vairāgya*).¹

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talk with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§28.

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The theistic religious traditions around the world acknowledge a personal God and advocate devotion and surrender to God as a means of salvation. A basic presupposition of all theistic systems is that there is posited a gap between the human and the Divine. Somehow, the theistic systems must find a 'bridge' that will enable these two separate entities to commune with each other. If one sets up God as an 'other', remote and estranged, a link must be found which will somehow tie the physical to the supra-physical. This link is devotion or surrender.

Devotion is called the path of love, an intense love of God wherein the devotee says, "Let that constant love which the ignorant have for objects of the senses, let me have that constancy in my love for Thee." Note that devotion, as it is traditionally known, involves not the disappearance of the ego, the 'I'-thought, but its release from all limiting barriers. No matter how high the soul moves, God is always higher – the soul may attain a God-like nature, but never God's identity.

In Sri Vaishnavism of South India a distinction is made between devotion (*bhakti*) and surrender (*prapatti*). Devotion is said to be 'formal'. It is like a ladder with a gradual movement upwards toward communion with God. It has qualifications and is dependent on external aids. Formal devotion begins at birth and culminates at death. Thus, the devotee must have an unflagging will to undergo all the disciplines needed and a patience to endure. It is described as a long, step-by-step, moment-to-moment, long path to God. It is a long hard path, full of pitfalls, and not open to everyone as rituals, mantras, and temple worship are required and mandatory, and such are not open to all the Hindu castes. This path of devotion is called the 'way of the monkey'. A baby monkey clings to its mother's chest as she moves about the forest. If the baby monkey lets go at any time, the little monkey will fall and die. Thus, in this path, the devotee must exert continual self-effort as well as having faith in God.

Surrender, the path of self-surrender, on the other hand, is a path open to everyone. The only prerequisite needed is a complete change of heart, an absolute confidence in the saving grace of the Lord. It has no rules. It is said to be a direct and easy path for once taken, all is then left in the hands of God. It is known as the 'way of the kitten'. A baby kitten puts forth no effort when the mother cat moves it from

place to place. In fact, it just goes limp and if it were to struggle, this would actually make the mother's efforts much more difficult. This path preserves the essentials of formal devotion, but dispenses with its conditions and non-essentials.

The path of (complete) surrender implies abiding by the will of God in all things. There will be no grievances about what may or may not take place. Even when things turn out differently from the way one would have once-upon-a-time, before surrender, wanted, everything is left up to God. Surrender means abiding by God's will whether God appears or not. One awaits His pleasure, at all times, in all circumstances. To ask God to do as one pleases or desires is not to surrender, but to command. One cannot demand that God obey you and still think you have surrendered. God knows what is best and when and how to do everything. Surrender means leaving everything, everything inclusive, entirely up to God. God carries such a person's burden even as a lawyer, to whom one has signed over a 'power of attorney' contract, carries one's burden. In the truly surrendered devotee, the ego, the 'I'-thought is also surrendered.

It is often remarked that Bhagavan Ramana advocated two paths to Self-realisation: primarily Self-enquiry, but also the path of surrender. He said:

“There are only two ways in which to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to enquire who undergoes this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by it and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realising one's helplessness and saying all the time: “Not I, but Thou, O my Lord”, and giving up all sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and for nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through *bhakti-mārga*.”²

² Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 28th June, 1946.

It has been said that Sri Ramana recommended two distinct versions of the doctrine of surrender: i) Holding on to the 'I'-thought until the one who imagines that he is separate from God disappears; ii) Completely surrendering all responsibility for one's life to God or the Self. For such self-surrender to be effective one must have no will or desire of one's own and one must be completely free of the idea that there is an individual person who is capable of acting independently of God.³ Lord Ramana said about this:

“There are two ways to surrender; one is looking into the source of the 'I' and merging into that source; the other is feeling 'I am helpless by myself, God alone is all-powerful and except for throwing myself completely on Him there is no other means of safety for me,' and thus gradually developing the conviction that God alone exists and the ego does not count. Both methods lead to the same goal. Complete surrender is another name for jnana or liberation.”⁴

The first method is clearly nothing but the path of Self-enquiry masquerading under a different name. The second method, of surrendering responsibility for one's life to God, is also related to the path of Self-enquiry since it aims to eliminate the 'I'-thought by separating it from the objects and actions that an individual is constantly identifying with.⁵

The path of devotion or surrender is usually thought of as the very antithesis of Self-enquiry since it is based on the presumption of duality, of worshipper and the worshipped whereas Self-enquiry presumes absolute non-duality. So, if Sri Ramana proposed surrender as a path, it is his particular definition of what surrender entails. For instance, he remarked about surrender:

“The spark of spiritual knowledge will consume all creation like a mountain of gunpowder. Since all the countless worlds are built upon the weak or non-existent foundations of the ego, they all disintegrate when the atom-bomb of knowledge falls on

³ See Godman, D., *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.78.

⁴ Op.cit., Mudaliar, 1-3-46 Morning.

⁵ Ibid.

them. All talk of surrender is like stealing sugar from a sugar image of Ganesha and then offering it to the same Ganesha. You say that you offer up your body and soul and all your possessions to God, but were they yours to offer? At best you can say: “I wrongly imagined till now that all these, which are Yours, were mine. Now I realise that they are Yours, and shall no longer act as though they were mine.” And this knowledge that there is nothing but God, or Self, that ‘I’ and ‘mine’ do not exist and that only the Self exists is spiritual knowledge (*jñāna*).⁶

“It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one’s being. Do not delude yourself by imagining such source to be some God outside you. One’s source is within yourself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it. Because you imagine yourself to be out of it, you raise the question “Where is the source?” Some contend that the sugar cannot taste its own sweetness and that a taster must taste and enjoy it. Similarly, an individual cannot be the Supreme and enjoy the Bliss of that state; therefore the individuality must be maintained on the one hand and God-head on the other so that enjoyment may result! Is God insentient like sugar? How can one surrender oneself and yet retain one’s individuality for supreme enjoyment? Furthermore they say also that the soul, reaching the divine region and remaining there, serves the Supreme Being. Can the sound of the word “service” deceive the Lord? Does He not know? Is He waiting for these people’s service? Would not He – the Pure Consciousness – ask in turn: “Who are you apart from Me that presume to serve Me?”⁷

Devotion requires a God and a devotee, a worshipped and the worshipper. About this relationship Bhagavan Ramana remarked:

“God is required for devotional spiritual practice (*sādhana*). But the end of the sadhana, even in the path of devotion (*bhakti mārga*), is attained only after complete surrender. What does

⁶ Op.cit., Mudaliar, 22-11-45 Afternoon.

⁷ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, Talk§208.

it mean, except that effacement of the ego results in the Self remaining as it always has been? Whatever path one may choose, the 'I' is inescapable, the 'I' that does the selfless service (*niṣkāma karma*), the 'I' that pines for joining the Lord from whom it feels it has been separated, the 'I' that feels it has slipped from its real nature, and so on. The source of this 'I' must be found out. Then all questions will be solved."⁸

To conclude, Sri Ramana remarked to the theists who advocate surrender to the worshipped by the worshipper, who staunchly advocate the reality of the subject-object relationship, "Whoever objects to his having a separate God to worship so long as he needs one? Through devotion he develops until he comes to feel that God alone exists, and then he himself does not count. He comes to a stage when he says, "Not I but Thou, not my will but Thine." When that state is reached, which is called complete surrender in *bhakti mārga*, one finds that effacement of the ego is attainment of the Self. We need not quarrel whether there are two entities or more or only one. Even according to dualists and according to *bhakti mārga*, complete surrender is necessary. Do that first and then see for yourself whether the one Self alone exists or whether there are two or more. Whatever may be said to suit the different capacities of different individuals, the truth is that the state of Self-realisation must be beyond the triad of knower, knowledge, and known. The Self is the Self; that is all that can be said of it."⁹ A seeker asked Ramana, "How can it be said that the end of both these paths is the same? Sri Ramana replied:

"Whatever the means, the destruction of the sense 'I' and 'mine' is the goal, and as these are interdependent, the destruction of either of them causes the destruction of the other; therefore in order to achieve that state of Silence which is beyond thought and word, either the path of knowledge which removes the sense of 'I' or the path of devotion which removes the sense of 'mine', will suffice. So there is no doubt that the end of the paths of devotion and knowledge is one and the same."¹⁰ ▲

⁸ Op.cit., Mudaliar, 22-3-46 Afternoon.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter One, Question Eleven.

Healing Blame and Aversion through Bhagavan's Teaching

MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

A shorter version of this article first appeared in The Direct Path, the magazine of the Delhi Ramana Kendra, in July 2018.

Often we find ourselves gripped by feelings we have no power to control. No matter how much we may want to avoid reacting to given events, internally or externally, we are sometimes ill-equipped to greet circumstances with equanimity. A fierce resistance to given situations bubbles up from within and we find ourselves labelling or dismissing others in an aversive way, even if only in our thoughts. At times we feel threatened by what family members and colleagues say and do. When challenged in a work-related project or for that matter, in any life situation, we find ourselves blaming others for our difficulties. Or we blame ourselves or are gripped by fear and anxiety about the future. Such mental states could be grouped under the heading, *blame and aversion*.

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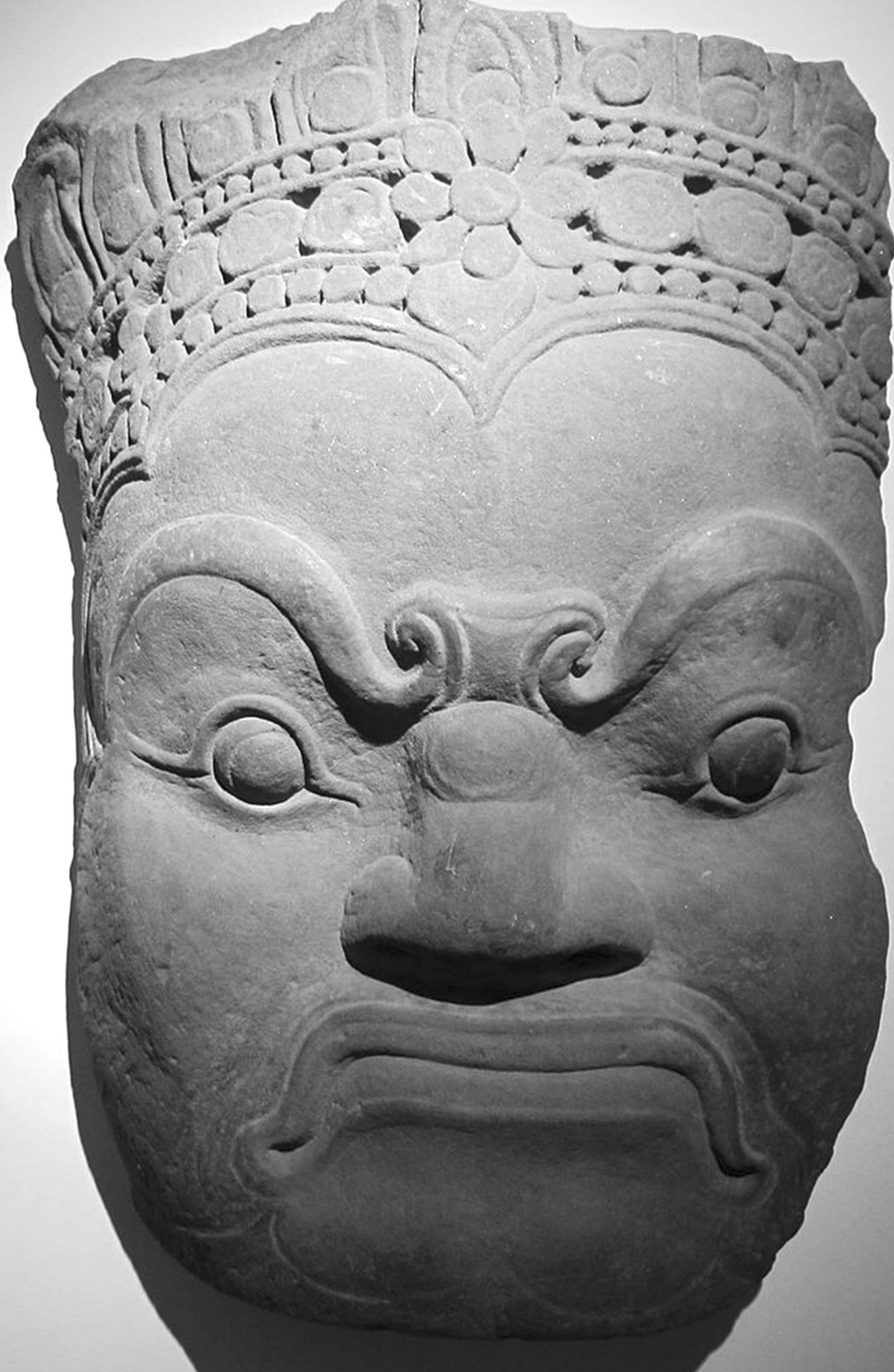
The pervasive tendency to blame and aversion, neurologists tell us, is linked to evolutionary biology. It seems we are hard-wired to isolate danger and threat from benign and benevolent conditions as a way of better ensuring survival. This may be the reason the news cycle tends to be negatively focused — news agencies naturally just want to sell their products and thus invariably take advantage of the fact that their readers and viewers, and indeed all people, are neurologically prone to give importance to what is potentially harmful or threatening. The fact is, neurologists tell us, we are evolutionarily biased toward eliminating potential threats, even when there are no immediate threats. The propensity to look for something or someone outside ourselves as the cause of our pain and suffering — called scapegoat projection¹ — gives a sense of control over the events of our lives, the illusion of being able to regulate and defend against life's suffering and hardship. By naming and blaming a culprit, we feel assured that we can reduce the chance of a recurrence of the undesirable episode.

It has been observed in baboons that when the alpha male bites a junior male, the junior male will in turn bite a female who will in turn bite a baby. If this sounds like the fellow who gets yelled at by his boss at the office and then goes home and promptly yells at his wife who then shouts at their six-year old, who then kicks the dog, that is because it is the same phenomenon.² But it is not restricted to primates. When laboratory rats are given regular electric shocks, they develop stomach ulcers, a condition sensitive to stress. Rats that had the opportunity to go over and bite another rat following an electric shock didn't develop ulcers or other symptoms of stress. In further experiments, rats were trained to press a lever to avoid the shocks. But when the lever was disconnected, the rat continued to press it even though it did not prevent the shock. These rats did not develop ulcers. It is believed that the felt-sense of control prevented the stress response.³

¹ A term coined by Rene Girard in his *Violence and the Sacred*.

² Robert Sapolsky in *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation*, edited by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD & Richard J. Davidson, PhD with Zara Houshmand, 2011, pp. 76-81.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-81.



This study is revealing and gives a compassionate angle from which to view the contagion of blame, aversion and vengeance as a means of discharging painful emotion. Blame and aversion could be seen as the nervous system's effort to modulate stress and trauma, to find something or someone to hold responsible for one's pain and frustration. Such a propensity may be neuro-chemical, a way of clearing the stress of painful experiences, internally or externally generated. If, on the other hand, we have no way to release such frustration, if we feel like we have no influence over the events of our lives, then resilience is diminished and the deleterious effects of stress emerge.

Evolutionary biologists tell us that the instinct for revenge in humans is universal. Primatologists have observed revenge behaviours in most species of non-human primates. And anthropologists have documented the ubiquity of scapegoating and ritual sacrifice, the practice of blaming the sufferings of the community on a single, or more than one individual and then ritually eliminating them. Such tendencies arise in developed societies in, for example, persecutions and ethnic-cleansing. The predisposition to blame and aversion is likely an evolutionary adaptation and is thus deeply ingrained. Sophisticated game-theory models show that blame and punishment have a social function but evolutionarily stable models depend on the element of unconditional forgiveness. Such research reveals that natural selection leads "self-interested organisms toward the acquisition of behavioural processes that allow them to forgive so that they can benefit from cooperative friendships and family relationships."⁴

Cultures the world over have adopted means for moderating the revenge instinct and have taught methods for regulating blame, aversion and vengeance. As cultures developed, such interventions became more sophisticated with the establishment of judicial systems designed to regulate revenge, make it less lethal, less contagious. Ethical and religious development in recent millennia has led to

⁴ See the work of Axelrod, Grim, Nowak and Sigmund and others cited in "Family, Friendship, and the Functions of Forgiveness" in *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct*, Michael E. McCullough; and "The Forgiveness Instinct", p. 125.

forgiveness and surrender practices that are not only revered for reducing the likelihood of harmful behaviour but seek to cultivate the higher virtues such as empathy, altruism, compassion and unconditional love.

Bhagavan Ramana's teaching embodies these virtues and tells us the process for enhancing them. *Ātma-vicāra* is one of the key methods for tackling unwanted mental states by refining attention and self-awareness. It is through bare attention and investigation that the unconscious roots of blame and aversion can be brought into the light of awareness, and thus defused.

When we get in touch with our mental states, the need to off-load the by-products of trauma by volatile means is decreased. In other words, awareness is the lever we are free to press in order to override the instinct to fix the problem by 'getting even'. The difficulty in stemming blame, aversion and scapegoat projection is that they often function below the threshold of conscious awareness, are contagious, and rise up unawares in the collective through bigotry, sectarianism, ethnic hatred, blood feuds and war. It has been pointed out that our reptilian brains⁵ cannot always tell the difference between a real threat and an imagined one, so we are quite capable of reacting defensively to relatively benign circumstances.

One recent study by Gallup Poll⁶ reveals the complexity involved. It graphed the responses of interviewees questioned about their most dreaded fears. One would assume that the fear of death would be at the top of the list. But surprisingly, this fear was outranked 2 to 1 by what psychologists call *glossophobia* or the fear of public speaking. This is a remarkable finding in that it would seem to suggest that we modern urban dwellers don't need to have a hungry lion in the room to have elevated cortisol levels and be in a state of panic, but only need to perceive that our self-image is under attack. This would explain the intensity that blame and aversion can sometimes generate even when there is no discernible outward threat. Punishment and blame are ways of maintaining security and standing in the community and would

⁵ The reptilian brain, i.e. the brainstem and the cerebellum, is the oldest of the three parts of the human brain which includes the limbic and the neocortex.

⁶ Published in 2011.

seek to communicate to others that if our self-image is disparaged, there will be consequences. Herein lies the connection between blame and the classical aim of the spiritual traditions, the one unassailable, perennial offender that above all others needs to be reckoned with for progress in cultivating virtue, namely, our self-centredness and conceit.

Religious traditions since the dawn of time have sought ways to regulate blame and sensed its relationship with narcissism. Bhagavan's *vicāra* is geared toward undercutting both our narcissism and our tendency toward aversion, the two being intimately linked. When we experience feelings of blame or aversion, view another as an adversary, we imagine we are protecting ourselves by empowering ourselves to make a stand against them in the future. But *vicāra* asks us to find out where this self we presume to be protecting is to be found. *Vicāra* is thus a means of reorienting ourselves, pulling the rug, so to say, out from under the assumptions needed for blame and aversion to arise in the first place.

By virtue of its ability to “sift Reality from unreality”,⁷ Bhagavan says, enquiry leads us out from the illusion that the entire blame-game depends on. “The enquiry ‘Who am I?’ is the principal means [for] the removal of all misery,”⁸ he argues, simply because aversive conditions are seeded in ignorance and delusion. But if *ātma-vicāra* “is the way,”⁹ as Bhagavan claims, how does it work? The answer is simple: *vicāra* exposes mental states at the place of their origin. The one who asks, “Who is it that is angry right now?” or “Who is it that is judging?” or “Who is it that needs to criticise, disparage and reject?” is by the very question detaching from the experience of the aversive state in order to become the one observing it. The one observing is not the one who is angry, for example. Simultaneously, the process of unmasking mental states reveals the false assumptions we have about the nature of the Self and the presuppositions we have about being a person in a body in a world. Instead, through enquiry we come to see that the world and the body are in us. But then what is this ‘us’? If

⁷ *Self-Enquiry* §12.

⁸ Talk §454.

⁹ Talk §430.

we say it is ‘the Self’, then we find ourselves hard-pressed to define it. Bhagavan says that the Self is Pure Awareness and “the world, the individual soul and God are [mere] appearances in It.”¹⁰ The world (object) and mind (subject) are unreal, Bhagavan says, so the goal is neither refuge in the world of objects nor in that of the egoic subject but in the Reality beyond both.

Each aversive experience has a narcissistic hook. Blame is built on reinforcing the egoic assumption by creating opposition to the other. Whenever we feel cheated or mistreated by another, there is always someone who is indignant, who feels disrespected, who needs to be defended. This is a great opportunity to benevolently identify our attachment to our self-partiality, to remind ourselves to bring *vicāra* into play and thus find out who or what this offended one is. We do not need to take it on faith that the narcissistic centre is unreal; we can discover it directly by enquiring into it.¹¹ It is not a question of doing battle with ourselves, of manhandling ourselves, imagining that if we beat up on ourselves enough, we will overcome our narcissism — this is just more of the old dispensation, more aversion. Instead, we compassionately acknowledge where things stand and where we have work to do, seeking to maintain the humility and patience that honest enquiry demands.

Sometimes our aversive states seem inevitable as though fated. But if *destiny is just a tightly-bound bundle of habits*, the reactive patterns we find ourselves enmeshed in merely signal our way of dealing with similar conditions in the past. Aversion, like any mental state, is not born of necessity but is a probability. If it were absolutely determined, then *vicāra*, and indeed all forms of *sādhana* and intervention in respect of mental states, would be futile. In responding to an emergent

¹⁰ See *Who am I?* §2: “[T]hat Awareness which alone remains — that I am”; also see *Who Am I?* §16.

¹¹ Extended cognition in neuro-science proves that there is no discrete isolated entity called the ego or self. Feral children, i.e. human babies brought up in animal groups, are revealed under examination to be genetically human, but theirs is not human cognition and beyond a certain age socialised outside a human context, they are unable to learn human speech and participate in human culture. We are mimetic creatures and learn by imitation and thus human cognition is extended and embedded in the collective.

aversive state, *vicāra* does not necessarily mean the question, “Who am I?” which may prove too steep in the heat of the moment. Rather we make our enquiry less ambitious and when observing that our heart rate has increased or our hands have begun to tremble, we ask a simple *vicāra* question like, “What is going on just now?” “Why is my pulse racing?” “Why do I feel panicked?” As stated previously, such questioning is not designed to make the aversion disappear. The aim is much more modest, i.e. just to identify the arising of the aversion.

* * *

The mystification at the heart of the blame-game, it could be said, is the in-group/out-group distinction for which all acts of othering are based. And yet, we simultaneously intuit that it is unreal. Blame and aversion depend on the self/other polarity which Bhagavan had long since divested himself of.

The reader may recall the scene where a small group of devotees is walking with Bhagavan in Palakotthu. Guy Hague, an American metallurgist from California living for two years in the Ashram in the late 1940s, spoke up: “Maharshi, when one attains *jñāna*, how does one help others?” Without the least pause the Master turned to him and replied in unflinching English, “When one attains *jñāna*, there are no others!”

Bhagavan lived his teaching day in and day out. It is not that he was trying to abolish social norms such as the in-group/out-group distinction but only that he knew it to be based on illusion. This is why he could commune with outcasts and the poorest of the poor, the simplest peasant farmer, because for him they were not other than himself. If *there are no others*, then there is no one to blame and no one to separate oneself from. If *there are no others*, then all blame and othering is brought to rest in the Self.

When we get enthralled by our mental states, they seem real. And some aversive states can even be enjoyable, at least in the short-run, granting us a sense of control, a sense of solidity. We love blame and aversion because they make us feel self-righteous and significant, after all, ego is born in opposition and differentiation. But here we are reminded of the exhortation from Nietzsche: *Beware that in your zeal to fight against monsters you do not become a monster*

yourself. In short, aversion may have a honeyed-tip, but it also has a poisoned-root.¹² Bringing *vicāra* to bear on mental states such as blame, anger and resistance grants the needed understanding regarding the ultimate status of all states: they are just states of mind, fleeting and unsubstantial, not Self.

But again by what practical means do we arrive at this insight? By identifying the mind state as a mind state. To do this we cannot have our *vicāra* practice depend on the little time we get to spend in our place of meditation but have to make it portable and take it with us wherever we go. When we see that *vicāra* can be practiced in an ongoing way throughout the day wherever we are, then it is a matter of remembering to observe mental states during the waking hours of our daily life. We watch for the arising of fear, blame, anger, resentment or, for that matter, any mental state — disappointment, confusion, distress, loneliness, frustration, etc. We name such states as they appear to us without trying to make them go away. This is the edge in *vicāra* practice: simply stepping back and observing where we are caught.

The trick is in noticing mind states rather than getting involved with them. We want to avoid struggling with them because trying to make them go away almost guarantees they will linger. Worse than that, resisting our mind states causes them to multiply as second-tier mental states of aversion pitted against the first. Hence we neither cling to them nor push them away, after all, *vicāra* is not about confrontation but about stepping back into the awareness of the Witness. If pain accompanies a mental state, we identify the pain, feel it fully and give ourselves empathy. But if we make the state of aversion into an enemy, we replicate the aversion. The art is mothering our mental states the way we might console a crying child.

Thus classical *vicāra* or ‘Who am I?’ helps us see that there really is no one to whom such states belong. In other words, the so-called ego is unsubstantial. The micro-*vicāra* of noticing and naming our mental states functions as a complimentary practice and helps us to see that mind states are likewise unsubstantial.

Enquiring into painful emotions and the core hurt is key to releasing the feeling of aversion. While *vicāra* does not necessarily grant

¹² A line from the Buddha.

immunity to future aversive states, it readies us to deal with them when they arise. Each time we sally forth to greet them, we learn to let go a little. If once we find ourselves less attached and able to avoid being force-marched into complete identification with our mental states, then *vicāra* begins to look like surrender.

This is something Sri Ramana hinted at on various occasions, namely, that *vicāra* serves to train our capacity to surrender. In surrender, rather than questioning through enquiry, we greet each negative mental state with the energy of letting go. Surrender helps us get beyond the need to identify with our mental states and to dispense with the relentless chatter of the mind that invariably accompanies them. In surrender, we slow down enough just to appreciate things as they are without having to know anything about them.

As we walk, see and hear without blame, aversion or evaluation, the world begins to look very different and at times even appears blessed. What previously may have evoked annoyance and resentment when the mind was busied with the interminable thought stream suddenly becomes the locus of freedom just by being experienced with an empty non-evaluating mind. Even if the tug-of-war between being caught up in our mental states and being detached from them continues, we incrementally gain ground with continued efforts.

When a poet once proclaimed that it is *sometimes necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness*,¹³ he did not mean that the world needed to be altered. Rather, the world is fine *as it is* if only we allow it to be *as it is*. Surrender frees us from being compelled to view the world through the filter of mental defilements such as judgment, criticism and aversion, all the while unmasking the fiercely clung-to illusions we have about our fundamental nature. In Bhagavan's words, "If you consider yourself the body, the world appears to be external [and unreal]; [but when] you are the Self, the world appears as Brahman."¹⁴

So *reteaching a thing its loveliness* is going forth each day and being present to the world as it is, seeing the inherent goodness in ordinary things, setting aside opinions and preferences, feeling one's feet on the ground, sensing the wind blowing against the skin, hearing the sounds of birds or of children playing, or for that matter, the sounds

¹³ 'Saint Francis and the Sow' by Galway Kinnell.

¹⁴ Talk §272.

of lorry horns. *It doesn't have to be a blue iris; it could just be weeds in a vacant lot*, wrote the poet Mary Oliver.¹⁵

If we condition our contentedness on ideals, then we will be forever in bondage to the changing conditions of the external world. In other words, if it does have *to be a blue iris*, then all is lost. Why? Because some vital part of ourselves or our world is taken to be weeds and is slotted for extermination. The *blue iris* will not always be blue, or in blossom, so it will be lost too. But if we can hold *the weeds in a vacant lot* for the beauty that is their nature, then the space the blue iris once occupied will also be beautiful just as it is. As soon as we let go of picking and choosing, of judging and dismissing, of blaming and resisting and of being swayed by mental states, the whole world becomes beautiful, as does every person in it.

This is what Bhagavan meant by *vicāra* resolving itself in surrender. It carries us beyond blame, anger, fear, aversion and self-identification, and allows for the spaciousness of a mind absent of clutter, freeing up our generosity and compassion, moderating our attachment to mental states and allowing the inherent peace that Bhagavan insisted is our birthright, to become ours once again. ▲

¹⁵ 'Praying' by Mary Oliver.

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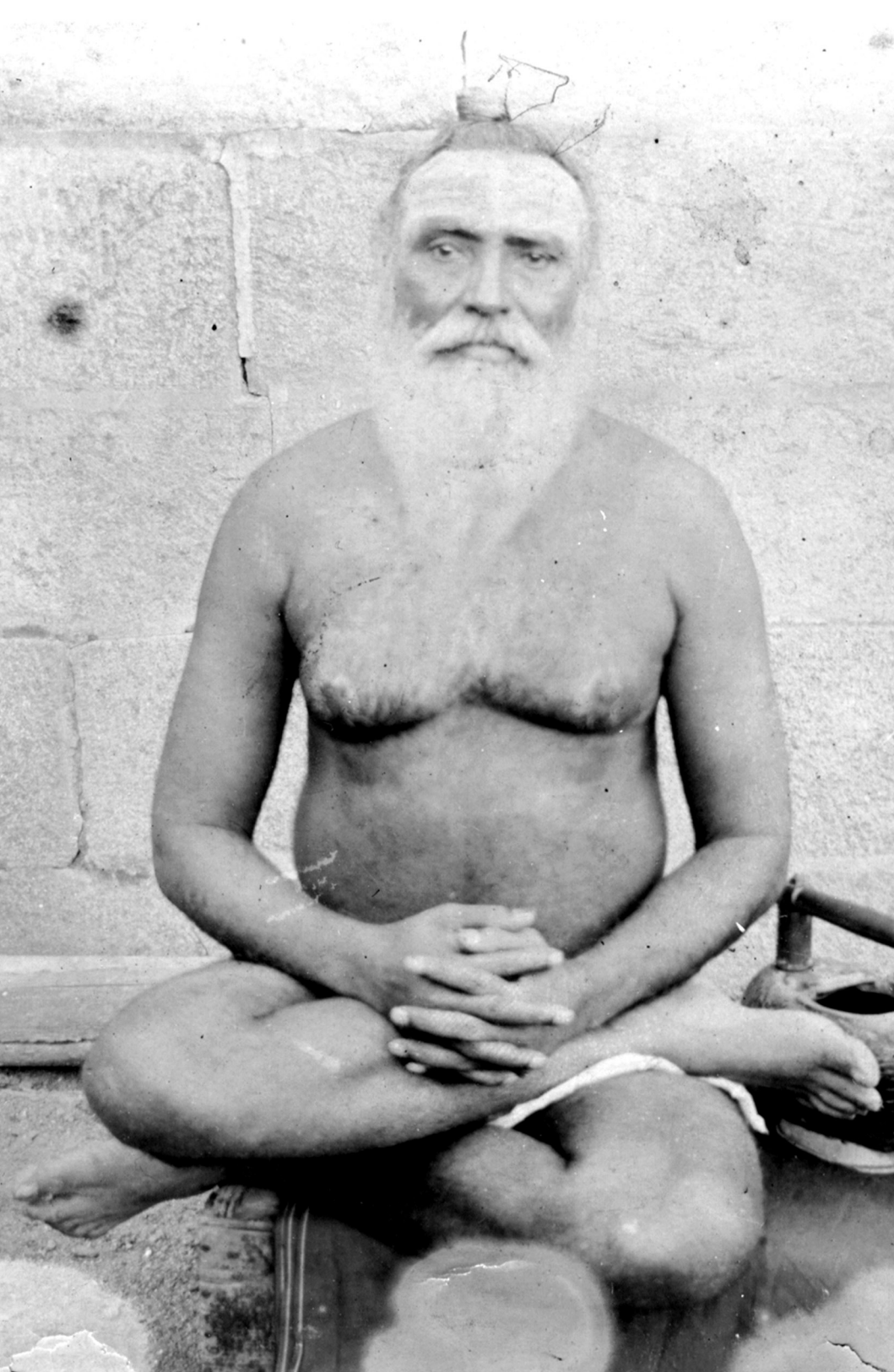
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Vallimalai Sri Sachidananda Swamigal

V. S. KRISHNAN

In the hall before the *sanctum sanctorum* of Lord Palani Andavar, one of the six principal shrines dedicated to Lord Muruga in Tamil Nadu, the air was filled with a song: “*vaṅgāra mārbilaṇi tāroḍuyar kōḍasaiya*” (As they move, the golden chain worn by them also swung over their bosom). The song, which extolled the glory of Muruga as he appeared on the peacock – his beautiful vehicle – came from a woman devotee. Among the many devotees who were waiting for the opening of the doors, there was one Ardhanari. While all other devotees just heard this song, for Ardhanari, the song made an enormous impression. He could discern some divine power in that song. Though Ardhanari, not well versed in Tamil, could not know the meaning, just by hearing it, he experienced an inexplicable sense of devotion towards Muruga, whose glory the song hailed. The lady completed her song. The doors

V.S. Krishnan was too young when Guru, Sri Mani Iyer came and initiated his parents and family members to *Thiruppugazh* form of worship; the practice which Krishnan continues even now at 78. He finds it a blissful experience joining the group of devotees rendering *Thiruppugazh* songs and also listening to the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi through the discourses of Nochur Sri Venkataraman.

were opened. The worship was over and even when he moved ahead towards the exit, the song continued to ring in the ears of Ardhanari. It had made a profound impact on him.

Ardhanari was born to Chidambara Iyer and his wife Mahalakshmi, a couple in a remote village called Poonachi Pudur in Coimbatore District in the year 1870. Ardhanari did not evince any interest in studies. In any case, he could not have pursued his studies because of his poor family condition; the pressing need was a livelihood rather than higher education. With the help of some of his relations who worked there, he managed to get the job of a cook at the Mysore Palace. When Ardhanari was nine years old, he was married to Subbalakshmi, all of six years old. Later, in an unavoidable situation, he had to marry a second time a girl named Nanjamma. For a time, his life moved on smoothly, but suddenly misfortune struck. His first wife and three children died one after another. Among the two daughters and one son born to his second wife, the two daughters also passed away. As if these sorrows were not enough, he suffered from some acute stomach ailment. Then a well-wisher in the palace suggested: “Why not have the *darśan* of Palani Andavar, the Lord of infinite grace?” It was this suggestion which brought Ardhanari to the temple at Palani where he heard the song that brought a radical transformation in his life.

Ardhanari wondered, “Why does this song create so much vibration in me?” He wanted to know more about the song, its meaning and its creator. Soon, he learnt that it was *Thiruppugazh*, composed by the saint Arunagirinathar.¹ He realised the need for learning Tamil

¹ Arunagirinathar lived in Tiruvannamalai in 15th century. By virtue of his knowledge, he was conscious enough to differentiate himself from the body. However, he could not compromise with the demands of the body and found no other means but to dispense with it. He therefore went to the top of the temple tower and fell from there only to land in the safe hands of a saviour. “You are not born to fall; you are born to make others rise. You are not born to be silent. You are born to sing”, said the saviour who was none other than Lord Muruga. Arunagirinathar then started rendering songs hailing the glory of Muruga, which is known as *Thiruppugazh*. *Thiruppugazh* is regarded as a remarkable treatise on devotion and *jñāna*. One line in *Kandhar Anubhuti* sums up what *Thiruppugazh* conveys: “Oh Lord, my individuality having been swallowed by you, I remained as naturally as I am, as none but the Self.” (*yānāgiya ennai vizhuṅgi verum tānāy nilai niṅdradu tarparamē*.)

to be able to appreciate *Thiruppugazh* fully. He made friendship with an eight-year-old boy named Mani and learned Tamil from him. After enquiries, he came to know that the book was available at the premises located at 292 Linghi Chetty Street, Madras.² He contacted them and managed to get the book. Within a month, he could recite by heart all the 150 songs of the books. Needless to say, the pain in the stomach had gone. He decided to stay at Palani by doing whatever services he could. He went to different temples, brought water from the sacred rivers nearby and brought it to Palani for the anointment of the Lord. He made it a practice to stand before the deity of Lord Dhandayudhapani and recite *Thiruppugazh*.

When the heart is overwhelmed with devotion, it starts yearning for *jñāna*, for *bhakti* is the mother of *jñāna*. When the quest for *jñāna* comes, the search for a *guru* begins. Paul Brunton went to Kanchi Math and met Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal who guided him to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Ardhanari went to Sri Sankaracharya of Sringeri who was camping at Coimbatore and requested that he should be initiated to sainthood. Having known that there is a family consisting of wife, son and mother dependant on Ardhanari, the Sringeri Swamigal politely declined his request. Ardhanari came back to Palani and dedicated himself to the service of Muruga. Though each day he recited *Thiruppugazh*, circumambulated Palani Hill and meditated, the search for a *guru* was his prime objective.

He went on a pilgrimage to important temples in South India, that had been visited by Arunagirinathar. Following Arunagirinathar's foot-print, he even went to Kadirkamam in Sri Lanka. He had two-fold objective in undertaking the pilgrimage; to worship Lord Muruga

² Ever since its composition in 15th century, the songs of *Thiruppugazh*, recorded in palm leaves, were lying scattered at different locations, unrecognized, unheard and unsung. Centuries later, it was '*Thanigaimani*' Sri Chengalvarayan, who searched, retrieved and brought them to light. No. 292 Linghi Chetty Street was the residence of Sri Chengalvarayan. This house used to be so vibrant with activities connected with *Thiruppugazh* that it came to be known as the 'Ancestral Home of *Thiruppugazh*' or *Thiruppugazh*'s Maternal house (*Thai Veedu* of *Thiruppugazh*). Sri Sachidananda Swamigal used this venue as a platform to initiate many programs such as like *Thiruppugazh* Recitals and *Tiruthani Padi Vizha*.

and to search for a *guru*. Accompanied by his surviving wife, he reached Tiruchendur, the abode of Muruga, the temple visited by Adi Sankara. He recalled the hymn which Arunagirinathar had sung there: “Oh! Muruga, so long as your grace is with me, can the planetary influence or the consequence of karma do any harm to me?” Kovilpatti happened to be his next destination. Here, he came into contact with an erudite scholar, Sri Venkata Rayar, who had mastered the *śāstra*-s. Ardhanari and his wife stayed at his residence and received lessons on *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Vasishtam*. It was the lessons learned here that kindled in Ardhanari a desire for *ātma-vicāra*. Having known that Ardhanari’s mission was to find a spiritual *guru*, Sri Venkata Rayar advised him to proceed to Tiruvannamalai and see Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Ardhanari was delighted that his long search for *guru* was now nearing its fulfilment.

He discovered that the abode of Arunachala and of Sri Ramana Maharshi was the ideal place to pursue his goal. He climbed the hill, went to Skandasramam and joined the devotees who were waiting to see Bhagavan Ramana. After sometime, he saw Maharshi coming out. For a moment, he saw not the Maharshi but Palani Andavar with his *danḍa* (staff) in the right hand. Folding his hands, Ardhanari cried out, “*Danḍapāṇikku Arōharā*”. (‘Hail the Lord of Palani Hill’).

His experience is described in his own words: “I joined the other devotees who were waiting to have the darshan of the saint. After a while, the sage appeared from inside the Ashram. He was standing there in his characteristic loincloth with a *danḍa* on his hand. I saw him and he looked at me intently. Suddenly, I felt that the very Palani Andavar, whom I saw frequently at Palani in the form of stone, was now standing before me in real life. I felt an inexplicable wave of power passing through my entire physique. In a moment of extreme bliss, tears were trickling down my face. Words failed me. However, I managed to gain my composure and expressed my humble obeisance to Maharshi.”³

Ardhanari wanted to experience the bliss of being near Maharshi. He took up residence in Tiruvannamalai and continued to visit Maharshi. In his divine presence, he found peace, quietude and bliss.

³ It is pertinent to recall here that Muruganar one of the foremost disciples of Bhagavan, considered the Maharshi as the manifestation of Lord Muruga.

In divine ecstasy, he would sing *Thiruppugazh* before Bhagavan who quietly listened. *Thiruppugazh* is unique for its *chandam* mode of *tala* (time measure), for its literary excellence, its highly rhythmic flow of words and the message of truth it conveys. It needs some training to sing the songs by splitting the words properly (*padam pirital*) and in harmony with *raga* and *tala*. Unfortunately, Ardhanari neither had the knowledge of the language, nor knew the nuances of music or the meaning of the songs. Knowing his predicament, Bhagavan came forward to teach him *Thiruppugazh* and took the book from Ardhanari. Thanks to his enormous power of comprehension, with just a simple glance he was able to grasp not just the words but the inner meaning of the entire songs and imprinted them on his memory. He explained their deeper meaning to Ardhanari.⁴

His explanations covered the whole gamut of Arunagiri's works such as *Thiruppugazh* and *Kandar Anubhuti*. Bhagavan explained the importance of 'Summa Iru', referred to in *Kandar Anubhuti*, that is, the act of remaining quiet and still without allowing any thoughts to come in between. He cited many songs which underlined the need to go beyond the concept of body or mind and the need to find our true identity. Just as Bhagavan had mastered the advaitic works *Kaivalya Navaneetham*, *Vedanta-Chudamani* and *Yoga Vasishtam*, which were brought by Palaniswamy during the Maharshi's early period at Gurusuram, he mastered *Thiruppugazh* as well which is evident from the reference he made to *Thiruppugazh* on many occasions. In his attempt to perceive the reality, *Brahman*, the *jñāni* analyzes and then negates all that do not fulfil the high standard of truth. In other words, the *jñāni* discards everything like body, mind, senses by saying 'not this' 'not this' (*neti-neti*) and ultimately finds the truth shining as the Self (*Ātman*). Arunagirinathar said: "He has no form but he is not formless either. He is not visible to the eyes but he is not absent. He is not real, nor unreal. He is not light and he is not darkness."⁵ Bhagavan quoted this verse to a group of devotees who had called on him.⁶

⁴ Narasimhaswamy B.V., *Self Realisation, Life & Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Fifth Edition, 1953, Chapter XXV, p.209.

⁵ 'Murugaṅ taṅivēl muni-nam Guru eṅḍru aruḷkoṇḍu ariyār ariyum taramō', *Kandar Anubhuti*, v.13.

⁶ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talk with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§122.

Ardhanari found immense joy in doing *girivalam* (circumambulation of Arunachala) by singing *Thiruppugazh*. As he walked around Arunachala devotees would gather around him and join in the songs.

Then, one day when he was moving ahead with a group of singers, an event occurred that elevated him to a state of bliss. It so happened that the time he went round the hill coincided with the time chosen by Bhagavan. While walking on the *girivalam* pathway, singing ‘*Vedīcci Kāvalaṅ Vaguppu*’ (songs hailing Muruga as Protector), he was pleasantly surprised to see Bhagavan also walking quite nearby. His joy knew no bounds when Maharshi also joined in the *Thiruppugazh* rendering. Ardhanari who considered Maharshi as the manifestation of Muruga was ecstatic that Lord Muruga came as his co-singer.

After taking blessings from Maharshi, Ardhanari embarked on a long pilgrimage to north India. Before leaving, Ardhanari went to his native village, Poonachi Pudur, transferred whatever little properties he had inherited in the name of his wife and asked his son, who was at Rangoon to come and take care of his mother. He visited holy places like Haridwar, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and Amarnath. He visited many sacred places and temples and met great saints. In the Himalayas, he met a realised sage and paid obeisance to him. Satisfied with the dispassion and dedication shown by Ardhanari, the saint gave him formal *dīkṣā* and initiation into *sannyāsa*, and named him as Sachidananda. After this, Ardhanari now Sri Sachidananda Swamigal retreated into a forest for about ten months and did *tapas*. After completing his long pilgrimage in North India, Swamigal came back to Tiruvannamalai, the centre which constantly had been pulsating in his heart. On seeing him, the Maharshi greeted him: “Good, you have come back.” Remaining at Tiruvannamalai, he continued to visit Maharshi and do whatever service he could.

One day, when he stood before Bhagavan at Skandasramam, Bhagavan spontaneously spoke and instructed him, “Go down and keep moving.” Sachidananda Swamigal was deeply shocked and understood that Bhagavan wanted him to leave but he could not understand the reason behind it. However, instruction that comes from Bhagavan should be obeyed. Soon afterwards, Sri Sachidananda Swamigal left the Ashram and walked down sacred Arunachala. On his way to the base, he saw Sri Seshadri Swamigal, a scholar and saint



Vallimalai

who had mastered the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma Sutra* and was a close associate of Bhagavan, who was coming from the opposite direction. They greeted each other. Sri Seshadri Swamigal knew that the *Thiruppugazh* was at the heart of Sri Sachidananda Swamigal's *tapas*. He then cited a stanza from *Sivamanasa Puja* composed by Adi Sankara:

The Atman in me is your reflection. Girija, the mountain-born Parvati is my intelligence. My vital energies (*prana*) are your companions. My body is where you reside. Whatever I do with my senses are your worship. When I go to sleep, I experience your state of *samādhi*.

He also recited and explained *Atma Twam...Guru Manasa Puja* v.4.

The walking I do is the circumambulation of your feet. Whatever words that come out of my mouth are hymns of your glory. Whatever act I do are my form of worship to you. Oh! Sambo, the Lord of benevolence.

Sri Seshadri Swamigal enquired whether there is any song in *Thiruppugazh* which conveys this Advaita philosophy of Adi Sankara. Sachidananda replied positively by quoting a few lines from the song '*Amala Vayu*' ("*eṇadi yāṇum vēṛāgi evarum yādum yāṇāgum idaya bhāvaṇātītam...*"), which states, "Oh Lord, grace me with the knowledge by which I come out of all differences like 'me' and 'you' and realise the Self (*Ātman*) that is shining in everyone."

Sri Seshadri Swamigal heard him explain the whole meaning of the song and said: "*Thiruppugazh* is a musical *mantra* and a way of life. The doctrines contained in Vedic scriptures have been explained in simple lyrics in *Thiruppugazh*. This is a philosophy complete in itself. This is enough for you to carry on your spiritual mission. Go to Vallimalai, make that holy place your base and take the glory of *Thiruppugazh* to greater heights." This was the confirmation that Vallimalai Swamigal had sought.

For a qualified aspirant who is in quest of knowledge, the *guru* appears at the right time and right place to emphasize that *jñāna* is already there. All that he needs to do is to look within and realise it. Sri Ramana would often say that *guru* is ever shining within everyone. What the external *guru* does is to merely direct the attention towards the *guru* shining as the Self within. This is what happened in case

of Vallimalai Swamigal. Right from the beginning he followed a path which he believed would serve as a bridge to reach the state of immortality. This conviction came from within naturally but he was not aware of it. He needed an external *guru* to assert that he was on the right path. The external *guru* appeared in the form of Seshadri Swamigal and reassured him that the path he was following was the path of truth and he should pursue it.

After meeting Sri Seshadri Swamigal, Sri Sachidananda Swamigal emerged as a realised saint. He now realised that Sri Ramana Maharshi had foreseen these developments in advance and it was only to create a ground for such a meeting he had directed Sachidananda Swamigal to go down the hill.

Having received a clear vision how to proceed, Sachidananda Swamigal proceeded to Vallimalai, situated around 80 km., from Chennai, near the town Walajah. It was here that the goddess, Valli, was born to Nambirajan couple. As an embodiment of humility, she guarded the millet crops in the Vallimalai region and ensured the prosperity of the people. According to legend, Lord Muruga heard about her qualities of simplicity, came to Vallimalai and managed to win her heart by various means. Normally, the aspiration of the individual *jīva* to be united with eternal reality, *Brahman*, is described as *jīva brahma aikyam*, but in the case of Valli, the individual, it is described as *valli sanmargam* where Muruga who was *Brahman* incarnate, came in search of the individual *jīva* Valli and was inspired to be united with her.

Sachidananda Swamigal established himself here at a new ashram and chose a cave in the hills called Parvata Rajan Kundru. From there he began the anointed task to spread the message of *Thiruppugazh* throughout Tamilnadu. He did this tirelessly for the next thirty odd years. He also founded a temple for Valli, known in local parlance as Pongi. He devised the proper method of rendering *Thiruppugazh*, known as '*Thiruppugazh Parayana Thava Neri Thirumurai*' which all devotees continue to follow with great devotion. He used all forums to stress the message that *Thiruppugazh* paves the way for *jñāna*.

Thiruppugazh is regarded as an inexhaustible treasure of devotion and knowledge. Apart from describing the majesty of Muruga, his beauty, his power, his knowledge, his compassion and above all his manifestation as *guru*, *Thiruppugazh* shows the way for liberation

from the repeated cycle of birth and death. It was Vallimalai Swamigal who brought *Thiruppugazh* to light by his perseverance and dedication.

The name Sachidananda Swamigal has become synonymous with *Thiruppugazh*. Swamigal realised that if he, who had absolutely no knowledge of the nuances of music and the meaning of *Thiruppugazh*, had now become an eloquent singer and commentator of *Thiruppugazh*, it was only due to the grace of Bhagavan. It was a great blessing that Bhagavan who normally remained silent and spoke only few words considered him worthy of receiving lessons. Though Swamigal went to different places in India, conducted *Thiruppugazh* recital, he ultimately came to this cave, his base, to meditate.

On the 12th January 1950 he enshrined his spiritual force into the image of *moolavar* Devi held by Sri S. Parthasarathy (who later become Sri Swami Anvananda) and named her Sri Vaishnavi Devi. A temple was established for the idol in 1954 at Tirumullaivayal near Chennai. Sri Vaishnavi Devi fulfils the love and affections that Swami poured onto the devotees after his lifetime.

Later in 1950, on the 15th November, the fifth day of the Skanda Shasthi festival, which he had arranged at Thambu Chetty Street in Madras, he was performing the *sangīta upanyāsam* on *Sri Valli Sanmargam* when suddenly he could not proceed further and withdrew. After a few hours, he revived and said that he had the *darśan* of Lord Murugar. On the 12th day, that is the 22nd November 1950, he attained *samādhi* at about 4 am. It was about 7 months after Bhagavan attained *mahāsamādhi*. His body was interred and enshrined at Vallimalai in the cave which he had previously prepared for his *samādhi*.

From time to time, great saints appear in this land and reveal the right way. They come with their own philosophy and imparts knowledge and devotion so that devotees at different levels of understanding can choose the path that suits them most. The saints advocate a method that suits the period. Though the means are different, ultimately the end remains same, the *ātma-jñāna*. ▲

Books Consulted: *Arunachala Mahimai* by Bharanidharan. Pub. Kalaigyan Pathippakam, 9 Kannadasan Salai, T. Nagar, Chennai 600017 (2002). *Thiruppugzh Parayana Thava Nerith Thiruppugazh* released on the occasion of the *Jayanti Vizha* of Sri Vallimalai Sachidananda Swamigal.

The World as an Illusion

Sri Ramana and Western Philosophy

VASKO KOHLMAYER

One of the most striking of Sri Ramana's claims is his repeated assertion that this world is not ultimately real, but merely an illusory appearance in the mind. "There is no alternative for you but to accept the world as unreal if you are seeking the truth and the truth alone,"¹ Sri Ramana would tell his hearers.

Many people could not accept Sri Ramana's contention and they would object that the universe must carry at least some measure of independent objective reality. Sri Ramana, however, remained adamant throughout his life. "There is no doubt whatsoever that the universe is the merest illusion," Sri Ramana told Sivaprakasam Pillai when questioned as a young sage at the outset of his teaching career. He continued, "That the world is illusory, everyone can directly know

¹ Godman, David, ed., *Be as You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (London: Penguin Arkana, 1988), p. 188.

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in the state of Realisation which is in the form of experience of one's bliss-nature."²

More than two decades later, Sri Ramana wrote, "Those who have realised the Self by direct and immediate experience clearly perceive beyond all doubt that the phenomenal world as an objective, independent reality is wholly non-existent."³ Later yet, he would tell another of his close devotees, the Tamil poet Muruganar, "The world neither exists by itself, nor is it conscious of its existence. How can you say that such a world is real?" He would explain, "It [the world] is in perpetual change, a continuous, interminable flux. A dependent, unself-conscious, ever-changing world cannot be real."⁴

We could list many other statements to show just how strongly Sri Ramana felt about this, but two more should suffice to drive the point: "At the level of the spiritual seeker you have got to say that the world is an illusion,"⁵ and, "Unless you give up the idea that the world is real, your mind will always be after it."⁶

For the vast majority of westerners such declarations are not easy to accept. Even though this view has periodically surfaced in some strands of eastern thought, it still tends to strike the western sensibility as unreasonable if not positively absurd. This should come as no surprise given that the occidental worldview has been overwhelmingly conditioned by scientific materialism. As a result, when we come across the notion of the universe as a mental creation, we are tempted to dismiss it as one of the unscientific aberrations of the Asian psyche.

Yet this notion is not completely foreign to the western mindset either. So much so that it plays a major role – albeit in embryonic form – in the writings of Immanuel Kant, a thinker who is widely deemed to be the West's greatest modern philosopher. One of the key tenets of Kant's work is his realisation that time and space are not inherent features of reality. According to Kant, they are categories that inhere

² *Self-Enquiry*, the question-and-answer version, "Question no. 10," <https://archive.org>.

³ Arthur Osborne, ed., *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1997), p. 25.

⁴ Muruganar, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, ed. David Godman (Boulder: Avadhuta Foundation, 2008), p. 34

⁵ Godman, David, ed., *Be as You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (London: Penguin Arkana, 1988), p. 187.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.188.

in the human mind prior to any perception or thought to make the very experience of the phenomenal realm possible.

Kant made this breakthrough in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*. Published in 1781, it stands – according to *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* – as one of the most influential works in western thought.⁷ Swami Krishnananda summarises Kant’s critical insight:

“The laws and the ordered unity of the world are therefore the laws and the ordered unity of the categories of the mind; what we call things are not things-in-themselves, but the categories of the mind alone, objectified in space and time.”⁸

Kant’s finding caused an upheaval in western dialectic whose reverberations are felt to this day. Aware of its momentous significance, Kant himself remarked that it set off a “Copernican revolution” in western thought. Western thinkers, however, have never been able to fully come to terms with Kant’s extrapolation. To wit, a current entry in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that deals with Kant’s treatment of space and time opens with the following sentence: “Two aspects of Kant’s views on space and time are immediately evident: they are widely regarded as central to Kant’s so-called critical philosophy, and there is no consensus on how they ought to be characterized and explicated.”⁹ Paradoxically, Kant himself never fully worked out the implications of his breakthrough.

It was left to another great German thinker Arthur Schopenhauer to draw Kant’s insight to its logical conclusion. If Kant was right, reasoned Schopenhauer, and time and space indeed derive from the mind, then the whole universe cannot but exist in the mind also. Even though this conclusion struck most of Schopenhauer’s contemporaries as an unwarranted speculative leap, his inference was based on unassailable logic.

Even before Schopenhauer and Kant came along, it had already been recognised that any object or thing can only exist within the

⁷ Honderich, Ted, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.439.

⁸ Swami Krishnananda, *Studies in Comparative Philosophy* (Rishikesh: Divine Life Society), <https://www.swami-krishnananda.org>.

⁹ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed., Edward N. Zalta, “Kant’s Views on Space and Time,” <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au>.

parameters of time and space. In other words, time and space are the necessary conditions for the existence of any phenomenon. If, then, time and space exist only in the mind so must the universe. Another way of expressing Schopenhauer's point would be to say – as Sri Ramana does – that the universe is a projection of the mind or an appearance in consciousness.

But if the universe is only in the mind, surmised Schopenhauer, then what is really out there can only be some timeless, space-less unicity that is single, non-dual, perfectly whole and indivisible. This, according to Schopenhauer, would be what philosophers call the ultimate or absolute reality. Having corrected Kant's error of assuming the existence of numerous things-in-themselves (*noumena*), Schopenhauer inferred that there could only be one such thing. According to Schopenhauer this one *noumenon* must be:

free from all plurality, although its phenomena in time and space are innumerable. It is itself one, yet not as an object is one, for the unity of an object is known only in contrast to possible plurality. Again, [it] is not as a concept is one, for a concept originates only through abstraction from plurality; but it is one as that which lies outside time and space, outside the *principium individuationis*, that is to say, outside the possibility of plurality.¹⁰

Discussing Schopenhauer's ground-breaking statement, Bryan Magee, a philosopher and Schopenhauer's biographer, elucidates: "What this means is that the noumenon should not really be spoken even as one: but we have to use language if we are to talk at all, and the singular form here is clearly preferable to the plural."¹¹

Like Kant's insight, Schopenhauer's conclusion has never been fully appreciated or understood by western dialecticians, for obvious reasons. For one thing, it runs in sharp contravention to the long-held western conception of reality. But perhaps even more importantly as far as the philosophers are concerned, Schopenhauer's conclusion would, if accepted, effectively destroy the whole enterprise of metaphysical

¹⁰ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, trans. E.F.J Payne (Dover Publications, 1969), p.113.

¹¹ Magee, Bryan, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.129.

speculation. Obviously, not a great deal of philosophising can be done about a reality of such nebulous nature, for what Schopenhauer pointed to lies beyond the realm of the mind.

Despite being underappreciated by professional scholars, Schopenhauer's extrapolation has received remarkable confirmation from the testimonies of advanced spiritual adepts from across religious traditions. When mystics from both the East and West attempt to communicate the experience of their forays into the heart of existence, they often return with descriptions that are eerily suggestive of the kind of reality posited by Schopenhauer. 'The ocean of being', 'pure existence', 'sea of love' and 'infinite emptiness' are some of the phrases that esoterists throughout the ages have used in an attempt to describe what they have experienced in the course of their transcendental visitations. And even though they use different appellations for the otherworldly reality they encounter – God, *Brahman*, Siva, Christ, the divine, the Absolute, etc. – depending on the tradition in which they live, one gets a strong impression that the ultimate essence of things is inherently of the nature postulated by Schopenhauer on the basis of Kant's insight into the provenance of time and space. The implication is that the seeming multiplicity and fragmentation of the phenomenal universe is only a surface appearance brought about by the play of our mental faculties and that below it lies a level of reality of infinite, non-dual and timeless unicity which can only be hinted at metaphorically. Thus the mystic and the philosopher have arrived at the same destination albeit by taking different routes.

This should suffice to show the inquiring westerners that Sri Ramana's position vis-à-vis the illusory nature of this world is not nearly as extreme as it may seem at first. There have been at least some western thinkers – as well as numerous mystics – who have suggested that this material universe is only a surface appearance in the mind and that that which is called god or ultimate reality is essentially an undifferentiated and indescribable whole that is fundamentally beyond the reach of outwardly-orientated human faculties. Sri Ramana, for his part, frequently used the term 'Self' to refer to this level of reality. This word implies that this reality is what we ultimately are. In the final analysis, it must indeed be our own self, since – being one – any apparent division between our sense of 'I' and IT can only be illusory.





Bury the Past

DADA J.P. VASWANI

We honour the memory of Dada J.P. Vaswani who attained mahasamadhi on 4th July 2018. His 100th birthday celebrations had been organised for the 18th July. A great karma yogi he encouraged and healed many seekers with his wisdom and demonstrations of unconditional love. He came to Sri Ramanasramam along with his uncle Sadhu Vaswani for Bhagavan's darshan in 1939.

In his honour we re-publish below a typical talk he gave which is eminently practical and inspiring. We thank the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune for the article.

*Be not a slave of your own past – plunge into the sublime seas,
dive deep and swim far, so you shall come back with self-respect,
with new power, with an advanced experience that shall explain
and overtake the old.*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jesus said, “Let the dead bury the dead.” To dwell in the past, to obsess about the past, to refuse to let bygones be bygones is akin to death.

Have you heard of Burke and Hare? Chances are that many of you have not! They were notorious rather than famous. They were two crooks who realised that they could make a fortune by digging up fresh graves, stealing the dead bodies buried therein and selling them to medical schools which needed corpses for their anatomy classes. (This was in the 1820s.)

“Ugh!” you are likely to say. “What a dreadful thing to do!” You are right, of course. It is terrible to contemplate. But are we any better? Can I suggest to you that many of us are grave robbers without actually being aware of it?

Let me say to you, every time you dig up an old grievance, every time you relive the wrongs that you suffered in the past, every time you revive an old animosity – either by thinking about it or talking about it – you too are digging up an old grave. And you know very well what you are likely to find in it ...

Life is too precious to be spent in such pursuits. The past is over and done with. It is gone with the wind! Therefore, I say to you, release it once and for all! Let it go! This is the best way to handle all your failures, disappointments, hurdles, and grievances – release them, let them go!

We can do this simply by erasing the slate of our mind. We can refuse to think of them – and just deny their existence in our mind.

You see, the only existence they have is in your mind!

The present is beautiful, valuable, full of life, wonder and interest. It offers a glorious prospect for all of us. How foolish of us then to waste our energy and spirit in clinging on to the dead past! Therefore, leave the past! Set it free! Why should we demean ourselves, devalue our life digging out graves, poking and prodding dead bones of past mistakes and failures? Let the past be in the past.

Repeat to yourself the words – I am made for this day. It is the happiest day of my life – it can be the most successful day, if God so will!

To live fully in the present, we have to be free from the burden of the past. If we do not heal past wounds and let the past go, we will be trapped in the past. And when we are trapped in the past, we cannot enjoy the present. We must learn to live in the present. We must attend to our present needs, resolve our present problems. We can hope and pray and plan for the future – but we must learn to leave the past alone.

The past is like old, uncleansed residue that needs to be wiped out and released. For many of us, long forgotten sorrows, anguish and pain, frustrated ambitions and thwarted dreams lie locked up and stored in the dark, deep recesses of our memory. We must be courageous, seek God’s help and release these dark forces. As Alan

Cohen says, “The road to healing begins not with a blind leap outward, but by a gentle step inward.”

Let us, by all means, learn from our past mistakes. This is a constructive, creative way of dealing with the past. But holding on to the guilt, shame and anger of the past is defeatist and destructive.

There was a woman who had led a life of immorality and crime. Her past was indeed unsavoury but she had resolutely turned over a new leaf, and was bravely attempting to walk the straight and narrow path.

But the authorities continued to trouble her, often suspecting her of committing crimes which had nothing to do with her.

“How can I get away from my yesterdays if you shove my past into my today?” she lamented. “I have tried to let the dead past bury the dead. But the State of California wants to make my past my present!”

God deals very differently, even with persistent sinners who seek His mercy and His forgiveness. Does He not say to us in the Gita – “Renouncing all rites and rituals come to Me for single refuge. Grieve not, for I shall release you from all bondage to sin and suffering.”

A similar promise is given to us in the Old Testament – “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

A young woman was censured by her priest, for not coming to the confessional for a long time. When finally she came, he told her sternly to confess her sins of yesterday, last week, last month, and last year. She replied, “I have none!” The priest reprimanded her, “You are either a great saint or an awful liar!” Perhaps the woman had confessed her sins to God and found full forgiveness!

Have you ever tried to talk to embittered people? They dwell insistently on the wrongs of the past. They cling on to the tiniest details of their bitter memories. They smother themselves in self-pity. They take great pride and a gloomy satisfaction in listing and numbering every offence that was ever committed against them. They are ever ready to tell everyone how much they have suffered, how badly they have been hurt.

They nourish their hatred and resentment as if they were precious possessions. Alas, the very idea of forgiveness does not appeal to them – they feel that they have been so hurt, so offended, so wounded, so deeply injured, that they are exempted from the need to forgive.

But it is just these people who need to practise forgiveness! They are virtually choking under their own pent up resentment and hatred, that they are doing themselves irreparable harm. Their hearts are so filled with ill-will and rancour that they lose their capacity to love.

Bitterness about the past is not merely negative – it is destructive and self-destructive. Let us empower ourselves to make our lives more beautiful, more peaceful, more serene, more fulfilling! Let us bury the past. When you heal the past, your life will surely take on new meaning. ▲

Silence

Ana Ramana

The breeze on my neck
told me I was about
to be uplifted.

Why did I cling
so hard to earth?

Doesn't the salmon live
only to go back home?

I love you, sky.
I love you, grass.

Flowers drizzling
in the wheat of my hair
are a miracle.

But something louder
is singing
and it is soundless.

It is a current
that knows.

I must step off
the world
toe by toe
into it.

The Ganges: Purity and Pollution

ALVARO ENTERRIA

Bhagiratha, a descendent of King Sagara, set out with the goal of attracting the goddess Ganga to descend to earth so that her waters might purify the ashes of his ancestors. After his practising austerities for many years, goddess Ganga took pity on him and agreed to descend to earth. However, the force of her fall threatened to destroy everything; Shiva caught her in his long matted locks, and from there the Ganga flows to earth, purifying and sanctifying the land of Bharat, India. But not only to the earth; Ganga is manifest in heaven as Akash Ganga: the celestial Ganga or Milky Way, on earth as the river Ganges, and in the nether regions as Patal Ganga, the subterranean Ganges.

The river Ganges, Mother Ganga (as most rivers are feminine in India) has constituted a very powerful symbol and a central point of reference in the history of Indian civilization. Worshipped as the grace of heaven in visible form, it is believed that its waters purify everything they touch. Ganga is the symbol of the primordial waters and the most important river, but it is not the only one venerated. There are seven

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sacred rivers that cleave through the geography of the land of Bharat (that used to include modern-day Pakistan and Bangladesh). Still today, many Hindus recite the following prayer as they take their daily bath: “Oh Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri, in Thy waters I am purified”, thus ritually transforming water from the faucet into sacred water. In other rituals, likewise, if Ganges water is not available, the water used will be considered as such. To bathe in the Ganges, to immerse oneself in her waters, symbolizes thus the return to ‘the Mother’, to the original waters, to the unmanifested primordial unity that was before the world and forms existed. More popularly, to bathe in the Ganges purifies man of faults and sins.

Beyond its mythology, it seems that the water of the Ganges possesses (or used to possess) special qualities. Along with many Hindu kings, the Muslim Mughal emperors, for whom the Ganges held no divine status, drank almost exclusively from that river, even going so far as to take it with them when they set out on campaigns. The first English ships discovered early on that the water stored in their tanks became putrid on the journey to India, while the water from the Ganges they took back with them did not. Later some scientists observed that the cholera virus died after only few hours in its water, and that epidemics did not normally spread downstream following the river’s course.

But economic development and over-population have placed a heavy burden on the river. The majority of the sewage from cities that line the Ganges is emptied straight into the river, along with all kinds of industrial waste. The myth of Ganga turns against her, for just like a mother who sits her children on her lap and puts up with their defecations without a murmur, it is assumed that Ganga puts up with this and purifies everything: how could the source of purification be contaminated?

In 1984 Rajiv Gandhi launched the *Ganga Action Plan*, aimed at cleaning up the river. After implementing a brief first phase the plan became entangled in legal and bureaucratic problems along with corruption and remained stymied. From 1984 to the present, much water has flowed into the Ganges and the contamination, both industrial and biological, is now clearly visible. Nevertheless, thousands of people continue to bathe every day in waters that contain a level of faecal matter many times above the tolerable limit, without apparently resulting in the rise of new illnesses.

On the other hand, at Tehri in the Himalayas, where the Ganges is still called Bhagirathi, an enormous dam has been built; one of various pharaonic projects upon which modern India has embarked following China's footsteps. This dam was constructed in a seismically volatile region, and will take several years to fill. Another 200 dams, both small and medium in size, are forecast. Meanwhile, an affluent called the Alaknanda supplies water to a diminished Ganges. It is no longer the original Ganges water that flows through cities such as Banaras, and the fall in the river's water level is ominous. Its current has become very slow, and its waters appear almost stagnant.

For some years there have been attempts to fight against the degradation of the river, but for one reason or another they have never amounted to anything. Since June of 2008, however, widespread popular movements have been organized to clean the river and renew its current. Press conferences, meetings, demonstrations, public fasts; nearly every day something occurs in Varanasi, Hardwar, Allahabad, Kanpur and other cities on the banks of the Ganges. Religiously inspired but with a vision that might be called 'ecological', these movements remain at the margin of politics and include in their numbers people of Muslim, Christian and Sikh faiths. And as if the country had been waiting for these movements since long ago, an awareness of the imperious necessity of cleansing the river is rapidly taking hold; of the need to take care of 'the Mother' so that she can take care of us.

Under the government of Manmohan Singh, Ganga was declared the 'National River' and a 'National Ganga River Basin Authority' was formed, but with few results on that account. Narendra Modi, the present Prime Minister of India, won the elections in 2014 with the promise of cleaning the river. Soon after, his government launched the ambitious plan *Namami Gange*. However, a few years later, there are no visible benefits to be seen. To clean the waters of Ganga implies cleaning the whole Ganges Valley, a job that probably requires decades of continuous work to achieve. Let us hope that this plan will gain impetus and soon bear visible results.

The situation of Ganga, worshipped and at the same time polluted, aptly symbolizes the conflict of modern India. The India that lives in its mythology continues to be very strong even now, an anachronism in today's desacralized world. But there is another India that has

recently leapt to the world's information arena as a result of its 7 - 9% economic growth in the last few years. Enormous economic forces that functioned in slow motion under the previous bureaucratic 'socialism' have suddenly awakened. The new India, deficient in energy, needs to rapidly increase its supply if it wants the economy to continue to grow at the current rate. The new elite who govern the nation, of a vastly different culture and education than the masses of the country, have launched the jingle that India wants soon, very soon, to be a developed country; that it wants to become a superpower in a few years at any cost. In my opinion, it is quite possible to achieve this, but only after paying a huge ecological, social, cultural and spiritual price.

Classical India, as reflected in the myth of Ganga, considers that the world is alive, and that the elements that make it up are not inert materials that are neutral and indifferent to man and other creatures, but constitute organs that are inter-connected and supportive of an all-encompassing unity: the universe is the body of God. The Divinity, the consciousness that vivifies all, is present in all beings, whether animate or not. One of the most surprising things to the foreigner who visits India is that the sacred is part of everyday life, a 'sacred ecology' where natural elements become sacralized. Nevertheless, the new elite in India, like those of the industrialized world, operate with the scientific-technological paradigm: nature is inert and is there to be exploited for the economic benefit of man. Water that simply flows into the sea, without producing any visible benefit, is considered poorly used. These two visions co-exist in the mind of innumerable Indians, but in airtight compartments that hardly communicate with or enlighten each other.

Oblivious to these new profound changes, pilgrims continue to bathe with faith in the waters of mother Ganga, dirty yet pure. When India has become a country of vast economic growth, and probably one of the greatest world powers of the 21st century, in my view the most important question will be: is it possible to integrate science and modernity with the classical spiritual vision which has bestowed upon this unique civilization its strength and longevity? Will India, abandoning the best of its culture, become a replica of Western industrialized countries, or will it manage to harmonize its culture with modern economic needs, thus contributing something new to the world? ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

Self-Love

The Original Dream

Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj's Direct Pointers to Reality

SHRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ
TRANSLATED BY MOHAN GAITONDE

Self-Love: The Original Dream is a translation by Mohan Gaitonde of the Marathi Atmaprem. It is a compilation of transcriptions made in the final years of Nisargadatta Maharaj's life by Dinkar Kshirsagar. It is published by Zen Publications, Mumbai. pp.527, Rs.650. ISBN: 938590283-0 www.zenpublications.com

Thursday 19th October 1978

World and Brahman Are Not Two

The seed sown by the Guru will turn into a tree and you will call it the world. But that is of no use to you as it is going to vanish one day. The things you acquire will remain, but you will not be there in a suitable form to enjoy them. Even your sense of being is bound to go one day. When is there no need for pleasure and no experience of pain? It is in the absence of the memory 'I am'. Your childhood and young age vanished without your doing anything. Similarly, your individuality is also going to vanish. Nothing is going to remain permanently. Whatever you may do, nothing will give you fullness. The hunger will remain. Your sense of being itself is responsible for all greed. It must become clear as to what is responsible for the existence of anything and in the absence of what, nothing exists.

Your true existence is measureless. It is neither white nor black, irrespective of your ideas about It. You will not know your death, although others may declare you dead. Your beingness is going to vanish, whether you like it or not. Is your desire or skill responsible for your appearance in this present form?

While meditating, when there is experience of nothingness, how will there be its knower? The individual souls are very much impressed by miracles. But that is not real knowledge. If the knowing ends, is it death?

Human beings have many names, but the sense of being is present in everyone. It is the most singular thing and its cause is known to only a rare one. That is the secret of birth. The consciousness in body means the world and its life. When the world appears, it means the consciousness existed prior to it. Gurudeva means that pure consciousness, which is responsible for the knowledge, 'I am a human.' Prior to having a human form, this knowledge was absent.

Every living being wants to live, which is its primary need. Every effort is made to sustain consciousness. Somehow we must continue to exist. We almost worship our consciousness, in order to sustain it. That is our first love and all other things are loved thereafter. One must have direct knowledge of our consciousness or knowingness or Atman. In order to know our eternal true being, continue to chant the *mantra* of 'Jaya Guru' mentally. At the end, this consciousness merges into the Self. You can take away anyone's body, but the consciousness cannot be touched.

In deep sleep, we are not conscious of ourselves. Hence we get rest. For rest do you have to go anywhere? 'I am a man or a woman' is our memory with reference to the body. When the body is forgotten, there are no needs.

Without knowing what we are now, we cannot know our true nature. We are not the body, but the consciousness, which we were identifying with the body. This is the summary of knowledge. Because we thought ourselves to be our bodies, we became individuals. In reality, there are no individuals but only manifestation. The knowers of the astral body have seen it occupying the entire world. All the different terms have been given to the manifested itself. The world and *Brahman* are not two, as the former is the light of consciousness. The knower of world is consciousness only, and this knowledge is also due to consciousness.

In the initial stages, one remains alone remembering the Guru. When there is oneness with the Guru, the question of aloneness or remembering doesn't arise. Without oneness with the Guru, it is difficult to sustain spiritual knowledge. Many Sadhus had to end their lives by yogic *samādhi*, as they found it difficult to continue with their consciousness. Only in the non-dual state, this consciousness becomes trouble-free. Be one with the Guru, which means remaining as consciousness. That, due to which we know we are, is like light, and it is consciousness and love. You must have awareness of true knowledge, as long as you are awake. You must have conviction that you are prior to all that is seen, right from waking in the morning to going to sleep again. 'I am prior to everything' doesn't mean being hundreds of years old. It means identification with beingness, which is prior to the world.

You know anything only after becoming conscious. All this may happen merely in a moment. The simplicity of this teaching can be understood only by the meritorious who is able to do *viveka*. If we are not, what exists? When you are one with the Guru, His grace flows and you have proper understanding. Then, you come to know that you were never a doer any time in the past, present or in the future. There is no need to do anything.

When the sense of being and all its meaning become quiet, there is no need to go anywhere for anything. Your intellect and all its ability cannot give you contentment. What is needed is *viveka* and faith. The world is known because of you and it resides within you. Just as a web is created by the saliva of a spider, the world is a creation of your own light. But you believe that you exist in the light of the world, which is because of your bondage. In reality, the world appears in your light.

The words or ideas give rise to actions. What lies in the hollow of the astral body wakes up by reiterated calling. What is this astral body and since when does it exist? It is that due to which you have your sense of being. Your memory of existence is the quality of the astral body.

There is no God apart from the devotee and no worshipper apart from God. This devotee is the consciousness or the ancient God. You are unaware of this due to your body-identity and certainty of death.

The entire universe is made of this singular consciousness, because of which you know your existence. To be in meditation regularly and

for long durations is the sign of a true son of the Guru. Any time, when in difficulty, chant '*Guru, Guru*'. One who is fearless in any situation there is no death at all.

Thursday 20th March 1980

You Are Never Born

Our thoughts help to clear up other thoughts and what remains is the Truth. *Viveka* is a strainer to filter words. Our thinking increases words and the right ones are selected by *viveka*. The mind, intellect and individual consciousness are also words, but they are also storehouses of words.

All languages are time-bound and they vanish when their time is over. At present, morning and afternoon are over, and what remain are evening and the night. This is the nature of time. The effects of your behaviour in the morning are experienced in the evening. There is stomachache now due to overeating in the morning. As there is life in the body, the destiny of its material is as per your earlier actions.

You have to make adjustments as required for your comforts.

Your self-love itself is the *Mahāmāyā*, 'the great illusion'. She has connected together the whole world. The self-love sustains on the juice bottled in the body. Your body gives an impression of individuality, but your consciousness is all the manifested. In order to know the Self, always remember your body to be food material in which is your consciousness. You have only to watch your consciousness without doing any addition or subtraction in it. You take yourself as your body and as an individual; hence you are bound to suffer.

The birth is not yours, but of the two states of waking and sleep. These states are responsible for unhappiness. In order to make our being tolerable, remembering *Īśvara* and repeating His name is recommended. This is one of the remedies. How was I in the womb and how did I develop into this complete form? Think on these lines. Your development and greatness is only a quality of food juices. Know this and drop all ego. Your development is like that of a raw mango which is initially bitter, then sour and finally sweet. This change is only in the quality of mango juice. The birth is not of an individual but only of a food body or a *sattva* form.

Amongst millions of people, only a rare one knows that the body is not his form. Then the birth of the body cannot be his birth. What you were prior to listening to any word, the same you are now as well. Hence, throw away all your stock of words. With the waking state, our pure being also appeared, but there was wrong identification with the body, followed by hopes, desires and cravings. There was bliss of being, but it was lost in the body-identification. You are trying to retain your identity, but as what? Many worship God but they believe themselves to be their bodies and work for their sustenance. Along with the body, everything is going to vanish. The experiencer is going to disappear, along with his experience. It is all a season, which is going to last for a short duration.

It was the consciousness which became aware of the body. Due to identification with the body, it forgot itself. *Chitragupta* means the secret individual consciousness which writes its own good or bad destiny and suffers accordingly. Astrology applies to the ignorant and not to the Self-realised. Your interest in that subject and your belief indicates your ignorance. Keep aside all those things which you have heard in this world, and what will remain will be your most natural true state.

When you hear my Talk, your speech becomes quiet. But as long as you are alive, you are likely to say or think something. If you think you are a man or a woman, you will have to also think about the future. The whole universe is the vision of a Sage. That vision contains everything, and it gives rise to the whole world. Hence, a Sage is free of volition.

Your true nature is as a *Jñāni*, which you are ignoring, and accepting some other identity, which you have heard of. Don't disturb your worldly life as it is a part of your vision. By loving the known, you are shattering your blissful state, which is complete in all respects.

The *Sadguru's* grace is such that a true disciple will not even touch any term of recognition by people. He is never a *Sādhu*, a *Mahātmā* or a *Yogi*. Then, why are there so many creeds or sects? The reason is, some ignorant religious teachers love certain concepts and believe those to be *Brahman*. That belief is then forced on their followers. One who realises 'I am *Brahman*' becomes one with the whole world. But, we are pure and beyond everything. There are no kinds or sorts that can limit us. 'I am *Brahman*' is also a concept. What is untinged and

beyond all concepts should be known only by *viveka*. True knowledge of Reality leads to absence of worldly passion. Never use your anger to prove your detachment. Let it be known to you that you are untouched even by dissolutions of the universe. A truly One is sure of his real nature as God or Guru. The timid lacks courage to have that faith.

Krishna says those who read or hear an account of His life, develop faith in Him. Guru means consciousness, which is the inner sense of being in every living being. It is the form of God, which is in the body but is separate from it. The consciousness, which listens about the nature of Hari, what He is and where, etc., is the form of Krishna. God says, to identify the self-love with the body is to ignore Him. One who develops full faith that consciousness is the real form of *Īśvara*, progresses faster in the spiritual quest.

One realises Krishna by worshipping Him non-dually. Only a rare one who has earned religious merit develops that great faith. The real faith is to observe the unity between our consciousness and God's form. Due to the consciousness in body, which is Bhagwan, we experience ourselves and also the world. A true devotee has full faith in the Guru's words, and he accepts them totally. He lives with full conviction of the existence of God in him as his consciousness. There are many who are devoted to God until they die, but the fear of death remains. Just as we don't need life when there is no body at all, as a Sage is not His body, His existence is eternal. In order to solve this riddle, have full faith in the Guru's words that you are not a human being but only God and live with that conviction. If you live as a body, your death cannot be avoided. And that cycle of birth-death will repeat again and again. Listening to the Guru's words, the body is easily forgotten and one gets absorbed in consciousness, with increase in bliss. Applying *viveka*, make friendship with consciousness. Then you will be untouched by whatever happens in this world. The God is in you as your consciousness, and in this world there is nothing more important than that. In reality, consciousness and the world are one. The real happiness is to have the feeling of inner freedom. The faithful realise that as they are *Ātman*, bliss is their very nature. Hence, practise *jñāna-yoga*, *ātman-yoga* so that you will realise the eternal *Brahman* in this very life. For this, increase your faith in *Ātman* and live with that faith.



Virtual Reality and Sacred Places

WASYL NIMENKO

In 1986 I was asked by Phil Judkins from the Xerox Corporation, to look at the possible psychological effects of using new computer technology. The computer was The Star Workstation, officially known as the Xerox 8010 Information System. The Star was introduced by Xerox Corporation in 1981 and was the first computer to incorporate various technologies that have since become standard in personal computers, including a bitmapped display, a window based graphical user interface, icons, folders, mouse (two-button) Ethernet networking, file servers, print servers and e-mail. The Star represented a milestone in the human computer interface which was thought of as a step towards developing virtual reality computer systems.

After discussions with leading IT people of the day, doctors and psychologists, a research study was designed and undertaken by myself and John Heron, (the pioneering clinical psychologist) on a group of 21 people who were using The Star for 8 hours a day. The

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subjects were also assessed by us and also by a counsellor and a physiotherapist for all known effects of stress including physiological measurement such as blood pressure and detailed blood analysis.

At the end of the research, the unanimous conclusion was that using this technology for 8 hours a day did not lead to any form of stress which could be detected. I decided not to publish the research findings as they seemed somewhat uninteresting.

If the same research was conducted today on a similar group of people, the findings would probably be the same. The main reason for this is that it is not the use of computers at work which seem to have changed us but more the double use injury or multiple use injury. Musicians hardly ever injure themselves simply from playing their instruments because they have trained to have the stamina to do so. However, musicians who also use their hands with considerable effort in their spare time such as painting ceilings or doing manual work frequently sustain a 'double use injury' which is not immediately apparent except upon careful questioning.

Similarly, the average person using a computer during the working day seems to come to no psychological harm. It would seem that using other forms of similar technology such as smart phones or tablets in the evenings may lead to simple multiple use fatigue but this is not necessarily the case.

Overuse immersion in virtual worlds can be an escape from the real world of having to interact with family and friends. Immersion can act like a drug, numbing and therefore avoiding experiencing real feelings. It is an easier way to feel more comfortable experiencing less pain and discomfort than in the real world.

Our experience of what most people would perceive of as the real world is reduced and replaced by another artificial world. Our interaction with nature and with real people in real time and space may be so reduced as to be almost absent.

The absence of relating to nature and to real people in real time and space removes the benefits these things give us. We are then in a situation where we are not relating to people and not getting the nurturing that this brings, but also without the contrasting problems relating always brings.

It is 30 years since the Xerox research project on the Star and we have in that time become proficient at multi-tasking with two or three

of these devices at the same time. Today a person may use a laptop, tablet, smart-phone, smart watch, eyeglasses, contact lenses or heads up display to communicate with hundreds to millions of people by e-mail, Facebook, Facetime, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat or other electronic formats. They may use these through all waking hours, at work, in education, at home, in intimate relationships, for sex, for religion, for entertainment, as leisure, as therapy or in criminal ways.

With these devices a funeral can be relayed to absent relatives who may not be able to travel, wherever they may be in the world. And although this may be seen as progress, it comes with the loss of many things and can leave only a second rate reality to life. A person attending an e-funeral has not travelled and thought about the journey to the deceased and loved ones. They cannot meet, greet and hold the people in mourning and give them the warmth of their hands or their embrace. They cannot share the experience of being there as much as they cannot smell the flowers or be with the deceased on their last journey. They cannot throw that flower onto the coffin.

The loss of basic experiences is a serious challenge and a threat to mankind, because, by permitting the entry of technology into our lives to help us we may have removed experiences; and this reduces not only our understanding but also our feelings about people, places and things. It may be making us behave less autonomously and more like automated machines.

Technology has enabled us to communicate instantly with almost anyone anywhere, and at a tiny cost and there have been great advances in access to information, in medicine and travel. But is this progress in that our material quality of life is better? Are we as prosperous as we have been in that we are flourishing, thriving, happy, healthy and in a state of good fortune?

The extraordinary technology which children have easy access to in order to gather and process information has also unfortunately been used by the media to over-promote competitiveness rather than cooperativeness, greed rather than sharing, power rather than empowering and worship of celebrity status rather than equality. In the past, values such as honesty, compassion and humility were promoted and nurtured by parents at home, teachers at school and religious figures in temples. Over the years these parents, teachers

and inner guides have been pushed to the side by other things such as psychology, the new age and finally new technologies. So we have the responsibility of being in a crisis about our core values which should define us as co-operative civilised humans. Technology plays a significant role in this.

Perhaps we are becoming more ‘down and out.’ Maybe we have been moving downwards as opposed to upwards in that we are not flourishing, as we are not thriving, we are less happy, we are unhealthy and in a worse state of good fortune. Man’s sight and perception are more focused on going more outwards (more materialistic) as opposed to inwards (more spiritual).

In their advanced training, members of the armed forces, such as air crew and special forces, who are at the highest risk of falling into enemy hands, have to re-learn basic survival skills, such as how to find water, food and shelter, and learn to live whilst hiding and evading capture. To primitive man the use of these skills were automatic, everyday experiences. In the world’s most advanced countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) air crew, Special Forces and secret service agents now have to spend weeks learning these essential skills on specialist Survival, Escape, Resistance and Escape (SERE) courses. That it is only the most advanced countries that have to do this is indicative of the fact that technological advance is often accompanied by a loss of fundamental self-reliance.

It is common to overindulge in the use of technology to the point of binge use. We are already at a point where technology substitutes everyday experiences. Even corporate mindfulness courses are online. Already some individuals are having to go on specialised courses to learn how to be in a room with family or friends for prolonged periods without resorting to technology. Some have to go on courses to learn how to be able to have a meaningful intimate relationship. Others have to go on courses to learn how to spend leisure time without technology so that they can relax and psychologically decompress.

If we have to go back to classes to re-learn how to be friends, how to relate to people, how to be gentle and kind and how to enjoy life, then what have we become? We just haven’t realised the position we are in because the consequences have not been seen or felt on a large

enough scale nor made a significant impact to make us want to do something about it.

Technology, in the form of simple tools, originally helped man to survive. A rock could help fight off an assailant, whether another man or a beast. A rock could also be used in the form of an arrowhead to kill an animal for food. A metal rock changed by heat could be used to cut wood for a timber shelter. Technology might one day be able to transport us to distant planets to set up new civilisations. It may even let us preserve the ways our brains think in a memory device. But it won't be able to preserve our sense of the spiritual, our consciousness, the Self.

The Gobekli Tepe temple in Southern Turkey which is 11,500 years old indicates that searching for the sacred and then worshipping it is a primitive impulse because it seems to have preceded civilised life as we know of it; that is before we were hunter gatherers. Whenever man first had this sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self, it was probably due to a sense of something else, the sacred, other than his thoughts, which he perceived as more important and more powerful. What made him have this sense of the sacred? Was it something about the Sun or the Earth, an event, or just an awareness, which came with the consciousness of an inner self that perhaps he alone had in the animal kingdom.

It could be argued that if the Sun, the Earth or an event initially prompted him to have this sense of the sacred, then it would be easy to understand how man projected his sense of the sacred externally onto whatever it was that had prompted him, perhaps creating the idea of a Heavenly God, which he then worshipped and which evolved into a belief system. Identification with and devotion to the sun or a holy site can take man deeply inwards into sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self producing a profound sense of the self in relation to others and the wider world. This may have enabled man to see the transience and futility of his ego. This inward journey is possibly the essence of the origins of spirituality.

For this identification with the sun or a holy site to happen, man had to realise a sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self, which he thinks he also sees in the sun or in a holy site. From here man could have conjured up rituals to support his belief in identifying with

the sacred. From here any religious belief system could have begun, whether it was the religious worship at Gobekli Tepe, Paganism or Aboriginal beliefs. The point is that this would mean that the origins of the sacred or of religious belief may have been through projection, or externalization of his sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self.

Perhaps, whatever the origin of the prompt that gave him his inner sense of the sacred, man chose to separate it from himself and see it externally rather than as originating from inside him. The worship at the Gobekli Tepe temple seems to be evidence of this externalization. The externalization may have evolved because a physical form was a more convenient constant reminder or the intangible inner sense. It may be that it took many more millennia for Buddhism and Hinduism to consider that the origins of the sacred could be within.

We are not born unhappy but because our external circumstances seem to make us unhappy we try to find the happiness we know, but we look externally to counterbalance the happiness we imagine we have lost there. Searching outwards leads to a never ending search because it is in the wrong direction.

Man seems to follow the easier path of least resistance and projects his sense of the sacred externally, but if he could recognise it as a projection, he could withdraw it and look inwards. Withdrawing the projection and looking inwards might set him on the path to discover the true relationship between his mind and his inner self. He might see that the mind, though powerful and clever, can be deceptive and project the needs of the sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self externally.

Maybe man's error has been to rely on the mind using external means to make him happy and, consequently he feeds the ego's desires whilst ignoring food for his sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self.

If we accept our externalized culture, then to turn around and go inwards, or to be internalized, seems to go against the grain of modern society's view of man. Maybe we need to challenge the belief that happiness lies outside of us. To be a nerd, a geek, a loner or a recluse is generally regarded as eccentric behaviour. Perhaps these types of people have already dropped out and care not what others think about them, simply because they are happy with themselves. Although

they appear to be at odds with the normal, modern society may have got them completely wrong. After all, these odd people are happy in themselves, which is exactly what we actually want to be.

It seems that society does not want us to nurture ourselves in this way and instead wants us to conform and be compliant so that we can be organised and civilised. Part of the solution lies in understanding that we are much more divergent than we imagine, that no single answer is going to fit all, and that all answers are not going to fit a single person.

So, where do we go next? If religion, science and technology, astrology, psychology, psychoanalysis, self actualisation, psychosynthesis, individuation, transpersonal psychology have failed to come up with a reasonable answer, then it seems that, although all of these have been part of an extraordinary journey or process, they have not seen progress at all but have merely been a lesson in finding out what doesn't make us happy. So where should we go now?

Spirituality refers to the ultimate reality of a person's inner path which consists of the deepest values by which we live and feel connected to others, the wider world and the Universe. For a very long time man has identified his sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self, with external objects which can actually be observed, primarily the sun but also sacred sites such as mountains.

Almost every religion subscribes to this practice. Buddhism has Bodh Gaya in India and Mount Kailash with Hinduism in Tibet. Hinduism has Varanasi and Arunachala in India. Islam has Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Judaism has the holy Mount Morai in Jerusalem and Mount Sinai in Egypt. Christianity has The Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Paganism has New Grange in Ireland, Maes Howe and the Tomb of the Eagles in Orkney, and Stonehenge in England. In fact, every country has its own sacred sites. To name just a few, the Aborigines have Uluru and Kata Tjuta in Australia; the Maori have Tongariro and Cape Reinga in New Zealand; the Cheyenne North American Indians have Bear Butte in South Dakota; and there is Mount Fuji in Japan, Mount Kilimanjaro in South Africa and the Temple of Delphi in Greece.

Each sacred site would have been designated sacred because of some special feature. Orkney has tombs and stone circles, but these

were put there by man in response to the presence of something else there. But what was there in Orkney that made man regard it as a sacred place? Whatever it was is likely to be still there, and I think it is right in front of our eyes, or above them. I think the most likely candidate for making it a sacred place, so that people made stone circles there and buried their dead there, is the Aurora Borealis. This is the spectacular colour-light show which is frequently seen in Orkney.

Our ancestors could not have failed to have noticed the Aurora and would have given it special significance. The Romans called the Aurora the Goddess of Dawn; Shakespeare wrote about it. However, most significantly, five thousand years ago the inhabitants of Orkney were almost certainly not the only people to give the Aurora sacred significance. The South Australian Aboriginal Ngarrindjeri tribe regards the Aurora as the campfires of the spirits in the land of the dead, and the Queensland Aboriginals regard the Aurora as fires through which spirits speak to people. The Aurora could be the reason why the places where it was seen were regarded as sacred.

When we see and wonder at the sunset on the winter solstice or the sunrise on the summer solstice, or walk around a sacred mountain, we seem to witness it as individuals, each person experiencing it differently. But it is still the same moment, the same sun, the same mountain symbolizing and mirroring the same sense of the spiritual, the consciousness, the Self that exists in all of us.

Man is now very technologically sophisticated and less aware of the importance of the sun and the sacred sites. He almost no longer ventures on pilgrimages or retreats and few even consider meditation or contemplation. He is in danger of being completely out of touch with his sense of the spiritual, his consciousness, the Self. He is focusing even more on the external in what he perceives as important. Perhaps we need to go back to the basics and see the sun and the sacred sites as a way to begin our search, to use them for pilgrimages, retreats, meditation and contemplation simply to help us to journey inwards. ▲

HOW WE CAME TO BHAGAVAN

How the Ramana Net Drew Us In

SANJEEV KUMAR NATH

My wife and I visited Ramanasramam for the first time many years ago when we were in Kerala for about a month. At that time we knew hardly anything about Ramanasramam, although we had read a little about Ramana Maharshi, and were somehow fascinated by him. We just wanted to see the Ashram where he had stayed. We did not know how important Arunachala was to anyone trying to understand the Ramana way, but knew that he had stayed in caves in the mountain, and wanted to see those too, if possible. We did not even plan to stay at Tiruvannamalai. We just took a bus from Puducherry after having checked into a room in a guest house belonging to Sri Aurobindo's ashram, planning to return to Puducherry in the evening.

We did not have much time on our hands, and we were not very well informed, so we just went about, visiting the shrines and paying our respects. We visited the ashram, looking into the Matrubhuteswara

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temple, Bhagavan's shrine, the old hall and so on, paying our respects to Bhagavan, and then we walked up to Skandasramam. We loved all the places.

Then, while walking up the stone steps on our way to Skandasramam, something happened that seemed to tell us how sacred, special, Arunachala was. My wife, unused to walking much, complained about pain in her legs as we started climbing up the mountain path. We walked slowly, looking at Arunachala, stopping now and then. Then, in her mind she started reciting the *Hanuman Chalisa*, and the pain, very intensely felt some minutes ago, just evaporated, and we happily climbed up to Skandasramam, spent some time there, and came back, without any trouble, without any pain whatsoever. We also quickly visited the Arunachaleswara temple before boarding a bus to Puducherry, but the doors of the *sanctum sanctorum* were closed. That evening we did a lot of walking by the sea beach of Puducherry, too, and the amazing thing was that my wife said she felt absolutely no discomfort or pain. *Hanuman Chalisa* is certainly a powerful prayer, and when you pray while walking on Arunachala, evidently, the prayer becomes even more powerful.

After this visit of just a few hours to Tiruvannamalai, I began to read more about Ramana Maharshi, and my wife and I would often talk about the subject. Years rolled by. Then in 2016, working as a teacher in the Department of English, Gauhati University, I came across a notice about an international seminar at VIT, Vellore. I checked the distance between Vellore and Tiruvannamalai, and decided to attend the seminar and take my wife along and visit Tiruvannamalai, too. In fact, we went to Tiruvannamalai first, and only after visiting Ramanasramam, Skandasramam, Virupaksha cave, and doing our first *giripradakṣiṇā*, we went to Vellore. I had arranged the whole trip in that manner. This time of course, we at least knew where to go, what things to see. I had written to the Ashram earlier, and we were accommodated in a guest house of the ashram for three days. It was wonderful. One evening we saw a gathering of people around Bhagavan's *mahānirvāṇa* room, and we joined. A little later, they sang *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, and we enjoyed singing together, although all we could do was sing the refrain:

Arunachala Siva Arunachala Siva
 Arunachala Siva Arunachala
 Arunachala Siva Arunachala Siva
 Arunachala Siva Arunachala

Only later did we come to know that the ceremony was held to commemorate Bhagavan's *mahānirvāṇa*. We were glad that we were able to be present on this important occasion, although we had not planned to do so, and had only used the opportunity of attending the Vellore seminar to visit the Ashram.

That was in April 2016, and before a year was over, during my winter semester break, we were back in Ramanasramam, and once again, we noticed signs that seemed to suggest how Bhagavan cared for us despite our unworthiness. This time we could not find accommodation although I had written to the Ashram, but that was because of the great rush of devotees during Bhagavan's *jayantī* celebrations. Once again, we did not actually know of the *jayantī* celebrations (of course now we subscribe to *Saranagati* and keep track of Ashram activities), but had landed up there at the exact time. We were staying at Hotel Arunachala near the great temple. This time we did *giri pradakṣiṇā* on a full-moon night, walking with the huge number of people that had come from near and far off places to go round Arunachala. When we finished the *pradakṣiṇā* and went to bed, it was quite late in the night; in fact it was almost dawn, and very soon sounds of devotional songs from the temple filled the air. Probably they were playing recordings, and the sound was pretty loud, so that I was not able to sleep well. I confess that there was a slight irritation in my mind for not being able to sleep after the circumambulation of Arunachala, but at the same time the Tamil devotional songs seemed to stir something deep inside. I did not know the language, and yet, the songs seemed to affect me. It was rather strange. Then, I was in a state of half sleep may be, when suddenly something very astonishing happened. I felt as if all things around me, concrete objects like houses and people and everything else just disappeared into a great nothingness. I felt as if something like the whistling and whoosh that accompanies the launch of a rocket into space occurring inside my brain/mind, and things were just becoming nothingness in a terrible speed. But I also felt that the total experience – whatever it was – was

withheld from me. I actually felt the whistle and whoosh twice, as if a button was put on, and then off, then on, and then finally off. I felt it twice, in quick succession, and then, suddenly everything was normal again. I was in bed, my wife sleeping beside me; we were in Hotel Arunachala; there through the window I could discern Arunachala; and I could hear the singing from the temple.

While in the Ashram during the *jayanti* celebrations in the evening, further ‘miracles’ awaited us. We were outside the Matrubhuteswara shrine, and I was just thinking whether Bhagavan cared for the likes of me, internally praying to Bhagavan, when my eyes fell on something on the notice board outside the shrine. We moved forward and I read a quotation from Bhagavan that seemed to precisely answer my question. It said that the Guru’s grace was such that it will certainly save the devotee, that the devotee cannot escape from that grace, just as a prey that has fallen into the jaws of a tiger cannot escape. I felt that Bhagavan had ‘heard’ my question, the intense question in my mind, and had answered me so accurately, and with such grace! “Is it possible? Is it possible that Bhagavan cares for us so much?” My mind still seemed to ask, even as tears came to my eyes, and through blurry eyes I read the big words written on the T-shirt of some young man who had just come in front of me, and the words were, ‘I OWN YOU’!

Then again during my next winter semester break, we visited Ramanasramam. By now we knew – something that Sri Nochur Venkataraman often says in his Talk – that every dust particle of Bhagavan’s Ashram, and Arunachala, is charged with Bhagavan’s presence. I can’t now say that we visited this and that only, because all things were now sacred. The terrible summer drought had passed, and I had read that the great *iluppai* tree in the Ashram had suffered a lot. Now we stood under it, and stroked it gently, reverentially with our hands. I now knew that Bhagavan had sat under this tree so many times, that He had moved around here, throughout Arunachala, on the Tiruvannamalai streets, making the whole place sacred with His presence. This time we were lucky to be able to attend the first two days of Sri Venkataraman’s wonderful discourse on Bhagavan’s *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, but had to leave Tiruvannamalai after that because our tickets had already been booked, and my holidays were coming to an end. However, we now had no doubt that we have been caught in the net of Bhagavan’s grace. ▲

Love Your Ego to Death

It is the Fuel for Your Enquiry

ART BAKER

This is an article describing how *bhakti* (love) towards the ego aids in burning away deeply embedded *vāsanās*, and how this form of *bhakti* together with *jñāna* (self-knowledge) merge during the practical aspects of Sri Bhagavan's teachings.

Many of us have been meditating and practising self-enquiry for decades. If you have an affinity for these teachings, chances are you've been at it for lifetimes. Yet, the mischievous ego still often trips us up. Usually this is in the form of *vāsanās* that appear as either anger, fear, grief, anxiety, depression, excessive doubt, unrestrained desire, or whatever the case may be. The ego fools us into following it outwards into conditioned thought, which can prove to be a major distraction to our practice. There is however, a solution to this. If we learn to see the egoic mind in a different light and recognise its importance as described by Bhagavan, it no longer is an obstacle. Rather, the ego itself when fully accepted and appreciated, can be recognised as being kindle for maintaining the fire, the fuel for deepening our practice.

When any repetitive *vāsanā* is met with full awareness rather than being recycled, ignored or suppressed, it is eventually burnt in the fire of self-knowledge. During your practice when *any* perceived obstacle

persistently arises between you and the silent stillness of pure being... *any* perception, sensation, irritating thought, problematic emotion, or any appearance that is taken as a barrier that you wish was not present, rather than resisting or acting out these *vāsanās*, unconditionally summon them to enter more deeply into your awareness with open arms. At times, these perceived hindrances are on the mere surface of the mind although they are felt to be embedded deeper within. Call them in even deeper yet, with a welcoming, loving attitude and you'll be amazed to see them slowly melt away. This may occur either gradually or in a flash. But with this sincere heart centered approach when consciously met, these facets of ego will no longer be the major issues that they once proved to be.

Aside from the ego in the form of the I-thought being the very entry point into self-enquiry, many of us fail to appreciate the central role of the ego in Bhagavan's teachings. Bhagavan tells us that the formless ego-ghost has an important function to play in the scheme of things. He says its task is to protect the body which enables it to go through the *karma* it is destined to experience. Without burning off this *karma* that has been generated by our misidentification with the body as who we are, we take further births. By misapprehending our self as the doer in the world, we own and are responsible for its actions, hence the accumulation of stores of *karma*.

Yet, by knowing who we truly are, not just cognitively, but by direct experience in the meditative silence of thoughtless awareness, we no longer identify with the body/ego limitation. Its *karma* as it unfolds no longer affects us. We learn to witness the results of *karma* rather than identifying with them as occurring to a localized 'me'. This is the very process of unwinding our egoic identity. This state of thoughtlessness is experienced by all in deep dreamless sleep. It is a matter of learning to be consciously aware of the profound peace and contentment of deep sleep, while in the waking state, and that is what self-enquiry entails.

Another way to look at the central position that the ego plays is to look at the image of Siva Nataraja. The aura of Siva is a flame of fire, the fire of self-knowledge. The Lord is showing some tough love by placing his foot on the little 'demon', the ego, which does not disappear in this imagery. Sri Nochur says that Siva aims His anger at the ignorant

ego (its *vāsanās*). Yet the Lord is not killing the ego in the image of the Nataraja. Rather, Siva is giving *pāda dīkṣā* (initiation by foot) to the ego! Upon close inspection of the dancing Nataraja, the so-called ‘demon’ representing the ego is not being slain but is instead looking endearingly at the Lord receiving His *darśan*. The ego is subdued, yet maintained as kindle for the fire of self-knowledge.

It is important also to appreciate the ego in the scheme of enquiry as the very starting point of Bhagavan’s method of *ātma-vicāra*. We focus on the I-thought which leads us back to its source. When we abide in its source, the ego has done its job... it gets burned as does the wick of a flame that still continues to burn. Bhagavan explains that although a *jñāni* has an ego, it has been reduced to ash, and like a burnt rope, it can no longer function to impede knowing one’s true nature. The only *vāsanās* that remain in the *jñāni* are non-binding, the *bhoga vāsanās* that serve for enjoyment.

Also, it is key to recall that Bhagavan during his death experience as a teen, describes that while his body was internally experienced as being taken to the cremation ground and reduced to ashes, he still felt the full force of his personality. This cryptic statement of Bhagavan is often a source of confusion to devotees since he repeatedly said to kill the ego. How can Bhagavan’s personality survive with a dead ego? To kill the ego really means to dissolve it back from where it first arose, into the silent depths of our very being. We can infer that this experience of Bhagavan – having felt the full force of his personality – that this personality in fact was the real eternal ‘I’ and not the violently fearful egoic ‘I’ which Bhagavan reports initiated the enquiry during his death experience into “Who dies?”, and was much like a charred rope. Bhagavan had fully invited death within, without being afraid, and he welcomed the fear of death, the primal fear of every ego.

In our *sādhana* then, what approach to the ego do we take? How do we handle the ego when it springs forth and distracts us from our inward focus of enquiry either during formal practice or in the midst of our everyday mundane affairs? Allow me to answer this by providing an illustration.

Each day I enjoy attending the readings of the ashram’s literature in English that takes place in the old bookstall next to Bhagavan’s

Samadhi shrine. The professor who reads to us uses a desk top fan that he places on the floor pointing directly at him. Afterwards, I return the fan to its rightful place at the ashram office. The fan is rather heavy and awkward relative to its size. To lift and transport it without difficulty however, I grab it by its neck and it is easier to handle. Likewise with the ego, a rascal that sometimes needs to be shown some tough love in order to put it in its rightful place. It's a matter of how we approach and handle the ego which often feels heavy and awkward, when in fact it has none whatsoever, the shadow that it is!

What does this mean, to show the ego some tough love to grab it by its neck and to put the ego in its rightful place? It means not ignoring egoic problems if the same binding *vāsanās*, the repeated patterns of anger, fear, grief, anxiety, depression, unrestrained desire, or excessive doubt constantly recur. Instead, invite these emotions within. Do not analyze them. Do not get mentally involved with them. Just allow them space to exist and focus your entire attention on these sensations without resistance in your awareness.

If you meet these feelings without acting them out or going into some story about them, or blaming someone about why you feel hurt or distracted; if you simply concentrate on the impression and watch the energy of these emotions move about in awareness, they will eventually burn away and dissolve. We must be willing however, to consciously meet the discomfort. It is important to understand that during our practice as we get quieter over the years and sink further into silence, anything that has been suppressed from our past will surface to be purged. When skillfully met, these deeply embedded *vāsanās* arise to be released, rather than keeping us enslaved.

This same dynamic that operates during the purification and removal of the emotional body's *vāsanās* parallels how the physical body cleanses and purifies during a fast. When we intentionally go without food during a cleansing fast, toxins that are stored deep within cells and tissues are slowly eliminated. In the process, they are released into the bloodstream and are chaperoned to our eliminative organs for expulsion. While in circulation however, these toxins may cause discomfort in the form of temporary headaches, sore throat, rashes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, etc. Yet this is the very process

of how the physiology heals itself by removing these toxins. Similarly with the emotional body as described above.¹

Just to be clear, I am not claiming that this is an easy process to go through as the emotional *vāsanās* are purged, when the ego is inflamed. Sometimes the ego flares up like a lightening bolt or a fierce gale of wind. Yet to have courage and honesty to enquire in these moments is essential.

If this is not possible due to uncontrollable ego irritation, express to yourself an especially heartfelt prayer for help to the Inner Guru and be patient and confident in knowing that that prayer will be answered. In this prayer, simply admit that the ego is not cooperating and there's nothing that seems to be working to free yourself from *samsāra*. You have absolutely nothing to lose by expressing this sincere appeal, and everything to gain.

Sometimes the ego will continue stewing, and will blame outer circumstances for its problems and there's nothing we can do but watch it spin until it settles down.

When we appreciate the role of the ego, its purpose in protecting the body, and as fuel for self-knowledge, we no longer fight with it since this very struggle feeds the ego and keeps it alive. Instead, fully engage *with* it. This is analogous to lovingly grabbing the ego by its neck and showing it its proper place. From a strictly non-dual standpoint, you might ask who is the doer in all this? Who is doing all this grabbing? Who is loving the ego to death? Who is inviting in these *vāsanās*? It is the mind which is confused and the mind must sort itself out.

Sri Nochur reminds us from the Vedantic perspective, the mind is the very first manifestation of the Self and ultimately is non-separate from it. What this means is that everything is already occurring within the Self. Bhagavan tells us that the mind when it abides in the Self, is no longer mind. It is the Self. When purified, when made *sattvic*, the mind is divine and reflects divinity from where it arises.

We should be careful and understand that the mere addition of non-dual concepts to our intellect is insufficient. Even the reading of this

¹ I happen to be an expert in this field, having written a book on this topic that has sold in the thousands called *Awakening Our Self-Healing Body – A Solution To The Healthcare Crisis* as well as having served as Dean of Students at Life Science Institute, formerly in Austin, Texas. And I have followed that up with an unpublished sequel called *Awakening Our Self-Healing Heart And Mind – A Solution To The Happiness Crisis*.

article will have no lasting effect without this *bhakti-jñāna* path being applied and assimilated, for it is *anubhāva*, or direct experience of the Self that is mandatory. It is essential to do the practice, otherwise, a permanent paradigm shift will not occur. When it comes to acutely embedded *vāsanās*, do not fool yourself. They've been there for lifetimes. To uproot them requires sustained effort along with constant exposure to Bhagavan's teachings. All efforts to extinguish the ego creates a vacuum into which grace will flow. And it is grace that finishes the job.

So what does it mean to grab the ego by its neck? It means to take charge, to stop being identified with the ego's latent tendencies. It means no longer being at the whim of mood swings based on anger, fear, or grief. Rather than struggling with the illusive mind which is like trying to pick up a freshly caught slippery fish, it's all a matter of approach. If you have a bucket, it's easy to catch hold of the fish. If you take the correct angle, it's easier to handle the unruly ego. And this is what it means to love the ego to death. But this form of *bhakti* is not a casual affair, rather it is a long term commitment. To be more precise, it is a moment to moment commitment that becomes deliberately embedded into your practice.

A short time ago, in the middle of the night I had a crazy dream that many would interpret as a nightmare. But for me, it did not register as such in the least. A devil came to me that was as vivid as anything experienced in the waking state. "There is no such thing as happiness," he said, "it is all fleeting, just a mirage." Then the devil handed me some pills as if these were the answer to *samsāra*. My immediate subjective reaction while still in the dream was one of amusement, not fear. My practice includes welcoming my ego. I recognised the devil as the ego. And his advice is actually correct with one caveat... there is no such thing as happiness *in the world*, nor *in the mind*.

The fact that I don't believe much in the waking state as being absolutely real by the grace of Bhagavan's teachings also includes anything experienced during any worthless dream. So the devil didn't spook me. Instead, I completely welcomed him as a cleverly disguised aspect of my ego. This invitation is a form of non-resistance. This disarms and kills the ego. It is the way to love it to death. It turns the egoic mind into an ally by recognising what it is and directing our attention deeply inward as it arises, not as an escape, but rather as a

reminder like a bell during meditation to turn awareness of whatever arises in the mind back to its source.

Bhagavan tells us that the life of an ego requires an object in order for it to survive. Bhagavan says that to be permanently rid of it we need to starve the ego of its tendency to objectify by turning it inwards to the subject itself. When the ego takes subjective awareness as its object of attention with an extended laser-like focus, the entire egoic structure flames out like camphor. It engulfs itself by virtue of intense self-referral and is immolated. What's left is no longer the I-thought. It is the I-I itself, pure formless awareness.

If all of this flaming out sounds far-fetched, consider the fact that Bhagavan reported that an intense burning sensation occurs after realisation, and this feeling was not extinguished until he embraced the Siva Lingam at the innermost sanctum of the Arunachaleswara Temple. For us mere mortals, the ego when irritated is also felt as an inflamed mass of energy waiting to explode in either anger, fear, or grief. The solution to this happiness crisis is to deeply turn within while devotedly inviting and holding these egoic tendencies within the silence of awareness. As they dissipate, soften, and cool down, as Sri Nochur reminds us, the fire of self-knowledge is actually experienced as a cool fire within the Heart, within the core of our very being. This cool fire is felt inwardly like a fresh breeze as the ego melts away.

This method of silent concentrated introspection, to rest in the mind's source is self-enquiry. When practised in this manner, the ego is no longer an adversary. It becomes our friend, and is returned to its rightful place. It is being utilised as a pointer to maintain awareness of our real nature by leading us there, via the portal of the I-thought. An authentic desire to wake up does burn away our binding *vāsanās*.

How do we know if that desire is authentic? A sure sign is how much we value and love a silent mind, and how much we gear our daily activities toward maintaining that. It's simply a matter of learning how to effectively manage our egoic self that typically runs wild when allowed to express itself unabated. That is *samsāra*, suffering. Instead, when it troubles you, summon it, as you would a friend in need. In this manner, the ego is progressively disarmed and it will continue to fuel your ever deepening practice and goal of self-enquiry.

Once a devotee told Bhagavan that he was unable to practice self-enquiry due to an inability to hold onto the elusive ego sense. Bhagavan

said nothing. Later on, that devotee entered the kitchen and had a major quarrel with another devotee. Just at that moment, Bhagavan unexpectedly entered the scene and the devotee who asked the question about the intangible ego felt embarrassed for losing his temper.

Bhagavan smiled and explained that this is exactly the time to catch hold of the ego as it raises its head up high. This is when the ego is easiest to grab as the egoic sense is undeniable. At these times, if we gradually learn to change our approach and attitude toward the ego, even its ugliness can work for us as we catch it in the act, and instead, use these moments for sustained self attention.

Bhagavan also describes the Self as love. We all know that when you love something, you give it your full undivided attention at any given moment. During enquiry, Bhagavan tells us to give the I-thought our absolute undivided attention and when fully attended to it does indeed eventually vanish. What is left over is what Bhagavan calls the 'illumination'.

He says, "The mind can do nothing by itself. It emerges only with the illumination and can do no action, good or bad, except with the illumination. But while the illumination is always there, enabling the mind to act well or ill, the pleasure or pain resulting from such action is not felt by the illumination, just as when you hammer a red hot rod, it is not the fire but the iron that gets the hammering."²

It is loving attention to the source of our being and to the ego itself that undoes the egoic knot and leads to final liberation. For this is all that the ego is a knotted mass of conditioned thought and beliefs that hypnotize us into believing that who we are is limited to the body and mind. Rather, what's needed is to identify with and know who we truly are as pure awareness, the deathless spirit, the Life principle itself, which animates and illumines the mortal coil and the egoic fixation.

Finally, as Sri Muruganar writes: "Desist from lamentations and feelings of affliction in the mind, and with devotion, put yourself under the rule and protection of our Lord's feet. The minds of those who have become devoted slaves of the liberal donor, Sri Ramana, will abound with the light of *mouna* [silence] that even the celestials cannot imagine."³ ▲

² Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Gems From Bhagavan*, Chap.III, 'The Mind'.

³ Muruganar, *The Shining of my Lord*. ed. D. Godman, v.1047.

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Ten

The Marriage of Kabir

NABAJI SIDDHA

Kabir and his parents bowed at the feet of Swami Ramananda and begged to take leave. With folded hands, Kabir awaited the dictates of the Swami. Looking at him with love pouring from his eyes, the Guru said, “My beloved, gladden my heart with your visit daily in the morning and evening.”

They returned home in a blissful mood. Kabir visited the ashram everyday, worshipped the holy feet of the Swami and participated in the devotional songs joyfully. As he turned sixteen, the Lord was inclined to get Kabir married to Sundara. Accordingly, He appeared in Tamal’s dream and instructed him to contact Sundara’s parents and speedily arrange Kabir’s marriage with her. In the morning Tamal apprised his wife of the dream and asked her to go and remind Sundara’s parents about the earlier proposal.

Jijabibi happily set out to Sundara’s house and initiated the subject of marriage after a small talk. However, they declined to entertain the proposal as Kabir had rebelled against circumcision and thus fallen out of Islamic way of living. Unable to answer this accusation, she returned home with a heavy heart and reported it to her husband.

Tamal was also unhappy with the outcome and felt that he could not do anything further without the Lord's active role in this matter. He resigned himself to His intervention.

Sundara's parents started searching for an appropriate match for their daughter. Finally selecting a suitable groom, they proceeded with the preparation for the marriage. That night, the Lord appearing in the form of a fakir in their dream warned them that if Sundara was not given to Kabir in marriage, their family line would be terminated. Alarmed by the dream, Sundara's parents gathered their folks and briefed them about the fakir's warning in their dream.

Turning hostile to them, the relatives said offensively, "Even if God appears to you taking the side of Kabir, you should not consent to this step which will bring dishonour to our tradition."

Sundara, the incarnation of Ramba, angered at their opinion, said, "First, you promised to wed me to Kabir; then, you went back on your words. This is indeed very objectionable. But I will have no change of heart. Having already fixed my mind on Kabir, now I will not consider anyone else in his place as my husband. Will you call a woman chaste if she changes her mind every now and then in the choice of a mate? I will not be any better than a prostitute if I agree to marry someone other than Kabir."

The congregation was wonderstruck at the outspokenness and strong views of the young girl. Her words reflected affection for Kabir. The relatives were not very pleased. They thought that her stand might cause trouble in upholding their tradition.

Undeterred by their resistance, she said, "One is forbidden to take water from the hands of a woman who becomes unfaithful even in thought. Humans are distinguished from animals by the value system they practice. Having committed my heart to one, if I marry someone else, I should be worse than a donkey. I look upon all men other than Kabir as my fathers and brothers. Therefore, it is not ethically possible for me to marry someone else."

The elders admonished, "You are shamelessly talking in public about your preferences. In this, you have crossed the limits of modesty which alone befits a woman born of a good lineage. You should look upon that man alone as your husband whom your parents consider suitable. By your blatant behaviour, you will bring dishonour on your family and clan."

Sundara unfazed by the opposition, stood firm in her conviction. The gathering thought that charmed by her beauty, Kabir must have cast a spell on her. So, she would not listen to anybody or care for her family honour. Advising her parents to keep a close eye on her, they dispersed.

Her parents turned their wrath on her, “You have brought disgrace on our family and Muslim Faith, by your partiality for a Hindu. We have become the laughing stock among our people. You have ruined everything for us. Even at such a young age, you have shown arrogance. Your behaviour doesn’t befit a decent breeding. If you speak anymore along this line, we will cut you to pieces.”

They locked her up in a room and mounted guard. Sundara started meditating on the Lord in solitude.

A few days later, the Lord disguised as a fakir came to Sundara’s house along with a number of disciples. He asked whether they could be given food. They readily agreed to serve a feast to all of them. The fakir said, “You are as generous as Tamal with whose family, I hear, you have struck a marriage alliance. You deserve each other.”

Disturbed by this comparison, Sundara’s father said hastily, “Please don’t mention his name in our household. We have broken the alliance, as Kabir, besides rejecting circumcision, has taken to Hindu way of living. We have nothing to do with that family any more. The family has been expelled from our community.”

The fakir said, ‘It is very surprising. About five years back, when I was about to take food in Tamal’s house, a fakir came and forbade me saying that Kabir had refused circumcision and was unfit to host Muslim priests. When we were about to leave, Kabir got the ritual performed and fed us sumptuously. Then we told him that it was not proper for him to dress and worship like Hindus. He gave up those things soon. Haven’t you heard of these developments? Now, you should get rid of your false notions about Kabir and arrange for the marriage with a free heart.’

This created a favourable attitude in Sundara’s parents and they agreed to proceed with the marriage.

Then, the illusory fakir gathered their relatives and the maulvi spoke sweet words about Kabir and brought about a change of heart in them. However, the maulvi raised a doubt if it was proper to associate

with Kabir, who had rebelled against circumcision and then converted to Hindu ways in the past, even though he seems to have conformed to Islamic faith later.

Showing mock anger, the fakir said, “Why are you obsessed so much with circumcision? Our ancestors had not followed this practice. This was started later. It is better not to go deep into this matter.

“If you contend that the girl is indecent and going against her parents’ wish, I disagree with you. It is improper to have fixed Sundara’s marriage first with Kabir and then to retract. You folks are wise in many ways. There is no need to go into lengthy talk on these things with you. Let us not delay this marriage any further. We will have it performed tomorrow.” With His charming talk, the Lord made them agree.

Leaving the disciples in Sundara’s house, the Lord, in the disguise of a Muslim, reached Tamal where he found the couple plunged in despair.

Introducing Himself as Sundara’s uncle, He said, “Sundara’s wedding is about to take place tomorrow. Don’t be sad. If God wills, he can change anyone’s destiny. I can arrange for Sundara to marry our Kabir. If I accomplish this for you, what will you give me in return?”

The couple said enthusiastically, “We place ourselves at your service.”

“Then, in that case, I want you to stop worshipping Vishnu.”

Glaring at him Kabir said, “I don’t want either your favour or Sundara on those terms.”

“Your parents have already promised their part in this.” said the illusory uncle.

“Of course, they will serve you. But, none of us will stop chanting Ram Nam.” was Kabir’s firm reply.

“Why have you given up the Impersonal and taken to the worship of an ignorant mortal Rama, who wandered in the forest lamenting the loss of his wife to the demon king?”

Falling upon the man with the ferocity of a tiger, Kabir threatened him, “One more word of profanity from your mouth, you will find yourself at the gates of hell.”

“You rascal”, shouted the uncle, “I came here to do a good turn to you. Is this how you repay? I will see that you come and beg at my feet to bring you and Sundara together.”

With a burst of laughter, Kabir said, “I will never desire her on your terms nor will I seek your help for anything. Your fond wish is a day dream.”

“At this rate”, the Lord bemused, “this fellow may even swear never to marry Sundara and his resolve will be irrevocable. I have to be careful in my approach. I must conspire in some other way to take him there with the help of the lute player Narada.”

He summoned the sage Narada to appear along with some disciples at the cottage of Tamal in the guise of Swami Ramananda and his devotees.

At dusk, the sage Narada along with a few devotees gathered in disguise at Kabir’s house and called out Kabir’s name. Hearing the voice of his Guru, Kabir came running to the gate and offered him worship wondering at his great fortune.

Swami Ramananda asked, “Tamal, is it true that your son’s marriage is to be held tomorrow at dawn? But I smell something strange in the atmosphere here. You all seem unprepared for the auspicious event.”

“O holy one! The girl’s uncle came here to finalise the marriage, but he returned in humiliation. Now it is difficult to secure that girl’s hand for Kabir.”

The Swami asked, “How can they go back on their words? Let us all go there. I will try to patch up the problem.”

“Swami, if we all go there with our devotees, we will be insulted.”

“By some means, we have to accomplish this mission. We will take some fakirs with us. We will also send an invitation to the king of the city to attend the wedding.” The illusory Ramananda sent an illusory emissary to invite the king.

When the illusory king along with his retinue and other paraphernalia arrived at Tamal’s place, they got Kabir ready as bridegroom. The marriage party in the company of the king and Swami Ramananda and illusory fakirs left for the bride’s place.

Seeing that the king himself has come for the wedding, Sundara’s folks and community got flustered. In a hurry, they got Sundara decorated as bride and proceeded with the ceremony. The marriage of Kabir and Sundara took place at dawn, the next day in the august presence of the saint and the king. The couple was given a send off in a ceremonial way in the morning and they reached Tamal’s house.

Tamal joyously hosted a big feast for all his relatives and friends on this occasion.

Soon after the feast, Kabir got ready to visit the Swami for his darshan. Sundara also expressed her wish to have darshan of the Swami.

Exultant at her words Kabir said, “Though you are born a Muslim, it is heartening that you cherish great devotion and respect for sadhus. Will you remain an ideal partner, abiding by my wishes always?”

“Why should you entertain any doubt about me? Your words will be gospel to me always. There is no well-being in the life of a woman who contradicts her husband’s wishes. The fame of Sita has spread to all corners, who in obedience to the command of her Lord, entered the fire pit, yet burnt the fire itself by the fire of her chastity. I hold the exemplary lives of such noble women as my model in life.”

“Your words are like cool showers to me. I know that you are an excellent woman and you are devoted to the service of saints. I am happy to take you to my Guru. We will worship him together.”

Both reached the ashram. Kabir, beholding his Guru’s form with great love, prostrated at his feet, kissing them with his eyes. Motioned by Kabir, Sundara also approached him with great reverence and humility, bowed down at the Swami’s feet, wetting them with tears of tender devotion. Looking at her with kind eyes, the Swami asked Kabir, “Who is this woman? Whom have you brought at the hour of dusk?”

“O my Master, you visited my house with your devotees and sanctified my marriage with this girl only this morning! I don’t understand why your holiness feigns ignorance now?”

Struck with wonder at his words, Swami Ramananda replied, “O Kabir, I am really unaware of your marriage. I didn’t know that this young girl is your wife.”

“You honoured our marriage this morning with your holy presence along with disciples. You sent word to the king also to attend my marriage. Your sacred presence along with devotees and the royal visit made it like a celestial celebration. Have you forgotten everything so soon?”

“You are a liar. Neither did I come to your wedding nor did I invite the king for the same. You must have been hallucinating! Now, mother, you tell me. Did you see me at your wedding? Tell me the truth.”

When Sundara looked at Kabir for his permission to speak to the Swami, Kabir told her to utter the truth.

She replied, “O Swami, a sadhu arrived along with his disciples and stayed with us till the wedding was over. The king also attended it.”

Kabir added, “It is you who came as the sadhu along with the disciples. I never utter falsehood even if it costs my life.”

“O Kabir, attracted by this girl’s extraordinary beauty, you have married her and lost your head. That is why you are lying. If your character has changed so much within a day of marriage, what will happen later?”

At that moment, the Lord, the deceitful Player appeared before them and said, “O Ramananda, It is I who took your form and got my beloved Kabir married to Sundara.” With His divine hands, He placed garlands on Kabir and Sundara, thereby exhibiting his love for Kabir and speaking loving words to him, disappeared.

Seeing this wonder of wonders, Swami Ramananda swam in a sea of bliss. He said, “What a great fortune I have attained today. O Lord, did you appear to validate your devotee’s words? What a rare vision you gave us, O Narayana! Feasting on your enchanting form and immersed in bliss, I became dumb with wonder. O Kabir, you are truly my son. O lover of Hari, a *jīvanmukta*! Don’t be cross with me because I called you a liar.”

Kabir shed tears on hearing the humble words of the Swami. He said, “I have taken refuge in you. Why do you sadden me with such words of praise?”

Kabir was dazed to think of the grace of the Lord. Sundara’s condition was also beyond words. “Oh how fortunate I am”, she wondered, “even in wild dream I did not imagine such a wealth of blessing! What a noble husband! What a great being is our Guru!”

Slowly, the couple came out of their reverie. The Swami blessed them both and bade them farewell saying that they should bless him every day with their visit. ▲

(To be continued)



TRANSLATION

Sonasaila Malai

Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

A selection of verses from this work were published in the Deepam 2006 edition of The Mountain Path. It is now planned to publish a translation of the whole work in a number of instalments, of which this is the first. Previously, in the July 2005 edition, an article featuring translations from Sivaprakasa Swamigal's Tamil version of Prabhulinga Leelai, itself a translation from the Kannada, was published. The introduction which follows is principally an amalgamation of material taken from the two aforementioned articles.

Sivaprakasa Swamigal was an accomplished Virasaiva poet and scholar who lived in the 17th century. He had a strong connection with Tiruvannamalai. His father, Kumaraswami Desikar, used to come to Arunachala from Kanchipuram every year for the Deepam festival. It is said that his three sons, of whom Sivaprakasa Swamigal was the eldest, were all born by the grace of Arunachala. When Sivaprakasa

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṇikkavācakar 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>.

Swamigal grew up, he had a Guru in Tiruvannamalai – also called Sivaprakasa – whom he visited regularly. Sivaprakasa wrote numerous works, one of the earliest being *Sonasaila Malai* – a song garland of 100 verses to the Red Mountain Arunachala, which he is said to have composed in a single *pradakshina* of the mountain. He possessed a vivid and daring poetic imagination that brings back echoes of the Sangam era, the golden age of Tamil literature, a gift which earned him during his lifetime the *sirappu peyar* (honorary title) of Treasure House of the Imagination.

Each verse falls into two parts, the first being a plea for Lord Siva’s grace in the face of the author’s self-avowed unworthiness, and the second, a daring image in which the nature and attributes of Lord Siva are compared and contrasted with those of the Mountain that is Lord Siva’s earthly-manifested form. Much emphasis is placed throughout upon the fact that, unlike the Siva of the temple cult, Arunachala is available to all without restrictions of any kind, an attribute which would have appealed very deeply to Sivaprakasa, who, as a Virasaiva, would have rejected the elitism of the temples and their cult, although it should be made clear that Sivaprakasa did not entirely reject temple worship, a fact to which many of the verses bear testimony.

Sivaprakasa’s erudition is apparent throughout with numerous references to the Puranic literature, the lives of the 63 Saiva Saints, and the flora and fauna, legends and even the folklore (see v.76) of Arunachala itself. In particular the various mountains that feature in the Puranic canon, Mount Meru, the fabulous mountain at the centre of the earth, Mount Mandara, which the Devas and Asuras used to churn to Ocean of Milk, Mount Pothiyam, abode of the sage Agastya, the father of Tamil, the Eastern and Western Mountains, behind which the sun is said to rise and set, and even Mount Kailash, the very home of Lord Siva, are found lacking when compared to the majesty of Sonasaila, the Red Mountain. How could any mountain in the physical realm, however glorious, begin to compare with one that, as the very embodiment of Lord Siva, stands beyond time and space in the non-dual realm of the Self? Each verse is driven home with a stirring refrain that never lets us forget that Arunachala and Siva, eternally, are one: *Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

Sonasaila Malai can of course stand on its own as a work of great charm and spiritual depth. However it can do no harm to mention

the fact that Bhagavan himself was one who appreciated its merits. The following is a quotation from *My Recollections of Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar.

One day Bhagavan quoted the following verse to me from the book called *Sona Saila Malai*. [Editor's note: the Tamil verse is quoted here, followed by the meaning of the second part of the verse.]

“Arunachala, Lord of Kailas! When Manickavachakar and others like him sang that they were wanting in Love for you and prayed for the same it was only their modesty and not the truth. But it is the base truth when I say I have no Love for you. Pray therefore grant me the same.”

The next day I wanted to copy down this stanza since Bhagavan had quoted it and nothing he did was without significance. I was going to the library to fetch the book when Bhagavan said to me: “You need not go and fetch it. Come here. I know the stanza.” So saying, he was pleased to take a sheet of paper and write out the stanza for me. It was not unusual for Bhagavan to do such things for some of his close followers. About a score of people may have such writings of Bhagavan in their possession.

It has often been surmised that Bhagavan must have had an eidetic memory, given his ability to memorise extensive passages from works in a number of languages with no apparent effort. Even so the fact that he was able to reproduce this verse from memory in its entirety is a testament to the high regard in which he held it.

Regarding the translation, the style of these verses, consisting entirely as they do of daring, imaginative, one might even say far-fetched in some cases, poetic conceits does not lend itself to a flat, uninflected prose translation. An attempt has therefore been made to render them in verse. On occasion extra words have been added to complete the sense or fill out the metre. Such added words have been generally enclosed in square brackets.

Invocation

 Holding in my heart the One
 whose feet ringing anklets adorn,

who as a tribute received an elephant herd,¹
and who is praised as He
who receives the tribute of steeds²
that are the minds of devotees
whose words are sweet,
I shall praise Sonasailan, wise and fair!

Those three great sages³ of noble fame
sang songs rare and ornate in your name,
and now this song of mine, too, shall be yours.
For even as your ears take in sweet sounds
of those two⁴ [who by you stand],
yet do you not heed the call of the deer
[you hold] within your hand?⁵

Just as Mount Meru in the northern land,
raises up his cloud-capped head,
so do you, waxing great, arise,
as Sun and chilly Moon
shine out on either side,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(1)

¹ The reference is to Vināyakar's encounter with a foreign king called Mukilaṅ (a general term for Moghul), who was harassing the devotees in the environs of Aruṅācala. Vināyakar appeared to him in a dream and transformed him into an elephant, or at least, frightened him badly, according to another account. When Mukilaṅ awoke he realised his error and rounded up a herd of elephants as a tribute to Vināyakar. This incident is recounted in one of the Tamil biographies of the famous Aruṅācala saint, Guhainamaśivāyar, who invoked Lord Śiva's intervention against the king with a *venba* verse. In response Lord Śiva sent Vināyakar to scare the king.

² *Steeds* are a metaphor for the unruly mind.

³ The *three* are Appar, Jñānasambandhar and Sundarar, who lived between the 6th and 8th centuries C.E. and whose works, collectively known as the *Tēvāram*, constitute the first seven books of the *Tirumuṟai*, the canon of devotional works in the Tamil language dedicated to Lord Śiva.

⁴ The melodious *two* refers to *two* Gandharvas, celestial beings with superb musical skills.

⁵ The idea is that Śiva takes note of the sounds made by the deer, in spite of the beautiful music going on around him. This gives the author courage to persevere, even knowing that his songs cannot match those of the three authors of the *Tēvāram*.

In Arur to be born is to gain knowledge
 that lies beyond this worldly thrall;
 the end of all suffering is to reach
 and gaze on Tillai's holy Hall.⁶
 In holy Kasi⁷ men joyfully abiding,
 await death's call.
 But to the mere thought of your own city
 can such as these compare at all?⁸

For those who journey on birth's ocean
 bound for final liberation's fair shore,
 you rise on high
 to guide for them the ship of *tapas*
 ending their confusion with a glance,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(2)

⁶ The verse refers to Chidambaram simply as *maṅṅru* – the [golden] Hall [of Chidambaram]. The basic meaning of *maṅṅru* is *hall of assembly*. Due to its great renown the mere mention of the word *maṅṅru* is sufficient to indicate the Golden Hall of Chidambaram, where Lord Śiva, as Naṭaraja, performs his cosmic dance.

⁷ Kāśi is referred to simply as *the unique abode*. Again the idea appears to be that Kāśi is so famous, in its power to grant salvation, that even to say its name is superfluous. Yet Aruṇācala is even more powerful. Verse 543 of the Tamil *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* particularly emphasises both the greatness of Kāśi, and to what extent that greatness is eclipsed by the greatness of Aruṇācala:

Even if food were given to ten million great *tapasvins* in one of the most eminent *sthalas*, it would not equal a single grain of boiled rice given in immortal Kāśi. (Similarly) if food was given in Kāśi to countless crores of great *tapasvins*, it could not compare to a single grain of boiled rice given in the land of Arunai, (embodiment of) the real.

⁸ The first part of this verse echoes a sentiment which has its source in the following śloka which is reputed to be from the *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam*, which is itself a section of the *Māheśwara Kaṇṭam* of the *Skanda Mahāpurāṇam*.

darśanāt abhrasādasi jananāt kamalālaye
 kāśyāntu maraṇāt muktiḥ smaraṇāt aruṇācale.

Liberation [will be assured] in Abhrasādasi (Chidambaram) through seeing it, in Kamalālaya (Tiru Ārūr) through birth there, in Kāśi through death there and at Aruṇācala through remembrance of it.

Caught up in the humours three,
here I dwelt,
afflicted by a suffering impossible to quell.
Then did I conceive the desire that,
before these three should cast me out,
I'd grasp and come to dwell
in your salvation's matchless state.
Yet still, your divine will, I cannot tell.

To dispel the flaw^{9a} the world decries, saying,
'The waning^{9b} moon aloft your bear!'
with the full moon in your crown,
you rise on high,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (3)

None will accuse you, saying why
did you remove
the multitude of painful births
from a wicked one whose stony heart
melted only for those pretty girls
with coral lips,
that red of scarlet gourd defy.
Show me then your mercy!

As the Sun dispelling dewy cold
above dawn's matchless Mountain rises up,
like a mirror bright set on a stand,¹⁰
waxing great, do you arise,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (4)

⁹ There is a play on the word *kuṛai* in this verse. On its initial occurrence its meaning is *deficiency, imperfection, fault, flaw* but in the phrase *kuṛai mati* it means *waning* as in *the waning moon*. Only in his embodiment as Aruṇācala does Lord Śiva appear each month crowned by the moon at the full!

¹⁰ The idea is that that the Mountain of the dawn and the rising sun are offering themselves up as a sort of dressing table and mirror, in which Lord Sōṇasailaṅ can view his own reflection.

Will it ever come, the day my mind
 that now in sadness and confusion lies,
 yielding to those whose eyes are dark,
 like tall spears with their shining blades,
 will come to dwell
 upon the lotuses of your dancing feet,
 fade, forget itself and melt?

Like a [bright red] lotus bloom
 with petals full expanded,
 as a [silver] swan glides by,
 the *Karttikai* beacon shines out
 upon your lofty peak
 as the moon herself draws night¹¹
 Thus waxing great, do you arise,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(5)

The sage of Vadavur,¹² whose hymns are rare,
 and others too,
 they said, 'We have no love for you!'
 but all their weeping and beseeching was a lie.
 But when I say 'I have no love, for you,'
 my words are true.
 Reveal to me your grace!¹³

¹¹ The scene described is that which occurs only once a year, on the full moon day of *Karttikai Deepam*, when, as night falls, a great beacon is lit upon the summit of the mountain Aruṇācala, to symbolise the manner in which Lord Śiva appeared as an unfathomable column of fire before Viṣṇu and Brahmā, to end their quarrel over which of the two was the greater, and thus curb their egos. The sight of the bright disc of the moon sailing up into the sky as the red flame of the beacon flares up is a very impressive one, especially when viewed from a distance and from a high vantage point, from which the scene unfolds against the wide panorama of the mountain's impressive silhouette. Here the beacon is fancifully compared to a red lotus blossom and the moon, to a swan swimming by it.

¹² *Vātavūraṇ* – he of *Vātavūr* refers to the poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar, whose birthplace was *Vātavūr*. He lived in the 9th century C.E. and his poems, the *Tiruvācakam* and the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, are considered equal to, or even greater, than those of the three *Tēvāram* poets mentioned earlier.

The black clouds that the ocean drink
and about you thickly cluster
recall the garment that you made,
from the hide of the elephant you flayed,
its temples oozing, wet
with dark juices of the must,
its trunk like a palmyra [ridged and black],
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (6)

The Asuras in their cities, and Kama too,
about whose flowery darts
winged insects buzz and sing,
once knew your white smile as you laughed,
and the gaze that from your forehead flashed.
Shall not this wretch's dark delusion
come to know these too?¹⁴

Too subtle even for thought to reach,
you are men say, but you,
this reputation to allay,
adopt this mighty material form,
and stand for all the world to see,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (7)

That you ate as if 'twere ambrosia sweet
the poison that with a roar
the surging billows, curling back,
cast up from the deep,¹⁵

¹³ The poet is saying that it is inconceivable that the great saints of the past such as Māṇikkavācakar could actually have had no love for the Lord and that their saying so was simply a means of demonstrating the depth of their devotion to Him. 'However, in my case,' he cries, 'it is actually true and therefore my need for your grace is greater even than theirs.'

¹⁴ Lord Śiva destroyed the three cities of the *asuras* with a smile when they stood against Him, and burned up Kāma with a glance from his third eye, when Kāma attempted to make him enamoured of Pārvati. 'If you are so keen to destroy evil,' the poet cries, 'why then do you not destroy the evil of the *āṇava malam* (the illusion that one possesses a separate self or ego) that afflicts me so?'

¹⁵ The poison churned from the Ocean of Milk is here compared to the devotee's own *āṇava malam*, which Śiva has the power to eradicate by taking it and absorbing it

is your great glory, yours alone.
 Will you not now, by your divine decree,
 complete it now, and make
 of this poor wretch
 a devotee at your holy feet?

The flame of *Karttikai* your bear
 upon your beauteous peak,
 to drive the dark delusion out¹⁶
 from hearts of all that look and see
 you rising up and standing fast, to shine,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(8)

Before the Lord of Death,
 a flower garland draped
 across his mighty chest,
 destroys my body's outward form,
 will there be, for wretched me, a day
 that your grace comes to wipe away
 the ego self that lies within
 so that, with every hindrance gone,
 I and shining *jñāna*'s form
 supreme are one?¹⁷

With an elephant's tusk
 for a crescent moon,

into his own self, just as He did with that poison. In strict *Saiva Siddhānta* terms *āṇava malam* is not the ego as such, but the principle of egoity that is supposed to inhere in all souls as a potential, even after union with Him, just as verdigris is ever potentially inherent in the metal copper. However this *iruḷ* or *āṇava malam*, the soul's darkness or delusion, is often regarded as synonymous with *ahamkāram* – the ego, the erroneous sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

¹⁶ In this verse it is stressed that the *Kārttikai* beacon has the power to dispel the inner darkness of the soul, unlike other lights, which have the power only to dispel outer, physical darkness.

¹⁷ A poetic formulation of Bhagavan's central teaching that, once the illusion of the ego self has departed, we shall come to dwell in the eternal bliss of the Self, 'shining *jñāna*', beyond birth and death.

and bright creepers,¹⁸
spreading in profusion
like untied tresses
upon your slopes, you shine,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (9)

Will the day ever come when,
fixing my thoughts upon the form
that Goddess Uma shares with you,
so that in my heart, that melts
like ghee before a flame,
I root out the delusion of female charms,
as my eyes pour forth floods of tears?

You who bathe in the wat'ry libation
that [Varuna], great Lord of the Flood,
pours down on you,
scooped up from the ocean's basin
with a black cloud as a jewelled ladle,¹⁹
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (10)

Upon the flowery earth,
that the ocean's fair gown girds about,
quite fittingly you grant your grace
to those who deem the body false.
But to me, who take the body to be true,
will you not deign to grant it too?²⁰

¹⁸ The *cōṭiyam koḍi* – *bright creeper* is a creeping plant that, whilst appearing green by daylight, has a glowing radiance at night. The moonlight, catching an elephant's tusk, and the shining creepers, resembling unloosed braids of hair, thus offer to the imagination a striking image of Lord Śiva with the crescent moon in his untied locks.

¹⁹ After Indra Varuṇa is the greatest of the gods of the *Rig Veda*, his role being the maintenance of the universal order. Varuṇa has a particular responsibility for aerial waters, pouring down the rains from the clouds' inverted cask. In this striking image, Varuṇa, knowing that his power is small compared to that of the One who is responsible for the very existence of the universe, is depicted as travelling south to perform *abiśeka* – *ritual bathing* of the lingam of Aruṇācala Śiva.

²⁰ The word *mey* in Tamil means *truth* and also *body*, which gives an ironic twist to the Tamil text. The poet says, 'Those who think that *mey* (*body*) is *poy* (*false*) are

Not wishing to dwell within a shrine,
 hid from view, and visited
 with proper observance of time,
 you grant your presence abundantly,
 standing fast, for all the world to see,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (11)

Are you not the shining Sun
 that with compassion's surging fire
 dries the mire of birth,
 wherein I languish, sunk
 through sensual desire,
 and brings the lotus
 of my heart to flower?

Mountain, where your palace stands,²¹
 Mountain, you took as a bow,²²
 to confound the senses of your foe,
 Mountain, father of your bride,²³
 within you all of these reside!
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (12)

right, and I who think that *mey (body)* is *mey (true)* am wrong.⁷ To those lacking in discrimination, there is nothing more true or real than the body. Only the wise know it to be false. The author, whilst admitting that he does not possess the attainment of the great ones who possess this realisation, makes the point that, as one who labours under this delusion, he is just as much, or more, in need of Śiva's grace, in order to dispel it. In the second half of the verse he reinforces his argument by pointing out that Aruṇācala, unlike other gods that remain hidden in temples and shrines, is accessible to all without restriction, regardless of their degree of spiritual attainment.

²¹ Mount Kailash in Tibet, which is reputed to be Lord Śiva's home.

²² Mount Meru, which Lord Śiva took as a bow when defeating the *asuras* in their aerial cities.

²³ The Himalaya Mountains, named after Himavat, the father of Lord Śiva's consort Pārvatī. As the all-embracing Self, free of all attributes, Aruṇācala subsumes all other mountains within himself.

Will there ever come a day
when you grant your grace,
so that I, poor wretch,
sloughing off the senses' woes,
and setting up within the temple
of my mind your holy feet,
with ankle-rings adorned,
may join the great assembly
of those holy ones who virtue seek?

Men in *pradakṣiṇā* walk around
with cries that like the ocean's roar
resound, as in their midst
like holy Mandara you stand and shine
the *tapas* of the world made manifest,²⁴
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(13)

This mortal frame, that's bound to die,
like a bubble that through water flies,
is truly real, thus did I think.
Whirled through births,
in bliss's enduring ocean
I knew not how to sink.
Will there ever be salvation
for one so ignorant as me?

With their tusks, the wild pigs root
upon your mountain slopes,
as if the Boar of former times
digging down, still sought today
your beautiful foot,²⁵
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(14)

²⁴ In another powerful image the author compares Aruṅācala to Mount Mandara, which was used by the *devas* and *asuras* as the churning-stick to churn the Milk Ocean, and the press of fervent devotees performing *pradakṣiṇā* around it, to the serpent Vāsuki, who was employed as the churning rope. The idea is that just as the Puranic churning brought forth the ambrosia which confers immortality, the unbroken throng of devotees performing circuits of Aruṅācala calls forth the ambrosia of liberation from birth and death.

²⁵ When Lord Śiva appeared before Brahmā and Viṣṇu as an immeasurable column

Holding you within my thoughts
 who are compassion's noble form,
 the Letters Five upon my lips,
 both hands above my head conjoined,
 grant that I may daily make
pradakṣiṇā of you!²⁶

The moon that rises o'er that sacred peak
 to adorn your holy locks you keep,
 and black of mountain caves
 for [the poison at] your throat you take,²⁷
shining forth as Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord! (15)

Knowing that the insults of all the world,
 are seen as praises by the Lord,

of fire, Viṣṇu, as the legend goes, burrowed down in the form of a boar in order to reach its feet and thus prove his superiority over Brahmā, who flew up in the form of a swan in order to find its head. The poet imagines that one of the wild pigs that he sees rooting on the slopes of Aruṇācala is none less than Viṣṇu himself, still trying to complete his challenge.

²⁶ The first part of these verses eloquently expresses the necessity of worshipping Lord Śiva in thought, word and deed, the essential requirement for all who aspire to realisation of their true Self. The Five Letters refers to the five syllable mantra *śi-vā-ya-na-ma*; *śi* represents *śivam*; *vā* represents his *energy of grace* – *aruḥ śakti*; *ya* represents the *jīva*; *na* represents *māyā* or *tirōtam*, the energetic whirl of impurity in itself, and *ma* represents *āṇavam*, that impurity as operating within the *jīva*. The symbolism of the mantra is described in the *Siddhānta* text *Tiru Aruḥ Payaṇ – The Fruit of Divine Grace* by *Umāpati Śivācāriyār*, a guru in the lineage of *Meykaṇṭatēvar*:

See on one side, the dance of defilement, on the other the dance of true knowledge, and oneself (the soul) in the middle.

As 'ma' and 'na' unfold, uniting with the consciousness (of the *jīva*) they do not permit it to return (to the Lord). If its powerful deeds are cancelled out, it will succeed in returning.

²⁷ Again a parallel is drawn here between Śiva's iconic anthropomorphic form, as bearing the moon in his matted locks and displaying at his throat the black stain of the poison *halāhala*, which was churned from the Milk Ocean and which he swallowed for the salvation of all living beings. The poison is equated to the blackness of cave openings on the mountainside.

the sage of Arur, on his wedding day,
spoke words of calumny, [they say].²⁸
So grant me now the grace
to bow down to the holy feet
of Him that daily [hears such words
and] finds them meet.

Above the glorious enclosing walls
of the universe's surrounding shell,
as a Siva lingam you arise
in the temple of the overarching skies.²⁹
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

(16)

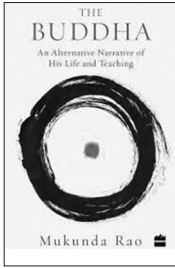


(To be Continued)

²⁸ Sundarar is one of the three authors of the *Tēvāram*. (See v. 1, note 3.) He is also known as Ārūraṅ in virtue of his association with the town of Ārūr in the Tañcavūr (Tanjore) district. His biography is told in the *Periya Purāṇam* by Cēkkiḷār, which recounts the lives of the 63 Tamil saints, the *Nāyaṅār* or *Nāyaṅmār*. When the time for his marriage came, Lord Śiva appeared in the guise of an old Brahmin and claimed that Sundarar was his slave according to the bond executed by Sundarar's grandfather and therefore he objected to the marriage. A close examination of this deed revealed that it was a real one. When the people wanted to know the residence of the old Brahmin, he entered the temple and disappeared, only to reappear as Śiva himself seated with his consort upon the bull. Because Sundarar had called him a madman when he first put forward his claim in the disguise of the old Brahmin, Śiva bade him compose a hymn addressing him as *pittāṅ – madman*. Thus did it come to pass that Sundarar composed the first of his decads, the one which begins with the words *pittā pīrai cūḍī – Madman! You who wear the crescent moon [in your locks]!* In this first part of the verse the author is saying, 'Since you are known to accept even the insults of your devotees as praise, then perhaps even I may dare to offer my hymns to you, however inferior and unworthy of you they may be.'

²⁹ In Hindu cosmology the universe was conceived as being contained in an egg-shaped shell. The idea here is that, if we were to conceive of *Sōṅasailaṅ* in terms of a lingam housed within a temple, then the only temple which might conceivably be worthy or capable of containing it would be the shell of the universe itself.

BOOK REVIEWS



The BUDDHA An Alternative Narrative of his Life and Teaching by Mukunda Rao. Harper Element 2017. Rs.350/- . pp.xxi+192 ISBN 978-93-5264-420-9

This highly readable book should have been titled ‘The Life and Teachings of the Buddha in the Light of the Teachings of U.G. Krishnamurti (UG)’ for though the life and message of the Enlightened One have been succinctly and lucidly presented in the book, it

is the presence of UG, the author's hero, which is dominant in it. In fact, the other spiritual masters, who have been usually likened to Gautama Buddha seem to have been just also-rans for the author, who undoubtedly wields a powerful pen.

‘Biology of Nirvana’ is the thesis in this book. In other words, as The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry (now Puducherry) declared after an extraordinary physical experience in 1962 when she was 84, ‘Salvation is physical’. She wondered why nobody saw this obvious fact. Now Mukunda Rao seems to hail UG as the prophet of the Biology of Enlightenment for he completed what The Mother began but could not finish. More on this a little later.

As this book has not been written to expound Buddha’s Noble Four-fold Truth and his Eight-fold Path, the Middle Path etc. in detail, but as a forum to defend UG’s assertion that there is only the body and nothing else, no mind, no Self, nothing at all and once you free the body from the octopus clutch of the phantom mind and its high-sounding creations, the body functions harmoniously in its natural state. In his own case and more or less in The Mother's case, what happened was a complete mutation of the body’s cells rendering him totally free from the contents of the mind. He was free from the three-decker structures of time with its past, present and future and the mind with the conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious and even the racial unconscious. This occurred to one who asserted that there is no use of talking about the conditioned mind for conditioning, which has gone on for millions of years, cannot be ended. Cannot, dear sir, the darkness of billion years end by the light of a moment? Is not as

J. Krishnamurti (K) said ‘seeing is ending’, a phrase which UG has made his own like many other original utterances of K? Elsewhere, UG laughs at K’s First and Last Freedom and says both should go and say the cat has choiceless awareness. And yet he himself became the freest of humans for he was freed from everything but the body. If one can transcend the mind, why not the body as well? Cannot the body be a thought too?

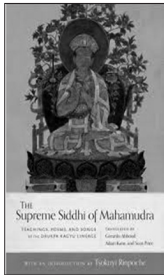
Not that the body has no role to play in freedom, joy and love (which UG brands as fascist). The ancient Tamil siddha-poet says he thought that the body was a bane but then realised that it is the Temple of God. He also says you cannot find God anywhere except if you turn inward and obtain inner light. Patanjali gives the body its due and tells us how to make it a perfect instrument for spiritual quest but also Talk about *yamas* and *niyamas* leading us through non-possessiveness, *ahimsa* (love) to *Satya* (Truth). Sri Ramakrishna gave the first fine feel of transcendence of the body to the amazing Narendra by a touch. Bhagavan Ramana had clinical death at the Tortoise Rock of Arunachala for some 15 minutes when he was in his early thirties and miraculously sprang back to life but he seemed to give little importance to it and consistently offered Self-enquiry as the sure, simple, direct, universal means to Self-knowledge. Contrary to what the author writes, Ramana attained complete Self-realisation at the age of 16 ½ at Madurai and there was no change thereafter.

Yes, the body with or without the chakras, identified as various plexus, is an extraordinary sheath, but only a sheath. There are other sheaths enveloping us. The body has the advantage of being visible to the naked eye and various instruments like x-rays, scanners, etc. There are subtler sheaths which have to be bypassed before we arrive at our natural state. You are welcome, however, to be content with the cream floating on the surface and deny the pearls lying at the bottom.

Talking of the natural state, I did not have the great good fortune of seeing Ramana who was ever in the *sahaja* state or Mastan Swami but I have seen some other devotees of Ramana who radiated an aura of that state to varying degrees, especially Thinnai Swami who was put in the natural state by Ramana with the one Tamil word ‘*Iru*’ (Stay, be). It was wonderful to see one who was still, silent, untouched by the world. A true devotee of his Master, he seemed to be free from others

and himself. I have never heard any disciple of Bhagavan belittle or blast others, let alone other Masters.

UG was an incredibly intelligent man and was a tenacious seeker of Truth on his own terms. He seems to have gone far. Perhaps, as Gandhiji said, it is enough to be on the Path. I admire the insight of Osho who said “Ramana Maharshi is the Buddha of our times.” In the sense of the word Buddha as ‘The Awakened One’. — Jijnasu



THE SUPREME SIDDHI OF MAHAMUDRA. Teachings, Poems and Songs of the Drukpa Kagyu Lineage. Translated by Gerardo Abboud, Adam Kane and Sean Price. Introduction by Tsoknyi Rinpoche. Snow Lion, Boulder 2017. pp.166, \$24.95. ISBN:978-1-55939-468-0 www.shambhala.com

This is a beautifully presented book by Snow Lion which gives us a direct access to many important teachings within Tibetan Buddhism. Though it is clear that a teacher is required, the fact that these secret teachings are now freely available in one essential collection of Drukpa teachings is remarkable. The Drukpa Kagyu tradition is one of the most widespread in Tibetan Buddhism. It is said in lore that half of Tibetans are drukpas. The kingdom of Bhutan, Ladakh and Mustang are results of that influence. The Drukpas trace their lineage back to Tilopa, Marpa, Milarepa, among other Tibetan masters. They emphasise the direct experience over learning, deep devotion and an attitude of renunciation. The essential motivation is *bodhichitta*, the wish to attain awakening in order to alleviate suffering in all beings. This book is a collection of twenty-one separate teachings centred on Mahamudra songs and meditation manuals. They range from the 9th century teachings of Tilopa in his Ganges Mahamudra to Advice for Mountain Retreat by the eight Khamtrul Dongyu Nyima in the mid-20th Century.

Mahamudra refers to the direct realisation of empty lucidity, the nature of the mind according to Tsoknyi Rinpoche in the Introduction. The main meditation practices are the six practices of Naropa whose main purpose is to transform the ordinary body and perception into a wisdom body and pure perception. One of the principal masters of

the Drukpa tradition, Tsangpa Gyare, who was also the founder of the lineage in the 11th Century, gave three pithy statements which encapsulated the entire tradition: i. Whatever happens, let it happen!; ii. However things go, let them go!; and iii. There is no need for anything!

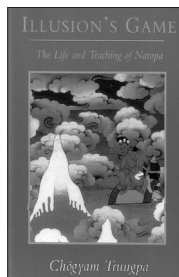
Like Dzogchen, Mahamudra is difficult to categorise and various masters have considered it in various ways, though Buddha-nature (*tathagatagarba*) is central to the teaching. Buddha-nature can be recognised in the intervals between thoughts and the apparent continuity of our so-called identity. Buddha-nature always abides as the basic, empty, luminous nature of the mind. Literally Mahamudra means that which is beyond measure. It is fullness without any comparison or association.

To take one text at random, a 14th Century master Pema Karpo writes of *samatha* (quiescence) in his concise ‘Notes on Mahamudra’, “When the mind rests still, what is the identity of this stillness like? How does it rest? How does movement occur from it? When there is movement, does it move after stillness has vanished? Or does it move while it is resting still? Is that movement something other than stillness or is it not? What is its identity like? Finally, how does the movement stop?”

If one ever needed proof of the results of the practice all one need to do is look at the photo of a group of Drukpa yogis at Tashi Jong Monastery on the last page of the book. They are sweetness, wisdom and light incarnate.

Though these texts require a teacher to unlock the door to the great wisdom within, they give a taste of what is to come for one dedicated to the path. For no particular reason, it is a physical pleasure just to hold this book in one’s hands.

— Christopher Quilkey



ILLUSION'S GAME The Life and Teaching of Naropa by Chogyam Trungpa. Shambhala Publications, Boulder, USA. pp.178, US\$19.95. ISBN: 0-87773-857-2

The story of the encounter between the great 12th Century master Naropa with his enigmatic guru Tilopa is one of the great fables of Tibetan Buddhism. Trungpa Rinpoche asked his students to first read Herbert

Guenther's *The Life and Teaching of Naropa* first before attending the edited lectures transcribed here. Doing so again may help a reader understand the background of this seminal combat for their meeting and the teachings that resulted were not the material for a nice tea party but a shocking confrontation between arrogance and intellectual prowess and an elusive teacher who not so much deflected his student's demands and preconceptions as simply ignored them.

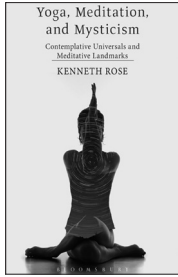
A brilliant student at Nalanda University Naropa suddenly had a vision of a very ugly woman who told him that he knew but the empty words in the books he read and not their meaning. She also said that only a guru could reveal the true meaning. It is clear that Naropa faced an existential crisis and realised that for all his learning he was no closer to understanding the truth about existence than when he began his illustrious career as a scholar.

He left the monastery and when after eleven hideous visions he was about to kill himself, his guru Tilopa finally appears and accepts him. There are then a series of eleven instructions each of which crushes Naropa. After each torment and humiliation Tilopa restores him with a touch and reveals a precious teaching. These teachings fare the basis of the renowned six teachings of Naropa which are central to the Tibetan Kagyu tradition.

There are ten lectures here ranging from 'An Operation without Anesthetics', 'Giving Birth to Intellect', and 'The Levels of Mahamudra'. Trungpa Rinpoche was a superb scholar whose breath of knowledge was coupled with an intelligence that was able to convey the profound teachings in a contemporary medium that did not detract from the original texts. Several other points are clear about Trungpa: he appealed to those who were for the most part highly educated and had a sharp intellect; his sobriety in conveying the teachings left no room for delusion and in this respect he was ruthless in cutting down any fantasies of his students; and thirdly, his patience and compassion were so resolute, he was prepared to pay any price.

Trungpa says, Enlightenment "...is not so much a matter of things being big and enormous and beyond the measure of one's thought; rather it has to do with things being so true, so real, so direct....It is not that things are sacred because they are beyond our imagination, but because they are so obvious. The magic is simplicity."

— Andrew Clement



YOGA, MEDITATION AND MYSTICISM. Contemplative Universals and Meditative Landmarks. Kenneth Rose. Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York. pp.245, £26.00 ISBN: HB: 978-1-4725-7168-7 www.bloomsbury.com

Those who are searching for a book that gives a precise, detailed survey of the mediation practices and mystical path of Hinduism, Buddhism and Catholic Christianity along with a subtle, authoritative investigation of their differences and parallels need look no further.

In the chapter titled ‘The Concentrative Itinerary of Catholic Unio Mystica’ Professor Rose writes, “Whether one thinks in terms of grace or not, these stages of concentration unfold in the Catholic tradition in a sequence that is virtually identical to their unfolding in the schema described in the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Yoga Sutra* [of Patanjali]. Surprising as it may appear, the discovery of phenomenological similarities between these traditions is to be expected and is predictable, given that all human beings share the same neurobiology, psychology and ontology.”

Rose contends that these contemplative traditions are universal and practitioners conversant with one would be familiar with another in principle though there would of course be divergences in description and analysis due to unique cultural and historical developments. Here we should be careful to discriminate between the external tradition of a religion with its literal meaning that satisfies those whose understanding is limited and the esoteric dimension, which according to some, such as the traditionalist or perennialist perspective, is the indispensable, primal and universal that in Hinduism is called the *sanatana dharma*, the eternal religion. Leaving aside the serious academic debate between perennial philosophy, religious pluralism, relativism, syncretism and ecumenism about the legitimacy of a single, timeless legacy and the arguments about who we are and the mystery of life, Rose recognises instead the importance of the practical and investigates the consistency of the meditative experiences of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity in the three major texts he has analysed. Though there appears to be overwhelming differences due to language, historical setting and philosophical expression, if one focuses on the practices that deepen consciousness in these traditions

one sees, as Rose shows us, that they reveal such a commonality because they are concerned with experience and not speculation and preconditioned doctrine. Though this is a scholarly book it is not hampered by the stifling arguments of conjectural academics with their specialist theoretical knowledge who are determined to dictate what is relevant and what is fantasy. One can but imagine the incomprehension of such academics if faced with the possibility of meeting say, the extraordinary Ramakrishna Paramahansa unlettered and it seemed a village yokel, who practiced all the major religions and gained a profound mystical confirmation in each in a short time.

The first part of the book deals with the question of religious pluralism and universals as epitomised by two leading scholars in the field Steven Katz and Huston Smith. I do not wish to extrapolate upon this controversy in the limits of this review, suffice to say that Katz denies the universality of the mystical and claims that mystical experience is dependent on mystical doctrine. In other words, “The Hindu mystic does not have an experience of ‘x’ of which he describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience.”

Before Rose gives us a superb explication presenting the similarities between the steps in Hindu, Buddhist and Catholic mystical traditions, he posits a new science of religion and the influential work of Robert K.C. Furman who has developed a comparative phenomenology of what he calls ‘pure consciousness events’ or PCEs. In other words, there are investigations supporting the possibility of a neurological basis for spiritual experiences. It is clear that there are radical biological, psychological and mental changes in a person who experiences the higher reaches of spirituality. One only needs to witness the extreme care Sri Ramana exercised in respect to his body so that no one except those nominated could touch him.

The three principal chapters comparing the mystical ascent of the aspirant are an example of concision, felicity of ideas and style and depth of scholarship. I was inspired particularly by Rose’s use of the classic on Catholic mysticism, *The Graces of Interior Prayer* by Father Augustin Poulain SJ, where the precision and simplicity of the technical language gave an intelligible, broad sweep and clear perspective that clarified the more technical and intricate schema of the *Yoga Sutras*, let alone the *Visuddhimarga*. — Christopher Quilkey

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Mahapuja

The Mother's Temple, the Matrubhuteswara shrine of Mother Azhagammal has an important function in the ashram. From the day she climbed Arunachala hill to be with her son at Virupaksha Cave till her death and liberation on 19th May, 1922, Bhagavan guided her till she was ripe to leave her physical form and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. The first Mahapuja took place on the 20th May 1922 at the now present Sri Ramanasramam and her samadhi became the focus of devotion. This year's celebrations commenced in early morning of 7th June with *mahanyasa puja* in the Mother's Shrine and concluding with *Deeparadhana* around 10.30 am.

Gurupoornima

On Friday 27th July, Gurupoornima was celebrated in the Ashram with *Mahanyasya puja*. The moon was particularly strong and bright in the days before and on the day of the *poornima*. Devotees gathered to honour Guru Ramana on this auspicious occasion. The Friday evening *Sri Chakra puja* was moved to the morning hours owing to the evening *chandra grahanam* which was at maximum occultation at 1.51 am early morning of the 28th.

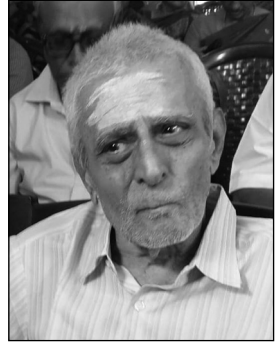
Obituaries

Sri V. Venkatraman, the grandson of late Sri Subba Iyer who was the younger brother of Bhagavan's father, Sri Sundaram Iyer, attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan on 30th July, at the age of 83. It was in Subba Iyer's house that Bhagavan had his Death Experience in July 1896.

Pichai Chithappa, as he is fondly referred was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and adored His philosophies, grace and ways of life. He was born on 25th December, 1935 in Devakottai and did his degree in Economics and joined the Indian Bank in which he worked for 40 years and retired as the Chief Manager.

He was a simple man who strongly believed in leading an honest and contented life, surrendering himself to the love and grace of Bhagavan. He said that he was surrounded in a whirlpool of emotions and anxieties, which would miraculously fade away once he surrendered himself completely. He would also make a sincere appeal to Bhagavan to solve the problems of all his friends and relatives.

He was 12 years old when he first met Bhagavan during his visit to Ashram with his father, and Bhagavan blessed the boy. The little boy had wanted to ask Bhagavan about the imbalances and inequalities in society. However, his father did not allow him to do so. During the course of his life, he always took it upon himself to help the needy in whatever little way he could. His close friends would often say that no beggar would walk away from his house dissatisfied. It was Bhagavan's simplicity, sense of equality and compassion for fellow beings that drew him closer to Bhagavan and inculcated the same attitude in him. Though he visited the Ashram at a young age, it was only in the 1980s that he became an ardent devotee of Bhagavan.

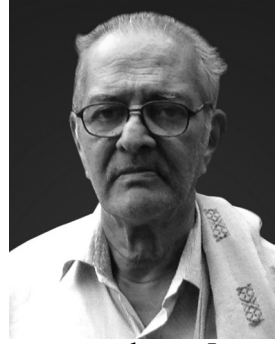


Venkatraman desired that the life and teachings of Bhagavan be known to as many people as possible for he believed that it would give them a belief to hold on to and transform their lives for the better. He was a voracious reader, particularly of books related to Bhagavan, so much so that the book shelves in his house could be an exact replica of the book depot situated in the Ashram. He would gift books of Bhagavan's life and teachings to all devotees, his loved ones and people desiring to know more about Bhagavan.

He was associated with Modern Senior Secondary School, Nanganallur where he lived, near Chennai, and had a photo of Bhagavan presented to the school with copies of *Aksharamanamalai*. It is now a practice for the school to celebrate Bhagavan's Advent day on 1st September every year. He was also a founder member of Nanganallur Ramana Satsang.

His greatest trait according to his friends and family was his ability to touch the lives of people close to him and create a lasting impact. To watch friends, members of the Satsang and colleagues visit him at the hospital and be overwhelmed with sorrow was to know what he meant to each one of them. The stories they narrated about his humility, honesty and compassion were recollected with great feeling. His compassion towards others and attitude towards life and fellow human beings were shaped by the influence of Bhagavan's teachings. It was only appropriate that he took his final breath on the completion of *Aksharamanamalai* by friends, family and members of the Satsang.

Sri Krishna P. Bhat was born 19th September 1934 to a poor rural family near Kumta, Karnataka. He lost his father at the age of nine and started working at the age of fifteen. He worked as a composer in a taluka printing press for which he had to walk almost five miles a day. Sri Bhat started his own printing press in Kumta sometime later and earned a high reputation in the field. Even though he had only studied up to fourth standard, he was successful in various fields and also became President of Devagiri Mandal Panchayat. An ardent devotee of Sri Ramana and President of Sri Ramana Seva Sangha, he specialized in Bhagavan's teaching and published eight volumes of poetry in Kannada, among them, *Jnana Surya*, a collection of poems on the Maharshi. Sri Bhat passed away on 30th July at his residence, 'Sri Ramana Nilaya' in his native village Handigon.



T.K. Natarajan and his father
Dr. TNK

Sri T.K. Natarajan was absorbed in Arunachala Ramana on 24th August at the age of 88. As a young boy, Natarajan accompanied his father Dr. TNK on weekend trips to the Ashram. While his father set up his tripod and clicked away with the camera, Natarajan would be assigned the task of storing rolls of film in the pockets of his trousers. He and his father usually accompanied Bhagavan along the mountain path behind the ashram.

Natarajan recalls Muruganar staying at their home for many months, as did many other Ashram visitors. He went to Annamalai University to study engineering and later went on to the University of Illinois. He returned to India in 1956 and lived in New Delhi with his wife Vasantha where they had three children, Sumati, Raghu and Badri. He was very fond of the Ramana Kendra in New Delhi and was close to A.R. Natarajan. He retired as Director of Central Road Research Institute, New Delhi in 1990, and returned to Mylapore. When the Ramana Kendra in Chennai was temporarily short of a venue for meetings he immediately volunteered his home. ▲